








# **The Blue Book**

*A Guide to the Writing Program at DMACC*

Des Moines Area Community College

Fifth Edition, 2018

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Finally, because composition course expectations are constantly changing, I would also like to hear from you. Feel free to contact me to help improve future editions of this reference.

Good luck this semester!

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# What to Expect

## *in your English Course*

Welcome to the composition program at Des Moines Area Community College! We are glad to have you as a student in our English class this semester! As English faculty, we hope that our time together will be interesting, challenging (in all the best ways) and worthwhile. We also hope that by reading *The Blue Book*, you will learn more about what takes place in DMACC composition classes, such as information about instructor expectations, standards, and guidelines that will help you become a more successful composition student. As you read, make notes about any questions you have, so that you can ask your instructor *before* an assignment is due.

English 105 (Composition I), the Accelerated Learning Program in English 145 (Strategies for Composition), and English 106 (Composition II) are courses designed to improve your communication skills so that you can be more successful in other classes and on the job. Although the work will be focused on improving your writing skills, other related areas—listening actively, reading critically, analyzing and evaluating research, and using language effectively—will also be emphasized in these courses.

*The Blue Book* is divided into five sections:

- What to Expect in Your English Course
- Overview of the Writing Program at DMACC
- What to Expect in Your Online English Course
- Common Composition Errors
- Helpful Websites

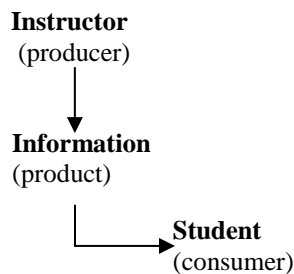
In addition to helping you get off to a good start in your composition class, *The Blue Book* will also be useful as a reference: The fourth segment, Common Composition Errors (see pages 21-37), will help you identify some writing problems throughout the course so that you can discuss them more easily with your instructors, tutors, and fellow students.

*The Blue Book*, however, should not be seen as a substitute for your instructor's syllabus or for DMACC's *Student Manual*. Individual course expectations, procedures, policies, and course schedule (including due dates) found in your instructor's syllabus should be followed closely. This guide merely describes those expectations and experiences common to most composition courses. The questions which follow anticipate some common concerns students have about composition courses at the college level.

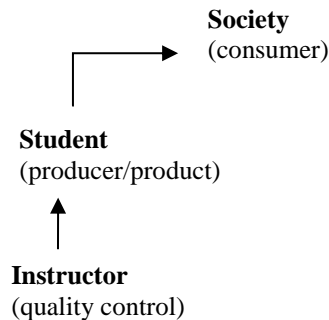
## What is my role as a college student?

Your DMACC composition course is designed to help you expand your knowledge base and skills. In short, *you are here to learn something*. Throughout this process, you will continue to improve yourself: You will be striving to become a better citizen, parent, employee, or whatever role you play in the greater society. But that's not all. As a college student, you enjoy the privilege of having experts teach *you* how to teach *yourself*. Once you achieve this ability, you establish credibility as an educated individual. You become more curious about the world around you, and, often, the world becomes more curious about you.

Unfortunately, some students enter composition courses with unrealistic expectations about their roles as students. Their thinking often resembles something like this:



In the model above, the student consumes information in the same way he or she purchases a new pair of shoes. But education works best when students see themselves as *producers* as indicated by the model below:



In this model, the student shares equal responsibility for his or her education. In college composition courses, the instructor cannot produce your writing—you do! Your instructor only serves as your guide throughout the process. Then, during the course and at the end of the term, it's the instructor's responsibility to express how well you did in the form of a grade. If you follow assignments with care, produce quality material, meet deadlines and adhere to other course policies, you should receive a respectable grade. But education is about more than accumulating good grades; it's about improving society as a whole.

Ultimately, when students realize their potential as *producers* rather than as passive consumers, the whole society benefits. No business or organization wants a non-productive individual on staff. Who would hire a song writer who does not write songs? On the other hand, those students who have gained the confidence and skills to produce quality work during rapidly changing circumstances will likely make any organization or business more successful. The more successful organizations and businesses become, the more successful society becomes.

So as you work through your composition courses, remember the goal is for you to produce papers that you can point to with pride as quality work. By accepting the role—and responsibilities—of being a *producer* in the educational process, you will have gone a long way toward making college a more rewarding experience.

### ***What can I expect from my composition instructor?***

Key to your success in English 105, 145, and 106 (and all college classes, for that matter) is interacting in a positive way with your instructor. Begin this process by finding out your instructor's expectations. A good place to start is by reading the course syllabus with care. Below are typical features of a composition course syllabus:

- ✓ behavioral expectations
- ✓ grading policies
- ✓ attendance expectations
- ✓ disability statement
- ✓ contact information
- ✓ textbook information
- ✓ course schedule
- ✓ office hours

If you have trouble understanding any of the instructor's policies (*e.g.*, you don't understand how the instructor grades papers), **please consult with your instructor outside of class, early in the term.** In most cases, you will be able to resolve any potential misunderstanding during this meeting, and you will develop a greater rapport with your instructor as well.

### ***How should I contact my instructor?***

Students and instructors typically communicate outside of class through one of three channels:

- face-to-face communications between the student and instructor
- email communications
- telephone communications

#### ***Face-to-Face Communications***

If you need to communicate with your instructor for any length of time beyond a minute or two, please do **not** email or phone your concerns to your instructor. Instead, visit your

instructor during office hours or arrange to talk with your instructor before or after class. Depending on the nature of the concern, your instructor may set up additional conferences with you to discuss the issue. The tips below will help you achieve a successful conference:

- If your conference has been scheduled, arrive on time with a positive attitude. A good start to any conference would be to thank your instructor for taking time to help you with your class work.
- Express your concerns patiently and clearly, allowing your instructor to respond without interruptions. Although you may become frustrated, focus on cooperating with your instructor to solve the problem. She or he may be as frustrated as you are, but you share the desire for a positive outcome. Work together and stay encouraged.
- When the conference ends, thank your instructor for his or her advice and time. Then take time to reflect on the meeting. You may want to document what was discussed. This will help you remember the important points so that future problems may be avoided.

### **Email Communications**

Email messages have become a popular method of communication between students and instructors. Sometimes, though, a more thoughtful and carefully-worded message would make the message content more effective. The advice below should help make your emails more successful:

- *Check course documents to see if you already have the information before sending a message.* In traditional face-to-face classes, emailing works best when you seek an answer to a simple question not apparent in your syllabus, assignment sheet, or class notes. Before emailing your query to your instructor, then, please refer to these documents to see if you can answer the question yourself. Doing so will save time for all involved.
- *Allow adequate time for a response.* Although most instructors are diligent about checking their email, their priorities may differ from your priorities. Also, remember that instructors are not in their offices, nor are they in front of their computers, 24 hours a day. If you send an email at 2 a.m. or during weekends, you can expect some delay in the response.
- *Compose the message with care.* The quality of the message content creates an impression of you as a communicator. Most instructors will expect the same composition standards in your emails as they do in your papers. Poorly written emails containing texting abbreviations, sentence fragments, misspellings, all letters in lower case or upper case, *etc.* may not garner a response, or you may be asked to revise the email. At the very least, proofread.

- *Sending an email does not automatically excuse you from coursework.* “Did you get my email?” is a common question asked by many students who miss class or submit late work. When an instructor answers “Yes,” do not assume that you are excused from your instructor’s syllabus policies and procedures. When an instructor answers “No” or “I cannot recall” do not assume it is the instructor’s fault for not addressing your excuse for absence or late work. Instead, follow the advice below.
- *Politely communicate a request for a response, if one is needed.* Sometimes you may not need your instructor to respond, such as when you send an email informing your instructor that you are going to be unavoidably late to class. Never assume, though, that your instructor will reply to each and every email he or she receives. If you wish the instructor to acknowledge your email, you *must* indicate this to the instructor, in a polite manner, with a closing note asking for a response:

Dear Professor,  
 I am ill and will not be able to attend our 105 class tomorrow at 10:10. I will get notes from one of my classmates to cover the material I missed. Please let me know that you received this email. Thank you.

--George Smiley, student

- *Expect that your email message may be saved as documentation.* Sometimes email becomes a channel to vent complaints about grades, instructor attitudes, other students, *etc.* Remember that the same rules governing classroom behavior as outlined in the *DMACC Student Manual* also apply to email. In college—and on the job—**never send an email written in frustration.** Such emails provide instructors, employers, and authorities a permanent record of your behavior. If you feel angry or frustrated, wait 24 hours—or more—before sending an email message, and revise the message until the tone and content are appropriate.

### **Telephone Communications**

Whenever possible, speak to your instructor face-to-face before or after class or during a scheduled office hour. If there is no other option, however, follow these guidelines when communicating by telephone:

If your instructor answers the phone:

1. Name the person you are calling if the instructor does not identify himself or herself.
2. Identify yourself and the reason for calling.
3. Allow your instructor to respond when appropriate.
4. Enunciate clearly.



If you need to leave voice mail:

1. Avoid rushing the voice mail.
2. Enunciate clearly.
3. Provide a *complete* message including
  - Your name.
  - Telephone number.
  - Time and date of your call.
  - Reason for the call.

As with email, if you expect a response, please politely request one. Also, there may be unanticipated delays waiting for a response. Please avoid multiple phone calls to the same instructor if you experience a delay. Your instructor will get back to you when time permits.

### ***What should my instructor expect of me?***

No other course at the first-year level is likely to develop discipline more than a composition course. Simply put: *writing is work*. Typically, students should expect to put more time *outside of class* into a college composition course than any class they experienced in high school or their other first-year college courses. To meet your instructor's expectations for class preparedness, a good rule of thumb is to spend at least one hour outside of class (reading/analyzing assigned material, researching, etc.) for every hour your class meets per week. Expect also to increase your workload outside class time when planning/drafting/revising/editing major papers.

Also, when taking a composition course try to ***avoid these bad habits***:

- missing class
- coming late to class
- playing video games, searching Facebook, or visiting websites in a computerized classroom instead of writing
- texting during class
- carrying on side conversations during class
- studying for a test in another course during class
- sleeping during class

By eliminating bad habits and by following your instructor's classroom expectations listed in the course syllabus, you can make your learning experience a positive one. Generally, most instructors will respond positively to good habits listed below (Utah State; adapted in Bittner and Ranch 57-58, and re-adapted, with the publisher's permission, here):

- *Attend class regularly.* You lose when you skip a class. If you must miss a class, arrange for another student to keep notes for you (don't expect professors to give you theirs, even if you send a request via email).

- *Arrive on time and be attentive in class.* Late arrivals are a distraction to the entire class. If you must be late, find the nearest convenient seat and quickly and quietly sit down. Then listen actively by taking good notes.
- *Submit assignments on time.* Late assignments suggest a lack of enthusiasm and commitment, and your instructor will likely penalize your grade. (Remember that late assignments on the job are rarely tolerated by most employers.) Make sure that you understand, and adhere to, the course policies regarding deadlines and penalties for late work as outlined in the course syllabus.
- *Accept responsibility.* Don't make excuses; learn from your mistakes instead of simply defending them. Avoid distracting your classmates by complaining about the instructor or an assignment during class time.
- *Submit high quality work in both content and form.* Always try to do your best work. The process of completing an assignment may require an extended time commitment from you, more so if research is involved. Learn to get started on papers early and revise them up to the due date. Avoid trying to generate papers the night before they're due.
- *Ask questions relevant to the course material.* By asking relevant questions, you show your instructor that you are engaged in the course, e.g. "Would my essay's introduction be more effective if I included this statistic?" On the other hand, if you ask questions like, "Can I leave early?" or "Can we have class outside?" or "Are we doing anything important today?" you are not likely to gain your instructor's respect and admiration.
- *Visit your instructor during office hours.* At least once during the semester, drop by your instructor's office to ask a relevant question or to inquire about your general progress in the course. Your instructor can get to know you a little bit so you'll become more than "a face in the crowd."
- *Avoid Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism.* Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating in which a student fails to give proper credit for written work that belongs to someone else. It involves trying to pass off the work of others as one's own. Extensive revision of your work by someone else can also be considered plagiarism. Students falsely assume that they will not be caught; however, instructors are very adept at identifying work that has been incorrectly documented or "borrowed" from another source without proper citation. Your instructor may also choose to use a plagiarism detection service, such

as Turnitin.com, or may use an online search tool, like Google, to double-check passages you have submitted as your own work. If a student plagiarizes, the student may receive a failing grade for a course. For more information and rules governing Academic Dishonesty, please consult a good handbook and your DMACC *Student Manual*. You may also want to visit the DMACC Academic Integrity website at <https://www.dmacc.edu/learntocite/Pages/welcome.aspx> .

### ***Will my papers be graded objectively?***

Students sometimes assume that college instructors are biased negatively towards them as people, and this is what causes low grades. Your grade, however, is determined by the quality of the work *you produce*, not simply because an instructor “likes” or “dislikes” you.

Other students are troubled by the lack of a single “right answer” in composition and thus see grades as being arbitrary—as compared to a course like mathematics where getting the “right answer” counts. True, there are not as many “right answers” in composition as in other disciplines because there can be many ways to write a paper successfully.

But getting the “right answer” does not translate into “objective” evaluation. In fact, your performance in college is judged *subjectively* by instructors: their curricular choices are *subject to* both the kind of training they received in their field of study and to their approach to teaching college students. Some math instructors, for example, give partial credit for wrong answers on exams and/or “curve” final grades. Moreover, subjective evaluations are also prevalent in the workplace—from daily assessments to the infamous “six-month evaluations” where employees are rated both by their performance and by their ability to work with others.

Your composition instructor is trained to recognize those patterns and strategies in writing that work best for future coursework and on the job. Your grades, then, are based on how well you develop such patterns and strategies and apply them appropriately in your papers and other coursework. Also remember that your instructor applies the same grading standards to your classmates’ performance. Overall, you should be confident that your performance is measured accurately and fairly.



# Overview

## *of the Writing Program at DMACC*

This segment describes approaches used by most instructors in English 105, English 145, and English 106. Typical approaches common to composition courses about grading papers, developing an effective writing process, and assigning final grades will be discussed below. In addition, more information about each course can be found in this section.

### **Grading Papers**

This section describes in general how instructors typically assign paper grades. For more specific information or criteria about assigning grades, please refer to your instructor's syllabus.

#### **Evaluation**

Your ability to produce quality work in composition will be observed and evaluated in much the same way athletic coaches observe and evaluate a student athlete's progress by offering advice about how to improve a specific athletic move or strategy.

As your writing coach, your instructor will provide you with helpful comments about your writing. For instance, your instructor may point to places where more content development is needed, or where a better organizational pattern would strengthen the paper's effectiveness. Also like an athletic coach who "preaches the fundamentals," your instructor will point out errors in grammar and punctuation and may refer you to the "Common Composition Error" section of *The Blue Book* or other handbook to promote your development as an effective writer.

Your instructor's comments, then, should not be interpreted as idle criticism, having no consequence. On the contrary, the commentary is designed to motivate you to think about your writing process so that revision of your papers will lead to improved style and deeper insights in future work.

#### **The Writing Process and Your Grade**

One of the ways to achieve a good grade on any assignment you submit is to revise your paper as thoroughly as time allows. Depending upon your instructor's approach to teaching the writing process, this revision may involve one or more of these strategies:

- composing multiple whole drafts leading to a final product,
- rethinking and rewriting major sections of a paper, following your instructor's advice, or
- making your own changes to papers as you draft them.

In one way or another, then, **how well you learn to revise papers will affect your grade.** Most often, if you apply appropriate revision techniques to papers, the quality of your writing will improve.



### ***Grading Rubrics—How to Check Your Grade***

To help you understand assigned grades, many instructors include a grading *rubric* in their syllabi, or they may include one with assignments. A *rubric* is defined as a summary of the criteria used to make a judgment. When you do not understand why you received a certain grade for a particular paper, you should follow these three steps before consulting with your instructor about your grade:

1. Check your assignment sheet to make sure you fulfilled all of the criteria for the paper.
2. Re-read all of the instructor comments on your paper.
3. Review your instructor's grading rubric (if available).

Please refer to the sample grading rubric below for a general idea of how an instructor might evaluate your papers and assign a grade. This example illustrates the criteria used in a typical rubric, and it should not be confused with the grading criteria for your course. Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for specific information about how your grade will be determined.

<b>A</b>	<b><i>Excellent</i></b>	An <b>A</b> paper contains an identifiable and interesting thesis, an awareness of its audience, a cohesive organizing strategy, unified paragraphs, generalizations supported adequately with details, evidence, anecdotes, statistics, <i>etc.</i> Also, the paper exhibits clear and lively expression, a strong conclusion and few, if any, grammatical errors. In short, the paper displays independent thought as well as a mastery of conventions. ‘A’ papers typically reflect a student’s ability to exceed assignment goals and/or reader expectations.
<b>B</b>	<b><i>Above Average</i></b>	A <b>B</b> paper contains much the same as that above, but it demonstrates one or two <i>isolated problems</i> : a bad paragraph, a few strange sentences, a relatively weak introduction or conclusion, a lack of support in one particular area, or any single feature that needs a bit more work. In general, the writer has addressed the needs of readers and demonstrated competence in the use of editing/proofreading skills.
<b>C</b>	<b><i>Average</i></b>	A <b>C</b> paper meets the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates competence, but it may include one or more <i>general problems</i> , such as a forced or incomplete organizing strategy, an unclear thesis or theme, a confusion over the audience, an inconsistent use of detail or support, a lack of transitions between ideas, scenes or images, a vague or nonexistent conclusion. In general, the writer has addressed some needs of readers, but the paper would benefit from more careful thinking and/or revision and editing.
<b>D</b>	<b><i>Below Average</i></b>	A <b>D</b> paper contains a <i>combination of general problems</i> and is, thus, difficult to understand, often the result of a weak paper focus and poor expression. More often than not, ‘D’ papers reflect some confusion with the requirements of the assignment. In addition, ‘D’ papers often reflect a lack of effort—the I-wrote-it-the-night-before-it-was-due phenomenon, and/or problems with appropriate documentation of sources. Almost all ‘D’ papers would earn a higher grade with additional revision.
<b>F</b>	<b><i>Fail</i></b>	An <b>F</b> paper is virtually unreadable because it lacks focus, sufficient content, does not meet the requirements of the assignment, does not cite sources, and often contains far too many grammatical errors.

## Determining Course Grades

Your course grade in composition reflects your instructor's assessment of your progress in the course: how well you've achieved the course competencies and adhered to course policies. The instructor may use any evidence—attendance, class discussions, in-class computer exercises, quiz scores, *etc.*—that will help evaluate your progress, but your ability to produce quality work on major paper assignments by the deadline is often the primary basis for your course grade.

Feel free to ask your instructor—politely, of course—about your grade or how grades are calculated. Your instructor may not know you have questions unless you share them, and if you have questions, it is likely other students do as well.

## Questioning Course Grades

In the vast majority of cases, your course grade has been determined honestly and fairly by your composition instructor. Because any time during the semester, you may ask your instructor about your standing or progress in English 105, 145 or 106, your course grade should come as no surprise to you at the semester's end. If you wish to improve your grade as the semester develops, please follow this advice:

- Attend all classes, and arrive at class on time.
- Make appointments with your instructor outside of class to go over rough drafts (Hint: Try to meet during your instructor's office hours).
- Make writing the issue: For example, ask your instructor where she or he thinks your writing is weak, and strive to correct those weak areas.

At the same time, when questioning the course grade, please ***avoid these bad habits***:

- Do not wait until the semester's end to begin asking questions about your course grade. Doing so makes the grade the issue, not your writing.
- Avoid defending the indefensible: For example, avoid arguing that papers submitted late should not be penalized when this policy is in the syllabus.
- Do not make the grade the issue: For example, do not state that you need a certain grade to get credit for a composition course at a four-year school, or that you need a certain grade to please your parents who are paying for your education, *etc.*

Because instructors employ a variety of successful approaches to teaching English 105, English 145, and English 106 the next sections will focus on those experiences and ideas common to these composition courses. Be sure to read your instructor's syllabus carefully to preview your composition course and ask questions as they occur.

## **Overview of ENG 105/ Composition I**

English 105/Composition I is your introduction to composition at the college level. In this course, you will learn the very important relationship between an author's purpose in a written piece and readers' expectations. By reading the work of professional writers, you will learn how to "read like a writer" to see how writers fulfill or challenge reader expectations. Then you will apply what you've learned to your own writing.

The course may begin with students writing about their own observations and experiences. At some point in the course, students typically analyze and write about the work of other authors. Students will also be expected to include research in one or more papers using Modern Language Association (MLA) format for documentation.

### **English 105 Competencies**

A "competency" is defined as a required course component. Students sometimes use these competencies as a checklist to chart their strengths and weaknesses in English 105. As the course develops, the terminology used in these competencies should become clear to you. If you have trouble understanding any of the terms or concepts listed below, please consult with your instructor. By the conclusion of the semester, a successful student in ENG 105 will be expected to

1. Generate writing as an active process, using planning, drafting, revising, and editing
2. Evaluate strategies and approaches for organizing content
3. Examine college-level reading skills as an active part of the writing process
4. Synthesize research resources appropriate to the task and context
5. Integrate standard college-level documentation practices
6. Adapt to the rules of Standard English grammar appropriate to context

For a complete list of ENG 105 course competencies, please check out <http://www.curricunet.com/desmoines/search/course/>. If you have difficulty accessing the competencies, please contact your instructor.

## **Overview of ENG 145/Strategies for Composition**

ENG 145/Strategies for Composition is a "cohort" course which provides students with additional help and advice to successfully complete ENG 105. It is part of **The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)** in English, designed for those students whose standardized scores are just below the requirements for ENG 105. ENG 145 students are required to be enrolled and attend an ENG 105 section and to be enrolled and attend an ENG 145 section that meets immediately upon completion of each ENG 105 class. The 145 section functions largely as a workshop to provide the support the writers need to succeed in ENG 105. (adapted from site <http://alp-deved.org/what-is-alp-exactly/>)



An important feature of ENG 145 is the relationship that develops among its students and the instructor. The familiarity that the students gain by having the same instructor for both ENG 105 and ENG 145 helps students achieve success in ENG 105. Typically, what students do in ENG 145 includes:

- answering questions left over from the 105 class
- discussing ideas for the next essay in 105
- reviewing drafts of essays the students are working on for 105
- writing short papers that reinforce what has been discussed in the 105 class or prepare for what will be discussed in the 105 class
- working on grammar, punctuation, and reading
- discussing how to succeed as a college student
- discussing problems interfering with the students' progress in 105.

(adapted from site <http://alp-deved.org/what-is-alp-exactly/>)

### ***English 145 Credit Information and Completion Requirements***

The extra support from their instructor and peers is a major benefit for students enrolled in ENG 145. In addition, by passing ENG 145 with ENG 105, students will receive three ENG 105 credits plus two general elective ENG 145 credits which will count toward DMACC graduation requirements.

It is important to remember that you must pass both ENG 145 and ENG 105 in order to be eligible to take ENG 106. Also, you must maintain enrollment in both ENG 145 and ENG 105 throughout the entire semester; **you may not withdraw from either course.**

### ***English 145 Competencies***

A “competency” is defined as a required course component. Students sometimes use these competencies as a checklist to chart their strengths and weaknesses in English 145. As the course develops, the terminology used in these competencies should become clear to you. If you have trouble understanding any of the terms or concepts listed below, please consult with your instructor. By the conclusion of the semester, a successful student in ENG 145 will be expected to

1. Develop an active reading process
2. Develop an active writing process
3. Evaluate strategies and approaches for organizing content
4. Adapt to the expectations of the academic context
5. Integrate standard college-level documentation practices

For a complete list of ENG 145 course competencies, please check out <http://www.curricunet.com/desmoines/search/course/>. If you have difficulty accessing the competencies, please contact your instructor.

## **Overview of ENG 106/Composition II**

English 106/Composition II is the second course in the composition sequence at DMACC. In this course, students will learn the fundamentals of informative and persuasive rhetoric. By reading the work of professional writers, students will learn how to apply these fundamentals to writing assignments.

The course usually begins by summarizing the persuasive work of other authors or historical documents. Later in the course, students will analyze an author's use of persuasion to discover how use of rhetorical strategies promotes the author's purpose in terms of his or her audience. Students will also be expected to write one or more persuasive papers, which incorporate primary and secondary source material and use either Modern Language Association (MLA) or American Psychological Association (APA) format for documentation.

### **English 106 Competencies**

A "competency" is defined as a required course component. Students sometimes use these competencies as a checklist to chart their strengths and weaknesses in English 106. As the course develops, the terminology used in these competencies should become clear to you. If you have trouble understanding any of the terms or concepts listed below, please consult with your instructor.

In order to enroll in ENG 106, a student is required to have earned a C- or above in ENG 105. By the conclusion of the semester, a successful student in ENG 106 will be expected to

1. Apply college-level reading skills to academic and professional texts
2. Analyze rhetorical strategies found in academic and professional texts
3. Integrate sources to support research-based projects
4. Argue in response to continuing dialogues within and beyond academic disciplines
5. Evaluate individual writing processes to produce college-level essays and projects
6. Integrate standard college-level documentation practices

For a complete list of ENG 106 course competencies, please check out <http://www.curricunet.com/desmoines/search/course/>. If you have difficulty accessing the competencies, please contact your instructor.



## What to Expect in Your Online Composition Course

Many students enroll in online courses for reasons of convenience. While online courses may offer you conveniences, it is important to know that online writing courses are not easier than face-to-face classes. Nor do they require less writing. In fact, online courses are often more difficult than traditional classes because students need a great degree of self-discipline to succeed in an online class. In addition, often **more** writing is required of students in an online writing class.

**The expectations for students in an online class are just as high as the expectations of students in a traditional class; please be aware that the convenience of the class does not excuse a student from completing his or her daily and weekly assignments. If a student does not submit an assignment on time in an online class, the student will face the same consequences that they would in a traditional class. Incomplete assignments will be reflected in the lowering of the student's grade.**

### *What is my role as an online student?*

Much of the guidance from the “What to Expect in your English Course” section (p. 2) applies to online courses as well. In addition to these valuable guidelines, the section below includes specific tips for succeeding in an online course.

- Be engaged, be curious about your course's content, ask clarifying questions, and find relationships between what you are learning and your life.
- In addition to bringing your attention and commitment to the class, read your syllabus carefully for your instructor's policies, especially regarding deadline expectations. Some instructors allow you to submit all of your assignments the last day of class, **but many do not; different instructors have different expectations.**
- Be sure you have reliable access to the internet and a backup plan in case the internet at your regular place is not working.
- Lastly, communicate with your online instructor frequently. If you are having challenges that affect your performance or online participation in the course, let your instructor know. Because you will not see them in person throughout the semester, it is especially important that you are in regular communication with them.

### *What can I expect from my online instructor?*

You can expect your instructor to be knowledgeable about the course and to be available to you during the times that they have established for students. You can expect your instructor to answer your questions about the course content in a timely manner (and during their available times), to provide you with guidance about how you will be graded, and to provide feedback about how you can improve your skills in the course.

## ***How should I contact my online instructor?***

Most online instructors will have a DMACC email address which you can use to contact them; however, some instructors may prefer that you contact them using their personal email address, telephone, and/or during their office hours. Check your syllabus for guidance about how best to contact your online instructor.

Please remember that, like many workers, many online instructors have a “sundown” policy and may not check email after 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. Also, many instructors do not check email on holidays or on the weekend. Your best strategy is to plan ahead and ask your instructor any questions you may have about class or an assignment **well in advance** of the end of the work day, and before holidays and/or weekends. Please understand that your online instructor is not available 24/7.

## ***What should my online instructor expect of me?***

Your instructor can expect you to be an engaged, thoughtful, respectful student who is committed to doing his or her best. To ensure success, try to establish good habits:

- Check your course every day; sometimes assignments and/or deadlines change.
- Complete your assignments early. Ask your instructor for feedback on your drafts **before** your assignment is due.
- Check your DMACC email every day.
- Write thoughtful, respectful, well-reasoned posts to the blog/discussion board.

In general, try to ***avoid these bad habits***

- Not logging on every day.
- Not checking your DMACC email every day. **Tip:** If you contact the IT Department on your campus, they can forward your DMACC emails to your cell phone.
- Not reading the instructor’s comments and feedback to see how you can improve; only looking at your grade.
- Writing surface responses to blog/discussion board posts.
- Waiting until the day an assignment is due to complete it. (Then running into technical problems or questions about the assignment).
- Waiting until the end of the semester to complete course assignments.
- Not submitting your work on time.
  - Unsuccessful online students sometimes miss assignments because they believe the expectations and deadlines for assignments in an online course should be convenient for them; do not fall into this bad habit of thinking. A deadline is a deadline; if a student does not submit an assignment or submits an assignment late, a lowering of the student’s grade will likely result, no matter if the student is taking a traditional class or an online class.



# Common Composition Errors

The following section lists many of the most common student errors made in composition courses. This is NOT an exhaustive list of all the errors writers sometimes make when composing; it is merely *a starting point* and should not be expected to take the place of a reputable handbook. For this reason, you should keep two key points in mind when using this list:

- Because this is not an exhaustive list of all student errors, your instructor may mark errors that do not appear in this section. When this happens, take care to note them and refer to a handbook for further instruction.
- As you review the material which follows, remember the error advice is limited. You may need to refer to a handbook or dictionary to make thorough corrections and improvements in your writing.

You will find this list useful because the error notations will help you identify errors more quickly in your paper (see the sample below). The shorthand notations will also help you identify error patterns which can be discussed more easily with other DMACC students, tutors, and instructors.

**Error Notation Sample**

When my brother was sued for defecation of character, we  
all had to go down to the courthouse we didn't realize we  
where in for a really long crappy afternoon.

1C USG

1A WW

1A WW

1B WC

2D RO

# 1. Language Problems

Mark Twain once wrote in a letter to a friend:

*The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter-- it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.*  
- Letter to George Bainton, 10/15/1888 (“Lightning”).

**Tip #1:**

*When proofreading, try reading your composition backwards. Read each sentence carefully, checking for correctness and clarity.*

In other words, good writers take care to choose exactly the right word and avoid wrong or approximate word choices. Three main categories of word choice problems are errors of *denotation* (1A WW), errors of *connotation* (1B WC), and errors of *usage* (1C USG). By reading and referring to the list below, you should begin to develop an “ear” for language, resulting in more confidence when writing, speaking, and listening.

## 1A. WW Wrong Word Errors (Denotation)

You probably have had a friend who occasionally sings the wrong lyrics to some of your favorite songs, and you probably either winced in a mix of annoyance and amusement or corrected your friend. In much the same way, if you don’t use the correct word in your writing, you will annoy readers by confusing them or distracting them while reading. Using the wrong word also calls into question your credibility and competence. Below are examples of errors in denotation—also known as wrong word errors (WW)—and a short list of some of the more commonly misused words in composition classes.

**Error:** Is she taller then me? (than)

**Error:** I’m defiantly going to take a vacation this year. (definitely)

**Error:** Werewolves where a problem wherever they went. (were)

**Error:** Because I took my geology course for granite, I got a ‘D’ on the final. (for granted)

**Error:** I tried to infer that Benji was a bum. (imply)

## 1B. WC Awkward Word Choice (Connotation)

Would you use the same kind of language with police officers as you would with your friends? Unless a police officer is a friend, you probably wouldn’t. Understanding that words have effects beyond their dictionary definitions is called *connotation*. Like using curse words in front of a trial judge during a legal proceeding, these errors result from a writer (or speaker) misgauging the context of the communication, resulting in vague, awkward, or inappropriate

language choices. Listed below are some of the more common awkward word choice problems found in writing.

**Ambiguous** Jane and Ted were entertaining guests.  
**Corrected** Jane and Ted hosted the party.

**Vague** Milking cows by hand is a thing not practiced by modern dairy farmers.

**Corrected** Milking cows by hand is rarely practiced by modern dairy farmers.

**Inappropriate** The King of England treated the colonists like crap.  
**Corrected** The King of England treated the colonists poorly.

## 1C. Usg Usage

**Tip #2:**  
Delete wordiness. Eliminate words that do not contribute additional support for your thesis/claim.

Words that are misused or do not conform to standards of formal communication are called *usage errors*. Commonly confused words (such as *less* and *fewer*), use of slang (such as use of *really* as an intensifier), and nonstandard English constructions (such as *theirself*) reflect some of the errors in this category.

**Confused Word** Less people in line would be nice.  
**Corrected** Fewer people in line would be nice.

**Slang** I was, like, really nervous before the interview.  
**Corrected** I was very nervous before the interview.

**Nonstandard** In today's doggie-dog world, a person must take care of theirself.  
**Corrected** In today's dog-eat-dog world, a person must take care of him or herself.

One of the most common usage errors encountered in composition courses is the nonstandard use of the word “you.” Be sure to use the word *you* only when addressing the reader directly. Do not use the word *you* as an indefinite synonym for *one* or *anyone*.

**Error** You could feel the tension in the room.  
**Corrected** Anyone who was there could feel the tension in the room.

**Error** You really have to know what you're doing when scuba-diving.  
**Corrected** One really has to know what one is doing when scuba-diving.

## 1D. ART Missing Articles or Wrong Articles

Students make two common article errors in composition courses: not including an article when one is required or including a wrong article. There are two basic kinds of articles in English: *the* and *a/an*. *The* is a definite article and is used to refer to a specific noun. For example, if I write, “let’s see the movie,” I am referring to a specific movie.

*A/an* is an indefinite article and is used to refer to a non-specific noun. For example, if I write “let’s see a movie,” I am referring to any movie. I am not referring to a specific movie.

*A* is used to modify a singular noun that begins with a consonant, for example, a tree; a chair; a parent; a store. *An* is used to modify a singular noun that has an initial sound of a vowel, for example, an egg; an airplane; an orchestra; an igloo.

**Error** The children liked to play on jungle gym.  
**Corrected** The children liked to play on the jungle gym.

**Error** I had a egg for breakfast.  
**Corrected** I had an egg for breakfast.

## 2. Errors in Sentence Grammar

A serious failing among some students is not understanding sentence boundaries, or *complete sentences*. The three most common errors in this category are the sentence fragment (SF), the comma splice (CS), and the run-on sentence (RO).

### 2A. SF Sentence Fragments

A sentence is defined as a group of words that contains a subject and a verb, and conveys a complete thought. When one or more of these elements are missing from a word group, a *sentence fragment* occurs, a very serious error in writing.

**Clause Fragment** We went outside. Because the day was nice.  
**Corrected** Because the day was nice, we went outside.

**Verbal Fragment** Bill and Sandy had fun. Swimming through the rolling waves.  
**Corrected** Bill and Sandy had fun. Swimming through the rolling waves, they laughed and high-fived each other in the surf.

**Listing Fragment** The cars in the parking lot were classics. Fords, Chevrolets, and Buicks.  
**Corrected** Fords, Chevrolets, and Buicks were the classic 1960s cars on display in the parking lot.



## 2B. CS Comma Splice

Consecutive independent clauses joined only by commas are known as comma splices or comma faults. Below is an example of this error and the various ways it can be corrected.

**Error** We ran around the yard looking for the mouse, unfortunately he slipped away.

**Corrected** We ran around the yard looking for the mouse.  
Unfortunately, he slipped away.

**Corrected** We ran around the yard looking for the mouse, but unfortunately, he slipped away.

**Corrected** We ran around the yard looking for the mouse;  
unfortunately, he slipped away.

## 2C. CJ-CS Conjunctive Comma Splice

Comma splice errors often occur when adverbial conjunctions (such as *therefore, as a result, consequently, however, etc.*) are used to join independent clauses.

**Error** We were very tired, consequently, we gave up the search.

**Corrected** We were very tired; consequently, we gave up the search.

**Error** At first he refused, however later that evening he changed his mind and agreed to buy the car.

**Corrected** At first he refused; however, later that evening he changed his mind and agreed to buy the car.

## 2D. RO Run-On Sentences

A close cousin of the comma splice error, a *run-on* or *fused sentence*, occurs when consecutive independent clauses lack any punctuation between them. This error should not be confused with a wordy sentence; just because a sentence seems overly long does not make it a run-on sentence.

**Error** I put the tire in the shed it was warm there.

**Corrected** I put the tire in the shed. It was warm there.

**Error** The car sped off the cliff the driver jumped to safety.

**Corrected** The car sped off the cliff; the driver jumped to safety.

### 3. Errors in Sentence Rhetoric

Errors in sentence grammar occur because the writer does not understand the rules governing sentence boundaries and the punctuation of clauses and phrases. Errors in *sentence rhetoric* have more to do with the effect of a sentence on readers; the sentence is difficult to understand by being vague, ambiguous, or both. Listed below are some of the more common ways sentences fail rhetorically.

#### 3A. DM Dangling Modifier

A dangling modifier occurs when two parts of a sentence don't seem to match; the element being modified is confused with something else or nothing at all.

**Error** After laughing with several of my friends, a white rabbit came into view.

**Corrected** After laughing with several of my friends, I saw a white rabbit.

**Error** Being a health hazard, the school nurse suggested the school closings.

**Corrected** Because most students were absent because of the virus, the school nurse suggested the school closings.

**Error** Racked with guilt, it becomes obvious why divorce is so common.

**Corrected** Many couples, racked with guilt, often end up in divorce court.

#### 3B. MM Misplaced Modifier

A misplaced modifier is not close to the word or phrase it is supposed to modify and can cause confusion.

**Error** I found several videos of The Foo Fighters performing live in Jim's closet.

**Corrected** In Jim's closet, I found several live performances of The Foo Fighters.

To increase the clarity of a sentence, place limiting modifiers such as *even* or *only* directly before the word or phrase they modify. Note the difference in these sentences:

**Error** Even his mother and the paperboy were surprised.

**Corrected** His mother and even the paperboy were surprised.

### 3C. //ism          Parallelism Error

When one or more elements in a sentence or a list violate a set pattern, the sentence is considered not parallel and is likely to confuse readers.

**Error**            Jimmy's favorite activities were fishing, hunting, and to swim like a fish.

**Corrected**        Jimmy's favorite activities were fishing, hunting, and *swimming* like a fish.

**Error**            Many people feel that winning respect is more important than money.

**Corrected**        Many people feel that *winning* respect is more important than *making* money.

### 3D. GS and GS/MW          Garbled Sentences and Missing Words

Sometimes a sentence may have multiple problems which will confound readers. Often, garbling results from trying to cram too many ideas into one sentence, as the examples below suggest.

**Error**            It is very difficult to see how the problem resulted from the actions of many people in the building at the time the event happened, showing the characters' development in the movie.

**Correction**      Character development was revealed in the movie's apartment building scene.

At other times, words may be left out of a sentence (MW) resulting in confusing or unintended meaning.

**Error**            I, fortunately, did go to jail.

**Correction**      I, fortunately, did not go to jail.

## 4. Pronoun Problems

One of the more common errors in student writing is the improper use of pronouns. By referring to the list of examples below and by using a handbook, you should be able to eliminate these errors from your writing in short order.

### 4A. Pro-F Improper Pronoun Form

Most of these problems occur when the grammatical function of the pronoun is not clearly understood. By determining whether the pronoun is functioning as an *object* or a *subject* within a sentence, you should be able to determine the proper pronoun form.

**Error** It's up to you and I to solve the problem. (object)

**Corrected** It's up to you and me to solve this problem.

**Error** Me and him went to the gym. (subject)

**Corrected** He and I went to the gym.

**Error** Who are you speaking to? (object)

**Corrected** To whom are you speaking?

### 4B. Pro-Ref Faulty Pronoun Reference

Pronouns need to agree in number and person with the words for which they stand or to which they refer—their *antecedents*. Remember that pronouns must agree with the function of their antecedents (*i.e.*, If an antecedent is singular like the word “dog”, then the pronoun referring to “dog” must also be singular as in “Every dog has its day.”). Also note that indefinite pronouns, such as *each*, *every*, *all*, *neither*, *none*, *everybody*, and *anyone*, often function as antecedents and almost always take the singular form, though they may “sound” plural. However, gender neutral “they” or “their” are now accepted as singular.

**Error** Each bush had little nuts under them.

**Corrected** Each bush had little nuts under it.

**Weak** The consequence was obvious to each member who attended the meeting. They had to go their own way. (singular antecedent)

**Weak** The consequence was obvious to each member. Each had to go his or her own way. (gender specific)

**Better** The consequence was obvious to each member. Each had to go their own way. (gender neutral)

For more about recent changes in pronoun use, please click on this link from Purdue's Online Writing Lab. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/595/04/>

Make certain the pronoun refers to its antecedent clearly. Pronoun references that are vague or ambiguous are sure to confuse readers.

**Error** When Billy swung the bat at the marble statue, it broke in two.

**Corrected** The bat broke in two when Billy swung it against the statue.

**Error** Throughout the course of a lifetime, a human being is likely to commit several serious errors. One's ego, however, tends to block this from one's memory.

**Corrected** Throughout the course of a lifetime, a human being is likely to commit several serious errors. One's ego, however, tends to block these errors from one's memory.

## 5. Verb Problems

In English, the verb carries the action of a sentence, and since almost every action carries new information, using the correct verb or verb form is a key to clarity. Listed below are some common ways verbs go wrong in a composition. Be sure to consult a handbook for more information about how to correct these problems.

### 5A. S/V Subject/Verb Agreement

In a sentence, the verb must agree with its subject in person and number.

**Error** The rocks we threw at the signpost was the best we could find.

**Corrected** The rocks we threw at the signposts were the best we could find.

**Error** A ball, a bat, and a glove is the required equipment.

**Corrected** A ball, a bat, and a glove are the required equipment.

**Error** There's three basic ways to succeed.

**Tip #3:**

There is a difference between **revision** and **editing**. Revision should occur first, paying attention to content, support, and organization. Editing is one of the last steps in correcting grammatical errors and polishing sentences in the final draft.

**Corrected** There are three basic ways to succeed.

## 5B. VB Verb Form Error

Make sure to follow standard verb forms. If you have trouble in this category, remember all good dictionaries provide lists of both regular and irregular verb forms and their principal parts.

**Error** Her imagination had ran away.

**Corrected** Her imagination had run away.

**Error** John didn't like the work, but after a while, he got use to it.

**Corrected** John didn't like the work, but after a while, he got used to it.

**Error** It's a good policy to let ideas set awhile before implementing them.

**Corrected** It's a good policy to let ideas sit awhile before implementing them.

## 6. SP Spelling Problems

Though you may view spelling errors as minor problems, readers often find them annoying because they have to stop and correct your spelling in their mind's eye. Poor spelling also calls into question your credibility and devalues what you are trying to convey. Finally remember that your word-processing program's spellchecker will not catch all spelling errors (as seen in some of the examples below). Instead of solely relying on such programs, use a dictionary to help correct these errors. It might be helpful as well to keep a master list of words which you commonly misspell.

**Error** My english course is tougher than my chemistry course.

**Corrected** My English course is tougher than Chemistry 250.

**Error** There was a miner delay.

**Corrected** There was a minor delay.

**Error** I have to much trouble with you too children!

**Corrected** I have too much trouble with you two children!

**Error** That textile coarse was too easy.

**Corrected** That textile course was too easy.

**Error** We were wonderfully accomodated at the hotel.

**Corrected** We were wonderfully accommodated at the hotel.

## 7. Punctuation Problems

Punctuation problems within sentences might be viewed as being minor, but, as in the case of spelling problems, these errors call into question one's credibility and often affect a sentence's meaning.

### 7A. R/NR Restrictive vs. Non-Restrictive Elements

Also known as essential and non-essential elements, these problems often occur within relative clauses. A non-restrictive or non-essential element is a word group that functions as parenthetical (*extra*) information to the intended meaning of the sentence and is often surrounded by commas. Conversely, a restrictive or essential element is crucial to the intended meaning of the sentence and commas are not present.

In the first sentence below, the placement of commas indicates *all* workers will receive extra pay, whereas the second sentence makes clear that only those working the graveyard shift will receive more money.

**Error** All workers, who work the 11p.m. to 7 a.m. shift, will receive extra pay.

**Corrected** All workers who work the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift will receive extra pay.

In the example below, the first sentence is in error because the placement of commas indicates the student has only one brother when, in fact, the student has many brothers as indicated properly by the second sentence.

**Error** My brother, who lives in Detroit, plays cards.

**Corrected** My brother who lives in Detroit plays cards.

### 7B. No Com Unnecessary Comma

Commas are misused when they interrupt closely related parts of a sentence such as a subject and its verb, a verb and its object, or a preposition and its object.

**Error** My old tennis racquet, is broken.

**Corrected** My old tennis racquet is broken.

**Error** All of us swam like madmen, to the shore.

**Corrected** All of us swam like madmen to the shore.

**Error** After watching the movie, I fell into, a deep sleep.

**Corrected** After watching the movie, I fell into a deep sleep.

## 7C. End Punct Terminal Punctuation Errors

Punctuation at its end helps convey the logic and tone of a sentence. When end punctuation is used incorrectly, your reader is likely to become confused.

**Error** He asked me what I thought?

**Corrected** He asked me what I thought.

**Error** "Where's the beef," asked the little old lady?

**Corrected** "Where's the beef?" asked the little old lady.

**Error** What does it all mean.

**Corrected** What does it all mean?

**Tip #4:**

Schedule as much time for revision as you budgeted for planning and drafting.

## 7D. Apos Apostrophe errors

Perhaps the most common punctuation error in composition courses occurs when some confusion between possessives and plurals results in the omission or misplacement of apostrophes.

**Error** Bob is in Bobs room where he belongs!

**Corrected** Bob is in Bob's room where he belongs!

**Error** Its a lot of work, do'nt you think?

**Corrected** It's a lot of work, don't you think?

**Error** In today's world, the individual gets lost in the shuffle.

**Corrected** In today's world, the individual gets lost in the shuffle.

## 7E. SC Faulty Semi-Colon Use

A common misconception about the semi-colon is that it functions as "a big comma," mistakenly used to create a longer pause than a comma provides. In most cases, however, it's better to think of the semi-colon as "a little period," used to connect closely related independent clauses.

**Error** Shelly thinks it's pretty neat; whenever she gets paid extra.

**Corrected** Shelly thinks it's pretty neat whenever she gets paid extra.

**Corrected** Whenever Shelly gets paid extra, she thinks it's pretty neat.

**Corrected** Sometimes Shelly gets paid extra; she thinks it's pretty neat.



## 8. Paragraph Problems

Unquestionably, knowing how to compose unified and coherent paragraphs is a major key to succeeding in a composition course. Well-constructed paragraphs make your logic and ideas more accessible to readers. After sentences, paragraphs are the building blocks of writing.

This section will focus on errors common in constructing standard paragraphs. Because there are numerous ways to solve these problems, please consult a handbook to consider your options.

### **Tip #5:**

*While word processing programs make drafting more efficient, do not forget to step back from the computer, print your draft, and read your composition with pencil in hand.*

### 8A. ¶unity? Paragraph Unity Problems

Each paragraph in your papers needs to be unified; in other words, it needs to be focused on a central idea, image, or function to make sense to readers. When a paragraph lacks unity, readers will have difficulty understanding the point or purpose of the paragraph as exemplified below:

I chose an advertisement that has several interesting designs in it. Central to the success of this ad was the picture of ducks in the center of the ad. My favorite duck is the mallard. The ducks tend to grab the attention of duck hunters who form the magazine's target audience. The last time I went duck hunting, I bagged a greenhead.

As you can see in the previous example, the student has mixed personal experience with ad analysis, the purpose of the assignment. How would you advise the student to correct his error? Remember, there is more than one answer to this question.

### 8B. ¶unity/top? Paragraph Unity Problems —Weak Topic Sentence

Sometimes a paragraph “breaks down” in the middle as in the example above. At other times, a paragraph is guided by a weak topic sentence as in the example below:

Many modern women stay in shape and relieve stress through exercising at home. My mother is no exception. When she works out, she makes a lot of noise which makes it difficult to watch TV. On other days, dinner is either late or is insufficient for us kids because she's

dieting. Her workouts also interfere with important projects needed to be done around the house, especially on weekends.

The topic sentence within the paragraph above is weak because it conveys something positive about working out at home, whereas the rest of the paragraph conveys negative attitudes about this activity.

## 8C. ¶Trans? Problems of Paragraph Coherence—Weak Transitions

A paragraph can be unified but still lack coherence. In other words, the paragraph may be unified on a central point or purpose, but logical links between sentences within paragraphs are weak, resulting in an inconsistent logical flow that forces the reader to work out logical relationships. Lack of transitions or cohesive devices between sentences within a paragraph can also create a “choppy” reading experience as illustrated below:

Transitional words phrases help writers connect ideas. These simple words and phrases act like highway signposts which point the reader in the right direction in a written piece. (X) Transitional words and phrases have a few downsides. Used in every sentence, transitional words and phrases can make the writing appear mechanical or “stiff.” Using the same transitional word or phrase can make a writer’s ideas seem redundant. (X) Transitional words and phrases are sometimes indispensable, particularly when the writer wants to contrast two ideas or to alert the reader to any change in the logical flow of ideas. (X) Though transitional words and phrases may not be used in every sentence, they are essential tools that help writers keep readers on track.

The circled Xs above indicate where transitions or cohesive devices are weak, making the logic of the paragraph difficult to follow (in this case, the writer employs an advantages/disadvantages pattern to establish logic). The example below shows what can be done with transitions to improve this paragraph:

Transitional words phrases help writers connect ideas. These simple words and phrases act like highway signposts which point the reader in the right direction in a written piece. Transitional words and phrases have a few downsides, **however**. Used in every sentence, transitional

words and phrases can make the writing appear mechanical or “stiff.” Using the same transitional word or phrase can **also** make a writer’s ideas seem redundant. **Nevertheless**, transitional words and phrases are sometimes indispensable, particularly when the writer wants to contrast two ideas or to alert the reader to any change in the logical flow of ideas. **On the whole**, though transitional words and phrases may not be used in every sentence, they are essential tools that help writers keep readers on track.

For a more complete list of transitions and cohesive devices, please consult a handbook or dictionary.

## **8D. Trans? Weak Transitions between Paragraphs**

Sometimes links between ideas are not only weak *within* paragraphs, but also *between* paragraphs. When this problem occurs, most often either the reader will have difficulty following a paper’s main points, or the paper will seem like a list of ideas rather than a good piece of writing. Consider the following student’s response to Gore Vidal’s article “Drugs”:

**X** In the article “Drugs,” Gore Vidal talks about how fighting drugs has become a big business as pushing them. In the second paragraph Gore Vidal gives his own opinion. He believes that many drugs are bad for the majority, but nevertheless should be sold in a more sensible way.

**X** Gore talks about how the United States was the first creation who believed every man has the right to do what he wishes, and in paragraph 6, he talks about how every man has the power to kill himself.

**X** In the article “Drugs,” Gore talks about how alcohol has impacted this nation. He also talks about how the same thing is happening today, and how the government has learned nothing of our past attempts to control inebriating elements.

**X** Gore talks about how the Mafia is selling drugs, and that current government policies will only increase the Mafia's control of the drug trade. He also implies that the Mafia is linked to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

As you can see, the student's paper reads more like a list of ideas rather than a well-considered response to Vidal's article. Even though each paragraph is unified and coherent, the logical links between paragraphs are very weak and annoyingly repetitious so that there is no logical flow to the paper. Consider the transitional improvements below:

**Tip #6:**

*Reading your draft aloud to yourself or a friend is a helpful revision strategy. Read slowly, marking errors or confusing sentences to be revised later.*

In the article "Drugs," Gore Vidal talks about how fighting drugs has become a big business as pushing them. In the second paragraph Gore Vidal gives his own opinion. He believes that many drugs are bad for the majority, but nevertheless should be sold in a more sensible way.

**X Later in this article,** Vidal talks about how the United States was the first creation who believed every man has the right to do what he wishes, and in paragraph 6, he talks about how every man has the power to kill himself.

**X This point is followed by how alcohol has impacted this nation.** He cites Prohibition as being an example of the harm non-legalization of "forbidden fruit" will lead to. Vidal also talks about how the same thing is happening today, and how the government has learned nothing of our past attempts to control inebriating elements.

**X Toward the end of the article, Vidal ends with maybe his best point about how the Mafia (or, nowadays, "cartels") was selling drugs,** and that 1970 government policies will only increase the Mafia's control of the drug trade. He also implies that the Mafia back in 1970 was linked to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

**X Overall**, although Gore Vidal's article is well-organized and highly spirited, he does not support his points very well. He lacks solid statistical evidence about the long-term effects legalization of drugs will have on the masses. By providing such evidence, he would make his position more believable and responsible. Instead he relies on questionable analogical reasoning and his own utopian views to support his points.

**Tip #7:**

*Revision can sometimes be overwhelming. Instead of revising the essay all at once, simplify the revision process by making big changes first, then returning to the essay later to make smaller final changes.*



## Helpful Websites

For further information regarding English 105, 145, and 106, DMACC policies and resources, or general composition advice, please visit the following websites:

### **DMACC Resources**

DMACC Academic Integrity website:

<https://www.dmacc.edu/learntocite/Pages/welcome.aspx>

*DMACC Student Handbook:*

<https://www.dmacc.edu/studentconduct/Pages/welcome.aspx>

DMACC policies and procedures (including Academic Misconduct and Non-Academic Misconduct): <https://www.dmacc.edu/studentconduct/Pages/welcome.aspx>

DMACC Libraries Online: <https://www.dmacc.edu/library/Pages/welcome.aspx>

DMACC help desk (support for technology and online-related questions):

<https://www.dmacc.edu/helpdesk/Pages/welcome.aspx>

DMACC resources for online students:

<https://www.dmacc.edu/online/Pages/students.aspx>

### **Composition Resources**

DMACC Library and Research Tools

<http://libguides.dmacc.edu/tutorials>

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University for Non-Purdue College Level Instructors and Students

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/679/01>

Bartleby's Usage, Style, and Composition—Full Text Searchable Resources

<http://www.bartleby.com/usage/>

Smarthinking.com—an online writing and tutoring service for students

<http://smarthinking.com/>

(Note: For more information about the service and information about how to establish an account, please see <https://www.dmacc.edu/smarthinking/Pages/welcome.aspx> .)

## Works Cited

- Utah State University Academic Support Services. Your Utah State Experience: Strategies for Success. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1998. adapted in “What is Expected of New Students.” DMAACC Seminar: Orientation 1<sup>st</sup> edition, by Sharon Bittner and Margie Ranch. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2003. 57-58.
- “Lightning.” www.twainquotes.com. Directory of Mark Twain’s maxims, quotations, and various opinions. Page L. 17 June 2008.
- <http://www.twainquotes.com/Lightning.html>.

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