

Dr. Paulk's

Common Writing Peccadilloes

1. The obnoxious word “that.” 99.9 percent of the time, “that” is totally unnecessary. Use the “that” rule. Take the word “that” out of the sentence. If it makes sense without the word “that,” then you do not need it. I have a great idea for a class mission project. Every time one of us uses the word “that” when it is not necessary, we will put a dollar in the mission jar. At the end of the semester, we will give the money collected to a missionary. ☺ Don't use emoticons either.
2. The word “biblical” is an adjective. We do not capitalize adjectives.
3. Punctuation goes inside quotation marks. For example, Dr. Paulk says, “Live every day you are alive.”
4. When quoting, put a comma before the quote, and capitalize the first word of the quote. Example: John Piper says, “God is most glorified when I am most satisfied in him.”
5. Passive voice actively annoys me.
Passive voice: The hymn has come to show me my sin.
Active voice: The hymn shows me my sin.
6. Sentence fragments make me want to scream and claw my face. They are unacceptable in college level writing. Each sentence has a subject and a predicate. If I cannot find both, I get very grumpy.
Fragment: The dog with green hair.
Complete sentence: The dog with green hair stinks.
(My dogs do not have green hair.)
7. Capitalizing the personal pronoun when the antecedent is God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit is not grammatically necessary. I know, I know you capitalize it because you want to honor God. God knows you want to honor him, therefore, do not capitalize he or him when the antecedent is God. If you do, Dr. Paulk will frown, and we do not want Dr. Paulk to frown. He has a nice smile, and we want to see his pearly whites.
8. Saying things like “for me,” “in my opinion,” “the way I see it” are merely taking up precious space for more needful words. I know it's your opinion because the assignment is asking for your opinion.
9. Writing really, really, really long sentences.....I get lost. Only very talented and gifted novelists can write long sentences without losing me.
Generally, long sentences are frowned upon in nonfiction writing.
10. Writing one mammoth paragraph is verboten!
11. Compound sentences require commas. Example: The dog ate a hamburger, and the cat ate a rat.
12. Beginning a sentence with an adverbial phrase requires a comma. Example:
When the hammer fell on my foot, I screamed.
13. Beginning a sentence with a prepositional phrase requires a comma. Example:
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

14. If you begin a sentence with “if” and you do not use a comma after the conditional phrase containing “if,” then Dr. Paulk will weep uncontrollably. Example: If the sky is red at night, the water in the bay will be smooth in the morning. (This is true, by the way.)
15. Double space!!!
16. Take a Webinar on proper formatting for your discipline (Turabian, MLA or APA). Learn it, memorize it, sleep it, eat it...

I will add to this list later. Keep this in front of you when you write all future assignments. Do not commit any of these capital offences!