

**King Philip Regional High School  
Composition and Style Handbook**

**English Department**

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# UNDERSTOOD RULES

- **HEADING AND TITLE** (correctly punctuated and creative)

Joe Student  
Teacher's Name  
English 9, Class  
22 March 2012

Creative Title (do not bold, underline, change font size, etc.)

- **TITLES**

-**Longer Works:** plays or novels should be **underlined** or **italicized**.

-**Shorter Works:** short stories, songs, poetry, and nonfiction articles should be in quotation marks.

- **USE PRESENT TENSE WHEN DISCUSSING FICTION**

Correct: Romeo makes some difficult decisions.

Incorrect: Romeo made some difficult decisions.

- **DO NOT USE CONTRACTIONS IN FORMAL WRITING**

Correct: does not

Incorrect: doesn't

- **PUNCTUATING CITATIONS** - punctuation follows the citation, with the exception of an exclamation point or a question mark

Correct: "Now watch me hit a target no man has hit before" (940).

"Now watch me hit a target no man has hit before!" (940).

Incorrect: "Now watch me hit a target no man has hit before," (940).

"Now watch me hit a target no man has hit before." (940).

"Now watch me hit a target no man has hit before." (940)

- **PUNCTUATING CLOSE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS** - all punctuation goes inside the quotation marks

Correct: After Jim walks off, Huck says, "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself..—but I done it" (73). Although it takes Huck "**fifteen minutes**," the fact that he apologizes to Jim proves that Huck is not a racist.

Incorrect: After Jim walks off, Huck says, "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself..—but I done it" (73). Although it takes Huck "**fifteen minutes**", the fact that he apologizes to Jim proves that Huck is not a racist.

- **DO NOT USE FIRST PERSON (OR YOU) IN FORMAL WRITING**

Correct: Romeo is impulsive when he...  
Romeo should have...

Incorrect: Romeo shows us that he is impulsive when he...  
I think Romeo should have...

- **DO NOT REFERENCE QUOTES IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING WAYS**

In this quote...  
This quote shows that...  
The following quote proves...  
As the quote proves...  
This quote connects to my thesis because...  
As stated in the quote...

Correct: Romeo is impulsive because...

Incorrect: This quote shows that Romeo is impulsive because...

## I. Comma Rules

1. Use a comma before **for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so** (conjunctions) when they join independent clauses

Correct: I went to the store, and I bought a soda.

Incorrect: I went to the store, and bought a soda.

*Independent Clause*: a group of words that contains a **stated** subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

*Conjunctions*: For  
And  
Nor  
But  
Or  
Yet  
So

2. Use a comma after a succession of introductory prepositional phrases

Correct: At the end of the long movie, I went home.

Incorrect: At the end, I went home.

*Prepositional Phrase*: A group of words that starts with a preposition and ends with a noun/pronoun but does not contain a verb.

*Common Prepositions*:

about	beside	inside	through
above	besides	into	throughout
across	between	like	to
after	beyond	near	toward
against	by	of	under
around	down	off	until
at	during	on	up
before	except	out	upon
behind	for	outside	with
below	from	over	without
beneath	in	since	

**3. Use a comma when a dependent clause comes before an independent clause.**

Correct: After the game **ended**, we went home.

Incorrect: After the game, we went home.

*Dependent Clause:* A group of words that contains a **verb** but cannot stand alone as a sentence.

*Common Dependent Clause Starters:*

after	so that
although	than
as if	though
as long as	unless
as soon as	until
because	when
before	whenever
if	where
in order that	wherever
since	while

*Independent Clause:* a group of words that contains a stated subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

Note: If you are having trouble locating the main verb in the sentence, locate all the verbs in the sentence, and the main verb will usually be the second verb.

**4. Use a comma to set off nonessential information.**

Correct: Students **who pass the test** will be exempt from the final. [essential]  
Robert, **who lives across the street**, graduated from high school. [nonessential]

Incorrect: Students, who pass the test, will be exempt from the final.  
Robert who lives across the street graduated from high school.

*Nonessential:* Adds unnecessary information and does not impact the main idea of the sentence.

*Essential:* Contains necessary information about the main idea of the sentence. \_

## II. Semicolons

1. Use a semicolon between independent clauses in a sentence if they are not joined by for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so (conjunctions).

Correct: I went to the store; I bought a soda.

Incorrect: I went to the store; and I bought a soda.

*Independent Clauses*: a group of words that contains a **stated** subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

2. Use a semicolon between independent clauses joined by transitional words.  
**\*Never start a sentence with any of the transition words.\***

Correct: I went to the store; however, they were out of bread.

Incorrect: I went to the store. However, they were out of bread.

*Transition Words*:

for example  
for instance  
that is  
besides  
accordingly  
moreover  
nevertheless

furthermore  
otherwise  
therefore  
however  
consequently  
instead  
hence

3. Use a semicolon (instead of a comma) to separate independent clauses in a compound sentence if there are commas within the clauses.

Incorrect:

After the game ended, we decided to get something to eat, but Jen wanted to go home.

Correct:

After the game ended, we decided to get something to eat; but Jen wanted to go home.

After the game we decided to get something to eat, but Jen wanted to go home.

*Compound Sentence*: A sentence that contains two independent clauses joined by a conjunction

#### 4. Use a colon when an independent clause introduces a quotation.

Correct: In *Of Mice and Men* Lennie specifically states how he and George are different from the other ranchers: "Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why" (15).

Incorrect: In *Of Mice and Men* Lennie specifically states how he and George are different from the other ranchers, "Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why" (15).

### III. Active and Passive Voice

1. You should always use active voice when writing essays. When using active voice, the subject does the action. When using passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action.

Correct: Most of the class reads the book.

Incorrect: The book is read by most of the class.

**Note:** A tip to finding passive voice is to look for forms of the linking verb "to be" (*be, is, are, am, being, was, were*) followed directly by another verb.

### IV. Subject/Verb Agreement

Verbs should agree in number. Singular subjects take singular verbs, while plural subjects take plural verbs.

1. A gerund is considered singular.

Correct: Writing thank you cards is such a hassle.

Incorrect: Writing thank you cards are such a hassle.

*Gerund:* A noun ending in "-ing," like "swimming" or "running"



## 2. Indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural.

The following pronouns are always singular: anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something

Correct: Everyone is wearing a t-shirt today.

Incorrect: Everyone are wearing t-shirts today.  
Does anyone wants a cookie?

The following pronouns are always plural: both, few, many, several

Correct: Both of the games were postponed.

Incorrect: Both of the games was postponed.

Some indefinite pronouns (such as some, all, any, most, and none), depend on their use in the sentence. These pronouns are singular when they refer to a singular noun or plural when they refer to a plural noun.

Correct: All of the vegetable garden has been planted. (All refers to vegetable garden)  
All of the vegetables have been planted. (All refers to vegetables)

Incorrect: All of the vegetable garden have been planted. (All refers to vegetable garden)  
All of the vegetables has been planted. (All refers to vegetables)

## 3. Compound subjects are usually plural

Correct: Milk and juice are beverages I enjoy.

Incorrect: Milk and juice is beverages I enjoy.

*Compound subject*: Two nouns joined by "and."

## 4. When the compound subject is one idea, use a singular verb.

Correct: The secretary and treasurer is Gretchen. (one person)  
Rice and beans is my favorite meal. (one meal)

Incorrect: The secretary and treasurer are Gretchen. (one person)  
Rice and beans are my favorite meal. (one meal)

**5. Singular subjects joined by "or" or "nor" take a singular verb.**

Correct: Neither John nor Casey wants to go to the movies tonight.

Incorrect: Neither John nor Casey want to go to the movies tonight.

**6. Titles, even when they end in a plural form, are singular.**

Correct: "The Birds" is a very scary story.

Incorrect: "The Birds" are a very scary story.

**7. Subjects preceded by "every" and "many" are singular.**

Correct: Every sophomore and junior is attending.

Incorrect: Every sophomore and junior are attending.

## **V. Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement**

**1. A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in both gender and number.**

Correct: Mike trained his dog.

Sally cleaned the room herself.

The dog buried its bone.

*Antecedent:* The word that a pronoun refers to.

**2. When the gender of the antecedent is not clear, the writer has the option of choosing the masculine or the feminine.**

Correct: A person can choose her friends but rarely her relatives.

Incorrect: A person can choose their friends but rarely their relatives.

**3. Use a singular pronoun to refer to: each, either, neither, one, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody, someone, or somebody**

Correct: Anyone can build his house here.

Incorrect: Anyone can build their house here.

4. **A singular pronoun should be used when two or more singular antecedents are joined by "or" or "nor."**

Correct: Neither Ryan nor Paul blamed himself.

Incorrect: Neither Ryan nor Paul blamed themselves.

5. **A plural pronoun should be used when two or more singular antecedents are joined by "and."**

Correct: Stephen and Peter have made up their own minds.

Incorrect: Stephen and Peter have made up his own minds.

## **VI. Pronoun Reference**

1. **Make sure a pronoun refers clearly to one antecedent.**

Correct: People sometimes like the *Harry Potter* series better than the *Hunger Games* series, but I like the *Hunger Games* series much better.

Incorrect: People sometimes like the *Harry Potter* series better than the *Hunger Games* series, but I like it much better.

2. **Ensure that the antecedent is not too far away from the pronoun.**

Correct: Employees who require personal time should consult with their supervisors.

Incorrect: Employees should consult with their supervisors who require personal time.

3. **Use *it* and *they* to refer only to definite antecedents.**

Correct: The United States entered into warmer relations with China after China's compliance with recent weapons agreements.

Incorrect: The United States entered into warmer relations with China after its compliance with recent weapons agreements.

4. **The words *this* or *that* must be immediately followed by a noun.**

Correct: This book is very interesting.

Incorrect: This is very interesting.

## **VII. Modifiers**

- 1. Modifying phrases and clauses should be placed as near as possible to the words they modify.**

Correct: Walking down the street, I could see the Lincoln Memorial in the distance.

Incorrect: Walking down the street, the Lincoln Memorial could be seen in the distance.

*The incorrect example above is called a dangling modifier because the word being modified is missing from the sentence.*

Correct: A no-trespassing sign nailed to the gate attracted Patty's attention.

Incorrect: Nailed to the gate, Patty noticed a no-trespassing sign.

*The placement of the modifying phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence.*

## **VIII. Parallel Structure**

- 1. Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words, phrases, or clauses.**

Correct:

I am not much of an athlete; but I like soccer, ping pong, and billiards.

The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

Incorrect:

I am not much of an athlete, but I like to play soccer, ping pong, and to play billiards.

The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.

## IX. Stylistic Issues

### 1. Sentence Variation:

Varying sentence structure improves writing. Not all of your sentences need to be complex; however, they have to vary. At times, a short sentence is necessary to either slow the reader down or draw his attention to a main idea.

#### **Repetitive Structure:**

The Winslow family visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art. In Anchorage stores they found some excellent examples of soapstone carvings. But they couldn't find a dealer selling any of the woven wall hangings they wanted. They were very disappointed when they left Anchorage empty-handed.

#### **Varied Structure:**

The Winslow family visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art, such as soapstone carvings and wall hangings. Anchorage stores had many soapstone items available. Still, they were disappointed to learn that wall hangings, which they had especially wanted, were difficult to find. Sadly, they left empty-handed.

### 2. Redundancy: Repetition of ideas after they have already been stated

A writer must have confidence that once she has stated (and proven) an idea, she does not have to repeat it.

#### **Example of Redundancy:**

Macbeth's tragic flaw of ambition has created debate among critics. Some believe that his imagination brings about his downfall; however, others see his misunderstanding of evil as the tragic flaw. Although critics debate Macbeth's tragic flaw, clearly his ambition brings about the downfall.

#### **Revised:**

Macbeth's tragic flaw of ambition has created debate among critics. Some believe that his imagination brings about his downfall; however, others see his misunderstanding of evil as the tragic flaw. Clearly, his ambition brings about the downfall.

### 3. Wordiness: Omit needless words. The length of an expressed thought should be appropriate to the complexity of the thought.

**Incorrect:** Many unskilled workers without training in a particular job are unemployed and do not have any work.

**Correct:** Many unskilled workers are unemployed.

#### 4. **Avoid:**

- *Colloquial expressions:* Conversational expressions

Example: Jay Gatsby is 'legit' loaded

- *Cliches:* Expressions that are old and stale

Example: Nick's morality was 'as hard as a rock' at the beginning of the novel.

- *Rhetorical Questions:* A question asked for effect

Example: Should anyone have to put up with this?

#### 5. **Melodramatic Writing**

- *Psychobabble:* Using psychological diagnoses without proper secondary support

Example: In Huckleberry Finn's subconscious, he believes that Jim is a human being.

- *Absolutes:* There are always exceptions to a rule

Example: Everybody is forced to make difficult choices in life.

- *Cheerleading:* Lavishing praise on an author, book, or character. This type of approach undermines the writer's authority and credibility.

Example: The greatest writer of all time, Ernest Hemingway,...

- *Exclamation points!!!!/Underlining/italicizing:* Emphasis in writing should occur through your word choice. The way you structure the sentence and phrase the sentence will create the emphasis

Example: Huck decides to help Jim!

\*Some examples and information taken from: *AP Central.collegeboard.com*; *Little, Brown Handbook*; *Purdue OWL*; *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition*