

# Pedantry and Writing Papers

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I am not by nature a detail-oriented person. But life has taught me the importance of trying to take details seriously. Part of the rationale of assigning papers is to prepare students for entrance into the job market. Most of you will take jobs in which you will be judged by the accuracy and precision of your work. Overt signs of sloppiness demonstrate the lack of commitment you have to doing a job well. Therefore, I see paper-writing as an opportunity to practice the disciplining action of being detail-oriented. Here are some rules I expect you to follow:

1. **Read all the instructions.** There are lots of instructions on the question sheet. Make sure to follow *all* of those instructions.
  - (a) **You must have a cover page.** I grade without reading your names. I grade blind because we are all susceptible to our own personal biases, and I want to be as fair as possible. I believe that as a TA I owe this both to the scientific process and to students. This means I flip the cover page over, mix the essays up, and then (and only then) dig in to your writing. I cannot do this if you do not have a separate cover page.
2. **Read the entire question.** Make sure your answer addresses all of the parts to the question you have chosen to address. If the question asked has four parts, your answer should cover all of them.
3. **Always spell-check.** If you do not spell check your document, I will assume that you are incredibly lazy. Showing that you have not bothered to correct typos is a demonstration that you are not detail-oriented, and I will mark it down.
4. **Learn where commas go.** Like many of you, I attended public high school. Public high school taught me a lot about life. Sadly, it taught me little about the rules of the persnickety comma. So, if you do not know what an Oxford comma is or how *which* differs from *that*, open up a style guide and figure it out!
5. **Contractions are not acceptable in academic work.** No it's, don'ts, won'ts, ain'ts, can'ts, wasn'ts, wouldn'ts, couldn'ts, or shouldn'ts about it!
6. **Always have at least one other person read your work.** Peer-review replicates non-student existence. You always want to pass your work by colleagues first before you give the work to your boss. So, do the same with your papers. Since you cannot give colleagues an opportunity to read the paper beforehand if you finish at 5:00 AM when no one else is awake, peer-review leads to an important axiom:
  - (a) **Never write your paper the night before it is due. We can almost always tell!**
7. **Enjoy.** You should actually derive pleasure from this experience. I know it is hard to believe, but if you think about a question seriously, it usually makes you gain a sense of fulfillment.