Writing Tips Handout

Tip #1: **Don’t** use CONTRACTIONS

Bad: The research didn’t indicate that watching violent television programming caused violent behavior in children.

Good: The research did not indicate that watching violent television programming caused violent behavior in children.

Tip #2: **Do NOT** use SLANG or COLLOQUIAL phrases

Bad: My internship was hella useful in providing valuable job experience.

Good: The internship was very useful in providing valuable job experience.

Tip #3: **TOPIC SENTENCES**—topic sentences need to summarize the main idea or theme of the paragraph. **Every** paragraph should have a topic sentence. Topic sentences are located as the first sentence of a paragraph.

Bad: Ross, Smith, and Barney (2004) demonstrated that violent TV programming caused at-risk behavior in children. Furthermore, the research indicated that children were more likely to strike their siblings after watching programs such as *Pokemon* or *Yu-Gi-Oh* (Ross, Smith, and Barney, 2004).

Good: At-risk behavior in children is influenced by a variety of sources such as television. Ross, Smith, and Barney (2004) demonstrated that violent TV programming caused at-risk behavior in children. Furthermore, the research indicated that children were more likely to strike their siblings after watching programs such as *Pokemon* or *Yu-Gi-Oh* (Ross, Smith, and Barney, 2004).

Tip #4: **NO Use of PERSONAL PRONOUNS (I, you, we, us, me)**

* “I” can only be used in Analysis of Experience (Soc Sci 194/97) or Campus Resources (Soc Sci 189)*

Bad: Mr. Smith told me that the majority of interns enjoy sales and marketing at Merril Lynch.

Good: Mr. Smith indicated that the majority of interns enjoy sales and marketing at Merril Lynch.

Tip #5: **Do NOT use VAGUE/BASIC LANGUAGE**

Bad: Overall, the internship experience was very nice.
Good: Overall, the internship experience was very beneficial; it taught the intern effective marketing skills.

Tip #6: Do NOT use PASSIVE VOICE (Watch forms of the verb “to be”).
*Passive voice occurs when the verb does not show a clear relationship between the subject and predicate.
Bad: The desk seems to be brown.
Good: The desk is brown.

Tip #7: EXPLAIN QUOTES/EVIDENCE (A+B = C)
*Your argument will always have a pretense (A), evidence (B), and a conclusion (C).
A: At-risk behavior in children is influenced by a variety of sources such as television.
C: Findings that support a correlation between violent TV programming and at-risk behavior demonstrate the influence of outside sources upon children.

Tip #8: Remember that WHICH and THAT are NOT interchangeable. WHICH is used for personal nouns or pronouns, and THAT is used for objects, ideas or non-personal nouns.
Bad: The copier, which is now broken, was used to make the copies.
Good: The copier, that is now broken, was used to make the copies.
Good: My friends, which are much older now, are very mature.

Also watch out for:
✓ Length of paragraph—it should be an average of 4-6 sentences. (no less than 3, but not the whole page).
✓ Use consistent language throughout paper. Do NOT call James Smith as Mr. Smith in paragraph 1, and then call him James in paragraph 2.
✓ Use the funnel effect—go from general to specific.
✓ When you introduce an acronym such as SSARC, you must first introduce it as: the Social Science Academic Resource Center (SSARC), before you can refer to it as SSARC in the rest of your paper.
✓ Do NOT start a sentence with THIS or THAT. Specify to what you are referring.
✓ Make use of transitions—but do NOT overuse them.