

Some guidelines for revising your essays

- **Substantive issues:** any new ideas or questions you may have; questions, problems, suggestions from my comments.
- **Transitions:** if you see this mark -- T -- in your text, between paragraphs or sentences, I'm asking you to make clearer connections between ideas. Make an outline of your paper so you can see the structure of the argument; reorganize if necessary; tell the reader what the connections are.
- **Fix the prose:** Two general approaches are often helpful in revising prose. One is to read sentences out loud -- would you say this? Another is to retype your text -- surprisingly, this works. More specifically, in your essays you will find copy editing marks for two kinds of issues.
 1. **Style** (word choice or general wordiness).
 2. **Grammar** (verb tense, idiom, articles, agreement).
- **Introductions (and titles).**
- **Conclusions (and last sentences).**
 - spend some extra time on the sentence which ends your essay; like titles, concluding sentences have an impact disproportionate to their relative size.

Sample introduction with title # 1 (not good)

Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

Throughout human history, human beings have responded to things in a variety of ways. Also, their thoughts are enhanced by being in a place themselves. In his book, the Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare states in 1613, "oh brave new world." This shows there can be a positive evaluation. By contrast, it is also mentioned, "you taught me how to curse." Among the characters, he becomes obvious that some things are the same, and some were different.

Sample introduction with title # 2 (better)

What Is Shakespeare's Island?

When it comes to describing a place, being there matters. But being there is not the same for everyone -- and nowhere is this truth more clear than in *The Tempest*. For Miranda, the island is a place of wonder; for Caliban, a place of cursing and being cursed. The difference seems clear, even stark. Yet Miranda's wonder is in response to the arrival of Ferdinand, who comes from outside, while Caliban speaks movingly of the properties of the island as he showed them to

Prospero in the past (citations go here). How different are their islands, and how many islands are there in the play?

Sample introduction # 3 (good)

[Title]

Text

1. In [date], a Protestant Frenchman remembers the taste of a remarkable fruit which he had eaten some 20 years before. **2.** The pineapple, writes Jean de Léry, [insert quote]. Jean de Léry pasted this pineapple in Brazil, during his sojourn there among the Tupinamba. **3.** As this passage and others make evident, de Léry sees the natural riches of Brazil as a gift from God [cite other passage briefly]. **4.** Yet he tells us repeatedly that the Tupinamba has been accursed or abandoned by God. **6.a** How can we make sense of the mismatch between Léry's sense that the **5.**natural world of Brazil is **5.** blessed, while the **5.**human world is **5.**cursed? **6.b** How is he able to praise the fruit he eats among the cannibals? **7.** In this essay, I will examine ...

Intellectual operations

1. In the text, this happens ("this" can be either an actual event, or the way that event is written about).
2. Example or direct quotation.
3. What should the reader notice in this example?
4. How does this phenomenon relate to the rest of the text?
5. What are the axes of comparison? What are the terms which will be used to characterize that relationship?
6. Frame the question or problem that arises:
a. in general, abstract terms.
b. In specific, concrete terms.
7. What will you try to do in the essay to shed light on the question you've identified? (Optional, but a good habit for other kinds of writing).

Conclusions

Conclusions and introductions should be different, not interchangeable. The introduction asks, what's the problem? The conclusion looks back to that original question or problem and reviews

what you have come up with in the body of the essay: does it illuminate the original question? Does it (also, or instead) answer any other questions?

For instance: my introductory question (in sample #3) was about the difference between how Jean de Léry evaluates nature (pineapples) as opposed to human culture (cannibalism). In my conclusion, I might decide that the important difference was not between nature and human culture, but between the natural (including human customs) and the supernatural or theological.

Here's what that might look like:

“Everything in the category of the natural can be judged by experience, aesthetically, by how it tastes. But these judgments are not the final word, because the world of experience and taste is subject to the higher laws of the supernatural world. The sensory experience of eating a pineapple, for Jean de Léry, is less real and meaningful than the state of the soul which will live on after the body and the pineapple are both gone. What may seem to us like tolerance on his part is, in the end, indifference: whether we eat pineapples or people, all that really matters is salvation.”