

## Frequently Asked Questions: Understanding Comments and Revising Your Paper

### EVALUATIONS

Q: Who is reading /grading my paper?

A: The same person who reads and comments on your paper grades your paper. The person reading your paper is one of a team of English Department faculty members. He or she has extensive experience with undergraduate writing and a special interest in the kinds of writing projects that take place within various University programs.

Q: Is the reader of my paper being very “picky” about all kinds of writing matters because he’s a college English teacher?

A: Yes and no. As English/composition instructors we have the expertise to recognize and make note of major and minor writing issues in your papers. We are also very much aware of the standards for academic and professional writing in our and other universities and in your and other professional fields. We are using this expertise and knowledge to help you achieve these standards of clarity, impact, and excellence.

Q: What do the categories on the Evaluation Sheets mean?

**A: Good:** Your paper shows few, if any, problems with this element.

**Be Very Careful:** Problems with this element are affecting the communication of your ideas. When revising, pay very careful attention to these elements; you may need to make significant changes.

**Needs Serious Work:** Problems with this element greatly affect your success in communicating ideas. For revision, take a very thorough look at every occurrence (or lack thereof) of this element. You’ll need to revise extensively.

Q: Do the checkmarked categories on the evaluation sheets have some “numerical” correlation to my grade?

A: While there is no strict formula of numerical correspondence between the evaluation checkmarks and your grade, each means of assessment reflects the other. Comments on your paper correspond with the evaluative checks; evaluative checks (and the comments they pertain to) correspond to your grade. A number of checks in the “Needs Serious Work” category will be consistent with a low grade; a paper with a high grade will have many checks in the “Good” category.

## REVISING

Q: Does “revision” mean “correction?”

A: “Revision” can mean correcting the design of a paper and/or correcting sentence-level awkwardness or error. For example, when revising, you may rewrite awkward sentences for clarity and conciseness, or correct all punctuation errors, or improve your graphics and their placement. However, a successful “revision” also often requires re-envisioning the focus, clarity and cohesion of your paper. A successful revision will state, **clearly and early**, those focusing concepts that may have been left unclear in the original version. A revised paper will make **explicit connections** among various ideas and sections of a paper. A sound, well-thought-through revision will supply all the specifics of evidence, explanation and example that may have been sketchy in the original version. The abstract, introduction, conclusion, and headings of a revised paper will reflect these important changes.

Q: The Engineering 0012 “Guide to Writing Your Conference Paper” states: “*For your paper, you can use any definition for sustainability. However, there should be some form of discussion that deals with the trade off issues of cost versus environment versus quality of life. Your conference paper should include at least a half of a page discussion on how your topic impacts sustainability. . . AT LEAST HALF OF ONE (1) PAGE of your paper should address the issue of sustainability.*” I included the required 1/2 page section on sustainability in my paper, but my returned paper is full of commentary like this: “Your presentation does not give sufficient attention to the subject of sustainability” or “What is the relevance of this information to sustainability?” What exactly is the problem with my paper regarding the discussion of sustainability, and what should I pay attention to when revising?

A: If you included a section specifically on sustainability, look to see where that section was placed. Did you put it at the end? A section/discussion that is central to all your research and ideas (and to the conference itself !) should appear **early** in your paper. A well-written section on sustainability that appears early in your paper will provide a focus, a connecting principle for your entire presentation. Nearly every section of your paper should refer somewhat explicitly to your definitions/discussion of sustainability. Such references will provide cohesion, clarity and ongoing impact to your paper.

If you have no specific discussion of sustainability in your paper, you will need to follow the guidelines for that minimum 1/2 page that specifically presents the issues/definitions of sustainability that inform all aspects of your paper, and you’ll need to maintain explicit attention to those issues/definitions throughout your paper.

## RESOURCES • REFERENCES • PLAGIARISM

Q: My reader raised questions about my use of sources. How do I give credit to other people when I quote or use their work?

**A:** Scientific research always takes place in conversation with the work others have done and are doing. As a responsible researcher and writer, you need to demonstrate in your writing that you have adequately researched reliable sources in order to understand your topic. Then you need to document the ways in which you are indebted to the work of others. Provide citations for both direct quotations and paraphrases as well as for specific details (such as statistics) that you learned from the sources you read.

If you are scrupulous about giving credit to those who informed your writing, you won't be accused of plagiarism.

Q: What, exactly, is a “direct quotation?” What’s the difference between paraphrasing and quoting? What do I need to do with quotes and paraphrasing in order to avoid plagiarizing or any charges that I am plagiarizing?

**A: Direct Quotations:** A direct quotation is a **passage (of any length) from a source** that appears exactly or almost exactly as it does in the source. When directly quoting material, **you must put that material within quotation marks.** The **necessary** in-text reference should appear at the end of the quotation, not at the end of a section.

Are you **paraphrasing or quoting** when you quote several sentences from a source, but change a few words around? You are, essentially, quoting! A passage in your paper that is **almost exactly like a passage from a source should be treated as a direct quotation.** If you are only changing a few words in a quoted passage it is best to simply quote the passage as it appears in your source. If you need to add or drop a few words in order to make a quoted phrase fit smoothly into your own sentence or paragraph, the convention is to **place the quoted material in quotation marks**, with the added words in brackets or with ellipses (. . .) in the place of the dropped words.

**Paraphrasing:** If you have read, for example, several paragraphs from a source and are condensing that information into one paragraph; or if you're condensing a paragraph into two sentences that introduce a section of your paper, then you are **paraphrasing.** The material does not need to appear in quotation marks, but **must be accompanied by an in-text reference** (and a full reference in your “References” section). That **in-text reference should appear at the end of the paraphrased material**, not at the end of a section, unless the entire section is a paraphrase of source material.

**Complete, Correct References:** The in-text reference number must match with the numbered references in your “References” section. References should be as complete as

possible: show all information available, including dates, specific URLs, titles of articles, etc. All information in your “References” section must be **correct** (especially tricky with lengthy webpage URLs —be very careful!)

Q: I’ve read a book on my subject and studied several web sites , and some of the ideas in my paper were inspired by my Engineering 0012 course, but no direct quotations or actual paraphrasing appears in my paper from these particular sources. Do I need to provide references for these sources!?

**A:** If (**and only if**) you are **not** using **any** of that source material **directly**--if you **haven’t quoted or paraphrased** material from the book, quoted or paraphrased from a handout from your course, or quoted, paraphrased or compiled passages taken from different pages of a web site, then in-text reference is not necessary, nor do you need to include these sources in your “References” section. You should, however, **“acknowledge” these sources** in an “Acknowledgment” section placed before your “References” section, as noted in your format guidelines. An “Acknowledgment” section might read something like this:

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#### **Acknowledgment**

I appreciate the help with understanding the impact of alternative fuel sources on sustainability provided by Dr. Dan Budny in the Engineering 0012 lectures, and by the Engineering 0012 handout “Engineering and Environmental Concerns.”

While I haven’t used material directly from the Honda.com website, the site was important in aiding my understanding of current HEV commercial concerns.

Rack Pinion’s book, *Wheels Into Tomorrow* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990) was useful to my overall understanding of the history of HEVs over the last decade.

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The University of Wisconsin—La Crosse has put together a webpage of excellent resources on avoiding plagiarism (including examples of acceptable and unacceptable borrowing from texts):

<http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/plagiarism.html>

## Additional Writing Help

Q: Where can I go for more information about writing matters and/or more help with my revision?

**A:** In addition to the websites suggested in your 0012 Guide, you might check out the **Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)**. This site provides easily downloadable “handouts” on many writing matters. Here is the URL:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html>

Through one-on-one consultations, the **University of Pittsburgh Writing Center** can help you with any aspect of your writing for this conference and for any writing project throughout your academic career. While Writing Center consultants cannot write, proofread and edit your paper **for** you, we can work **with** you on strategies for recognizing and implementing what is required for the revision of your conference paper.

The Writing Center offers consultations on weekdays in three different sites:

- Main site:

**501 Cathedral of Learning; Monday–Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Thursday, 9:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.; Friday 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.;** this site offers 30 minute consultations **by appointment**. You may schedule up to two half-hour appointments per week . Call **x4-6556** for an appointment.

- Satellite “Drop-in” Writing Center sites:

**Tower A, 12<sup>th</sup> floor Lounge; Monday and Wednesday, 6:00–9:00 pm;** 30 minute consultations available on a “drop-in” basis—no appointment necessary; open to any student at the University, but bring your Pitt I.D. to get into the Tower

**Hillman Library, Ground Floor (Encyclopedia Alcove) Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 1:00–4:00 pm;** open to any University student on a “drop-in” basis—no appointment necessary

For more information or to make an appointment, call the **Writing Center at x4-6556**.