**College Prep Writing 101**

**Than vs. Then** – Then denotes an event that occurs at a different point in time. (It happened then). Than is used to compare things. (She is taller than Mike.)

**Your vs. You’re –** Your denotes ownership (That is your cat.) while you’re is a contraction that means you are (You’re going to catch a cold.)

**Two vs. Too vs. To** – Two is a number (I have two cats.), too is a synonym for also (I want to have a cat, too!), and to is a preposition that often indicates the direction of something (I want to go to the shelter so I can get a new cat).

**Verb Tense -** Do not switch between verb tenses unless it is appropriate. Always use past tense or always use present tense throughout the paper. When talking about history, use the past tense.

**Writing Numbers** – In general, a good rule to follow is the spell out all numbers one through ten and to write numerically all others numbers (11+).

**First and Second Pronouns –** Never use a first or second pronoun in a formal essay. These include: I, me, my, you, yours, ours, us, we etc. Formal essays may include opinion, but they are to be stated without these pronouns.

**Literal Introductions –** Do not begin an essay with any form of the following: “This essay will describe the causes of the Civil War.” Do not reference writing an essay in the essay (I am going to be writing about the Civil War). Do not summarize paragraphs literally (This paragraph described the causes of the Civil War. The next paragraph will explain the results.) Do not address the reader in any way that is literal (I hope you enjoyed this essay! Or Wasn’t it fun to learn about the Civil War?).

**Sentence Variety** – In general, a variety of sentences (length, purpose, content etc.) makes for a more interesting and better flowing paper.

**Subject-Verb Agreement**  - Make sure the subject of your sentence matches the verb. A singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb. For example:

He **doesn’t** understand the assignment. (Incorrect – He **don’t** understand the assignment).

They **are** blue. (Incorrect – They **is** blue.)

Pepperoni and cheese **are** fine on the pizza. (Incorrect – Pepperoni and cheese **is** fine on the pizza.) *Because it is BOTH* pepperoni and cheese, the subject is plural.

Pepperoni or cheese **is** fine on the pizza, but not both. (Incorrect – Pepperoni or cheese **are** fine on the pizza, but not both.) *Because it is EITHER* pepperoni and cheese, the subject is singular.

**General Writing Tips**

* Do not use exclamation points, bold, or underlined font unless it is absolutely necessary.
* Do not include filler sentences with no real substance to meet a page or paragraph requirement. Most teachers would rather read a shorter, but more meaningful, assignment.
* Do not write with fragments, or incomplete sentences. Read the sentence out loud and alone – make sure it has a NOUN and a VERB or it is NOT A SENTENCE!
* Do not write with run-on sentences. Each sentence should have one clear point or idea. If you include more than that, it might be a run-on. Split them into two sentences.