English 9
Formal Writing Guidelines

1. DO NOT use contractions in formal writing.
   a. Can’t = cannot or can not
   b. Won’t = will not
   c. Couldn’t = could not
   d. Shouldn’t = should not

2. DO NOT begin sentences with it, and, but, so or a vague pronoun. Please notice how I just broke my own rule as an example in the previous sentence. Essentially, poorly written, weak, and ineffective sentences begin with…
   a. It
   b. And
   c. But
   (There are exceptions, but it's best to leave these for when you're an English major.)
   d. This
   e. So

3. DO NOT start sentences with "That's because."

4. DO NOT use first person. I, me, we, us etc. should be removed from formal writing

5. DO NOT write like this is an email. Any written assignment for this English course other than a reflective journal is FORMAL writing. Slang, symbols and abbreviations are not tolerated. Particularly offensive items include the following:
   a. & = and
   b. w/ = with
   c. w/out = without
   d. b/c = because
   e. lol – laugh out loud – U just RCVD a C! 😊

6. If your thesis or topic statement is some derivation of “_____ and _____ are very unique/different but also very similar” you need to revise and rethink your thesis or topic statement significantly. WHAT characteristics are unique/different, WHAT characteristics are similar?
   BAD – The Gentleman's Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were very different but also similar.
   GOOD – The Gentleman’s Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were similar in that they were both caused by racism and fear that was directed toward restricting the rights of Asian populations in the Western United States, but unique in which groups were targeted.

7. While rhetorical questions are appropriate in some literary genres a formal essay or response is not one of them. Otherwise, you sound like you're having a conversation with the reader.

8. Eliminate Passive Voice!!! GRRRR!!! ARGH!!! Yes, you SPEAK this way, but this is not the most effective way to WRITE. How do you prevent this? Make sure the subject of your sentence is actively completing the verb. Writing actively also eliminates wordiness.
   a. Passive – The paper was graded by the teacher.
   b. ACTIVE – The teacher graded the paper.
   c. Passive – The rubric was reviewed extensively by the student.
   d. ACTIVE – The student extensively reviewed the rubric.
9. The following do not qualify as a PARAGRAPH:
   a. Three to four unrelated sentences
   b. A bullet pointed list
   c. An assortment of words that lack a topic sentence and supporting evidence and in the
      most egregious cases no subjects or verbs (for shame)
   d. A short essay masquerading as a paragraph

10. When an assignment calls for a 3-4 page paper (typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times
    12 pt. font) the following do not qualify:
    a. A 2 page paper presented as a 4 page paper with triple space between paragraphs, 1.5
       in margins and Times 13 or Verdana 12 font.
    b. Any other random combinations that represent a shortage of thought and information or
       the inability to organize and distinguish between good information that supports an
       argument and an outright inventory of all information, relevant or not, that you can
       regurgitate on a topic.

11. Do NOT overuse direct quotes and paraphrased material.

12. Use MLA format for all source citations.

13. Do NOT use his/her. Use the masculine pronoun when gender is in question or change the
    sentence structure. (When the student came to class, he was assigned a desk (or) When the
    students came to class, they were assigned desks.)

14. Know the difference between:
    i. then and than
    ii. there, their, and they're
    iii. to, too, and two
    iv. no and know
    v. effect (n.) and affect (v.)

15. Remember proper use of numbers: spell out numbers that can be expressed in one or two
    words and use figures for other numbers

16. Do not use the words thing or things. Be specific.

17. Do not shorten words - for example: til for until or cause for because

18. When introducing parenthetical material, use the full representation the first time then use the
    acronym thereafter. (She will be taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) soon. Her SAT
    scores should be very high.)

19. Use apostrophes correctly. (The boy's bike is green. Three boys were at the store.)

20. Write in the PRESENT tense.
21. Periods and commas ALWAYS go inside quotation marks (except for research citations): 
   (A recent movement among computer programmers is "idea theft." "Idea theft," a recent movement 
   among computer programmers, is a problem in the work place. )

22. Use who with people and that with objects. (The boy in the back row is the one who threw the 
   airplane. The dog that barked first is the one that bit the boy.)

23. Internet is always capitalized.

24. Avoid quote bombs – a quote bomb is a quote used out of context with no introductory 
   information and no follow-up information. Quote bombs often happen when you know you must 
   include a quote but you haven't really thought about why you chose the quote you did.

25. Each paragraph should have a lead sentence summarizing its content. If this doesn't work 
   naturally, the paragraph is probably too short. Try reading just the first lines of each paragraph - 
   the paper should still make sense. For example,

   There are two service models, integrated and differentiated service. Integrated service follows 
   the German approach that anything that isn't explicitly allowed is verboten. It strictly regulates 
   traffic, but also makes the trains run on time. Differentiated service follows the Animal Farm 
   approach, where some traffic is more equal than others. It seems simpler, until one has to worry 
   about proletariat traffic dressing up as the aristocracy.