**Seventeen Tips for writing better and getting higher marks**

1. **PLAN** your essay. Most of you do, well done. But STICK to the plan.
2. The **introduction** says what you are going to argue. The **conclusion** says what you’ve argued. That’s it: it’s really that straightforward. You can make them more interesting and elegant, but they MUST ALWAYS ALSO do this basic task.
3. One point to a paragraph. Remember: **INTRODUCE** the point, **QUOTE** the evidence, **EXPLAIN** what it means, **ANALYSE** it and use it to **ANSWER** the question. **INTRODUCE**, **QUOTE**, **EXPLAIN**, **ANALYSE,** **ANSWER. IQEAA.**
4. “It is emphasised by Plato that reason is important” is a clumsy terrible sentence, ugly and hard to read. “Plato emphasises the importance of reason” is elegant and stylish. Why? In any sentence there is a SUBJECT who does the action, and a VERB which is the action. In an **ACTIVE** sentence the subject DOES the action (‘Plato emphasises…’). In a **PASSIVE** sentence a thing is done and then ascribed to someone (‘it is emphasised by Plato…’). PASSIVE sentences are clumsy (see the two uses of ‘is’ in the example) and evasive (‘the chocolate was eaten…’). ACTIVE ones are clear and elegant. **WRITE ACTIVE**.

Example: “When studying Emma Donoghue’s *Room*, Jack’s voice as the narrator can be considered as dialogic”. Bad passive sentence: clumsy, unclear, lacking in confidence. Why not: “In Emma Donoghue’s *Room,* Jack’s voice is dialogic”? Clear, not evasive, owning the concept and argument. (Is his voice not dialogic if you are not studying it? Who is doing the considering? You are, but it sounds as if you are blaming someone else. Own your ideas).

1. You can say ‘I’: it’s your essay after all and using ‘I’ helps make elegant, active sentences (see 4). But remember, you are *arguing* (‘in this essay I argue that…’) and it’s your *argument*, your **informed response** we’re interested in, not you (sorry).
2. Short sentence are fine. Overlong ones often go awry, with too many subclauses, this is a subclause, look how far I’ve got from the original idea I wanted in this sentence, which was just to warn you not to let your sentence escape, it’s like, one point per paragraph, one idea per sentence, otherwise you go awry and now I’ve repeated myself and look like an idiot. **Stay short**.
3. **Be accurate.**
   1. The right accurate word is better than the wrong one that sounds good.
   2. On Sunday 22nd November, I found ELEVEN mistakes in ONE four line quotation in an essay. We check.
4. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Pay attention to what you are actually saying. Say it to yourself: does it make sense? No? Then sort it out.
5. Avoid repeating words in sentences because repeated words make boring sentences. Avoid.
6. If you have two sentences, one after the other, saying the same thing, you haven’t planned or IKEAA-ed properly (see 1, 3) or are writing passive (see 4). Make them into one sentence (but watch 6).
7. Do not use non-technical words you wouldn’t use in normal life: do you ever say ‘thusly’, ‘deemed’ or ‘somewhat’? No? Then don’t in an essay.
8. “**Due** to its **being**” is awful: “we can’t go for a walk due to its being wet”. What’s wrong with “we can’t go for a walk because it’s wet”? More elegant and clearer. Almost any sentence with ‘being’ in it is bad. Almost any sentence with ‘due’ in it is bad. (see 4).
9. **Book titles** go in *italics*. Not like “this” or like this but like *This*. **Poem** titles have inverted commas, like this ‘A Poem’.
10. Know the difference between **it’s** (= it is) and **its** (“its hat”, the possessive). About 30% of third year English students don’t know the difference. They look really silly and lose marks.
11. **The footnote “goes after the full stop”** even if the quotation is in the middle of the sentence.[[1]](#endnote-1)
12. **Don’t use semi-colons** (that’s this one ;). Most people don’t know how to use them properly so just don’t risk it.
13. Bibliography. Five facts for each book. Author, *Title in Italics* (City of publication: Publisher, Year). In alphabetical order. NB look at the commas, brackets and colon in that example.

1. Always after the full stop. No exceptions. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)