

# General Comments on Rough Paper Drafts

## All papers

1. Proofread! Ask a friend to read your paper and to give you feedback (But you have to write it by yourself). You can ask the Writing Center (<http://cstw.osu.edu/>) for help.
2. Split into sections. Each section should have a title and the title should reflect what the section is about.
3. You need to credit every idea that is not yours. However, the paper is not a legal document, so avoid direct quotes as much as possible. Each person has their style of writing; therefore a paper made up out of direct quotes is extremely hard to read because it mixes so many different writing styles. Use paraphrases or summaries instead.

So instead of:

Slave captains “document the lack of...language mixing in the early slave trade.” (Billard 1975)

Use something like this (unless the exact wording is important):

According to Billard (1975), there was relatively little language mixing during the transport of slaves to America.

If you want to include pages, which is always good, you can write “Billard (1975:125)”

List sources at the end of the paper. There are many citation styles, but you can use something along these lines (the first one is a book, the second one is a journal article):

Billard, J.L. 1975. *On the beginnings of Black English in the New World*. Oxford Press.

Billard, J.L. 1979. On Black English. *Journal of American English* 21 ed, 29-44.

4. Put your examples in italics or in quotes. I prefer the former and use the latter for translations, in this case to SAE. Do not mix styles. For example:

AAE expresses habitual or recurring situations by means of so called habitual *be*, for example *She be late* (“She is always/usually late”).

Or:

AAE expresses habitual or recurring situations by means of so called habitual *be*. Thus, for example *She be late* means “She is always/usually late” in SAE, while *She late* means “She is late [right now]”.

## Papers about AAE

1. If talking about grammar of AAE (obviously by comparison to SAE).
  - It is good to mention some example(s) that shows that there are features of AAE grammar that are more elaborated than SAE. That way you clearly show that AAE is not just a simplified version of SAE. The aspect system (including habitual *be*) can be such an example (see e.g. wikipedia).
  - Say you are showing just examples, that it is not an exhaustive list of differences.

- If possible, say that the phenomena are common in other languages, were present in Old English, etc. Again that way you clearly show that there is nothing weird about AAE grammar. For example:
  - o multiple negation (common or even obligatory in French, Russian, Old English, ..),
  - o no copula in present tense (*She nice*, also in Russian, Hebrew, ...),
  - o reduction of consonant clusters (extremely common, occurred trough out the history of English, [kn] in *know*, ...)
  
- 2. When talking about AAE in education, take into account that there is a whole range of possibilities, not just the extreme ones (all instruction in AAE versus all instruction in SAE), for example:
  - o Teach fully in AAE and teach SAE in the same way as a foreign language is taught (or even not at all).
  - o Have some classes in AAE, some in SAE.
  - o Educate teachers in AAE so they better understand errors speakers of AAE do when trying to speak SAE.
  - o Modify methods used to teach reading and writing to the fact that the students do not speak SAE or do not speak it well. (Imagine native speakers of SAE would be taught how to read and write in Swedish, without taking into account they do not speak that language. Or just imagine native speakers of SAE taught how to write in AAE without being able to speak it.)
  - o When teaching SAE to speakers of AAE, refer to their native language. Similarly, when you teach English to Dutch speakers, you compare it with Dutch so they better understand what you mean.
  - o When a student does a mistake in non-English class, say in geography, consider whether it is because they do not know geography or because they do not know SAE.
  
- 3. In discussions about AAE, the word *language* is used in at least two different ways – (1) as opposed to “mess”, etc. (AAE is clearly a language in this sense) or (2) as opposed to a dialect (this is something that is not easy to decide). I suggest to use the phrase *separate language* in the latter case.