

CLICHES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

A cliché (pronounced “klee-shay”) is a writing device that is overused and should be avoided. Using clichés makes your writing sound amateurish, lacking in originality and substance. Here are some common clichés and how to avoid them.

The term cliché comes from the French word *clicher*, which is the verb for stereotyping or generalizing.

CLICHES TO AVOID

- 1. Starting your paper with a definition: “The Oxford English dictionary defines [keyword] as...”**
Don’t start your paper with a definition because your reader is likely already familiar with the concept you are defining. Hence, it is redundant to provide a definition. In addition, no one “owns” the definition of a word, so you ought to describe the term in your own words if you feel the reader needs that information.
- 2. Using the word “very”** – Eliminate the use of the word “very.” Why? A better word to replace “very [adjective]” with almost always exists.
 - a. Rather than saying “**very tired**,” say “**exhausted**”
 - b. Rather than saying “**very angry**,” say “**furious**”
 - c. Rather than saying “**very hungry**,” say “**famished**”If there isn’t a better adjective to use, just nix the “very.” “I’ll be there very soon” becomes “I’ll be there soon!”
- 3. Organizing your paper using words like “First, Second, Third, etc.”** – This writing device is commonly used by beginners to organize their writing. Your writing should be easily followed on its own without the need for organizing phrases like this.
- 4. Ending with phrases like “In conclusion...” or “To sum it all up...”** – Using phrases like these adds nothing to your paper. Your reader will be able to determine when the paper ends, so there is no need for these types of phrases.
- 5. Referring directly to your paper with meta statements** – Avoid using phrases like “In this paper, I will...” or “This paper will argue that....” Your thesis should always be at the end of your introduction, so there is no need for a signal phrase. In addition, using these meta statements breaks your reader’s immersion and does not add anything.

AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT NOT TO DO.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines luck as “chance; the force that causes good or bad things to happen to people.” In this paper, I will argue there is no one who understood luck as well as the very good mathematician Gerolamo Cardan. Firstly, Cardan wrote a very fascinating book called *The Book of Games of Chance*. This book discussed luck and probability theory much earlier than other mathematicians. Secondly, Cardan was so good at games of chance he made a very fine living off his winnings. Thirdly, Cardan recognized luck could be measured and described using mathematics. In conclusion, Cardan was a very smart and lucky gentleman!

LET’S FIX IT.

No one understood the concept of luck as well as the brilliant mathematician Gerolamo Cardan. Cardan literally wrote the book on luck, titled *The Book of Games of Chance*. This text has some of the earliest information about luck and probability theory. In addition, Cardan made his living off games of chance! Cardan accomplished both by recognizing luck could be described using mathematics.

PRACTICE NOW