

## A Quick Guide to Some Common Style Issues

The college essay is a personal narrative, NOT an academic essay, which means that certain style rules of academic writing (like never beginning a sentence with “and,” for example) don’t apply as rigidly. Your writing should sound like your voice when you’re talking -- on your best, most articulate, cleverest day. You don’t have to sound “smart” or sophisticated or super-mature; you just need to sound like yourself.

That said, here are some common issues that are more straightforwardly problematic and should be avoided:

### **Problem**

### **Fragments**

### **Example**

When Jules saw Joe and Jess kissing and their friendship almost ended.

### **How to improve it**

*Read it out loud:* Does it sound like something’s missing? Add the rest, or get rid of words like “when” that make fragments.

### **Problem**

### **Run-ons**

### **Example**

When Jules saw Joe and Jess kissing, their friendship almost ended as she yelled, “You b\_\_\_\_\_!” to Jess didn’t know what to do or how to make the situation better.

### **How to improve it**

*Read it out loud:* Too many thoughts with no pause?  
Separate complete ideas with periods or semicolons.

## Problem

### Using non-descriptive, boring language

#### Examples

Jess felt **happy** about her decision. Jules was **mad** at Jess. Joe felt **sad** that Jess couldn't play any longer.

#### How To Improve It

Go to [thesaurus.com](https://www.thesaurus.com) and find some more exact options. For example, *happy* could be more precisely expressed as *elated*, *content*, *satisfied*, *ecstatic*, *cheerful*, etc.

## Problem

### Your/You're

#### Examples

"**Your** no longer my friend," said Jules.

"**You're** kind's not welcome here," they told Jess' dad.

#### How To Improve It

your = it belongs to you

you're = you are

## Problem

### They're/there/their

#### Examples

**There** no longer best friends.

**Their** stands a lonely man.

**They're** love is over.

#### How To Improve It

There = a place

Their = it belongs to them

They're = they are