

How to interpret my comments on your papers

When I grade writing assignments I make marks and comments throughout the paper. I do not mark every error I see. The first page or two usually contain more marks and comments to give you an idea of the types of errors you should look for throughout the paper. Sometimes I mark something only after I have seen it several times.

If you are asked to revise a paper, you should not have the impression that merely fixing the errors I pointed out is sufficient. You should also take into account my general comments about the structure and/or content of the paper and the comments from the grading rubric corresponding to your grade on each component. As you are doing this other things that need to be modified will probably come to mind. If not, you are probably not thinking deeply enough about what your paper is communicating and how it is doing so. Revising a paper is not a mechanical process in which you fix the obvious errors. It often involves rethinking significant parts of the paper.

Here are some marks. If you need further interpretation of my comments, please feel free to ask.

Mark/comment	Interpretation
<u>word or phrase</u> → ←	When I underline a word or phrase or have an arrow pointing at one or more lines, something is wrong. Sometimes I provide a comment. It could be a grammar error, strange or confusing word or phrase, etc. Sometimes it indicates an awkward repetition of a word/root in a sentence.
<u>word or phrase</u> ?	This means that either I am not sure what you are trying to say <i>or</i> I don't think that the word/phrase you are using is the correct one.
<i>huh?</i>	I am not sure what you are trying to say and/or you lost me.
<i>what?</i> <i>which?</i>	It is unclear what you are referring to. When it is near words like <i>this</i> , <i>it</i> , it typically means that there are several possibilities in the previous sentence or two, but which is in mind is ambiguous. Typically it means you need to rephrase one or more sentences. When it is near a noun with a definite article (e.g. <i>the program</i>), it typically means no specific instance of that noun comes to mind. It can often be fixed by either using the indefinite article or by introducing the instance of the noun at some point earlier.
<i>why?</i>	You say something that probably needs further justification, explanation and/or comment.
<i>meaning?</i>	I am either not quite sure what you are trying to say <i>or</i> I am not quite sure how this applies in the current context and/or why it is significant.
←foo? ^foo?	I think that the thing that I am pointing to should be "foo" instead of what it is. I think you might need to insert "foo" here.
←?	Typically this means "Is that a typo?" or "what is that?"
<i>not really</i> <i>not exactly</i> <i>not precisely</i> <i>not quite</i>	You are doing one of the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misusing a term or phrase • applying a verb to an incorrect subject • stating something backwards (e.g. cause/effect) • saying something that has some validity to it but isn't entirely true • making a connection between things that isn't correct and/or clear
<i>trite</i>	The ideas are overused and do not contribute anything meaningful to the paper.
<i>hype</i>	You are trying to make something sound a lot more important or fantastic than it is.
<i>tone</i> OR <i>too casual</i>	A phrase or sentence doesn't fit the tone of the paper. Often this occurs when you write as if you are having a spoken conversation and/or like a newspaper article.
<i>runon</i>	This is a run-on sentence. Typically marked on or near a comma where I realize it is one.
<i>not a sentence</i>	Exactly what it says—you are missing a verb or subject or something else is wrong.
<i>rephrase</i> or <i>awkward</i>	You either have a grammar problem or the point you are trying to make isn't clear, so you should rephrase the sentence(s) to make what you are trying to communicate more clear. Often used when there are multiple problems that make explaining the problem difficult.
<i>transition</i>	You need some sort of transition. Marked at a sentence that doesn't seem to flow from previous.
<i>redundant</i> <i>repetitive</i>	You either repeat almost the same phrases or ideas in multiple places or you say almost the same thing two or more times in a row using different words (but not in a helpful way).
<i>pick one</i>	When you have phrases like "coding and programming", "law or rule", etc., I am suggesting that you should just use one term since nothing is added with the additional word(s).