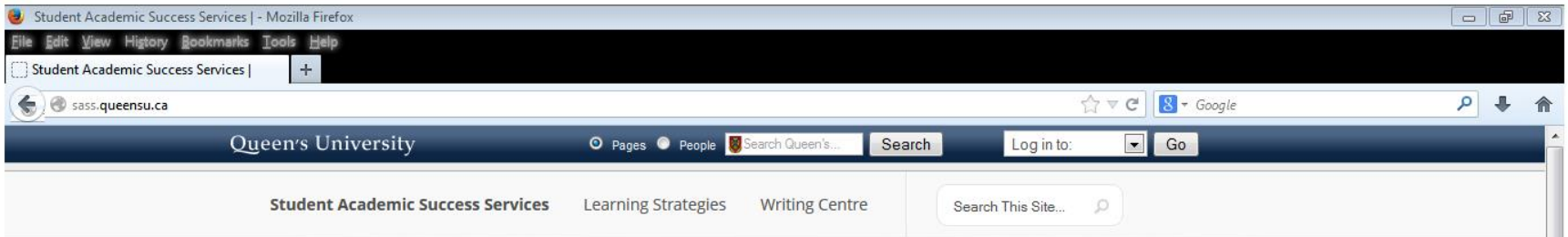


# How to Write Your First University Essay

By the end of this workshop, you'll be able to

- Identify the steps of the writing process that contribute to a successful essay.
- Apply the what/how/why model to create effective thesis statements and well-structured body paragraphs.
- Locate various forms of on-campus writing support to help you with your next assignment.

# Student Academic Success Services



## Student Academic Success Services



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Welcome! Learning Strategies helps students become more efficient and confident learners. Our service is free and confidential.

We can help with topics such as

- time management

### Writing Centre



Welcome! The Writing Centre helps students improve their writing skills. Our service is free and confidential.

We can help with topics such as

- strengthening thesis statements and arguments
- planning and organizing your ideas

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# How to Write Your First University Essay

## An overview

- \* Where do I start?
- \* Thesis statements
- \* Outlining
- \* Paragraphs
- \* What else is my marker looking for?



**Where do I start?**

# Starting out . . .



- \* **First**, understand what you are being asked to do.

ANALYZE	Separate the matter into key parts, essential elements, details Identify causes/key factors or features/possible results
EXAMINE/ EXPLORE/ INVESTIGATE	Take a diagnostic approach Enquire or look into closely, perhaps to uncover a hidden motive, cause, theme, etc. Seek out core issues, suggest possible interpretations/solutions
COMPARE/ CONTRAST	Note similarities and differences between two or more things ( <i>not</i> a list but an argument based on similarities and differences)
DISCUSS	Comment on, analyze, explain, examine, investigate, write about the topic using whichever approach seems appropriate


- \* **Second**, understand the material you are writing about.

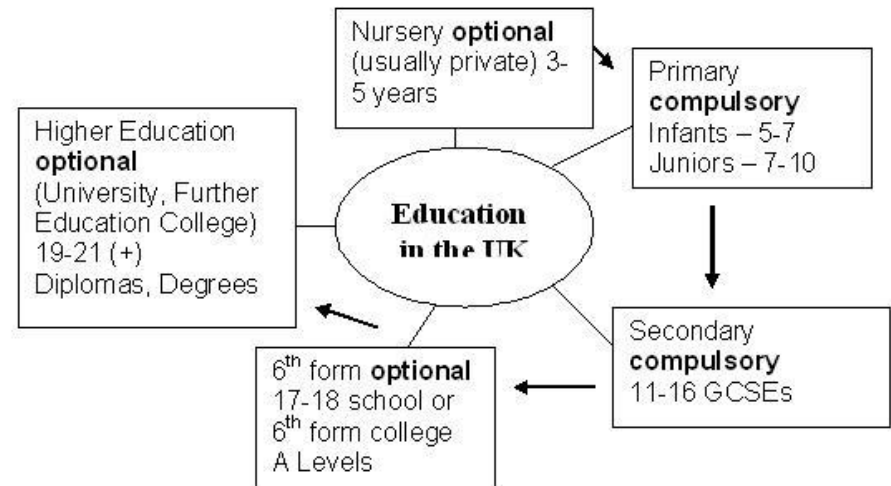
# A SAMPLE ESSAY QUESTION

*“Student street parties have become synonymous with the student presence at Queen’s. The damage and increasing notoriety associated with such parties have become an issue for the Queen’s student body, the university administration, the Kingston community, and the local police department.”*

Discuss student street parties and their implications for one of these groups. Focus on the aspect of the issue you find most significant and develop an argument. Support your position with evidence from at least three sources.

# How to organize your thoughts

- \* Spend time free-writing.
- \* Create a mind-map. 
- \* Develop an outline.
- \* Review course material.



# Developing a thesis statement





# What a **THESIS STATEMENT** does

- \* It offers an interpretation, explanation, or position instead of a simple description of an issue.
- \* It presents an argument that is supported by and requires solid evidence and reasoning.
- \* It answers the assignment question.
- \* It usually offers a quick summary of what the paper will discuss.

# Two key concepts

A strong thesis statement is  
argumentative rather than descriptive.

The thesis is the **BACKBONE** of your essay:  
it is your **POINT**.

# A thesis statement should answer WHAT/HOW/WHY?

<b>WHAT?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The matter at hand</li><li>• The topic or incident to be examined</li></ul>
<b>HOW?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The means by which the topic will be examined</li><li>• Examples, themes, key images, etc. (i.e., the major discussion points of your essay)</li></ul>
<b>WHY?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your interpretation of the events, topic, etc.</li><li>• The significance of examining the topic from the angle you have chosen</li><li>• Conclusions to be drawn (i.e., the “SO WHAT?” of your argument)</li></ul>

# Writing an explicit thesis statement

## ELEMENTS OF A SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENT:

**What:** Street parties → effects on community → immediate community of student renters and tax-paying residents

**How:** Property damage, noise pollution, larger sense of community safety and comfort

**Why:** Parties have an unacceptable negative effect on many residents in the immediate area.

**Now, it's time for you to create a thesis statement based on these ideas.**

# A SIMPLE THESIS

Student street parties have an unacceptable negative effect on many residents of the immediate area, including damage to property, significant noise pollution, and the overall loss of a sense of community safety.

# A COMPLEX THESIS


**While student street parties encourage a sense of tradition, spirit, and continuity for many Queen's students,** the damage to property, significant noise pollution, and loss of a sense of community safety have an unacceptable negative effect on the residents of both Aberdeen Street and the immediate area.

# Your thesis statement: **NOT**

**NOT a description:** *In this essay, I will discuss the effects of street parties on the student body. I will examine the issues of Queen's reputation and student safety, as well as consider the long-term implications.*

**NOT self-evident:** *Street parties at Queen's are divisive.*

**NOT a statement of fact:** *Student street parties have become an issue for the Kingston community and have implications for both tax-payers and renters.*



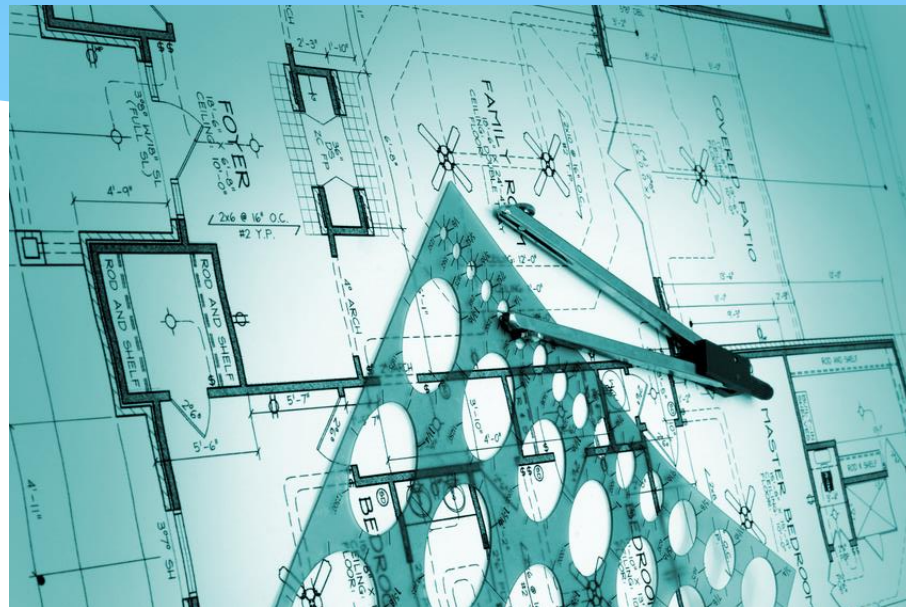
**NOT a question:** *Are the effects of street parties significant enough to warrant action?*

**NOT personal opinion that cannot be argued against:** *Student street parties are an enjoyable part of the student experience at Queen's, and Kingston residents who live near campus should accept them.*

**NOT a broad generalization:** *The student street parties at Queen's demonstrate that the younger generation is always open to new experiences, while the older is more interested in control and order.*



# Structuring and Outlining

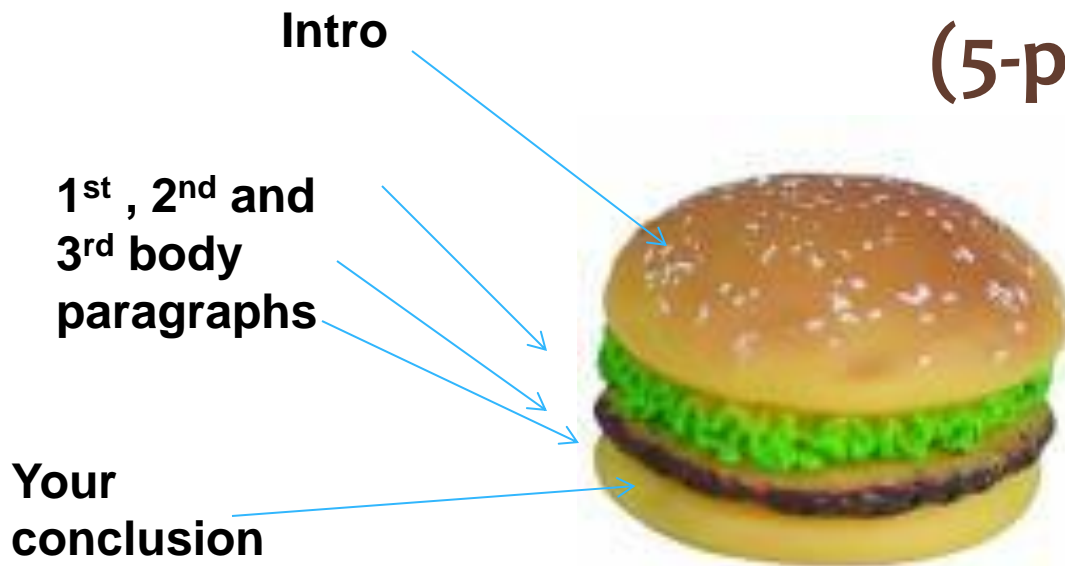


# Structuring your essay

## Why organize your paper?

- \* Essays written at university are usually longer and more complex than those written in high school.
- \* The limited format of three body paragraphs may not suit your writing task.
- \* A well-organized essay shows the development of your argument and is easy to read.

# THE HAMBURGER (5-paragraph model)



It's the old high-school favourite, but generally it's too simple for most topics and tasks at a university level.

# THE HAMBURGER

(a more complex model)



infinitely expandable,  
depending on your task and word limit

# **HONOURS or MASTER'S THESIS**



**Good luck!**

# The Outline

- \* Begins with a thesis statement.
- \* Is organized in sections, paragraphs, and points.
- \* Contains sentences that express each main point in support of the thesis.
- \* Indicates where examples or other evidence will be used.

# Activity

**Based on the draft thesis statement you just created, develop one or two topic sentences for paragraphs/ sections within the body of the essay.**

# A SAMPLE OUTLINE

**Thesis statement:** While street parties encourage a sense of tradition, spirit, and continuity for many Queen's students, the damage to property, noise pollution, and loss of a sense of community safety have an unacceptable negative effect on residents of both the immediate area and the larger community.

**Section I.** Many students, former and current, argue that street parties are an important part of the Queen's experience and a financial windfall for the city.

**Paragraph A** – contributes to tradition, continuity, and spirit

**Paragraph B** – indirectly leads to alumni contributions

1. quotations from alumni at this year's party
2. stats re: alumni contributions

**Paragraph C** – generates money for Kingston

**Section II.** However, parties are actually more detrimental than positive, particularly for residents of the area.

**Paragraph A** – cause serious amount of noise pollution

**Paragraph B** – result in mild to extensive property damage

**Paragraph C** – lead to erosion of neighbourhood sense of safety and community

**Section III.** Finally, there are negative implications for the larger Kingston community, as well.

**Paragraph A** – financial burden due to policing costs, clean-up, etc.

**Paragraph B** – further strain on town-gown relations



# Creating organized paragraphs



# Writing paragraphs

Applying a **what/how/why** strategy to paragraph structure may help you stay focused.

<b>What? (the Point)</b>	The main idea to be discussed (best introduced in a topic sentence, the introductory sentence to your paragraph)	<b>1 to 2 sentences</b>
<b>How? (the Proof)</b>	The evidence used to substantiate the point or back up the argument: examples, appropriate reference material, quotations, etc.	<b>2 to 4 sentences</b>
<b>Why? (the Comment)</b>	Commentary outlining the significance of the preceding material. Your explanation of how and why these ideas fit together: relationships, contrasts, conclusions, etc.	<b>2 to 4 sentences</b>

## A SAMPLE BODY PARAGRAPH

One of the negative effects of street parties on Kingston residents is noise pollution. Increased noise usually consists of loud music and loud voices. It may also include the sound of breaking bottles or property damage occurring. Effects of noise on residents may include increased levels of stress, disturbed sleep, and a loss of a feeling of safety. The Kingston Police Department receives many complaints and distress calls related to the noise of street parties. They observe that disturbing levels of noise also contribute to a loss in the sense of community between Kingston residents and Queen's students (Jones 10). For all of these reasons, students should take measures to locate parties where their noise will not affect as many residents as the parties that are held in the midst of neighbourhoods.

# Using evidence effectively: 3 keywords

## 1) high-quality

- \* from scholarly sources, peer-reviewed journals, and books from authorities in the field
- \* recent, reliable, and authoritative

## 2) relevant

- \* directly relates to the thesis and the body paragraph in which the evidence appears
- \* must be material that you understand

## 3) well-integrated

- \* You have engaged with the material and connected it to your own argument.
- \* All quotations and paraphrases are properly introduced and followed by analysis or interpretation.

Something to remember . . .

**Secondary  
material  
should not replace  
your own  
thoughts.**



# Avoiding the scary territory of plagiarism

**Cite all borrowed ideas, and place  
all borrowed language in  
quotation marks.**

# Quoting and paraphrasing

**Use a quotation if you include three or more consecutive words from a source.**

**Use direct quotations when**

- 1) the precise wording is important.
  - \* You may want to use the quotation as a starting point for your discussion, examine it, or refute it.
- 2) the quotation has **IMPACT**.



**Paraphrases** are used in the following cases:

1) when a quotation isn't necessary

2) when you are summarizing factual information

**A valid paraphrase must do more than simply change or re-order a few of the author's words.**

**All paraphrases, like quotations, need to be followed by citations.**



# Making the transition

- \* Transitional words or phrases help your reader to understand how one paragraph, idea, or sentence **relates** to the next.



- \* Transitions can signal to your reader a **shift** to a new idea, an opposing point, or an additional example.
- \* Transitions between paragraphs should occur at the **beginning of a new paragraph** rather than at the end of the previous paragraph.

# Your introduction

- \* Usually a **single paragraph**
- \* Provides some **opening remarks** related to the issue
  - \* BUT not too general--avoid “Since the dawn of time” openings.
  - \* Try starting with a quotation, provocative question, interesting fact, or startling statistic.
- \* Introduces a particular **theory/approach** (if you’re using one)
- \* Includes any other **context** that is necessary for the reader to make sense of the issue and the thesis statement
  - \* e.g., titles, dates, places, names
- \* Culminates with your **thesis statement**
  - \* Usually at the end of the paragraph

# A SAMPLE INTRODUCTION

Student street parties at Queen's often gain national attention. Because of this attention, the public image of Queen's is tarnished. But who else besides the university is negatively affected by the parties? And do these negative effects outweigh the benefits of these social events? While student street parties encourage a sense of tradition, spirit, and continuity for many Queen's students, the damage to property, significant noise pollution, and loss of a sense of community safety have an unacceptable negative effect on the residents of both Aberdeen Street and the immediate area.

# Coming to conclusions



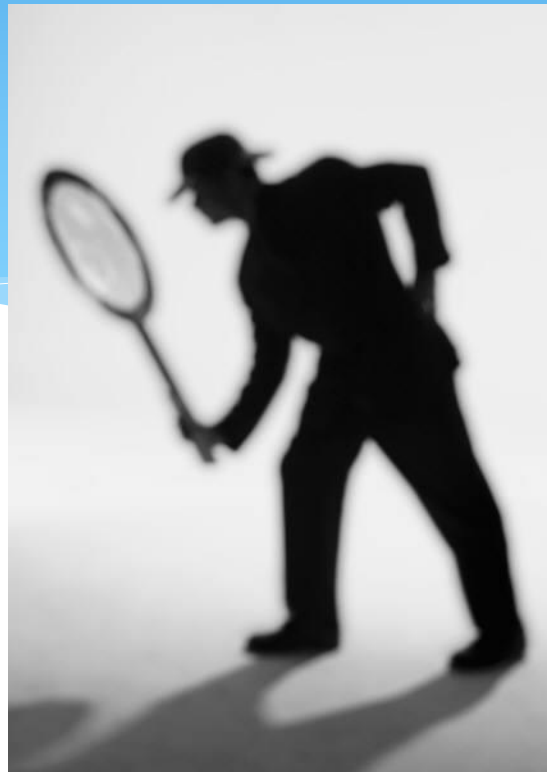
## A concluding paragraph should . . .

- \* Provide a brief summary of your essay's thesis and main points.
  - \* BUT not a word-for-word restatement
- \* Suggest the wider implications of your discussion.
- \* Avoid introducing a contradiction.
- \* NOT introduce any new material.
- \* End with your own words.
- \* Encourage your reader to think further about your topic.

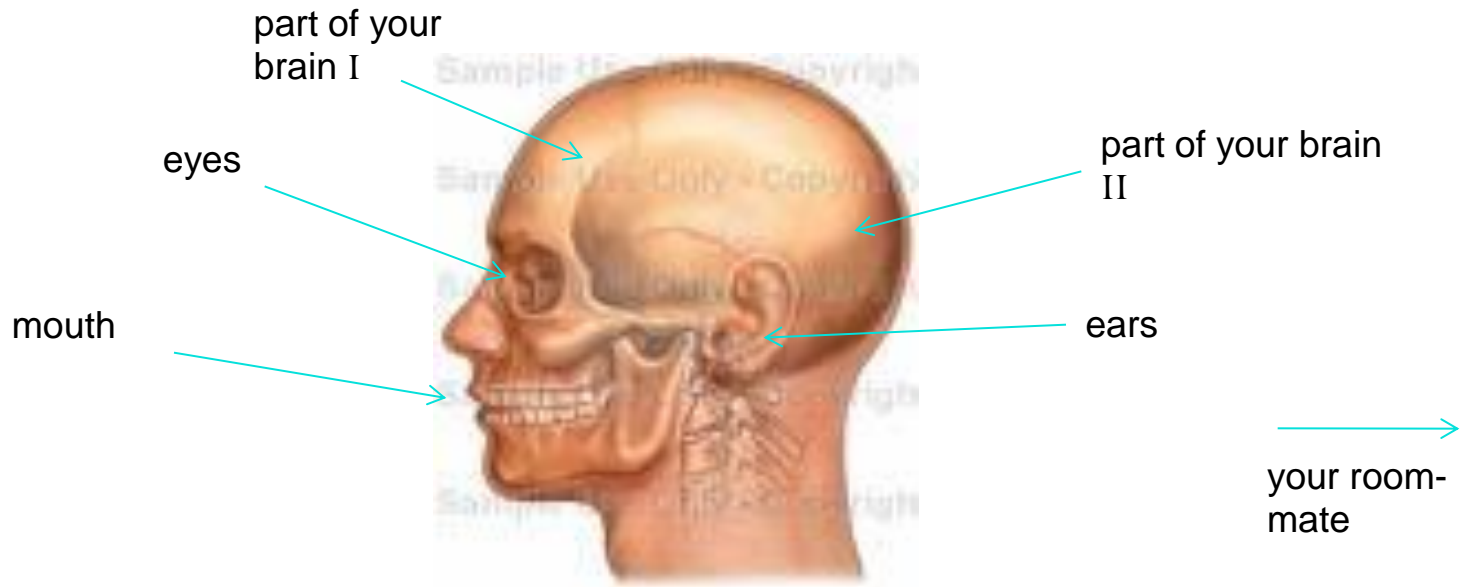
# A SAMPLE CONCLUSION

Street parties help students to feel connected to their peers and provide an enjoyable social outlet. However, the negative effects of parties can be significant and far-reaching, particularly for the residents of Kingston. Residents often experience disturbing levels of noise, damage to their property, and a loss of a sense of safety. These effects lead to an erosion of community relations between residents and Queen's students. In order to preserve community spirit, not just Queen's spirit, students should consider planning their parties with Kingston residents in mind.

**What else is my marker looking for?**



# 1) Making use of all your editors



1. Never hand in a paper without first **printing** out a final draft and reading it over.
2. By reading your paper **aloud**, you bring into play two further “editors” in your brain—your ears and your mouth.
3. Make use of a **second set of eyes**—your roommate, friend, classmate . . . .

## 2) Writing clearly, simply, and concisely

### Some tips about word choice:

- ✓ Use plain language.
- ✓ Choose precise and accurate language.
  - \* Remember: it's better to repeat an accurate word than to use an inaccurate or confusing one.
- ✓ Try to avoid using words you really don't understand or that are too challenging for a busy reader.



## AN EXAMPLE OF PLAIN LANGUAGE

**Not:** When devising plans for parties to occur on the streets of the city of Kingston, students should attempt to identify and utilize areas that are not located in the midst of neighbourhoods where many non-student Kingston residents habitate.

**But:** Students should plan to have street parties outside of neighbourhoods where many Kingston residents who are not students live.

### 3) Paying attention to feedback

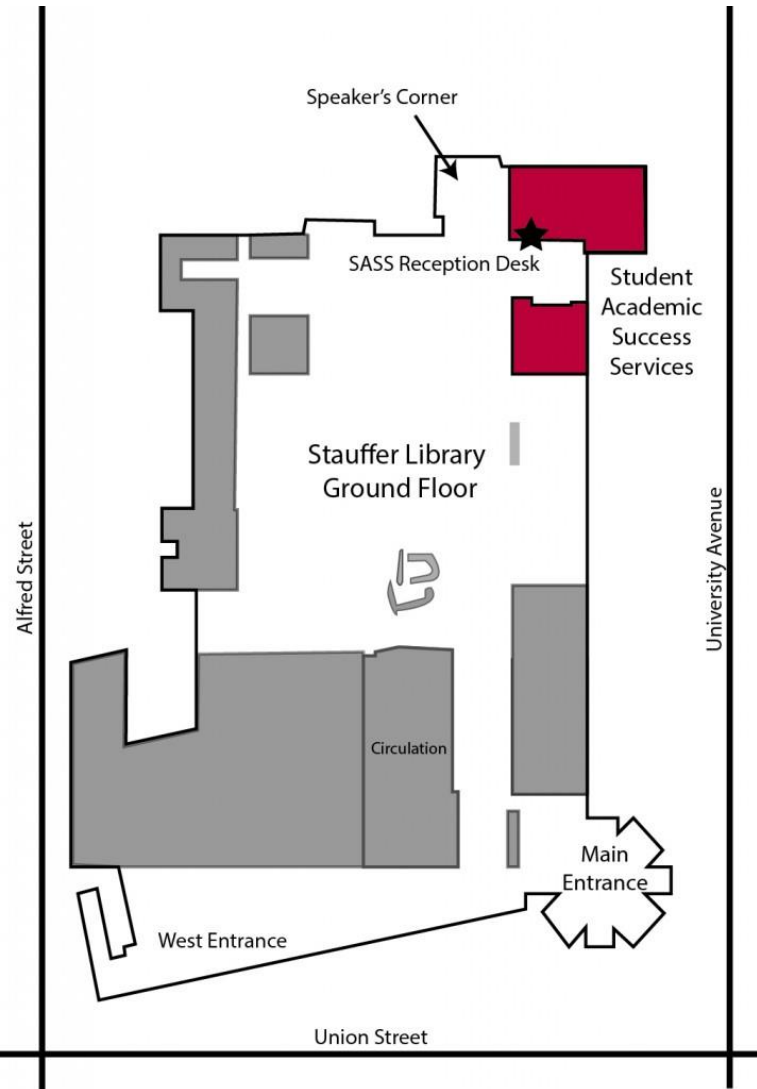
*Some advice on assignments from a Queen's professor:*

“I mark down for errors in punctuation, sentence structure, and proofreading. I penalize more for recurring errors, and, if they recur more than twice, generally I fail the paper.”

Be aware that markers often keep copies of their comments on your papers on file. Implement the advice given by markers because they will be tracking your progress (or lack thereof).

## 4) Using the appropriate tone

- ✓ Avoid using the overly familiar and informal personal pronoun *you*.  
You can see . . . → Smith's words demonstrate that . . .
- ✓ Find out your marker's preferences regarding *I*.
- ✓ Avoid contractions in formal writing.
  - can't → cannot
  - isn't → is not
  - doesn't → does not
- ✓ Avoid colloquialisms (informal language).
  - a lot of → many
  - really great, awesome → interesting, insightful
  - does a good job → effectively



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# Upcoming Writing Centre Workshops

- **Effective Writing for First-Year Science Students**  
Oct. 1, 7:00-8:30 p.m., Dunning 14
- **Writing Effective Thesis Statements**  
Oct. 9, 1:30-2:20 p.m., Stauffer 121
- **Constructing Clear and Focused Paragraphs**  
Oct. 23, 2:30-3:20 p.m., Stauffer 121
- **Using Sources Effectively and Avoiding Plagiarism**  
Oct. 29, 10:30-11:20 a.m., Stauffer 121
- **Perfectionism in Writing**  
Nov. 14, 11:30 a.m.-12:20 p.m., Stauffer 121