The Hamilton College Writing Center presents

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF WRITING

The Seventh Deadly Sin: Committing Pet Peeves

Learning to write clearly and effectively is a central part of your education. As the Hamilton College Catalogue notes, “The College expects its students to think, write and speak with clarity, understanding and precision.” Below is a list of professors’ pet peeves you should consider as you aim for “clarity, understanding and precision” in your writing.

PET PEEVES

utilize vs. use

singular/plural disagreement

bloated diction

inflated, imprecise words

misuse of prove/proof

burying the subject

unnecessary subordinate clause and passive voice

use of I as object

indefinite antecedent

loose vs. lose

treating data as singular

than vs. then

vacuous first sentences

affect vs. effect

less vs. fewer

use of impact when violent implications are inappropriate

general sloppiness

EXAMPLES OF INCORRECT USAGE

Descartes utilizes the wax argument to show that we know physical objects with the mind, not the senses.

The student finished the essay, only to discover that their printer did not work.

Once liberty is actualized, justice will burgeon.

The lifestyles of the majority of individuals were difficult due to what society utilized against them.

The results prove that our hypothesis was correct.

(A study supports a hypothesis, not proves it.)

The significance of the study is that there is….

There was one factor that was ignored by the “con” side: ….

They went with Dido and I to tour the Colosseum. The family came to see David and I perform.

President Johnson’s ignoring of George Ball’s Vietnam memo proved disastrous for him. (for whom?)

Forecasters fear that stocks will lose value next year.

The data shows that medication affects ADHD symptoms.

The data indicate that Americans work more hours than Europeans.

Scientists have studied DNA for years.

We studied the effect of the angle on acceleration.

Bush got less votes than Gore in 2000.

The poem has a subtle, gradual impact on the reader.

The English department cares to much about grammar and speling.