

How to Interpret Red Marks

First of all, when you get a paper back, you will see that in many places I write "Why?" or ask some similar question. This doesn't always mean you have omitted something that you need to answer the question (though sometimes it does, especially when I write "But why?"). Often I just am trying to get you to pursue a line of reasoning further for the fun of it. So lots of questions don't mean there's necessarily a problem. When there's more than one essay question, I read all the question (1)s first, then the (2)s etc., and I don't know whose papers are whose, so if my comments seem curt and focused on problems, remember I don't know who you are when I grade them. Also don't be offended if I make little jokes and stuff--I'm not making fun of you, you just get punchy after reading lots of papers. I correct spelling, grammar, diction (which words one uses), and stuff like that. I do this for your benefit, and it in no way has anything to do with your grade. I also use abbreviations, as listed below:

- 2V Two Verbs: You have a sentence that has two different verbs fighting for the same place.
- AWK Awkward phrase or sentence.
- B/G Ah, welcome to the modern world. Yes, nowadays we must decide whether the imaginary person we are talking about is a boy, a girl, both or either, and we must stick to our decision, otherwise we are likely to get a PP.
- BMU Beam Me Up! You seem to be in a world of pure ideas: instead of saying "Property is important," you are saying "the idea of property is important," and so on.
- BP Big Print! (For when you spread out a paper by changing fonts) and VBP is for VERY Big Print
- BTM Block That Metaphor! And exceptionally ungainly metaphor or, more commonly, a mixed metaphor. Ex: "Of all of the foul pollutions that issued forth from Bernstein's revisionist pen, his theory of credit is really the icing on the cake."
- BTMR Backwards The Mind Reels: For some reason, you've reversed the normal order of words in a sentence and it sounds funny. Ex: "The analysis of things into their components is the method materialists use."
- Cite? You have made a claim without any support. Can you cite evidence for this?
- Col Colloquial. Your use of colloquial or slang is out of place either stylistically or because it's indefinite in its meaning.
- Con Connection. The connection between one sentence or idea and the succeeding one is unclear. This is a big problem, by the way,.
- Ex? Can you give an example?
- DARST Did the Author Really Say That? (Can also mean Where did the author say that?). Usually it means that I think you are reading something into the text or claiming that someone said something or meant something that they did not say/mean, but occasionally I really want to know if s/he said it or not.
- FW Funny Word. Instead of a common word like "says", you've used a word that sounds a little funny (or a lot funny). E.g. "Marx demises Smith when Smith reveals that the division of labor...."
- Gen Everything here is relatively general and could be omitted without changing your specific point.
- GIGO Your use of the computer has screwed up your paper.
- HEY! Hey! Didn't I say not to use big quotations!?
- Hmmm I get the point, but I think its a doubtful one, but I'll suspend my disbelief, and see if you prove me wrong.
- HR131 Your essay sounds like a resolution on the floor of the house of representatives. This usually means beginning sentences (which lack independent clauses) with "Whereas,"
- ITN Is This Necessary? Ask yourself if you need to bring this up to make your point.
- IR Irrelevant. A red herring. A distraction. Makes no difference.
- JQ Juicy Quotation. This would be an appropriate time to introduce supporting evidence--without it, the argument is weak.
- Key This point could be the key, or pivotal point, and you should treat it in more detail

- and make it central.
- NAV Not A Verb—this word is a noun that you are verbifying
- NNN Not Necessarily Necessary. A stronger version of ITN--here I'm pretty sure that its not something you should be going into in this paper.
- OC Only Connect--You have many if not all of the elements of an answer, but you need to make the connections clearer.
- OR Over-Writing (I know writing begins with a W but I don't mean to say OW!—see below). This means that you are adding unnecessary flourishes. While you probably are not intentionally trying to take up extra space, it has this effect. Example: “Before beginning my laborious discussion of this truly important problem, I thought it wise to begin by examining the most reliable sources that I was able to locate. One source in particular was of great utility, and substantially assisted my initial attempts.” All that could be “I first looked in X...” or “According to X...”
- Ouch! You have (usually inadvertently) given a mortal insult to your subject, though you point may be correct (e.g. referring to Marx's theory as utopian, when he hated utopianism).
- PASS An unnecessarily passive construction is used. Another ex: "An interpretation of the dynamics of class struggle is offered by several theorists."
- PDP Papa Don't Preach—your paper is taking space to reassert how important the topic or question is. Since I assigned the question, probably you don't need to do this, and can get straight to your own point. And certainly don't include pious statements....
- PID Put It Down--I.e. put the bong down and take a breath of fresh air
- PP Pronoun Problem. This is a problem with unclear or mismatched pronouns (it could be related to B/G)--maybe you switched from "one" to "they" to "he," or maybe you use a pronoun that probably doesn't refer to the last mentioned noun.
- PR! Proofread your paper before you hand it in to me! I don't want to struggle with some obvious omission of a page or paragraph or whatever.
- Q/A You seem to be answering a different question from the one you should be answering.
- R&R Redundant and Repetitious (joke). Saying the same thing twice or more
- RO Run-On Sentence--two complete sentences back to back without : or -- between them.
- SF Sentence Fragment. Usually a dependent clause hanging out by itself. E.g. "While Marx is sometimes confusing."
- SMF You are a sick m__ f__!
- SP Spelling error
- SSI Single Space and Indent (for large quotations)
- Sub There's a problem with the subject of the sentence. Sometimes the subject that's implied by the pronoun is not the subject you want; at other times, the subject is shifting without warning in the middle of the sentence; at other times, it's not clear if there is a subject.
- S-V The subject and verb disagree. For example, "can you believe how speedily that opossum run?"
- Tense Your tenses don't agree--change from past to future or present or

whatever. For example. "The women had taken over the factory, because they get mad..."

- TF Touchy Feely. You are saying "feel" when you really mean "says," "argues," etc. Remember, we often don't know how people really feel when they write.
- TSNV This Sentence No Verb. E.g. "This morning the pope his hat."
- TU Tighten Up. You have eight overlapping sentences where three would do--so tighten up your writing!
- UNC Unclear: refers to meaning of sentence....it's unclear!
- Whoa! Rein in your style!
- WS Watergate-Speak: You are using a Haigism or Nixonism, i.e. using more big words to say a simple thing. E.g. "At this point in time" instead of "now." (Thanks to H.L. Wilensky for the idea!)
- WW Wrong word; i.e. a problem in diction. The word you chose means something a bit different from what you intend.
- YR Why is this relevant? Here I'm not saying that I know it's not relevant, but you certainly haven't made it clear that it is relevant.
- YYUR YYUR, YYUB, ICURYY4Me! You're over my head! What can I do?
- ¶ Paragraph symbol. Either means time for a new paragraph, or if I write "No ", it means you shouldn't have a break.
- || You have a problem with a sentence structure that should be perfectly parallel. For example, "The candidates in the election did not focus on the economic issues, but George Bush was often irritated by reporters." Or the problem can be between two sentences.
- # Number problem: you change from singular to plural or vice-versa. E.g. "the problem with harold are..."
- 0 This sentence really isn't saying anything. You're going in a circle--either your writing or your logic is going in a circle--back to where you started from.....
- """" You are "putting" too many "words" in "quotation marks" that don't "belong" in ""quotation" "mar"ks""
- ☠ The sign of the SPACE INVADERS. This means that something ALIEN to your project is taking up VALUABLE SPACE and is taken by your reader as a HOSTILE act.
- ? I Don't understand the point.
- !?! You don't understand the point.
- !?! Are you serious!?! Holy smokes!
- !*#!<?#@&!! Arrg I kill you filthy!