1. **Use of first person**. Avoid “I think,” “I believe,” “To me this means…”
2. **Use of second person “you.”** Avoid the use of the second person. No: “When you die…” Instead use: “When humans die…” or “When one dies…” No: “The author’s use of diction makes you feel…” Rather use: “The author’s use of diction makes the reader feel…”
3. **Colloquial speech and immature, excessively informal vocabulary**. Examples: “Your average Joe,” “Joe College,” “Back in the olden days,” “Nowadays,” “A bunch of…a ton of…” (Does the writer mean a “significant number of”?); “I would have to agree/disagree…” (because you don’t have to); “He got off…” (Rather use a more elevated “He escaped justice…”); and so on.
4. **Use of psychobabble**. Do not over-emphasize psychological lasting effects (unless stated in prompts).
5. **Use of absolutes**. “always” “never” “everybody” “99.99% of people agree…” All of these sound false, absolutes are a rarity.
6. **Excesses of tone**. Hysterical, breathless, indignant, self-righteous, cute, breezy, etc. Example: “If a homeless man even talks he gets arrested.”
7. **Cheerleading**. This is a special type of excess of tone when a student lavishes praise on an author or his work. Example: “The greatest poet…” “Does a magnificent job…” “obviously a genius…” (Note: this observation is not intended to squelch true passion or heart-felt response to texts).
8. **Silly, weak, childish examples**. Students’ lack of discernment with regard to quality of examples or evidence; using cartoons, Disney movies, etc. as legitimate evidence (unless mentioned in prompts.)
9. **Rhetorical questions**. Especially those with an indignant response, such as: “Do we Americans have to put up with this? I think not!”
10. **Clichés**. All of them. They are old and no one wants to read another.
11. **Exclamation points**. Especially when a student uses a lot of them!!!
12. **Most adverbs**. Such as basically, obviously, surely, certainly, very, really, incredibly, totally, should be used sparingly (if ever).
13. **Writing about author and speaker or narrator as though they are the same**. Weak: Dickinson greets death as a courtly suitor. Stronger: Dickinson’s speaker greets death as a courtly suitor.
14. **Misspelling the author’s name**. Although misspellings are often overlooked, pay heed to the author’s correct name.
15. **Referring to authors by their first name**. Unless you are close personal friends, it is appropriate to use last names.
16. **Writing about an author’s life rather than his or her specific purpose in a text**. Weak: “Dickinson writes about death because she was surrounded by it.” Stronger: “Dickinson’s purpose in using this image is to….”