Diction

Diction is the effective use of specific words that give the exact meaning intended by the writer. There are several things that writers can do to develop this important characteristic.

The first step is to build on existing vocabulary by using more specific words instead of less general ones. For example, "dog" can be replaced by "collie" or "dachshund," two specific species. Using "dachshund" or "collie" gives a clearer picture to the reader than the word "dog." Below is another example of how the sentence "We did things today." was revised to be more specific.

We did things today.
We planned an essay today.
We formed a thesis statement and constructed a sentence outline today.

Besides revising sentences and making the vocabulary more specific, there are other rules that you should follow when writing.

Avoid Conversational Styles- This is writing which resembles spoken English. It is acceptable for writing a letter to a friend, but is not appropriate in formal essays. For instance, someone would not use "Forget this trip, man" when writing a formal paper.

Avoid Clichés- Clichés are expressions (usually metaphors) used in English that have lost all meaning. They are a bunch of empty words. Some examples are "fits like a glove" and "happy as a lark."

Avoid Jargon- Jargon is specialized language that has been adopted for certain fields. People from outside that specific field will probably not understand the related jargon. An example of using jargon would be something like, "Attendance at the national convention topped out at 1500." "Topped out" is an expression used in the stock market.

Avoid Slang- Slang is not proper in formal essays because it is constantly changing. What one person uses for slang, another person might not. Examples of slang in English might be saying "joint" in place of "place" or "no sweat" instead of "no bother."