No-No Word List

We generally suggest avoiding the following list of words in your writing because each generates vagueness, lacks of specificity and confusion. When you can, remove them for all formal papers.

- **Stuff** – Lacks details about the “stuff”  
  - Example: There is a lot of stuff in my soup.  
  - Revision: There are a lot of vegetables in my soup.

- **Different** – Does not include the “difference” between objects  
  - Example: Sara and I are different  
  - Revision: Sara is a sophomore and I am a Junior in college

- **Certain** – Avoids the adjective and/or specific detail  
  - Example: I feel a certain way about this movie.  
  - Revision: I really disliked this movie

- **Should** – Has a biased undertone without support or evidence  
  - Example: People should eat more vegetables.  
  - Revision: Health studies indicate that eating more vegetables lowers heart disease.

- **How, Why, Why** – Question words in statements leave out specificity  
  - Example: I know how you feel. I know why she went to the store.  
  - Revision: I know you feel upset. Sally went to the store to buy cheese.

- **Thing, Something, Everything, Nothing*, Anything* – These words are too ambiguous and may prompt the reader to ask questions.**  
  - Example: Tony knows everything about cars.  
  - Revision: Tony knows a lot about the mechanics, design and making of cars.

- **We, Our, Us, You, I* – These pronouns are subjective if not used in conjunction with the proper noun. Avoid using these words in place of a generalized public**  
  - Example: We know about the universe.  
  - Revision: The students in my Astronomy class have learned about the universe.

- **Always, Never** – These words can leave the writer open for criticism since the action might have happened before for limited amounts of time.  
  - Example: Seniors are always smarter than sophomores.  
  - Revision: Research finds that 30% of seniors are better writers than sophomores.

- **Today, Society** – These words are not concrete because they have shifting definitions  
  - Example: Society dislikes individuals who do not work.  
  - Revision: American society encourages hard work to achieve the American Dream.

*Disclaimer: These words may be appropriate in some classes and majors.*