

US POLITICS Fall 2020

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Lecture: Asynchronous delivery, time set aside Tues 9:30a – 10:20a, see below

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Course Description

This course is designed to give students an introduction into the government and politics of the United States. It will provide a broad survey of topics, designed to provide students an overview of the study of American politics. The primary goal of this course is to educate students on the current state of American politics, how this state was reached, and to prepare students for more advanced studies of American politics. The course provides both an overview of the institutions of American government, and a discussion of the political culture, political sociology, and political economy of the government and politics of the United States. This course will cover the main institutional and cultural features of the American political system, and will discuss the enduring contentious issues in American politics.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand the major institutions of American politics
- Understand the cultural features of the American political system
- Have a broad understanding of the sources of sclerosis in American politics
- Be able to discuss America in an international context, including questions of American foreign policy and American exceptionalism

Required Materials and Texts

- James A. Morone & Rogan Kersh, *By The People: Debating American Government, 4th Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- All other readings will be posted on Avenue

Class Format

2US3 will be delivered asynchronously online. Video lectures will be posted on the Saturday morning of the week of the course. Students should complete the assigned readings and watch the video lecture on their own time, at a time of their choosing. On Tuesdays, from 9:30 to 10:20, there will be an open Zoom meeting where the instructor will answer questions on the material presented in the video lecture. No new material will be presented during these Zoom sessions: it is a chance for students to ask questions about material, have additional examples provided, etc.

2US3 also features tutorials, which will meet via Zoom meetings. Most of these tutorials will help build on skills that are introduced during the lecture. Consult the class schedule below for specific tutorial content.

Regular watching of the video lectures and reading along with the text are key to success in any course. Tutorial discussion is designed to hone oral communication

skills, and to provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion of questions related to the course.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Tutorial Participation – 15%, ongoing through the term.
2. Midterm Test – 20%, October 20th
3. Research Paper – 30%, November 24th
4. Final Exam – 35%, April exam period.

Course Evaluation – Details

Tutorial Participation (15%), ongoing

This weekly tutorial involves discussion of course material, primarily the assigned readings, for the week. A quality contribution to tutorial involves reading all required materials, making thoughtful and relevant comments, being courteous to classmates and respectful of opposing viewpoints. Students who attend tutorials but do not contribute to discussion should not expect a passing grade for tutorial participation.

Political science involves a good deal of discussion of opposing viewpoints. Students are reminded to be respectful of those with whom they disagree. That said, language and comments which are sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, speciesist, or which discriminates on the base of age or ability will not be tolerated.

It is the Student's responsibility to ensure they have signed the attendance sheet for each tutorial they are present. Cell phones are not permitted during tutorial. Students who insist on texting or using social media during seminars will be asked to leave.

Tutorials Run:

- T01: Fr 1:30pm-2:20pm
- T02: Fr 9:30am-10:20am
- T03: Th 1:30pm-2:20pm
- T04: Fr 3:30pm-4:20pm
- T05: Fr 10:30AM-11:20am
- T06: We 3:30pm-4:20pm

Midterm Test (20%), October 20th

This test will be completed online through Avenue, and will be done synchronously from 9:30 to 10:20am. The test will cover the material of weeks 1 to 5.

Research Paper (30%), due November 24th

You are expected to write essay on one of the topics below. Students should write a **8 - 10 page** paper on one of the topics of their choosing, in the style of an argumentative

research essay. The essay should have a clearly presented thesis, from which the argument flows naturally. You are expected to consult no less than **six peer-reviewed academic sources** *not* including the assigned readings for this course. Your paper will be evaluated on your thesis statement (the clarity and feasibility thereof), the quality of your research and presented evidence, and the quality of your writing.

The first task in your term paper is to lay out a clear thesis and central argument. Your paper will be evaluated based on the strength of evidence you lay forth to support your thesis. A good paper will have a logical flow to it, and an argument that follows clearly from the central thesis statement. An excellent paper will also link your particular topic / case study to a larger body of theoretical work. You should also read the guidelines for grammar and style in the course outline - part of your grade will be based on your writing style.

Term Paper Topics

1. What goals did the authors of the Constitution have and did they achieve them?
2. How can we explain the repeated pattern of working class Americans voting against their own economic interests?
3. Should the Electoral College be abandoned in favour of the election of the President by popular vote?
4. Evaluate the state of federalism in the United States today. Does the federal government have too much power? Too little?
5. Do lobbyists have too much power in decision-making processes? If so, is there a way to curtail this power?
6. Has power become too concentrated in the executive branch of the federal government, particularly in the Office of the President? (NB: while you may wish to discuss the Trump presidency here, this topic should go well beyond Trump).
7. Pick either women, African-Americans, Latino-Americans, or Native Americans. Why have the group that you have picked been marginalised within American politics?

Final Exam (35%), April exam period

The exam will cover material presented in both the lecture and the course readings, and will cover the entire course. Please note that the readings are designed as a starting point for the week's material, and that lecture will invariably cover topics not in the readings. Thus, it is critical that students view lecture if they hope to pass the final exam.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (September 8th): Course Introduction

Readings: None assigned this week.

Notes: Tutorials do not run this week.

Week 2 (September 15th): The American Constitution

Lecture Readings: BTP 3, "The Constitution" & BTP 5, "Civil Liberties"

Tutorial Readings: Richard Albert, "American Exceptionalism in Constitutional Amendment," *Arkansas Law Review* 69 iss 2 (2016).

And: Ed Burmila, "wE'rE a rEPuBLiC nOt A dEMoCRacY," (2019)

Week 3 (September 22nd): Federalism

Readings: BTP 4, "Federalism & Nationalism"

Tutorial Readings: Craig Volden, "The Politics of Competitive Federalism: A Race to the Bottom in Welfare Benefits?," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (April 2002): 352 - 363.

Week 4 (September 29th): American Political Culture

Readings: BTP 2, "The Ideas That Shape America" & BTP 8 "Political Participation"

Tutorial Readings: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Chapter 2 "Political Participation," and Chapter 3 "Civic Participation."

Week 5 (October 6th): Civil Rights

Readings: BTP 6, "The Struggle for Civil Rights"

Tutorial Readings: Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" (2014)

Week 6: Reading Week (October 12th – 18th)

Week 7 (October 20th): Midterm Held Online

February 10th – Midterm

February 12th – No class this day

No Tutorials This Week

Week 8 (October 27th): Political Parties

Readings: BTP 11, "Political Parties"

Tutorial Readings: Seymour Martin Lipset & Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000. Chapter 2 "The American Party System."

Week 9 (November 3rd): Elections

Readings: BTP 10, "Campaigns & Elections"

Tutorial Readings: Zoltan Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi, & Lindsay Nielson, "Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes" *Journal of Politics* 79, iss 2 (April 2017)

Week 10 (November 10th): The Presidency

Readings: BTP 14, "The Presidency"

Tutorial Readings: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004 [1973]). "Back to the Imperial Presidency" and Chapter 1, "What the Founding Fathers Intended."

And: Charles M. Blow, "An Imperial Presidency?" (2019)

Week 11 (November 17th): Congress

Readings: BTP 13, "Congress"

Tutorial Readings: Samuel A. Marcossou, "Fixing Congress" *BYU Journal of Public Law* 33 iss 2 (2019)

Week 12 (November 24th): The Media & American Politics

Readings: BTP 9, "Media, Technology, and Government"

Tutorial Readings: Richard Meagher, "The 'Vast Right-wing Conspiracy': Media and Conservative Networks," *New Political Science* 34, No. 4, (December 2012)

Week 13 (December 1st): American Foreign Policy

Readings: BTP 18, "Foreign Policy"

Tutorial Readings: Omar G. Encarnacion, "Trump and the Retreat from Human Rights" *Current History* 116, iss. 793, (Nov 2017)

And: Ed Burmila, "Naughty By NATO" (2019)

Week 14 (December 8th): Catch up if required; review

Note: No lecture will be posted this week. The instructor will hold an open Zoom session on Tuesday to answer your questions leading into the exam.

Course Policies

Contact Protocol

Besides the Tuesday information session and the tutorials, both the instructor and the teaching assistants have set time aside for virtual office hours. The teaching assistants will make their office hours known in tutorial. If you wish to consult with me, please send me an email and we will set up a one-on-one Zoom meeting. Please note that all course communication must run through your McMaster email to the McMaster email of the teaching team: we will not be answering course related questions sent via Zoom private messages, for example. When consulting members of the teaching team, please keep the following simple rules for email etiquette in mind:

-At a minimum, include an appropriate salutation in your email.

-Students will be asked to revise, edit and re-send emails that do not meet minimum standards of grammatically correct English. In short, this is a formal communication to a member of the teaching team, not a text message.

-Please allow for a minimum of 48 hours turnaround on emails.

Submission of Assignments

Students must submit assignments via Avenue dropbox. A penalty of 5%, per day or part thereof, will be applied to late papers. No paper will be accepted 7 days after the due date.

Technical Requirements for Written Assignments

Papers for undergraduate writing **do not** include abstracts - these are reserved for published, peer-reviewed works. Do not include an abstract, unless explicitly instructed to do so, with your written work. The following technical requirements exist for all written components of this course: 12 point font, one inch margins, and double spaced text. All written assignments **must** use a recognized academic citation style for their assignments - Chicago, APA, or MLA. If you use an 'in text' citation system, you **must** reference specific page numbers in your citations - an author / date citation is not sufficient. Students who do not conform to these instructions risk a penalty to the grade of their written work.

Students should also consult the appended "term paper guidelines" for some simple rules, that will be enforced come marking time, on how to write a proper term paper.

Policy On Remarking & No Extra Credit

You will find that I have very limited enthusiasm (read: none) for grade negotiation. Remarking only happens in the case of some kind of “technical” error during grading - the person marking your paper forgot to read a page of the paper, or some other similar outlier. I am always willing to talk with you about your grades or tips for doing well on any assignment in the course. However, assigning grades is not a process of bargaining and negotiating. The grade I report to the registrar is the grade you earn based on the items listed in the course syllabus.

After feedback has been provided on an assignment, students should wait 24 hours before contacting the marker with follow-up questions. However, they should wait no longer than seven days, so that any questions can be resolved quickly and without unnecessary problems.

There will be no opportunity to make up extra credit in this course, there will be no alternative assignments offered for this course (except, of course, in the case of those assignments arranged through the SAS centre), nor will there be ‘make-up’ assignments for missed seminars, missed papers, etc. Please keep in mind that “I need a higher grade to keep my scholarship,” “I need a higher grade to maintain my eligibility,” “I need a higher grade to graduate,” or “I need a higher grade to get into my major” are not valid reasons for extra credit or make up assignments. Requests of this nature will simply be ignored. Please keep this in mind during the course. You will have ample opportunities to receive a very high grade in this course, assuming you avail yourself of all the resources present: attend lecture, do your readings, visit the office hours of the teaching team or send emails to us when you need help.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Papers will be penalized 5% per day that they are late. No paper will be accepted seven days past the due date.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Students are expected to virtually attend class and to complete all class readings. University policies around absences due to illness will be respected. Students should speak with an advisor in their faculty office (e.g. the Faculty of Social Sciences office for students enrolled in Political Science) if they are dealing with complicated health, mental health or life situations that might affect their ability to meet the normal course deadlines.

If you require academic accommodation on religious grounds, you should make a formal, written request to your instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of any given academic term.

Courses with an On-Line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be

assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms

Intellectual Property Notice

All slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other course materials created by the instructor in this course are the intellectual property of the instructor. A student who publicly posts or sells an instructor's work, without the instructor's express consent, may be charged with misconduct under McMaster's Academic Integrity Policy and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Written Work

Rules for essay structure and writing

1. You need to have a title page and a works cited page. These pages are separate. They do not count towards the page minimum of your paper.
2. Number your pages with numerals centred at the top of the page.
3. Follow these steps. Establish your topic. Research the major debates and think through the strongest arguments and counter-arguments. Establish your thesis statement. Develop a skeletal structure of the essay based on the arguments and your counter-arguments. Write the essay. Then write your introduction. Edit. Edit again. Edit again.
4. When choosing an essay topic, take time to think about what will interest you, what will help you confront the pressing issues in your life, and what will give you a chance to be creative. An essay written like it's a chore will likely be a chore to read.
5. You should, at almost all costs, avoid the personal pronoun - "I." It makes your writing seem sloppy and un-academic. Instead of writing "I will argue," use "this essay will demonstrate," or something similar. If you are using "I," it really makes your essay seem weak.
6. Similarly, to be blunt, I care not for your opinion. If you are writing "in my opinion" frequently, or at all, you probably will not do well. I care about what you can show to me with the support of academic evidence from academic sources. Leave your opinion out, and include only what you can support with citations from academic sources.
7. Craft a clear thesis statement. The following example is so broad it is basically meaningless: "This essay will explore Karl Marx's theory of alienation in terms of its political, economic, and cultural implications." Why would anyone invest the time to figure out what the heck the author will argue in this essay? Conversely, this is a clear thesis statement: "This essay argues that Marx's theory of alienation is as important in his later work as his early work, contrary to the assertions of Louis Althusser." A clear thesis statement not only sets the boundaries of your research question, it should also entice readers. If the reader does not know what the thesis of your paper is by the end of the first page, you are unlikely to pass
8. The most important part of any writing is critical analysis. Don't only summarize - also explain and analyze. You should typically summarize and explain only as much as is necessary to get to the good part of your writing: your critical analysis. Don't tack critical analysis on to the end of the essay. It is integral to the entire essay. It begins with your thesis statement.
9. Don't write long, incoherent sentences. Keep them short and succinct, with one main point.
10. Make sure that every sentence includes a subject (noun or pronoun) and a verb.
11. Remove unnecessary words and use concise sentences. Say the most with the least. Remember, you are expected to write at the level of this course - not above it, not below it. If you are using "big" words for the sake of making your essay look more academic or smarter, you run the *very good* chance you're using words wrong, and this has the opposite effect - it makes you look not at all smart.

12. Your writing should be organized in paragraphs. Each paragraph should have one central theme, idea, or argument you're trying to convince the reader of. Long, sprawling paragraphs that span multiple pages are improper. Break them down into clear and concise paragraphs.

13. Your audience is an intelligent layperson. Don't speak down to them, but don't assume their familiarity with the topic. Provide the necessary context. If you begin explaining what a character did before you explain who the character is, you haven't provided enough context.

14. Academic writing shouldn't have an informal, or colloquial, tone: "So, it seems to me that Robert Nozick has a pretty limited idea of free choice and democracy, right?" Nevertheless, don't hide behind academic-speak either: "It is evident that, when considered in their totality, Nozick's disquisitions on the freedom of choice, and concomitantly, on the democracy bequeathed by liberal institutions, are quite, albeit not wholly, limited." Remember, your audience is the intelligent layperson with a nose for academic bullshit. Write clearly and directly: "Nozick's ideas of free choice and democracy are quite limited."

15. Unless you are writing directly about something that occurred in the past (e.g. "Simone de Beauvoir died in 1986."), don't write in the past tense. Rather, write in the present tense. Consider this sentence: "De Beauvoir asserted that ethics is ambiguous." This makes her ideas sound dead and gone. Consider this: "De Beauvoir asserts that ethics is ambiguous." With this, her ideas are living and vibrant. Ethics might be ambiguous, but your writing should not be.

16. You should almost never use block quotes from a source. It makes it look like you have nothing original to say for yourself, so you are just copy-and-pasting the words of another author, and filling up space to reach a page limit. If you *must* use block quotes (and you shouldn't), the proper style is to indent them, justify the edges, and single-space them.

Citation and Citation Style

17. When citing work, irrespective of the citation style,¹ the footnote and endnote numbers or symbols should follow the comma or period.² Or, if a direct quotation, as Gray notes, "The numbers or symbols go after the quotation marks."³ With regard to in-text citations, as Gray (2017) notes, "With a direct quote, put the year of publication beside the author's surname and then put the page number after the quotation" (1). When you are citing an idea without directly quoting the author, as Gray (2017, 1) notes, put the year of publication and page number immediately after the author's name. If you are citing an idea, but not directly quoting and not mentioning the author in the sentence, put the name, year, and page at the end of the sentence (Gray 2017, 1).

18. Bibliographic information belongs in the bibliography, not in the text of the paper! Including it in the paper looks sloppy, and I think you're filling space because you have nothing to write. Never do this!: "in a paper, written by two political scientists, Doug Hagar and Tim Fowler, at Carleton University, entitled, 'Liking' Your Union: Unions and New Social Media During Election Campaigns," published in Labor Studies Journal, they argue....." Instead only ever use the last names of the authors, "Fowler and Hagar (2013) argue that unions have not harnessed the potential of new social media."

19. The three major citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago), all have easily found style sheets online. Pick one citation style, cite with it consistently, and follow a style guide online. Do not make up your own citation style. Citation errors can cause lost marks.

Specific Punctuation, Spelling, Style, and Grammar Errors to Avoid

20. Use proper Canadian English spelling. Most word processors will default to American English - change to, and use, Canadian or British English.

21. “Ideology” is not a synonym for “idea.” It is not the fancy, academic way of saying “idea.” An “ideology” is a system of idea and ideals, and is usually formed around a political, economic, social, or cultural theory. “I think I shall make a sandwich” is an idea. Liberalism is an ideology.
22. “Whom” is not a synonym for “who.” It is not the fancy, academic way of saying “who.” “Who” refers to the subject of a sentence, “whom” refers to the object of a verb or preposition. Generally, if you can replace the word with “he” or “she,” use who. If you can replace it with “him” or “her,” use whom.
23. Affect and Effect are two different words. In everyday speech, *affect* is a verb. It means to influence something, such as in the headline from the Springfield News, “Duff Shortage Affects Moe’s Customers.” The beer shortage had an impact on some of Moe’s customers: they were without beer. *Effect* is mostly commonly used as a noun meaning the result or impact of something, an outcome. Most of the time, you’ll want *affect as a verb* meaning to influence something and *effect for the something that was influenced*.
24. “Novel” is not a synonym for “book.” A novel is a work of fiction.
25. It is stylistically incorrect to use the phrase “on the other hand” without first using “on the one hand.”
26. There are fourteen separate punctuation marks in standard English grammar. You should learn the difference between them, and how to properly use them. The semicolon is particularly abused in undergraduate writing - the only proper use of a semicolon is to connect two independent clauses - two things that could be a sentence on their own.
27. Don’t use apostrophe s (’s) to form the plural of a noun or proper name. Plural nouns are formed by adding s to the noun with no punctuation. ‘s means a possessive relationship as in phrases like “Canada’s future” or “women’s rights”.
28. Don’t confuse “may have” with “might have”. Use “may have” only if you aren’t certain of the facts. Use “might have” for scenarios that you know did not happen. Correct usage: “Germany might have won the war if it had possessed nuclear weapons.” Incorrect usage: “Germany may have won the war if it had possessed nuclear weapons.”
29. Don’t write “lead” when you mean “led”. Lead is a metal. Led is the past tense of “to lead”.
30. Don’t use “amount” to designate a quantity that can be counted. Use “number.” Correct usage: “The number of students has increased.” Incorrect usage: “The amount of students has increased.”