Avoiding Colloquial (Informal) Writing

What is colloquialism?

It is an informal style of English that should be reserved primarily for speech or casual conversation. In other words, it is writing in the way that one would speak.

How can you avoid colloquial writing?

- **Write out contractions.**
  doesn’t = does not, they’re = they are, etc.
- **Stay in the third person point of view.**
  Avoid first and second person pronouns such as “I,” “you,” and “we,” unless your teacher specifically requests that you write in first or second person.
- **Avoid ending sentences with a preposition.**
  Instead of “This is the situation she finds herself in,” use “She finds herself in this situation.”
- **Avoid clichés.**
  Clichés are phrases that have been repeated so often that they have lost all meaning and originality. Phrase your thoughts in an original way. Some common clichés include:
  - “All’s fair in love and war.”
  - “There’s no place like home.”
  - “All’s well that ends well.”
  - “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”
- **Avoid using slang.**
  Using slang in writing essays or papers does not sound serious and formal in academic study. Avoid using slang such as “kid /kids,” “hood,” “hang out,” “…,” instead use the words “child/children,” “neighborhood,” “spend time with,” “…”

Some common colloquial words and expressions to avoid:

- **A lot/alot**
  “Alot” is not a word. Instead of “a lot,” use “several,” “many,” “hundreds,” “thousands,” “millions,” etc.
• **Alright**  
  Avoid this altogether, but if you must use this term, it is two words: all right.

• **Anyways/Anyway**  
  Avoid using these terms.

• **Could of/would of/should of**  
  Avoid these verbs. Replace these with “could have,” “would have,” or “should have.”

• **Get**  
  Do not use this term to replace the word “understand.” Instead of “She does not get it,” use “She does not understand.”

• **Got**  
  In the following context, “got” should be replaced with “have”: “Do you have an extra pen?” *not* “Do you got an extra pen?”

• **Gonna, wanna**  
  Use “going to” instead of “gonna” and “want to” instead of “wanna.”

• **Kinda, kind of, Sorta, Sort of**  
  Use “somewhat” or “rather.” It is better to use “type of” rather than “kind of.” Use “It is rather difficult,” *not* “It is kind of difficult.” “It is a type of orange,” *not* “It is a kind of orange.”

• **Like**  
  Use “as if,” “similar to,” or “such as,” unless using “like” as a verb, for example, “I like spicy food.”

• **Real, Really**  
  In formal writing, replace these words with “very.” Use “The coffee is very hot,” *not* “The coffee is real hot.”

• **Thru**  
  This is only appropriate if you are writing about a “drive-thru.” Otherwise, use the word “through.”

**Completely avoid using texting language:**  
Many students use texting language in writing their essays, which is highly unacceptable in writing an academic essay or paper. Avoid using “U,” “2,” “Y,” and “BTW,” instead use the words “you,” “two/to,” “why,” and “by the way.”
A Word of Caution:

When using a thesaurus to replace a colloquial or overused term, make sure that the new word matches the meaning of the original word as closely as possible. If you are unsure of the new word’s meaning, look it up in the dictionary to make sure it fits with your sentence’s meaning and tone.