

Academic Paper and Writing Style Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This is a very brief style guide for graduate students writing their first term paper in English. It is not intended to be comprehensive or to include every fine point that is covered in the dozens of full length style guides available in any academic

library (for example, see Northey, 1993). But it does provide a reasonable format that will be acceptable for most arts and science, education and management disciplines. No matter how much your professors may emphasize the substantive content and originality of a term paper, the basic mechanics of grammar, style and documentation are among the most common complaints and the most easily corrected faults.

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

It is essential to organize the paper in a logical sequence. It is not unusual to experiment with several different sequences of material as the paper develops. But no matter how you structure your paper, it must have an introduction, a body, a conclusion, and a list of references. The paper should begin with an introduction that states the goal of the paper, shows why it is an important topic and explains how you will accomplish the goal. The main portion of the paper is called "the body" and it should be divided into sections. At the end of the text you will need a conclusion to summarize the results you described in the body of the paper and demonstrate that you have achieved the goal that you stated in the introduction. The conclusion may also discuss the implications of your conclusions and propose directions for further research. A list of the books and articles consulted in your research is the final section under the heading of References Cited.

Heads and Subheads

It is usually helpful to separate each major section of the manuscript with a heading. Major headings are typed in upper case (capital letters). Further division using bolded subheadings is recommended for lengthy sections. Sub-subheadings may also be used. The headings, subheadings and sub-subheadings in these guidelines provide a good example of the use of headings.

Paragraphs

Sections of the manuscript are divided into paragraphs to separate different ideas. Except for the first paragraph below a heading, paragraphs are usually indented one tab stop and separated by a double space. While a business letter may have one sentence paragraphs, the "rule of thumb" for expository writing is for a paragraph to contain no fewer than three sentences.

Italics

Italics are used for words in foreign languages, the proper name of ships and aircraft (H.M.S. *Titanic*) and to identify the titles of published books, journals, magazines and newspapers. In years gone by, when typewriters could not form italic characters, underlining was accepted as equivalent to italics, thus book titles were traditionally underlined. Now that italics are available with all word processing software, underlining is no longer used for titles.

Quotations

Short quotations should be identified as such using quotation marks. Quotations longer than three lines should be single spaced and double indented in lieu of quotation marks. Page references must always be given at the end of quotations. If more than 10 percent of an essay is made up of quotation the originality of the paper is compromised. In general, quotations are used for two purposes. One is to provide evidence of a specific argument which you wish to discuss. The second is to include a particularly apt piece of prose which succinctly expresses an idea which you want to incorporate.

Avoid quoting material that must have parts excluded. If it is absolutely necessary to omit parts of the text, signify the gap with three periods (an ellipsis) e.g. "To be ... is the question." It is possible to take a quote out of its context or to strategically delete words using ellipses, changing the meaning intended by the author. This is unethical in academic work. Ask yourself: Would the author agree that the quotation I am using is a fair characterization of the original argument?

Writers for whom English is their second language are often confused about the use of quotation marks because there are distinctive differences between British and American styles of punctuation and use of quotation marks. The American style is now more commonly used world-wide; it uses double quotation marks and periods are normally placed inside the quote. President Ronald Reagan once said, "There you go again." However you may occasionally see the British style of quotation which uses single quotation marks and punctuation is normally placed outside. Tony Blair said, 'I don't have a reverse gear'. The American style is recommended for submitting papers journals to American journals while the British style should be used for British journals.

Endnotes and Footnotes

Endnotes (grouped at the end of the paper) or footnotes (typed at the foot of the page) are becoming obsolete for all but discursive or explanatory material that is not a part of the main text. Footnotes or endnotes are seldom used to cite source material in the social, natural, or management sciences. However, they are still commonly used in humanities such as philosophy or history.

Paranthenetical referencing (sometimes called "in-text referencing" or the "author-date system") is now the preferred method for giving credit for ideas or the source of quotations (see the references heading below). In the event that explanatory notes are necessary, they should be consecutively numbered in the text using Arabic numerals in superscript (e.g.¹). Caution! The default superscript setting on your version of MS-Word may be lower case Roman numerals (e.g.ⁱ). Be sure to change the default setting. If used, the notes themselves should be listed in numerical order on a separate page which is placed after the conclusion and before the references.

Numbers

Numbers of 100 or greater and all decimals should be expressed as figures (100). Exact numbers less than one hundred should be spelled out (ninety-nine but 99.6), except for: (a) numbers referring to tables and figures (e.g., Table 4); (b) numbers preceding the word percent (e.g., 5 percent); (c) numbers preceding units of measure (e.g., 7 kilometers) or (d) dates. Never use a numeral at the beginning of a sentence because numerals cannot be capitalized. The "#", and "&" symbols should not be used in text, spell out the word in full.

Spelling

British (including Australian and Canadian) spelling differs from American spelling, e.g. colour, honour and labour not color, honor or labor. Pick one spelling style and be consistent. Use the simplest constructions available (oriented not orientated). Avoid contractions in formal writing. For example, avoid "she'll be comin' 'round the mountain when she comes" for anything but popular song lyrics. Normally abbreviations are not used in academic writing except for units of measure, e.g., and i.e.

If you wish to use an acronym it should be defined first unless it is in common usage (e.g. "U.S.A." is in any dictionary thus it need not be defined). To define an

acronym, you would write out the name in full and then give the acronym, in parentheses, "The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)..." Once the acronym has been defined, you may subsequently use "UNESCO" without further explanation.

Remember, "it's" is a contraction for "it is" and as a contraction, "it's" should not normally be used in a term paper. The possessive adjective "its" requires no apostrophe just as "my" "his" "her" and "our" do not require apostrophes.

The spell checker included with your word processing software is very useful but it is vital to use it intelligently and carefully. Many technical terms are not included in the word processor's dictionary even though they are found in the literature. For example, the term "Gini," referring to a coefficient of inequality, is not in my word processor's dictionary. "Gin" is typically suggested as the preferred alternative!

Two Common Grammatical Errors

While English grammar is beyond the scope of this guideline, two simple faults are so common and so easily avoided that they are worth mentioning.

Split Infinitives

An infinitive is the purest generic form of a verb consisting of the word "to" and the verb itself. For example: "to write" or "to walk." If the "to" and the verb itself are split by inserting an adverb it becomes a split infinitive, a construction that should be avoided. Examples of split infinitives include: "to badly write" or "to softly speak." The error is easily avoided: "to write badly" or "to speak softly." Sometimes a split infinitive is clearer or used commonly and therefore is acceptable, as any devotee of *Star Trek* will attest ("to boldly go where no one has gone before").

Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

A preposition is a short word that links other words (e.g. by, for, of, with). Avoid ending a sentence with a preposition. "This is the only example I can think of." Instead, you could write: "I can think of only one example". Sometimes this rule is broken too. "I have much to be thankful for" is surely preferable to, "I have much for which to be thankful".

TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables and figures (graphs, diagrams, or maps) are important ways to present evidence in geographic papers but they must be referred to and discussed in the text. Photocopies of maps or diagrams are acceptable in a term paper but only if all of the photocopied material is relevant to the point at hand. An edited and typed table or an original graph is a much more effective way of documenting your argument than a sheaf of photocopies. If you use photocopies of tables or figures you must add the source where you obtained it.

Sources for data presented in original tables or figures must be acknowledged. The word "Source:" followed by a full citation should be at the base of all tables and figures.

Tables should be numbered consecutively. The table number and its title should appear above the table. Tables may be integrated into the text or they may be on a separate page immediately after the figures and before the references.

A "figure" is a graphic such as a map, bar graph, or diagram. Figures should be numbered consecutively. Figures may be integrated into the text or placed on a separate page and inserted between the text and the references. The figure number and title of the figure should be placed at the foot of the page. Neatly hand drawn figures and freehand lettering are quite acceptable for term papers.

USING THE FIRST PERSON (I OR WE) IN A TERM PAPER

Traditionally, it was considered inappropriate to use the first person singular (I) or even the first person plural (we) in academic writing. There are two reasons for this.

The social sciences have traditionally followed the positivist natural science model which places a premium on objectivity. Whether I measure 10 milliliters of sulphuric acid or you do it, there should be exactly the same amount in the beaker. And if we use union density as a surrogate measure of class struggle, you and I should both draw the same conclusions about class consciousness in Alberta compared with Ontario. Assuming that scientific evidence is gathered and reported in completely objective fashion, it does not matter who conceives the hypothesis, records the evidence or writes up the results; the objective conclusion from objective evidence is beyond subjective interpretation. Thus the subjective

pronoun wrongly personalizes science and wrongly infers that someone could possibly have a personal influence on scientific outcomes.

The second reason is that any use of “I,” shifts the emphasis away from the subject of the paper and towards its author. Academic papers are not works of autobiography, the subject of an academic paper or report is a problem, phenomenon, or event. Any reference to “I” makes the author the subject of the paper instead of the task at hand. The substantive subject of the investigation ought to be the grammatical subject of the sentence. For example:

1. “I think that capital punishment is a barbaric practice.”
2. “Capital punishment appears to be a barbaric practice as it involves the ritual slaughter of a human being as an act of atonement.”

In the first declarative sentence, a personal opinion is expressed. It clearly admits that it is a personally held position and that others may think differently. Such an unjustified personal opinion has no place in any academic paper, no matter how controversial the topic. An academic paper is based on reason supported by evidence. The second claim is an “argument,” it offers a rational position and then supports this by reference to its ritual character. The subject is “capital punishment,” not the author.

In a research report writers may need to refer to specific actions and procedures that they had to undertake themselves. For example:

3. “I computed the standard deviation using a hand calculator and the standard formula for a sample.”
4. “The standard deviation was computed using a hand calculator and the standard formula for a sample.”

The third example uses “I” quite unnecessarily and leaves open the question that someone else might have obtained different results. The second example uses the passive voice to make “standard deviation” the subject of the sentence. There is only one standard deviation for the data set and it does not matter who actually does the mechanical procedure. It could have been done by your laboratory partner or your employee and the sentence would still be correct.

All of the preceding subscribes to the view that science is and ought to be a strictly objective inquiry. This view has been under fire for some time by a variety of critics arguing for different conceptions of knowledge, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Most recently the post-modernists have argued that research is unavoidably subjective. They sometimes drive this point home by using

the subjective “I” as an integral part of their reasoning. From this perspective, I would argue that many social scientists now consider the use of the first person to be acceptable especially to underscore positionality and the subjective nature of scholarship from a post modern perspective. If I were writing for a traditional economics journal or in the natural sciences, I would avoid using the first person.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Until the 1980s, the use of masculine singular pronouns such as "he" was accepted as generic and applicable to either a male or a female. (For example: "If a student follows all of these instructions, his paper should have no stylistic problems.") This is no longer the case and most universities have adopted inclusive language policies mandating language which does not discriminate among any social characteristics, including gender.

Unless you are referring to a particular male or female, you should use "gender neutral" or "inclusive" language in all of your academic and professional writing. For example: "If a student follows all of these instructions, his or her paper should have no stylistic difficulties". The preceding example is inclusive but it is also cumbersome! With a little practice it becomes quite easy to write inclusively without the ponderous and repetitive usage of she/he or his/her. For example, one could write: "By following all of these instructions, students should have no stylistic problems with their papers" or, "Papers which follow all of these guidelines should have no stylistic faults".

If you are referring to a particular male or female, then you should specify the appropriate gender.

PRESENTATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Double spacing is traditionally required for term papers and journal article submissions, however, one-and-a-half spacing is very common, conserves paper and is easy to format using a word processor. The default MS-Word setting is now 1.15 spacing and growing in acceptance. Leave one inch margins on both sides, top and bottom of each page. With the exception of the cover page, all pages should be numbered with Arabic numerals.

A term paper should be printed single-sided in black ink on white letter-size (8.5x11 or A4) paper. Submit the original, not a photocopy. Use a standard 12 point font such as Times Roman, Garamond. or Calibri for text.

Term papers were traditionally expected to have a cover page with the title, author's name, and so on. This wastes a lot of paper and the current trend is to put the title author's name, course name, number and instructor for which it is prepared and the date that it is submitted at the top of the first page and to start the paper text immediately below the preliminaries.

Avoid putting any form of commercial clip art on the cover page, it is unoriginal and unprofessional. All pages should be stapled securely in the upper left hand corner. Use a heavy duty stapler for papers over 15 pages in length. Bobby pins, paper clips or a dog-eared corner do not convey the impression that you want to make on the reader.

Contrary to popular belief, most professors do not appreciate any type of report cover and the clear plastic ones are especially hated. Pages may slip out of the plastic spine, plastic doubles the weight and volume that must be lugged home for grading, and plastic folders are environmentally unsound.

REFERENCING

Whenever you use a specific fact or discuss a concept that has been obtained from a source document you must clearly identify the source so that the interested readers may obtain it for themselves. This is called "referencing" or "citation."

Referencing styles vary considerably. Footnotes, or more commonly, endnotes are preferred by humanists. Notes are especially useful for documenting primary sources obtained through archival research. The most common standard for referencing in the humanities is now the Modern Languages Association (**MLA**). Parenthetical or "in-text referencing is preferred by science and social science writers who make extensive use of journal articles. A widely used standard for parenthetical referencing is the American Psychological Association (**APA**). A third common standard is based on the Chicago Manual of Style (**CMS**). The CMS provides two documentation systems, one for the humanities (notes and bibliography) and the author-date system for use in the sciences and social sciences.

Geographers might use either style. For instance a historical geographer would use a style based on footnotes with a bibliography while an economic geographer is more likely to use the author-date system. My preference is for author-date referencing following either the CMS or APA style.

In using parenthetical referencing for student papers, especially in a library research paper, it is essential to provide page numbers in all references that refer to specific concepts, facts or data. You may only omit the page number when the reference to the article refers to the entire work. For example:

In a typical year, new housing construction adds only 2-3 percent to the total housing stock of North American cities (Yeates, 1990: 187)

[A page number (p. 187) is given because a specific fact was obtained from a particular page of the book.]

Yeates (1990) adopts a “spatial organization” approach to his textbook on urban geography.

[No page number is given because this is a general reference to the whole approach of the article.]

Note that we may use the author’s name as the subject of the sentence with the date in parentheses or we may construct the sentence differently so that the author, date and page are all in parentheses (see above).

At the end of our paper we must have a list of references which includes the full bibliographic citation for every parenthetical reference appearing in the paper. For example:

List of References

Yeates, M. 1990. *The North American City*. 3rd edition, New York: Harper and Row.

CITING SOURCES OBTAINED ON THE WEB

The web has become an important source for essay writing and academic research. Mixed in with some very useful and heretofore inaccessible information there is a huge volume of unreliable and downright pernicious misinformation. Like any printed source material, the web must be approached critically. Referencing style

for web based information is still in its infancy. Anything you can do to make it easier for your reader to find the relevant page is a good idea.

Sample Entries for Web References

We access a web site by using a universal resource locator (URL). Unless you are referring to an entire web site itself, it is **never** acceptable to insert a long meaningless URL text string directly into your text.

However, you may simply wish to identify a home page in itself and no entry in the references is necessary. For example: Like most Alberta municipalities, the Town of Coaldale has a web site with a host of information relating to municipal governance, social services and economic development (<http://www.town.coaldale.ab.ca/>)

More commonly, however, you will be referring to a specific document available through the web. It is essential to cite the author (or corporate author) and date in parentheses and to provide the URL in the references. For example: The American Psychological Association (1999) has one of the best guides to academic citation of web sources

In this case you would need the following entry in your references at the end of the essay:

American Psychological Association 2016) *APA Style® Help* American Psychological Association Washington, D.C. Retrieved June 15, 2016 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.apastyle.org/apa-style-help.aspx>

Most academic geography journals are now available in electronic format. A wide variety of contemporary popular magazines and newspapers may be accessed through the web.

For example: Mercosur has not developed as quickly as the European Union due to growing friction between its two largest members: Argentina and Brazil (Murphy and Kessler 1999)

In this case you would need the following entry in your references at the end of the essay:

Murphy, Tom and Kessler, Richard 1999 "Will Mercosur Get Left in the Dust?"

Business Week Online August 18. Retrieved August 27, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/index.html>

[This entry looks quite similar to an ordinary reference to the hard copy of a magazine, the only difference is that the date of retrieval and URL are given. Note that the title of an electronic publication is italicized.]

PLAGIARISM AND ESSAY ETHICS

Plagiarism is the representation of the words of another person as your own. It is an academic offence and is punished very severely. Whether the text is taken from a published source, from another student, or from the internet, it is still plagiarism. Plagiarism includes:

1. Extended word-for-word quotation of another source without indicating that it is quotation and identifying its source.
2. Extended paraphrase of another source without indicating its origin. Some people believe that they can rip off a paragraph, changing a word or two here and there and so avoid being accused of plagiarism. This is not so.

Judgment plays an important role in deciding the appropriate number of times to cite your sources. Library research papers are an exercise in summary, synthesis and analysis of other works. Obviously a library research paper will require a lot of citations or notes to identify where ideas were obtained. Taken to its extreme, however, the text could be so littered with citations and notes as to be unreadable. As a rule of thumb when a large amount of citation seems necessary, enter a citation at the point where an idea is first raised in the text and give a citation at the end of a paragraph to indicate the source which was used for the preceding material. When in doubt, give credit for the idea.

Other unethical essay writing behavior includes the fabrication of references, disguising of source materials and the submission of work which has already been used to fulfill the requirements of another course of instruction. Many of these issues are matters of fine judgment. Your instructor is available to discuss them with you.

CONCLUSION

This thumbnail style guide for university term papers is geared to students having little prior experience with academic writing in English. It does not attempt to replace the many detailed manuals of style available in the library or book store. Many disciplines have a standardized stylistic format for all academic writing. Those who have learned to follow the excruciatingly detailed format of professional associations such as the Modern Languages Association or the American Psychological Association may not need this précis though they may appreciate its brevity.

REFERENCES

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