

# TIPS FOR COURSEWORK

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## INTRODUCTION

Being a student is hard work. It's even harder if you're like many of our students, returning to school after a hiatus. Among the skills it takes to succeed, communication skills are paramount, both for coursework and for work in the information professions. If your message, no matter how brilliant, has grammatical errors and typos, you lose credibility. If it is so poorly structured that the meaning is obscured, your audience may ignore or even reject it. You don't want that audience to be instructors, employers, or—ultimately—information consumers.

Fortunately, the ability to communicate clearly is merely a matter of becoming aware of problems and developing better habits. *Tips for coursework* started many years ago as brief class handouts that summarized the errors I was finding repeatedly in student papers. The handouts grew as I realized some students were struggling because they had forgotten (or never learned) how to organize their readings, cite their sources, edit their writing, work in groups, or make class presentations. *Tips* is, in fact, totally inspired by my students, because every part of it is drawn directly from student problems.

The tips themselves are based on my experience as an instructor for more than 20 years and as a professional editor for more than 30 years. I have verified this advice with the APA style manual and with dozens of other style manuals, books, and Web sites on writing and editing. Please note that *Tips for coursework* is not intended to replace major published style manuals or to supersede the requirements of your particular instructor or employer.

I have tried to keep the advice current and succinct, with a dash of humor to make it more palatable. This revision contains new sections on how to avoid plagiarizing, check references, and deal with exceptions to style rules. Other changes include recommendation of APA as the primary style manual and expanded tips on evaluating sources, collecting citation data for electronic sources, and copy editing.

I thank my students and faculty colleagues for their constructive feedback and, as always, welcome ideas for further additions and corrections. Many people have asked to use *Tips for coursework*. I gladly make it available to anyone who wants it, but do request author credit for redistribution. Parts may be altered for local use and credited with the phrase "adapted from."

Fundamentally, people who communicate well do well in the information professions. I hope these tips help you get through the trials and triumphs of your coursework and continue into your professional work.

***One should not aim at being possible to understand,  
but at being impossible to misunderstand.***

—Marcus Fabius Quintilian  
(Roman rhetorician, ca. 35-95)

## CONQUERING COURSEWORK

If you are a new student, especially a student returning to school after many years, here are some tips for starting and maintaining a productive pace.

### Resources and Searching

Bibliographic information resources include journals, books, Web sites, professional organizations, and the catalogs, indexes, and directories used to find them. Off-campus students in particular should explore UNT Libraries electronic resources, local library resources, and the Internet/World Wide Web. The UNT Libraries' *Subject Guide: Library and Information Sciences* (<http://www.library.unt.edu/subjects/lis/lis.html>) lists major resources for coursework.

People are resources. Ask instructors for clarification on lectures and assignments, and read their comments on your work. Ask librarians for help finding or using materials—that's their job. Ask a friend to edit your paper before you submit it.

Update your personal collection of writing resources. In addition to a style manual (see [Choosing a Style Manual](#)), get a writing handbook, dictionary, and thesaurus (print or electronic).

Literature searching can be tedious and confusing. Professional searchers stay focused and efficient by proceeding systematically. You can do the same by making notes to plan and track your strategy: resources consulted and search terms entered.

Save time by never having to backtrack. Whenever you encounter a promising document, borrow, print, download, or bookmark it on the spot. If it is available only through interlibrary loan, order it immediately to allow time for delivery. Save electronic citations or email them to yourself to use later in your reference list. Make sure you have all the citation data you may need (see [Collecting Citation Data](#)).

### Evaluating and Reading

Evaluation begins with your first glance at a potential source, as you decide whether it is relevant at all, and continues through your in-depth analysis of content. A key skill is the ability to assess credibility, which involves far more than topical coverage.

Cultivate a critical and inquiring attitude toward all potential sources. Assume that, for the most part, you can trust sources recommended by your instructor, cited in your textbook, indexed in library resources, or affiliated with major organizations, journals, and publishers. It is the new or unfamiliar sources, particularly on the Internet, that may require background digging. For advice on evaluating Internet resources, search academic library Web sites. For any source, look for clues beyond topic and title.

- **Reference and search tools.** Be a savvy searcher. Instead of blindly typing a word into an everyday search tool and hoping for the best, choose your reference resources and search tools carefully. Is this publication listed in a standard library catalog or index? Is this Web site listed in a credible directory or metadirectory? Directory information is purposefully selected and classified, and metadirectories list finding tools as well as Web sites. (Try INFOMINE at <http://infomine.ucr.edu>; Internet Public Library at <http://www.ipl.org/>; The Invisible Web Directory of searchable databases at <http://www.invisible-web.net/>; Librarians' Index to the Internet at <http://lii.org>; or Refdesk.com at <http://www.refdesk.com/>). Finding tools include academic and scholarly search engines (e.g., Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.com/> and myLITsearch at <http://www.mylitsearch.org/>). As you discover more and better search tricks, share them with your classmates!

- **Context.** The context affects the quality and authority of facts, opinions, advice, and research results. Ask why this was written and for whom. Is its purpose to inform, educate, persuade, sell, or satirize? Basically, is it scholarly, professional, or popular? Any of these contexts can yield high-quality information suitable for coursework; the key is to know the difference and use the information appropriately. On the Web, note type of domain in URL (e.g., .edu, .org, .gov, .com). Popular sources are fine for inspiration and examples, but prefer scholarly and professional sources for terms, definitions, and substantive support. "According to Webster" does not belong in a graduate paper! (Besides, it's Merriam-Webster!)
- **Authors.** Authors' occupations and fields affect their viewpoints (e.g., service-oriented library literature vs. system-oriented computer literature). Are the authors affiliated with credible institutions, organizations, or corporations? If authors' credentials are unclear, check them elsewhere.
- **References and links.** Connections between works provide clues to credibility. Who do these authors cite? Who cites these authors? (Check *Social Sciences Citation Index*.) Does this Web site link to credible sites? What sites link to this site? (Use advanced search options, such as Google's page-specific search.)
- **Currency.** The field is changing so fast that it is wise to focus on literature published within about the last five years (or less, for technology topics). Exceptions are widely cited foundational or historical works. If the source is Web-based, does it have a date at all? Is the date recent? Do the links work?

Reading can be as time-consuming as searching, so be as efficient as possible. To avoid information overload, learn to scan before you read. Scan abstract, introduction, conclusion, and reference list first. As you scan and read, type notes in a working file so you can insert them directly into your paper later. When marking important parts, use yellow online highlighting, yellow highlighter pen, or sticky notes; all allow a readable black-and-white copy or printout to be made if necessary.

## Writing and Editing

It is possible to conceptualize the final paper from the beginning and save an enormous amount of time and energy. The trick is to start by using the assignment to create an informal working outline in your word processor. Keep revising and expanding, turning outline items into headings and fleshing out text, until the final draft. The result is more likely to be well-organized and complete. Outlines also work for essay exams: jot down a quick outline to sort and remember ideas before you start to write.

Avoid writer's block. If you get stuck on one section, set it aside and work on another section. Note that you can't summarize content until you know what it is. Write body of paper first, followed by conclusion and introduction. Write abstract last.

A subtle but effective writing technique is to maintain parallel structure at all levels. For example, if you introduce two concepts, refer to those concepts in the same order everywhere. This approach works especially well for organizing literature reviews. A good literature review presents a synthesis of ideas supported by citations, not a sequence of ideas by source. If you feel compelled to quote authors constantly, you are not analyzing the literature to extract the ideas.

Follow your style manual rules for writing, citing sources, and organizing your paper. Use technical terms consistently; do not substitute terms for the sake of variety. Track the sources of all ideas throughout the writing, using some simple system of labeling or numbering. You may not use or cite all sources in the end, but you won't waste time rereading every publication later to find the source of one idea.

Achieving professional polish requires extra effort. Expect to write multiple drafts. Allow extra time to reread the assignment, consult your style manual for rules, check your citations for accuracy, and deal with any computer or network problems. Always run your word processor's spell checker. Let the paper sit for a day or so before the final edit. Have someone else read and edit your work. Read it aloud yourself, to hear any awkward sentences. If instructors cannot understand your writing or point out major writing problems, do your career a favor and consult a writing tutor!

## Organizing Files

Each semester, you will accumulate a surprising number of paper and electronic files. If you don't develop some system of organization, you may waste days looking for the items you need to write a paper or study for an exam. Organize new material as you collect it or at the end of each semester.

Sort literature by author, subject, course, or whatever works for you. Ideally, create your own catalog database, using reference software such as ProCite, EndNote, or Reference Manager to organize your own literature collection and generate reference lists. Separate journal articles from class notes, research ideas, etc. Store downloaded journal article files on CDs (see file-naming tips in [Electronic Source Data](#)). In your handwritten notes, no matter how cryptic, add a date to help you recall the context later.

## Working in Groups

Information professionals and researchers constantly work in teams and committees. For this reason, part of your education includes work in group projects. Suggestions:

### First meeting

- Exchange telephone numbers and email addresses immediately after the group is formed.
- Go over the assignment and delegate responsibilities as soon as possible. Choose a leader to coordinate the project and collect progress reports.
- Schedule meetings at various stages of the project. Include meetings to pull the paper together and to rehearse the presentation. Meetings may be in person, online chats, or conference calls.

### Sample task delegation

- Each person researches some portion of the project. The assignment may suggest divisions by topic, section, task, or type of information resource.
- Each person writes some part of the paper. One or two people integrate parts of the paper and make it as unified as possible. One or two people create the class presentation. Everyone reads and edits all the material.
- Everyone participates in a unified presentation in which each person speaks.

### Potential problems

Most problems arise from lack of communication among group members. Dissension can affect both the group's grade for the project and future professional collegiality. Suggestions:

- Complete your portion of the work and come to meetings on time.
- Tell other members immediately if you cannot meet your commitments.
- Important: If you drop the course, tell the group and the instructor! Give the group any materials you have collected or written.
- If you have a problem with another member, go directly to him or her and explain how you feel. Do not assume that person is aware that you are unhappy. Try to sound concerned, not accusatory.
- If another member comes to you with a problem, be calm and understanding. Listen without interrupting. Do not get defensive. Try to work out a solution together.
- Finally, if an irresolvable conflict threatens the quality or completion of the project, ask the instructor for help before the project is due.

### Potential outcomes

For the most part, students are expected to (and do) work out group problems on their own. Consider that, at worst, the project will last only until the end of the semester. Expect that, at best, you will have fun, make friends, and gain respect for your classmates. Don't worry too much: if you communicate well and do your share, you will finish the project and get a good grade.

## AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

### Understanding Plagiarism

Why cite sources? Fundamentally, citations acknowledge the ideas and expressions of others and direct the reader to the original sources. Citations represent authority and continuity of research in a discipline. They provide support for your own statements and add professional credibility to your writing.

Those are the right reasons. The wrong—but a very real—reason is to avoid charges of plagiarism for failing to cite sources. Plagiarism is illegal. The UNT *Code of Student Conduct and Discipline* (Fall 2003) ([http://www.unt.edu/csrr/student\\_conduct.htm](http://www.unt.edu/csrr/student_conduct.htm)) states that penalties for academic misconduct, including plagiarism, range from reducing an assignment grade to revoking a completed academic degree. It says students are responsible for understanding the meaning of academic misconduct. Plagiarism is defined as follows:

The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: (a) the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement and (b) the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

The SLIS Academic Misconduct Policy (April 2005) (<http://www.unt.edu/slis>) conforms to the UNT code. The SLIS policy leaves decisions about specific penalties to individual instructors, but requires that all students sign a form stating they understand the definitions of misconduct and disciplinary procedures. If discipline is required, instructors will not accept student claims of lack of knowledge or intention.

Advice and examples are available in many books and Web sites about plagiarism, as well as in style manuals and writing guides. Below are a few Web-based resources:

Anti-plagiarism strategies for research papers

<http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>

Plagiarism: What it is and how to avoid it

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Plagiarism and the Web

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/wiu/plagiarism.htm>

Quoting and paraphrasing sources

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>

Student plagiarism websites

<http://www.lib.iastate.edu/commons/resources/facultyguides/plagiarism/websites.html>

Thinking and talking about plagiarism

<http://bedfordstmartins.com/technotes/techtiparchive/ttip102401.htm>

Use of copyrighted material and trademarked names

[http://www.tsgs.unt.edu/graduation\\_process/copyright\\_and\\_trademark.htm](http://www.tsgs.unt.edu/graduation_process/copyright_and_trademark.htm)

### Practicing Safe Cites

In writing assignments, you are expected to synthesize what you have learned from the materials available and to credit the sources of ideas, facts, or opinions that are not your own. To avoid plagiarizing:

- In addition to the resources listed above, develop a sense of who, what, when, and how to cite by studying the literature.
- Cite sources in all your work, regardless of whether it is intended for publication: this includes exams and class presentations (e.g., PowerPoint shows) as well as papers.

- Cite published works, Web sites, speeches, interviews, and correspondence. As a student, remember also to cite course materials, instructors, and other students.
- Record bibliographic data for all potential sources as you collect the literature, in order to ensure that no sources are missing in your reference list. Either create a draft reference list, with unused sources to be deleted later, or enter data in reference software so you can generate a reference list later.
- Track the original wording of sources in order to be able to relocate exact words to compare with your direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. As you write, highlight original wording and/or note page numbers, etc. in square brackets or comment balloons. Delete highlighting and notes in final draft.
- Cite sources with or without a direct quotation. When paraphrasing and summarizing, use your own words and syntax, not those of the author (see [Quoting Sources](#)).
- Do not cite sources when the ideas are common knowledge in the field. If you are unsure, ask!

## Preventing Paranoia

Plagiarism results not only from neglecting to cite sources entirely, but also from little things like forgetting quotation marks, paraphrasing too close to the original, and misplacing references. The sensible approach is to track the original wording and pay attention to detail. Nevertheless, fear of plagiarizing makes some students panic to the opposite extreme by overciting and overquoting.

**Overciting** is tossing a reference into nearly every sentence. Many references are unnecessary, such as common knowledge in the field and everyday terms and expressions. Others are unnecessary when the entire paragraph is based on one source: simply put author-date reference at the beginning and word the rest of the paragraph carefully to remind the reader that the source is the same (e.g., *they further stated or the researchers also reported*).

**Overquoting** is basing the writing primarily on direct quotations. Overquoting suggests an inability to synthesize the readings, an inability to compose one's own words, a lack of confidence in one's own opinion, or simply inexperience. It leads the reader to ask, What do you think about this?

**Paraphrasing** is a viable alternative to quoting, so long as you cite the source. I recommend paraphrasing for several reasons.

- Paraphrasing requires understanding and synthesis of the writer's ideas, which is the primary objective of most class paper assignments. One approach is to think big: summarize a larger chunk of information, such as the writer's major conclusions (reworded, reordered) or the significance of the work in the overall topic area. This should help you rely less on the author's exact words, and may even help you make connections you wouldn't have made otherwise.
- Paraphrasing can condense and clarify ideas. Scholars and professionals tend to be serious and often wordy. The exact words are (let's face it) seldom memorable, clever, or witty in a creative sense and therefore are not really worth quoting.
- Fewer quotations mean fewer chances to make errors in punctuation and page numbers. Page numbers are not required in APA style for paraphrases.

Bottom line? When in doubt, cite, but don't overdo it.

***I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I write and I understand.***  
—Chinese Proverb

## CHOOSING A STYLE MANUAL

Style manuals provide standards for improving consistency and clarity in scholarly and professional writing and accuracy in citing the sources of ideas. Despite their name, style manuals do not address style in a creative sense, but rather prescribe rules and formats for writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation); documentation (citations, quotations); and organization (headings, tables, appendixes).

### APA and Other Manuals

Dozens of style manuals exist for various disciplines and professions. One is highly recommended for library and information science (LIS) students:

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

APA is the primary style manual underlying *Tips for coursework*. It is required for all students in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Information Science. For Ph.D. students, only the UNT *Dissertation and thesis manual* ([http://www.tsgs.unt.edu/graduation\\_process/required\\_formatting.htm](http://www.tsgs.unt.edu/graduation_process/required_formatting.htm)) supersedes APA.

APA is also recommended for LIS master's and bachelor's students. Individual instructors may require or allow different style manuals, such as Gibaldi's *MLA handbook for writers of research papers* (2003) or *The Chicago manual of style* (2003). A useful condensation of APA, MLA, and Chicago together is

Hacker, D. (2004). *A pocket style manual* (4th ed.). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Style manual rules vary in many small ways, but the most debated differences are in citation style. APA style is intended for social scientists, who emphasize dates for tracing the development of scholarly knowledge and often rely on journal articles for current information. APA uses parenthetical author-date references in text and a matching alphabetical reference list with full citations that begin with author and date. This style is particularly appropriate for the fast-changing and high-technology discipline of LIS.

### Using a Style Manual

I wrote *Tips for coursework* to provide general guidance, not to substitute for a style manual. You are likely to use several different style manuals over time. Here are some tips for coping.

- Use the style manual required by your instructor (or employer or editor). If you are unsure, ask!
- Obtain the fullest version and most recent edition of the style manual. Although style manuals are available in libraries, it is best to purchase your own to have constantly at hand.
- Use only one style manual for a given paper; do not mix styles.
- If your style manual gives a choice of citation styles, prefer text references and reference list over the alternatives, such as footnotes.
- Make your own quick crib sheet with style examples as I have done for APA style in the following pages. (In fact, *Tips for coursework* started out as my own crib sheet!)
- Consider other resources: shorter versions of your manual, Web sites, general writing manuals. Just make sure these are based on the latest edition of your manual and that the examples are accurate. When searching, note that style manuals are also called style guides, stylebooks, and handbooks.

## CITING SOURCES

### Understanding Style

Citation style is a consistent format for presenting the bibliographic data (names, dates, etc.) necessary for document retrieval. Scholarly and professional writers are expected to understand bibliographic formats and rules and to cite bibliographic data fully and accurately.

In writing, failure to enter data accurately (e.g., misspelling an author's name) in citations can hinder the reader's ability to obtain the original document. In cataloging, indexing, or searching, failure to enter data accurately may result in loss of an entire document because it will not be retrieved at all.

### Collecting Citation Data

Have you ever pulled an all-nighter writing to meet a deadline, only to discover at the last minute that you were missing critical citation data? The best way to avoid this (and maybe even get some sleep) is to collect the data at the time you obtain the documents. Record it in your reference software or draft reference list (see [Practicing Safe Cites](#)). For print copies, write full citation or missing data in margin. Collect all of the following available, including data you may need later for a different style manual.

- Full names of all authors and/or editors (exact order and spelling)
- Full titles of article/chapter and parent publication (exact spelling, capitalization, punctuation)
- Publication year, plus month/day/season for periodical
- Volume number, plus issue number for periodical
- City and publisher
- Pages (range of page numbers, or exact page numbers if not consecutive)
- Call number and ISBN or ISSN (not cited; for your own use)

### Electronic Source Data

For electronic sources, collect the same data, if available, plus

- URL
- Access date (month/day/year)
- File name
- Source type (e.g., open Web, CD database)
- Database and/or vendor name
- Identifying number (e.g., vendor's document number)

The first two items are for citations and the rest for your own use. On the Web, it is often hard to locate bibliographic data, or to access documents later due to broken links or site changes. Take extra care to collect usable data during and after online searches.

### While searching

- **URL.** In your browser, save any Web site (in Favorites or Bookmarks) that looks promising, and/or print at least the first page. Copy the URL and paste it into your reference software or draft reference list, so you don't risk making typos later.

Although there are no guarantees, the URLs you cite should be viable for as long as the site is stable. Test each link: simply open a fresh browser, paste in the URL, and try it. If that doesn't work, truncate the URL (delete pathname components right to left) to a page you can cite.

Do not cite dynamic links. These are temporary relationship links, or links generated on the fly, usually during a database or other query-based search. Dynamic links tend to be long, with symbols such as =?&%&. Unlike the static location-based URLs associated with many Web sites, dynamic links are seldom reusable; that is, they cannot be relied on to take the user back to the same place later. An APA alternative to a dynamic link is to cite the name of the database.

## Before downloading

- **Author.** Check whether author name is written in file itself. It may be on page that links to document instead, especially if author is an organization or corporation. It may also be buried in small type at the bottom of the page. Do not rely on author names shown in file properties except as a last resort.
- **Publication date.** Check whether date is written in file itself. In HTML files, date may be buried in small type at bottom of page. The last update, last date modified, or copyright date can be used. If a range of dates is given, use the most recent. Do not rely on dates in file properties; use *Created* date only as a last resort because it may not be actual creation date and it may change to access date.

## After downloading

- **Access date.** Do not confuse publication date with access or download date. For downloads, do not rely on *Modified* date in file properties or on file date in file manager (e.g., My Computer or Windows Explorer) because these may not change to actual download date. Always recheck links in the final draft of a paper to see whether they are still valid. Put latest access date in citation.
- **Pages.** Do not rely on or cite page numbers for HTML documents because the number of pages varies depending on computer display or printer.
- **File name.** Rename files consistently, so they sort alphabetically for easy retrieval. For article files submitted with assignments, I require that the file name begin with the author name. I use author-date (Smith\_2005), with variations for multiple authors (Smith&\_2005; Smith&Jones\_2005) and/or subjects (Smith&\_2005\_blogs).

Yes, all of this is extra work, but it will save you from scrambling to find data later. See solutions for missing data in [Reference List Style](#) and [Text Reference Style](#).

## Checking References

Allow extra time before submitting a paper to check whether the references match and are accurate. Matching means duplicating exact spellings of names and years, etc. to help the reader. Criteria for matching references are explained on the following pages and in the [Assignment Checklist](#). Basically, each source should appear at least once in a text reference and only once in the reference list.

1. Read the entire paper to ensure that all sources are cited appropriately.
2. Scan to find each author-date text reference and compare it to its reference list citation. In text, checkmark each reference that matches full citation. In reference list, checkmark each citation that matches text reference. Correct as needed.
3. Scan to find each text reference to an illustrative item (e.g., Figure 1, Appendix A) and compare it to label on item itself. In text, checkmark each text reference and its matching label on the item. For illustrative items you did not create, be sure the source is credited at the bottom of the item. In reference list, checkmark each citation that matches citation in the item. Correct as needed.
4. In reference list, scan to find any citations that do not have text references (i.e., that you did not checkmark). Either delete the citations or create text references for them.
5. Edit citations in reference list for style.

## REFERENCE LIST STYLE

### Examples

APA and other style manuals explain citation style rules in detail and provide examples for a wide variety of source types. No one can be expected to memorize all of these; however, you will learn style for the most common sources through repetition. This takes time and requires attention to detail. In the two examples below, can you find a dozen differences?

**APA** Fox, B., & Fox, C. J. (2002). Efficient stemmer generation. *Information Processing & Management*, 38(4), 547-558.

**MLA** Fox, Brian, and Christopher J. Fox. "Efficient Stemmer Generation." *Information Processing & Management* 38 (2002): 547-58.

Many electronic documents are not consistent in format or stable in location, and standard rules for citing them have not been fully established. The APA style examples below are for source types that are often cited by and problematic for students.

- **Print journal, electronic version, one author**

No pathname, database name, or access date. This is a stable document that can be accessed several ways, including print. This was retrieved in a search that began with UNT Libraries Electronic Resources and ended in an external library subscription vendor site, creating a dynamic link.

Hjørland, B. (2002). Epistemology and the socio-cognitive perspective in information science [Electronic version]. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(4), 257-270.

- **Online journal, two authors**

No month/day in publication date because this is a journal (not a magazine, newspaper, etc.). No page numbers because this is HTML format, so number of pages may vary depending on computer display or printer. If document is accessible only through dynamic link, cite name of database or other source.

Marty, P. F., & Twidale, M. B. (2004). Lost in gallery space: A conceptual framework for analyzing the usability flaws of museum Web sites. *First Monday*, 9(9). Retrieved October 16, 2005 from [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue9\\_9/marty/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_9/marty/index.html)

- **Web page, no author**

Publication date based on last update at bottom of Web page. No indication in citation that URL has changed (forwarding page led to this URL) or that both HTML and PDF versions of document are available. If page is not directly accessible, cite URL of nearest page that does link to it.

Plagiarism: What it is and how to avoid it. (2004, April 27). Retrieved October 16, 2005 from Indiana University, Writing Tutorial Services: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

- **Web page, no author, no date**

Web site name in place of author and n.d. for *no date*. Even if this is only a general example, put citation in main reference list, not in separate examples list.

Flickr. (n.d.). Retrieved October 16, 2005 from <http://www.flickr.com/>

## General Tips

**Matching references.** Each entry in the reference list must appear at least once in a text reference. Full citations are also required in illustrative items; see [Tables, Figures, Appendixes](#).

**Reference list format.** In APA style

- Begin reference list on new page (insert page break).
- Title it *References*.
- Double-space throughout.
- Order citations alphabetically by author, then chronologically by year.
- Format citations with hanging indents only, not with numbers or bullets.

**Missing information.** Look first in the examples chapter of your style manual. If examples don't help, refer to rules in other chapters. If rules don't help, try these tips.

- Bibliographic data not available: This is not unusual; see style manual for solutions.
- Source type not listed in manual: Adapt from closest example(s) you can find. You may have to use parts of two examples to represent a source. If source type is covered in another style manual, convert to style of your manual by altering authors' first names, order of elements, punctuation, etc.
- Source not generally accessible: Consult your style manual for rules about unstable or unpublished sources such as electronic documents, interviews, and private correspondence.

Electronic sources are the most likely to have missing data, and there is no absolute right or wrong way to compose them. It is safer to provide more rather than less information. Generally, citations should

- Provide sufficient information to help the reader find the original document
- Be consistent with your style manual
- Be consistent with citations for similar types of electronic or print documents
- Contain URLs that are currently and directly accessible (see previous pages)
- Contain recent access dates

APA offers examples online (<http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html>). Other Web sites, especially academic libraries, provide examples of APA and other styles. Check to see that examples are based on the most recent edition of your style manual. If the style is not APA, look for author-date text reference and reference list style instead of alternatives such as notes and bibliography.

**URL format.** Note that URLs in examples on the previous page have no underlining (are not hot-linked) and are broken between lines.

- URL underlining obscures underlines in the Web addresses and can further be mistaken as signifying italics. For class papers, you may leave your word processor's hyperlink function (and underlining) turned on in order to be able to click the link to recheck accessibility. In that case, you may not be able to force the URL to break between lines.
- Break URLs only after slashes. Do not add hyphens or periods because these could be mistaken for parts of the URLs.

**Content notes.** APA allows numbered footnotes or endnotes that contain substantive explanations or remarks, not citations. Content notes should be used sparingly.

The KISS (Keep it simple, stupid) principle applied to writing does not mean shallow and simplistic, but does mean clear, clean, and consistent. So give your copy a KICCC by editing it!

## TEXT REFERENCE STYLE

### Examples

#### One author

Inside or outside parentheses Hjørland (2002) or (Hjørland, 2002)  
 With page number for direct quotation (Hjørland, 2002, p. 257)

#### Multiple authors

Two: name both in every reference. Fox and Fox (2002)  
 Use ampersand inside parentheses only. or (Fox & Fox, 2002)  
 Three: name all in first reference, and (Ford, Wilson, & Foster, 2002)  
 then use *et al.* in subsequent references. and then (Ford *et al.*, 2002)  
 Four or more: use *et al.* in every reference. (Fidel *et al.*, 1999)

#### No author, no date

Substitute title for author. Abbreviate *no date*. Flickr (n.d.)

#### Multiple articles

Within parentheses, list in alphabetical order by first author (not necessary outside parentheses). (Chu, 2001; Goodrum, 2000)  
 Letters *a, b*, etc. distinguish between duplicate author-date combinations in a given paper. Use same letters in reference list. (Hjørland, 2002a, 2002b)  
 If authors of separate articles have the same surname, add first initials. (P. Wilson, 1996) and (T.D. Wilson, 2000)

#### Secondary citation

Read primary work if possible in order to understand full original content and context and to avoid repeating errors. If that is not possible, state primary work and cite secondary source. In reference list, cite only secondary source. In the 1960s, Salton . . . (as cited in Allen *et al.*, 2002, p. 1).

### General Tips

**Matching references.** In APA style, each source referenced in the text must match one full citation in the reference list. Multiple text references to the same source must all match the same single full citation. References are also required in illustrative items; see [Tables, Figures, Appendixes](#).

**URL.** URLs are locations, not authors or titles; do not include them in text references. Note that a Web site name may resemble a URL (e.g., Amazon.com).

**Spelling.** The abbreviation *et al.* ends with a period, is not preceded by a comma, and is not italicized.

**Location.** Avoid citing sources in the abstract. Do not introduce new sources in conclusions section.

## QUOTING SOURCES

### Examples

All of these examples are options for dealing with the words and ideas of the sources you cite. See [Avoiding Plagiarism](#) for more tips on what, when, and how to quote sources.

**Direct quotation.** Exact words of the source. Quote when words are particularly illustrative and powerfully or colorfully written. Retain exact words and spelling (some minor changes are acceptable; see APA 3.37). Cite page number except for HTML document (see below). Use double quotation marks. Place final period after parenthetical reference.

Smith (2005) said, "The results revealed that most users agreed" (p. 23).

"Most users agreed" (Smith, 2005, p. 23).

Smith said, "The results revealed that most users agreed" (2005, p. 23).

**Block quotation.** Direct quotation with about 40 or more words. Indent exact words without quotation marks. Place final period before parenthetical reference.

[end of introductory sentence] Smith (2005) said,  
 [indent entire quotation]The results revealed that most users agreed  
 . . . . [end of long quotation here]. (p. 23)

**Paraphrase.** Source's ideas reworded. Paraphrase when ideas are more important than exact words and when ideas can be condensed. Omit page number (see below).

Smith (2005) found that users tend to . . . .

Users tend to . . . (Smith, 2005).

**See reference.** Paraphrase with *see* (or *e.g.*) added. Use for general background or example.

It is generally understood that users tend to . . . (see Smith, 2005).

This behavior has been observed in other studies (see Smith, 2005).

### General Tips

**Clarity and flow.** The literature itself provides the best examples of how to integrate references into text.

- Cite author and date together if possible, to help reader find them in reference list.
- Clarify switch from source A to source B or from source A to your own ideas by putting reference at beginning of discussion based on a new source, not buried at end of paragraph. Repeat reference in subsequent paragraphs about the same source.
- Make references as unobtrusive as possible. Test the text flow by reading sentences aloud without the parenthetical parts. Note subtle differences: author outside parentheses suggests emphasis on the author, whereas author inside parentheses suggests emphasis on the topic.

**Page number omissions.** In quotations, omit page numbers for HTML and other electronic documents that lack predictable print paging. An alternative for lengthy electronic documents is to cite chapter/section and/or paragraph (Smith, 2005, ¶ 2 or Smith, 2005, Conclusion). In paraphrases, omit page numbers except for very long texts such as books. Note: you still need to keep track of page numbers for your own information.

**Lengthy quotations.** When a quotation is more than half a page in length, it is best moved to an appendix so as not to break the flow of body text. Note that, for publications and dissertations, permission must be granted by the copyright owner under fair use provisions of the Copyright Act of 1976. APA allows up to 500 words to be quoted without permission.

## FORMATTING PAPERS

Consistent formatting and clear organization are key to making any document look finished, professional, and—above all—readable. These tips apply to essay exams and other assignments as well as papers.

### General Tips

Some of these tips are common sense and others are based on requirements for my courses: if these differ from your instructor's requirements, follow the assignment instead. To save time, get the formatting right when you start the first draft of an assignment.

- **File format.** Use a file format that can be read with standard software. Usually this is DOC (Word), RTF, or HTML. Reserve HTML for Web-based projects (not papers or exams). Name the file with your last name first, as in `LastnameReport1`, to assist the instructor with file management.
- **Page format.** Set margins at 1 inch on every side (Word default is 1.25 inch left and right). Keep text left-justified (Word default; do not reset alignment). For efficiency's sake, create your own template.

Set line spacing to double-space. If you write drafts single-spaced (as I do), remember to add paragraph indents and to delete blank line spaces before you double-space the final draft.

Number all pages in the paper, including appendixes, except page 1 if you have no title page. I prefer the page number to be at top right, as part of a running page header that starts on page 2 and includes your name or topic (e.g., `Lastname/p. 2`). Do not type page numbers individually.

- **Your name.** Put your full name at the beginning of your work—don't make the grader figure it out!
- **Title.** Write a title: the name of your topic, not the name of the assignment.
- **Headings.** Use them! Headings probably help the reader more than any other device because they instantly reveal the organization and flow of the entire work. Headings also help the writer organize papers; see [Writing and editing](#).
- **Printing.** Print/copy papers one-sided (public printers/copiers may default to two sides). If your work contains color, make a test printout in black and white to ensure that color does not obscure words.
- **Length.** Note whether assigned length includes references and appendixes.

### Exceptions for Coursework

Are you overwhelmed by your style manual? If so, I'm not surprised: APA and most other manuals are intended for formal manuscripts, such as journal articles, books, theses, and dissertations. These tips are about APA rules you can change or omit for relatively short, simple class assignments. Ask your instructor about any exceptions not covered in your assignment. These tips are not for dissertations or publication manuscripts (although Ph.D. candidates might want to review them to see what shortcuts not to use).

- **Page format.** Beyond APA standards of 1-inch margins and left justification are these exceptions:

Body type can be 12-point Times New Roman (APA style and Word default) or 10- or 11-point Arial. The notion that sans serif typefaces are harder to read is outdated; Arial in particular is extremely legible, even in a smaller point size. Do not use Courier or a decorative typeface.

Single-space short items, but double-space between items. Short items include block quotations; bulleted or numbered lists; content notes; reference list citations; and parts of tables, figures, and appendixes. In some assignments, all body text may be single-spaced.

- **Parts of the paper.** You need only these (or fewer) parts: title page, abstract, headings and body text, references, appendix(es). This is APA order; other style manuals put references at the end.

Save trees, especially for short papers: omit a title page and type your full name, course number, and date at top right on page 1. Do not insert a page header here because it may not display onscreen. Below this, type title (topic) in large bold type, centered. If the assignment allows a separate title page, do not include lines such as institutional affiliation and formal submission statement. These are for dissertations and publications, not class papers.

Include an abstract only if appropriate for a longer paper. Keep it short; APA's limit is 120 words.

APA style does not number sections of the paper. If your assignment requires section numbers, use Arabic (not Roman) numerals, and do not extend these past two decimal places (e.g., 2.4.1).

- **Headings.** APA headings are the same typeface and size as body type for purposes of typesetting. For coursework, you can set headings 2 to 4 points larger than body type and boldface them. Italic headings are acceptable, but are less visible than regular (roman) type, so boldface them, too.

Student papers seldom need more than two or three levels of heading. The specific style in terms of positioning (centered, left-justified, indented) and capitalization is less important than the consistency of style for each level. To check heading levels (and organization in general), create a temporary copy of the paper and strip the copy down to just the headings.

- **Tables, figures, and appendixes.** For the most part, follow APA style or use it as a guide.

Type may be single-spaced, but double-space between rows in tables, labels in figures, and sections in appendixes.

The specific style for headings (tables) or captions (figures) is less important than their consistency.

External sources must be cited in the illustrative items themselves. APA style calls for full citations, but student work may have only author-date references as in body text. These references must match full citations in reference list.

See also standard guidelines on next page.

- **Reference list.** For short papers, start reference list below the concluding paragraph instead of on a new page. Single-space citations, but double-space between them.
- **Bibliography.** APA style allows only a reference list, not a bibliography. If you want to cite sources that are not referenced in the text, create a second list called something like *Additional Sources* or *Recommended Reading*. If the assignment requires an annotated bibliography, find guidance in other style and writing manuals.
- **Permission.** Although you must properly cite all work by others, including lengthy text excerpts and illustrations, you need not obtain permission from the copyright holder for course assignments. This applies only if you do not publish the paper or distribute it publicly.
- **Stapling and binding.** APA requires hardcopy manuscripts to be loose: no staples or binding. I ask students to submit papers stapled at upper left or held together with a binder clip. Spine bindings and report covers, especially the kind that do not allow pages to lie flat, simply hinder the grader.

Cluttered writing is the sign of a cluttered mind—forget about the state of your desk!

## Tables, Figures, Appendixes

Certain kinds of illustrative items provide detailed information in support of the text.

**Tables** present quantitative data (numbers) and/or qualitative data (words).

**Figures** may be charts, diagrams, or images such as drawings or photos.

**Appendixes** contain items that are inappropriate or too lengthy for inclusion in body text. These may be questionnaires or other forms, detailed descriptions or lists, technical notes, correspondence, and tables or figures.

For class papers, use common-sense principles:

- Determine whether the extra items are necessary.
- Prepare content so it is easy to understand.
- Keep design simple, readable, and consistent.
- Identify it clearly and refer to it in text.
- Position it so it is easy to find.

Below are a few guidelines for matters that students often overlook. Refer to your style manual for specific instructions.

- **Content.** Illustrative items should be complete, able to stand on their own. Summarize them in body text: do not repeat all the details. (If you repeat the details, why have the illustration?).

Numbers must be accurate—check and recheck them. Summarize only key data in text. Learn style for figures vs. words. Avoid extra zeros: 9 a.m.; \$5; \$12.4 million, 16%.

- **Format.** In APA style, format tables with horizontal rules (lines) only; no vertical rules. Unless a table is very small, do not try to create it with tab stops in Word. Instead, use a Word or Excel autofomat style that is close to APA.

Label appropriately. Tables have headings above and notes below. Figures have captions below and legends (keys) within or beside. Number tables in order of first reference in text. Do the same for figures and appendixes, numbering each type of illustration in a separate sequence.

- **References.** Illustrative items have their own rules for references. Briefly:

Refer to items by their numbers in text references. Integrate references smoothly and unobtrusively into text: The variables were significantly correlated (Table 1). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) consists of . . . . Do not say Table 2 compares salaries: this focuses on the table instead of its content and anthropomorphizes the table. Instead, say something like The salary comparisons in Table 2 . . . . or The chart in Figure 3 indicates . . . .

For items created by others, APA style calls for full citations below the items. These citations are duplicated in the reference list.

- **Positioning.** Place tables and figures after the paragraph in which you first mention them, in the nearest position that will not force them to break between pages. Tables and figures may also be grouped at the end of the paper, especially if they are too large to fit on one page. Place all appendixes at the end of the paper (i.e., append them). Start each appendix on a separate page.

This is only a sampling of APA rules for illustrative items. See also exceptions on previous page.

## EDITING TEXT

To write well, you must edit. These tips begin with the serious matter of biased language and move on to common writing problems. The errors are all drawn from student work, and the solutions are based on APA, other sources, and my experience. If you cringe at the thought of editing, read on, because somewhere in this compact section, your worst writing snags are bound to be covered. If I write *Clean copy* on your paper, that is high praise indeed!

### Nonbiased Language

Biased language labels people in ways that may be perceived as inaccurate, exclusive, judgmental, or demeaning. Writers may offend unintentionally because they are unaware that terms and usage have changed. Even if they understand the major changes, they may miss subtle differences in word placement. Advice for avoiding bias is widely available. APA offers detailed guidelines, with examples, for reducing biases related to gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, disabilities, and age.

The most important tip is to mention characteristics such as race only if they are relevant to the topic. If they are relevant, find the currently acceptable term or ask people which term they prefer. Note that two basic demographics, gender and age, are almost always reported in research results. This is not bias. The biases lie in referring to humans in general as *man*, nurses in general as *she*, older people as *the elderly*, and so forth. A bonus of becoming aware is improving your everyday speaking as well as writing.

### Schamber's Screammers

Three errors are so common they make me scream! Or at least write *Ouch!* in the margin.

- **Misspelled names** (including my name). Correct spelling is vital for professionalism, courtesy, and—especially in LIS—information retrieval!
- **Misspelled *its* and *it's***. *Its* is a possessive pronoun (like *his*); *it's* is a contraction of *it is*.
- **Noun-pronoun disagreement**. *not person . . . they*, but *person . . . he or she or people . . . they*. Using a plural noun with *they* is the easiest way to avoid gender-biased language.

### Pronoun Pitfalls

Two of three Chamber's screamers concern pronouns. The fact that pronoun misuse is rampant is no excuse for sloppy writing. By definition, a pronoun substitutes for a noun: simply remember which noun.

**They (generic)**. Again I scream, the pronoun *they* is plural! The English language has no singular gender-neutral pronoun for people. Either use *he or she* for one person or make the antecedent noun plural. Instead of *The student takes their exam at home*, say *The student takes his or her (or the) exam at home* or *Students take their exams at home*.

**They vs. it**. An organization or institution is singular and gender-neutral: use *it*. Write *The senate met its (not their) objectives* or *The senators met their (or the) objectives*.

**I vs. me**. *I* is used as the subject of a sentence and *me* as the object of a verb or preposition: *Bill and I agree on that point*. This is just between you and me. Please call Maria and me. The tip is to test the sentence without the other person's name: *Please call . . . me*.

***Only the hand that erases can write the true thing.***

—Meister Johannes Eckhart (German writer and theologian, 1260-1328)

**We (editorial).** *We* is accurate only for multiple authors. APA recommends using *I* for one author in the body text (not in the abstract). Find out your instructors' preferences. The traditional alternative for oneself is a noun such as *author* or *researcher*. In this case, use the same noun consistently and *he* or *she*, not *I*. Avoid using the passive voice (see below).

**We (generic).** Broad uses of *we* are confusing: replace them with nouns. The reader may see *We often assume* and ask, who assumes? —people in a certain group? —people in general? —the authors? Is the reader included in *we*? If the sentence says *Parents often assume*, the reader can decide.

**You (generic).** Broad uses of *you* are ambiguous. The phrase *You can see why* does not indicate who can see: —the reader, personally? —people in general? Is this a form of emphasis, as in *y'know*? Better wording is *It is clear why* or *The evidence supports*. *You* is too informal for most scholarly and professional writing. (An exception is instructions like these, directed at a nongeneric you!)

**Who: vs. that (or which).** People are *who*. Say, *Admit only people who (not that) pay the fee.*

**Who vs. whom.** *Whom* is used as an object. The students whom I find to be successful are able to organize their ideas. To test the usage, reverse the subordinate phrase and substitute *him/her* or *them*: I find them to be successful. When *who/whom* can be subject or object, prefer subject: He will vote for whoever (not whomever) runs for his party.

## Sentence Structure

Most problems with sentence structure stem from misused verbs and missing subjects of verbs. These errors are likely to garner comments of *AWK* (awkward) or *WHO?* on your paper.

**Active vs. passive.** The traditional insistence on avoiding the first person is the main culprit behind the tortured passive sentence constructions in academic work. Passive voice is not wrong per se, but it omits the subject. Prefer active voice to clarify who or what instigated the action. Instead of *A search was conducted*, say *I conducted a search*. Use passive voice when the actor is unknown or unimportant: *The words on the sign were covered by graffiti.*

**Initial there.** Sentences that begin with *there* bury the subject and often are wordy. Instead of *There were 50 students who volunteered*, say *Fifty students volunteered.*

**Subject-verb agreement.** As with the Schamber's screamer about using *they* for one person, the key is to clarify how many people, objects, or ideas the subject represents.

The pronoun *each* is singular, whereas *none* is singular or plural depending on context: *Each of the participants was . . . . None of the participants were . . . .*

Collective nouns such as *faculty*, *pair*, *couple*, *series*, and *set* take singular or plural verbs depending on context. *The biology faculty meets monthly. The faculty [members] agree.*

The noun *data* is plural, despite its common use with a singular verb. Prefer the plural: *The data were incomplete (unless you're a Trekkie: Data is ready to energize).*

**Dangling modifier.** Participial (*ing*) phrases and infinitive (*to*) phrases are said to dangle when the subjects they modify are missing. The phrases precede passive verbs and/or nouns that are not subjects.

**Awkward**    After entering more search terms, 92 records were retrieved.  
                   To retrieve more records, more search terms were entered.  
                   After entering more search terms, the results were 92 records.

**Better**        After entering more search terms, I retrieved 92 records.  
                   To retrieve 92 records, I entered more search terms.

**Misplaced modifier.** Place modifiers close to the words they modify. Most errors involve adverbs, such as *only, often, usually, nearly, barely*. Instead of He only earns \$5 an hour, say He earns only \$5 an hour. Modifier placement affects the meaning, as in He usually said he was late vs. He said he was usually late.

**Verb tenses.** Choose the simplest verb tense (usually present or past) and use it consistently.

- **Present.** Use for statements of general or continuing applicability in discussion and conclusion sections of your study report, when stating facts that will continue to be true, and when referring to your own paper: The primary conclusion is . . . . The consensus among researchers is that . . . . The next section contains . . . . In this paper, the concept is defined as . . . .
- **Past.** Use for specific past events in the results section of your study report and in citing past research: The data analysis method was factor analysis . . . . The data were skewed . . . . Smith (2005) conducted a study of . . . . Smith (2005) concluded . . . .
- **Future.** Avoid except for future events: In the proposed study, the researcher will explore . . . . The law will go into effect next year.
- **Subjunctive.** Use for conditional or unlikely outcomes: If that were (not was) true, the test would fail. It appears (not would appear) that the right person for the job is (not would be) Pat.

## Peripatetic Punctuation

Apostrophes and hyphens in particular are so often misused that they seem to wander at random.

**Apostrophes.** Apostrophes serve multiple purposes, which contributes to the confusion.

Do use apostrophes in

- Singular possessives: library's policies, UNT's actions, Charles' business (or Charles's if you pronounce the second S).
- Plural possessives: libraries' policies, Joneses' neighborhood.
- Clarification of some plurals: do's and don'ts (not don't's), learn the abc's (or ABCs).
- Contractions ('90s, can't, it's, who's, you're). Avoid using contractions in scholarly and professional writing: prefer 1990s, cannot, it is, who is, you are. Use 's for is, not has: It has been awhile (not It's been awhile). He has (not He's got) the car.

Do not use apostrophes in

- Possessive pronouns: *its, hers, theirs, whose*. Test the spelling by substituting *his* (not *hi's*).
- Most plurals: PCs, DVDs, CDs, TVs, 1990s, nineties, pros and cons, Joneses. (Yes, signs ad infinitum—like The Joneses' and Free puppy's—are excruciatingly wrong!)

If you think editors are humorless, check out the Web, where you can find everything from tongue-in-cheek advice such as "When dangling, watch your participles" to all-out humor, such as the Self-Appointed Grammar Police at <http://sagp.miketaylor.org.uk/>

**Hyphens.** Hyphens connect words for a purpose, primarily to keep adjacent words from being misread.

Do use hyphens in

- Prefixes with proper nouns (*pro-American*) and numbers (*pre-1900*), or cases where words could be misread (*co-occur*, *re-form* (form again), *semi-independent*)
- Compound adjectives or nouns beginning with *self-* or ending with *-based*, *-dependent*, *-driven*, *-oriented*, *-related*, *-specific*
- Compound adjectives or nouns with words of equal weight: Dallas–Chicago flight; 1983–2001 (En dash, shown here, or hyphen can be used.)
- Compound modifiers preceding nouns, in order to prevent confusion: bias-reducing technique; first-come-first-served basis; 10-year-old boy; two-tailed *t* test; 19th- and 20th-century art (note space after 19th-)

Do not use hyphens in

- Most prefixes: antiwar, coworker, counterintuitive, multidimensional, nontext, semiskilled
- Compound phrases containing comparative or superlative adjectives: best known poet; better designed study, higher ranking officer; less important findings
- Compound phrases containing *y* or *ly* adverbs: very hot issue; widely cited study
- Compound modifiers with letter or number as second word: Library A respondents; type II error
- Descriptive phrases that do not precede nouns: boy is 10 years old; art of the 19th and 20th centuries

Do not use hyphens as separators.

- A space-hyphen-space sequence ( - ) does not equal or replace a dash (—). This is a lazy typing practice that probably spread as an email convention.

**Dashes and ellipses.** Use em dashes to mark interruptions—like this—(–or this–) with no spaces around them. Use ellipses (three or four periods with spaces between them, like this . . . ) to indicate deletions, not pauses. Instead of using dashes or ellipses for pauses or breaks in thought, prefer commas, parenthetical phrases, separate sentences, or separate paragraphs.

**Quotation marks.** Double quotation marks enclose article or chapter titles and direct quotations. Single quotation marks enclose a quotation within a quotation. Use double quotation marks to introduce invented, slang, or unusual terms that might be misread, and then only on first mention. Do not use them to introduce important technical terms (use italics) or to hedge, apologize for, or emphasize words.

**Commas and periods.** Place commas and periods inside quotation marks, regardless of context (i.e., whether they belong to the material inside quotation marks): chapter titled "Secrets." Place other punctuation inside or outside quotation marks, depending on context: chapter titled "Secrets"? Insert one space after a period.

**Colons.** Use colons after complete clauses or sentences to introduce explanation or detail. He said this in just one chapter: "Secrets." If the material following a colon is a complete sentence, capitalize the first word. Insert one space after a colon. Do not use colons after incomplete clauses or sentences: The instructors were Rio, McDill, and Kazinski.

**Commas and semicolons.** Omit a comma between two adjectives of equal weight preceding a noun: old brick house. Insert a comma before *and* in a list of three or more items: red, white, and blue. Insert semicolons between clauses with internal commas or other punctuation: red, white, and blue; white and gold

**Italics.** Italicize book and journal titles; important terms or linguistic examples (without quotation marks); foreign terms (unless common); and emphasized words or phrases (use sparingly). Underlines can be used instead of italics, but do not use both.

**Boldface.** Use bold type for visibility in headings, but not for emphasis in text. Boldface headings are contrary to APA style, but I prefer them in student papers (See [Exceptions for Coursework](#).)

**Boomer alert:** Do you place commas and periods inside or outside quotation marks, depending on context? Do you type two spaces after a period or colon? —two hyphens to represent a dash? —underlines to represent italics? If so, you're showing your age (or your teacher's age)! All of these practices are decades out of date for computer-based writing; holdovers from the era of typewriters.

## Ubiquitous Usage

### Writing succinctly

Succinct writing is accurate and concise. Good writers present the content in an organized fashion and use a minimum number of words to make their points. They keep sentence structure simple and use key terms consistently, rather than varying terms for the sake of creativity. Here are a few general usage problems that appear most frequently in student papers.

**Inaccuracy.** Get names and titles of people, organizations, and documents exactly right. Write out technical terms, corporate names, etc. on first mention, followed by abbreviations or acronyms in parentheses, unless abbreviations are common usage (e.g., *CD*, *DVD*).

**Redundancy.** Delete part of each set: *age 20 years old*, *both alike*, *component part*, *continued on*, *end result*, *exact same*, *general consensus*, *future plans*, *group together*, *often times*, *plan ahead*, *point in time*, *previously found*, *reason is because*, *reason why*, *small in size*, *total of 50*, *whether or not*, *year 2000* (and *more and more!*)

**Jargon.** Academia, business, and government are notorious for inventing words. Distinguish between technical terms for specific concepts and convoluted or euphemistic usage that serves no purpose.

**Nouns as verbs.** Many nouns have evolved into verb forms, but some of the newer verb forms are awkward and confusing. Several that I find particularly irritating are *architect*, *dialogue*, *journal*, *transition*, and even *verb* used as verbs. All have clearer synonyms.

### Speaking of people

**Names.** In text, state last names only, except for people who do not appear in the reference list or different authors with the same surname. In APA citation style, use initials instead of first names.

**Titles.** Omit titles of polite address (*Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Mrs.*, *Dr.*, *Rev.*, etc.). Occupational titles are not normally capitalized standing alone, or when following a proper name. Capitalizing them is an institutional affectation. If you do capitalize, be consistent. Prefer *the library director* or *Susan Jones, library director* or *Library Director Susan Jones*.

**Age.** People are *ages*; they are *aged* if they are older (but better, like wine). Say *ages 20 to 30*.

**Gender.** Referring to people as *males* and *females* is somewhat dehumanizing. Prefer *men and women*, *boys and girls*, *male and female teachers*.

**Subjects.** *Subjects* used as a term for people in research studies suggests involuntary manipulation in laboratory experiments (like rats). Refer to people by their role in the study (*participants, respondents, interviewees*) or in real life (*teachers, students, managers, patients*). Choose one or two terms and use them consistently. Note that *subject* can be confused with topic, as in *online subject searching*.

**Say.** People can *say* something, or they can *state, describe, explain, note, remark on, respond to, or conclude*. All of these words are safe to use but, out of the 100+ words for *say* in English, the safest is *say* itself. In this case, *safe* means neutral; presenting an unbiased picture of the speaker's intention. *Assert* and *claim* are fairly safe, although they imply some doubt about the speaker's veracity. *Argue, contend, and debate* are not safe, unless they actually refer to disagreement. *Believe, feel, and think* are never safe because one can know only what people *say*. Stick to the safe words, even if they sound boring, and keep the focus on the language of the speakers themselves.

## Writing the right word

**Affect vs. effect.** Each word has verb and noun forms.

The correct verb is usually *affect*. *Affect* is to change or influence, whereas *effect* is to execute or accomplish: The school board effected the passage of the new library program, which will affect every student.

The correct noun is usually *effect*: The effects were surprising. The noun *affect* (accent on first syllable) is a psychology term pertaining to emotions.

**Can vs. may.** *Can* implies ability and *may* implies possibility, permission, or choice: Although she can (*capability*) go out, she may (*maybe*) stay home instead.

**Center and focus:** Follow these with *on*, not *around*: they are points around which other things revolve.

**Comprise vs. compose.** The whole *comprises* (*includes*) the pieces; the parts *compose* (*constitute*) the whole. The club comprises 18 members; 18 members compose the club.

**Each vs. either.** *Each* refers to individual things; *either* implies a choice. Do not say *students on either side of the room* when you mean *each side* or *both sides*.

**e.g. vs. i.e.** The abbreviation *e.g.* means for example and *i.e.* means that is. Each is followed by a comma and should be used only inside parentheses. Do not italicize (*e.g.*, like this).

**Entitled.** A worthy person is *entitled*; a written work (or a royal person) is *titled*: the article, titled "UNT" or the article, "UNT." Usually only author and year, not title, are cited in text references.

**Fewer vs. less.** *Fewer* refers to a number of distinct things; *less* refers to collective quantity or degree: With fewer events planned this year, club members are less interested. He earns less than \$30,000 a year. (Prefer *less than* or *more than* to *under* or *over*.)

**If vs. whether.** These words have different meanings and are not always interchangeable.

*If* introduces a condition. A condition that is untrue calls for a subjunctive verb.

If it rains, I will stay home.

If he were rich, he would be a philanthropist.

*Whether* introduces an alternative or possibility. *Whether or not* is redundant. Use *whether* when:

Alternatives are given: He debated whether to expand or sell the business.

At the beginning of a sentence: Whether she called me isn't important.

Before an infinitive (*to*) phrase: I don't know whether to buy a new car.

After a preposition: It's a question of whether her parents will consent.

*If or whether* is acceptable in direct or indirect yes/no questions.

Did he say if/whether he will be late?

I can't remember if/whether she called me.

**Infer vs. imply.** The speaker implies (lies) or hints. The listener infers or concludes from some evidence. Her note implied that the deal was off. He inferred from her note that the deal was off.

**Internet.** Capitalize the global Internet. Lowercase *internet* or *intranet* as general system structures.

**Lay vs. lie.** The difference depends on the meaning and whether the verb is transitive (has an object).

Lay (transitive): He lays the book down (is laying, laid, has laid).

Lie (intransitive): He lies down for a nap (is lying, lay, has lain).

Lie (intransitive): He lies about his age (is lying, lied, has lied).

(At last, the truth about lying! Can millions of dogs learn to *lie down* instead of *lay down*?)

**Not only . . . but also.** Retain parallel structure by remembering the *also*.

**Prove and cause.** Social science research cannot *prove* anything, including whether one thing *causes* another, so do not use those terms. It is safe, however, to say that research results *demonstrate*, *indicate*, *predict*, *show*, or *suggest*. Observe how researchers describe their own studies.

**Rank vs. rate.** *Rank* indicates order; *rate* indicates degree. The toys are ranked from most safe to least safe. The toys are rated for safety on a 5-point scale.

**Relevance vs. relevancy.** Use the preferred noun form, *relevance*. The *y* is unnecessary.

**Research vs. study.** *Research* is a collective noun, whereas *study* is not. Say *research* (not *researches*) for a general area of inquiry and *study* or *studies* for discrete research effort(s).

**Since vs. because.** *Since* refers to time elapsed. *Because* refers to reason or justification. Say *Because* (not *since*) *Joe's grammar is poor, the instructor suggested tutoring.* *Sometimes* both concepts apply: *Since—if not because—Joe failed the exam, class morale is low.*

**That vs. which.** Choose *that* or *which* according to whether the clause is restrictive (necessary to meaning). Introduce a restrictive clause with that and no commas: *The manual that he gave us is outdated* (or omit *that* in a short sentence). Introduce nonrestrictive clauses with which, set off with commas: *The manual, which he gave us last year, is outdated.* Ask whether the sentence is meaningful without the clause. The appropriate term is usually *that*, so conduct a which hunt!

**Unique.** *Unique* means the only one of its kind, not special, unusual, or odd (a misuse from advertising).

**Use.** *Use* is simpler *usage* than *utilize* and *utilization* (which are overused!)

**Verbal vs. oral.** *Verbal* refers to the use of words in both written and oral communication. Don't say *verbal agreement* when you mean *oral agreement*.

**Visual vs. textual.** *Visual* refers to use of the eyes in reading both textual and nontextual material. Don't say *visual format* when you mean *nontextual format* such as photos, drawings, and other images.

**Web.** *Web* is short for *World Wide Web*, a subset of the Internet. The term is now widely accepted and does not have to be written out on first mention. *Web* is preferable to *WWW*, which is awkward and difficult to say. Capitalize the global Web. Lowercase *web* as a general system structure.

**While vs. but and although.** *While* refers to time (simultaneous actions): *Joe ate while he studied.* *But*, *although*, and *whereas* introduce contrasts. Instead of *Joe studied, while Mary did not*, say *Joe studied, but (or whereas) Mary did not.* Also say *Although (not while) Joe studied, he failed the exam.*

***I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.***

—Mark Twain (1835-1910)

## Spelling Secrets

Poor spelling gives the impression of ignorance or carelessness. Run your spell checker and ask someone else to edit your paper. Make a list of your personal problem words and hang it beside your desk. English is notoriously inconsistent, so watch for exceptions to rules and mnemonics below.

**Singular vs. plural.** Frequent offenders: *appendix/appendixes* (or *appendices*), *crisis/crises*, *colloquium/colloquia*, *criterion/criteria*, *curriculum/curricula*, *datum/data* (*datum* is rarely used), *index/indexes* (or *indices*), *medium/media*, *phenomenon/phenomena*, *thesaurus/thesauri*.

**Double endings.** Double last letter if accent is on last syllable: *occurrence*, *omitted*, *referring*. Do not double if accent is on first syllable: *benefited*, *canceled* (but *cancellation*), *modeling*, *traveler*.

**Seedy endings.** Spell it

*sede* for one word only: *supersede*.

*ceed* for three words only: *exceed*, *succeed*, *proceed* (but *procedure*).

*cede* for all other words: *precede*, *secede*, etc.

**C vs. S endings.** Alphabetically, *noun* precedes *verb* and C precedes S, so spell these noun/verb pairs *advice/advice*, *device/device*, *council/counsel*.

In American English, spell both noun and verb forms of *practice* with a C.

**Ible quibbles.** Add the suffix

*able* to a complete word: *workable*, *believable* (drop the *e*), *noticeable*, *reliable* (change *y* to *i*).

*ible* to an incomplete word: *horrible*, *plausible*, *tangible*.

*ible* to a word that can also be completed with *-ion*: *accessible*, *collectible*, *reducible*.

**Nifty mnemonics.** Some of these are classics (thanks, Mom!) and some are my own.

*Accommodate* accommodates two Cs and two Ms.

*All right* (not *alright*) is the opposite of *all wrong*.

*A lot* (not *alot*) is the opposite of *a little*.

*Cite* (credit) a Web *site* (space).

*Consensus* (not *conconsensus*) depends on *consent*.

The only *criterion* (just *one*) is cost.

*Dependent* (not *dependant*) has an E in its *end*.

An *everyday* (adj.) event (noun) happens *every* (adj.) *day* (noun).

I before E, except after C, or when sounded like A as in *neighbor* and *weigh*

*Judgment* (preferred) is quicker than *judgement*.

Today they *lead*, yesterday they *led* (verb); the noun *lead* is the metal).

*Lose* the rope and *loose* (free) the *goose*.

A *memento* (not *momento*) jogs the *memory*.

*Predominant* (adj.) things *predominate* (verb).

*Preventive* (not *preventative*) tries to prevent.

*Principals* (pals) uphold school principles (rules).

*Privilege* (not *privelege*) means I want all I can get.

*Pronunciation* (not *pronounciation*) has a nun in it.

*Separate* (not *seperate*) has a rat in it.

**Variations and errors.** These tips cover a few gray areas.

Use American spellings instead of *afterwards*, *amongst*, *behaviour*, *catalogue*, *centre*, *colour*, *grey*, *in regards to* (say *regarding* or *with regard to*), *learnt*, *modelling*, *organisation*, *programme*, *towards*.

Retain original spelling in names, titles, and quotations: *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*.

Retain errors in quotations. Insert [*sic*] only if the error is serious or could be mistaken for your own. The phrase a child loses his identity is clear and grammatically correct, so do not insert [*sic*] or [*or hers*]. In *Most children fair well*, insert [*sic*] after the misspelled word *fair*. If necessary, explain the usage in brackets or a note. Best solution? Paraphrase!

## EDITOR'S MARKS

Read the assignment*	RTA
See note/comment*	they never* do or <i>see</i> (A)
Check/correct throughout*	↓ or ↓
Agreement/not parallel*	user finds their ≠ (not equal)
Reference mismatch*	≠ RL (reference list) or ≠ text
Hard to follow/awkward	? or <i>awk</i>
Repetitious	again and again <i>repet</i>
Redundant	future plans <i>redund</i>
Wrong word	people <sup>a</sup> <del>that</del> care WW
Misspelled	seperate or <i>sp</i>
Abbreviate/write out	( <u>that is,</u> never) or (&)
Change to word/number	(9) or (ten)
Transpose words/punctuation	[term] the "library" or <i>tr</i>
Insert word/punctuation	reason <sup>that</sup> <del>why</del> or its <sup>↓</sup> or et al <sup>↑</sup> or et al <sup>⊙</sup>
Delete word/punctuation	reason <del>why</del> or its <sup>⊙</sup> s
Insert hyphen	system <sup>^</sup> dependent
Insert em dash (no spaces)	sometimes <sup>^</sup> depending
Insert space	go every day or everyday <sup>#</sup>
Close/delete space	every ( ) day event
Capitals or uppercase	<u>url</u> or <i>cap</i> or <i>uc</i> <i>lc</i>
Lowercase/upper-lowercase	<del>Marry</del> or <del>MARY</del> or <del>MARY</del> or <i>ulc</i>
Italics (or underline)	<u>Newsweek</u> or <i>ital</i>
Roman (regular)	<u>et al.</u> or <i>rom</i>
Boldface	<u>Conclusions</u> or <i>bf</i>
Lightface (regular)	her <u>conclusions</u> or <i>lf</i>
Justify left or right	[ <b>Conclusions</b> or p. 2 ]
Justify centered	[ <b>Conclusions</b> ]
Start paragraph	[ Once upon a time or ¶
Sentence fragment	And so on. <i>frag</i>
Leave as is (whew!)	gray or <i>stet</i>
Excellent!*	☆ or ★

\*Schamber's marks; not standard

## MAKING PRESENTATIONS

### Preparing and Practicing

The oral report should be a separate work, a distillation of the written report. Deliver it in informal language, clarify it with audiovisual support, and if possible, enliven it with an anecdote or joke. Write speaking notes in outline form, using brief phrases rather than full sentences, in order to force yourself to speak naturally, without reading word for word. Notes should be large enough to be read while standing.

Practice the entire presentation to ensure that it flows smoothly and stays within its allotted time, including time for questions or discussion. Speak loudly enough to reach the back of the room. Maintain a steady, unrushed pace. Do not mark every pause with "uh." If you have slides, coordinate them with your speech. Do not read from slides or notes; use them to support your points as you talk. Remember to face the audience, not the screen.

Request any special equipment, such as a computer projector or video player, at least a week in advance. Have a backup plan in case equipment fails or is unavailable.

### Using Audiovisual Aids

Audiovisual aids support and further distill the written report. The choice of aids depends on the topic and on ease of production and use. Students often use handouts (one to five pages), PowerPoint slides, online demonstrations, and the whiteboard or chalkboard. Other aids are examples of books or other materials (one to six items), audio or video recordings (five minutes), 35mm slides, flip charts, table displays, quizzes or games, dialogues or skits, and costumes.

Spell-check handouts and slides, and keep them brief. A handout can include an outline, example, table or chart, or reading list. Include references, in proper style, because a handout is all the audience gets. PowerPoint slides should be legible onscreen and in handouts. Test legibility by printing handouts, three or six slides to a page, in pure black and white (not grayscale). Guidelines:

- One theme per slide; keywords or phrases only
- About six words per line, six lines per slide, with bullets or numbers for lists
- Maximum of two plain (not decorative) typefaces, such as Arial or Times New Roman
- Upper-lowercase letters (not all-caps) in large type size (minimum 20 points; references 18 points)
- Plain background (no pattern) with strong light-dark contrast between background and type
- Little or no distracting animation, especially graphics that flash more than once.

### Overcoming Stage Fright

All speakers are nervous at some time. The problem is when nervousness becomes paralyzing fear. If you cannot even face the task, ask your instructor for advice. For most students, these tips help:

Rehearsal is the best preventive for stage fright. Practice until you are totally comfortable with the content. Record and listen to your speech. If you can't practice in the classroom, pause occasionally at the podium on the way to your seat and visualize speaking there. Think of yourself as the expert and your audience as friends who are interested, receptive, and supportive. (Really, they are!)

Work off nervous energy immediately before the speech. Take a walk alone. Breathe deeply.

Volunteer to go first and be done with it. Once you begin, focus on the content instead of yourself. Let the words flow. It may help to admit your nervousness. If you freeze up, take a moment to sip some water and collect yourself. When you finish, enjoy the applause, sit down, and relax!

## ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

### Content and Editing

- \_\_\_\_\_ The paper/presentation is complete and adheres to all parts of the assignment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your name, course name, and date are typed (not in running page header) on page 1 or title page.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your name or topic and page numbers appear in page headers beginning on page 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The paper has a topical title (not the name of the assignment).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Style for headings and other elements is consistent throughout paper/presentation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Text is free of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All pages in paper, including references and appendixes, are numbered consecutively.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Any additional assigned materials are enclosed with paper/presentation.

### References

- \_\_\_\_\_ References are included wherever appropriate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Each source appears at least once in text reference and only once in reference list.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All bibliographic data are accurate, especially authors' names and publication dates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Authors (including multiple authors) and dates match in text references and reference list.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Direct quotations are accurate in wording, spelling, and punctuation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Text references for direct quotations include page numbers (except for HTML documents).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Each illustrative item is referred to by its label (e.g., *Figure 1*) in body text.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Any illustrative item from another source contains an appropriate reference.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Full citations for sources of illustrative items appear in reference list.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Style for text references and full citations is correct and consistent throughout.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Any adapted citations are sufficient for access and consistent with style manual.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reference list entries are alphabetized and not numbered or bulleted

### Tables, Figures, Appendixes

- \_\_\_\_\_ Any illustrative items are assigned or necessary to support the text.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Content is clear, readable, and explained by notes if necessary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Content is free of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Design is simple and adheres to style constraints (e.g., APA: no vertical rules in tables).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tables, figures, and appendixes are numbered in separate sequences.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Content is summarized in body text; all details are not repeated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tables and figures are positioned after first mention in text and/or grouped at the end.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All appendixes are positioned at the end.

### Oral Presentation

- \_\_\_\_\_ Any special equipment has been requested in advance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The presentation has been rehearsed and adheres to allotted time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All group members participate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Content includes references where appropriate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Slides are simple, legible, and spell-checked.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts are brief and spell-checked.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Backup plan is ready in case equipment fails.

## TEN WAYS TO PLEASE INSTRUCTORS (and possibly improve your grades!)

1. **Take responsibility.** Instructors do not send daily reminders to individual students. Bear in mind that you—not faculty or staff—are responsible for understanding and adhering to the policies, procedures, and deadlines of your courses, the School, and the University.
2. **Follow instructions.** Read course handouts, beginning with the syllabus. Don't force instructors to repeat what they already told you. Follow assignments exactly (omissions alone can cost many points). Come to class prepared: if you do the assigned readings beforehand, you will be able to participate knowledgeably and get more out of the class (and look smarter!).
3. **Meet deadlines.** Reduce stress (making excuses, receiving late penalties) by finishing your assignment at least a day in advance. Allow time for thorough editing and last-minute delays. Understand that when instructors can grade all students' work together, they are likely to finish grading sooner and to grade more consistently (late work is graded out of sync with the rest).
4. **Put your full name on your work.** Some instructors ignore work with no name (assign a grade of zero) because it is annoying and time-consuming to figure out whose work it is. When formatting a report, note that the pages may become separated, so include a page header that identifies you and the page number, beginning on page 2. When composing email, sign your name: your email address may not contain your name, and some downloads/printouts may not save your address.
5. **Be patient about grading.** Do you know how often instructors hear, "When will we get our papers back?" Don't bother asking. The answer is, "As soon as I'm done grading them."\*
6. **Read instructors' comments.** Many instructors spend a great deal of time writing comments on papers (one reason for slow grading) or giving other forms of feedback to help you learn. You may disagree with instructors' judgments, but please think about their comments before you complain.
7. **Inform instructors of your problems.** If you are lost or unable to complete the work, speak up as soon as possible. Instructors are willing and able to offer good advice if it is not too late. Consider also that they have busy schedules, so do not skip appointments or burden them with trivial matters.
8. **Be courteous and professional.** Respect instructors' and classmates' ideas, both onsite and online. State negative criticism tactfully. Avoid being confrontational, which can make people defensive and less inclined to listen to you. Inform instructors if you must submit work late, miss class, arrive late or leave early, or withdraw from the course. Do not detain instructors immediately prior to class periods (their last-minute prep time) or class breaks (they need breaks, too!).
9. **Request recommendations wisely.** If you want positive job (or other) recommendations, choose instructors from whom you earned A's and/or who know you well. Ask permission at least a week in advance. Make the task easier by providing relevant information: your résumé or vita; your courses and grades; and the position description, contact name/address, and deadline. Afterward, send them updates and thanks (the only reward they get for doing this).
10. **Re-introduce yourself later.** Do you know how many students instructors have in a year? Do you realize that online instructors may never have met you face to face? Be kind: don't walk up and say, "Remember me?" Instead, say, "I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I was in your \_\_\_\_\_ course two years ago." Your instructors will love you for it!

\*Unfortunately, a few instructors do fall short in timely grading and other responsibilities in this list. That's why we have students evaluate the instruction in every course.