

# Writing down the Basics

An Everyday Guide to Grammar and Writing



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## WHY REFINE YOUR WRITING

Let's face it, writing is hard. Even if you know exactly what you want to say, figuring out how to say it so that you paint the picture, feeling, and sense of what's in your head to your readers is, on some days, a small feat of magic. However, it is an important skill to master. Here are the facts you need to know about that.

As you move out of college and into the professional world, you will be judged on your writing. Many times, people will read your writing before they even meet you. In the most extreme case—the cover letter for a job application—other people's views of your writing will determine whether or not you even get the chance to speak to them. Clearly, this is a case in which your writing can determine your future. However, even after that your writing will continue to affect your life. In the professional world, you will often be representing yourself through email and other electronic means of communication. How you write those documents—whether they're one sentence long or pages upon pages—are part of the ways that people build their image of who you are and how capable you are. As Max Messmer notes,

Even in our increasingly "e-enabled" business world, expertise in translating ideas into words is still critical. In fact, it's technology that's making these skills even more important than they've been in the past. Think about it. As technological advances such as e-mail allow us to communicate more rapidly, more often, and with greater numbers of people, writing is becoming a larger part of everyone's job.

The tools you will be required to use as a professional are wrapped up in writing; therefore your writing is, in many cases, you. In a competitive marketplace, your writing can mean the difference between getting the job or promotion or not.

Now the real facts: grammar is not hard. There is no mystery about it. There are solid rules, and while the English language with all of its craziness does have a number of exceptions, if you learn the basic rules, you will stand out above the crowd. The truth is that learning to write well is not that hard. It in no way compares to Calculus or Advanced Physics. That is not to say it's easy, but it is to point out that the rules do not have to be mysteries. It is up to you to decide that you can learn them, and then dedicate yourself to learning and applying them. If you do that, you will find that you have more control and are more comfortable getting your ideas across.

This book is designed to help you improve your basic grammar and to give you a broad familiarity with some of the most common types of writing for both school and work. It does not cover specific concerns such as negotiating writing in English if it's your second language or learning the basics of writing that should have prepared you for beginning college-level writing. There are excellent resources in libraries and on the web for both of those issues and if you're dealing with them, make it one of your goals to search for those resources and use them.

In the end, remember that you are in control; if you learn the rules, you will not simply know them as a few words in a book, but also as tools you can use to not simply get your message across, but also get the tone, sound, and passion of your message into the minds of your readers.

--Kelli

## GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS: A SHORT OVERVIEW

The first thing to know about grammar is that there are rules and those rules help make messages clear for us. Just as any driver learned the rules of driving before getting behind the wheel of a car in order to avoid accidents, writers must learn the rules of writing. Also like driving, the more you write, the less you'll have to remember the rules exactly. It will become as smooth as knowing that a red light means stop.

Of course, if you don't know those rules in the first place, then it's time to learn them. While you study writing, you need to think about them consciously, and this is a time-consuming process, so, be prepared to dedicate some time now to your writing so that when you move into other classes and your job you will be able to pay more attention to your content and goals.

In this section, we'll review the basics. There will be some technical terms here and there, and while you need to understand them enough to get the concepts and know how they work in writing, unless you're going to be an English teacher, you won't have to memorize them all. The key is to understand the logic behind how these things work and be able to apply that to your writing.

Finally, as you approach this overview of grammar, keep in mind that your sentences communicate your message, but the way you punctuate them communicates the voice, tone, and emphasis you want to get across.

## WRITING SENTENCES CORRECTLY

Every sentence in the English language must have a couple of things going on. Of course, it has to be *about something or somebody--that's the subject*, and *that someone or something has to be doing something or there has to be some state of being--that's the predicate*. Finally, it has to make sense. Here are some examples:

Some people play video games for hours on end.

Who is this sentence about? (Subject) **Some people**

What do those people do? (Predicate) **play video games for hours on end.**

Love is a many-splendored thing.

What is the sentence about? (Subject) **Love**

What is happening in this sentence? (Predicate) **is a many-splendored thing.** (It is being a many splendored thing.)

You can ask either of these questions first.

In addition to having a subject and a predicate, sentences must make sense—express a complete thought. It doesn't have to be fancy.

I write.

That has a subject (I) and a predicate (write) and once you read it, you got the whole idea.

There's one other tricky thing about sentences in English. Sometimes they have an understood subject. That means the subject is not in the sentence—it's just implied.

Look at this sentence.

In that sentence, there's no subject. We have the predicate—some action or state of being, *look at this sentence*, but who is supposed to do that? Well, you are, dear reader! These type of subjects occur in commands, orders, or suggestions.

Read this. = **(You should)** read this.

Have fun! = **(You)** have fun.

Consider a degree in art. = **(You should)** consider a degree in art.

As we move on to more complex sentences, we have to start looking for parts of the sentence that give us more details and eliminate those to figure out what the subject and predicate is so

that we can check and see whether we have each of those. After that, we give it the final test and check to see if the sentence makes sense on its own.

We'll deal with how to punctuate those later, but for now, we'll just look at samples that use commas—in general, commas separate out extra details, lists, and divide between sentences.

Take a look at these sentences:

“I don't know the rules of grammar. If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language.”

— David Ogilvy

The first sentence here is simple:

Subject:       **I**  
 Predicate:    **don't know the rules of grammar**

We have a subject, a predicate, and a clear meaning. Let's break down the next one:

If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language.

So, now we have to ask, what is this sentence really about? Yes, it mentions *persuading* and *buying*, and we've got *trying*. All of those are verbs that show us some action that "you" might take, but if we take those parts on their own, do they make sense?

If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something,

No, that doesn't make sense on its own. How about the next part:

it seems to me you should use their language.

As my avuncular grammar instructor would say, "Now we're cooking with gas!" This makes sense! But wait, there's some extra stuff still in here. Where's our main verb?

**use**

Who should "use"?

**you**

Now we have found the predicate and the subject.

Subject       **You**  
 Predicate    **should use their language.**

What's everything else? For our very basic purposes, they're just details. They give us context, examples, and create images. We'll discuss these next. However, before that, let's look at one more example.

“Let me just acknowledge that the function of grammar is to make language as efficient and clear and transparent as possible. But if we’re all constantly correcting each other’s grammar and being really snotty about it, then people stop talking because they start to be petrified that they’re going to make some sort of terrible grammatical error and that’s precisely the opposite of what grammar is supposed to do, which is to facilitate clear communication.” — John Green

The first sentence presents a little problem, but if we ask our questions carefully, it's not too tricky:

Let me just acknowledge that the function of grammar is to make language as efficient and clear and transparent as possible.

We've got the "me" which is a pronoun, so it could be the subject and "acknowledge" which is an action, but if we look at that on its own, it doesn't make sense:

Let me just acknowledge that

That looks like some of that extra information. So, let's check out the second part. Is this sentence about John Green acknowledging, or is it about the function of grammar? If "the function of grammar" is the subject, what's left?

is to make language as efficient and clear and transparent as possible.

"Is" is one of the state of being verbs, as in "it is over there." (What's it doing? It's being over there.) So which makes more sense on its own?

Let me just acknowledge that

Or

the function of grammar is to make language as efficient and clear and transparent as possible

When we break them apart and compare them this way, it's easier to see that the second one is the main sentence. The "Let me just acknowledge" is just giving us some details and voice. Now, what about that second part?

"But if we’re all constantly correcting each other’s grammar and being really snotty about it, then people stop talking because they start to be petrified that they’re going to make

some sort of terrible grammatical error and that's precisely the opposite of what grammar is supposed to do, which is to facilitate clear communication."<sup>1</sup>

Now, I mentioned before that we'll cover commas in the following section, but two of the things they do are set off extra information—details, and separate sentences. So, the commas in this are doing those things. If we break it up at those commas, it will help us figure out the parts better:

But if we're all constantly correcting each other's grammar and being really snotty about it,

then people stop talking because they start to be petrified that they're going to make some sort of terrible grammatical error and that's precisely the opposite of what grammar is supposed to do,

which is to facilitate clear communication.

This way, it's easy to see that the first and last sections don't complete our test for full sentences, as they don't make sense on their own.

While the middle one needs a bit of context since it starts with the "then," it still makes sense on its own. Who or what is doing something?

Subject	<b>...people</b>
Predicate	<b>stop talking...</b>

All the rest of the stuff is details that fill in the blanks. (Okay, there's lots of other technical stuff going on and that middle part is really two sentences, but, for the sake of brevity, let's just go with what we've got for now. Bonus points if you can figure out those other things. ;-)

We could go on and on, but you can see the basic premise. Being able to recognize the basic parts of a sentence will help you write more complex sentences and figure out how to punctuate them to clearly communicate your meaning and voice, or, as John Green says, "facilitate clear communication."

If you have trouble with this, take a look on the web for sites and videos that will explain more and give you some places to practice. Also, take some time to look at a few more sentences in your writing or other writing to see if you can't find the subject and predicate. The better you get at seeing this in others' writing, the better you'll get at seeing it in your own writing. It's all a matter of practice and caring about making sense to your reader.

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<sup>1</sup> In general, you should avoid starting sentences with "and" and "but" in your formal writing. Typically, try to avoid that whenever you can. However, sometimes we can break the rules for the sake of artistry.

## COMBINING SENTENCES

As our sentences become more complex, one of the things we do is combine sentences and add extra information as you can see from the previous section. If we always write safely and just use simple sentences, our writing will sound choppy and simplistic, so learning to combine is very important. Here's the basic rule:

If you have two sentences you want to put together, you have to have something in between them.

You have three basic options:

**#1:** Simply create two different sentences separated by a period.

I am going to college. I hope to have a job with good benefits.

It seems like Joshua was born only a few years ago. Now he's forty years old.

Becoming a chemical engineer is my goal in life. I will achieve it with hard work.

While these sentences are clear, they are very simple, and if we write all of our sentences this way, we will create a very simplistic and choppy tone. Still, don't forget that a short sentence can carry a lot of weight and be very powerful. A short sentence surrounded by longer ones will stand out and make a strong point.

**#2:** Use a comma *and* one of the FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions) to combine them.

The FANBOYS are:

**F**or **A**nd **N**or **B**ut **O**r **Y**et **S**o

---

**WARNING: Always use a comma *before* FANBOYS that combine sentences.**

---

I am going to college, **so** I hope to have a job with good benefits.

It seems like Joshua was born only a few weeks ago, **but** now he's forty years old.

Becoming a chemical engineer is my goal in life, **and** I will achieve it with hard work.

Notice that in each of these, the comma *and* the FANBOYS are required. When you proofread your writing, look for both commas and FANBOYS. When you see either one, ask if you could make a full sentence from the information on each side.

If you can, then you need both the comma and the FANBOY. (Of course, there are other rules for commas, so if that one doesn't apply, move on to a test for those rules. They're discussed later.)

**#3:** Combine the sentences with a semicolon ( ; ).



**WARNING:** ONLY use this technique sparingly. Think about all of the unusual punctuation marks as if they are salt. While salt is necessary for our bodies, and it's often good for the taste of our food, too much of it can both be bad for our bodies and for our food. So, use them judiciously. This includes semicolons, colons, exclamation points, parentheses, and dashes. There's no problem with using them, but when you do, make sure you know the rules and understand *why* you are using them.

When do you use the semicolon to combine sentences? Use it when you are combining sentences that are *very* tightly related or show a *stark contrast*. In addition, you generally want to use it in writing that is more formal. Let's look at our examples again.

I am going to college; I hope to have a job with good benefits.

It seems like Joshua was born only a few years ago; now he's forty years old.

Becoming a chemical engineer is my goal in life; I'll achieve it with hard work.

Notice that we **do not** use any of the FANBOYS with the semicolon. Again, remember, don't overuse this technique. It will not make your writing better.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RUN-ON SENTENCES

Run-on sentences happen when you smash sentences together without showing where one ends and the next begins. There are two types of run-on sentences:

### **SENTENCESSENTENCE**

**Fused Sentences:** Sentences smashed together with no punctuation at all.

**I am working on this assignment the students are taking a test.**

### **SENTENCE,SENTENCE**

**Comma Splices:** Sentences connected by only a comma.

**I am working on this assignment, the students are taking a test.**

To figure out whether or not you have a run-on sentence you first have to be able to identify a complete sentence. Remember to have a complete sentence you must have a subject, predicate, and complete thought. Practicing identifying complete sentences will help you with all your writing, but most especially with this.

One way to find out if you have a run-on is to ask yourself if you can divide the suspect sentence into two complete sentences. Let's look at the sample sentence given above more closely. Can you divide this into two complete parts?

**I am working on this assignment the students are taking a test.**

As you'll remember from studying sentences, one of the first ways to check for a complete sentence is to ask what is happening in the sentence. In our example, we have two things happening:

**am working**  
**are taking**

Then we can ask who is completing these actions:

**I am**  
**Students are**

In both cases, we have a subject **and** a verb. The next question to ask is whether each part would make sense on its own.

**I am working on this assignment**  
**The students are taking a test.**

Now we can see that we have a subject, a predicate, and a complete thought for **each** part. In short, we have two full sentences. Now we just need to figure out how to punctuate them correctly.

**NOTE:** We can also fuse more than two sentences together, so don't just assume this happens with only two sentences.

#### *HOW TO FIX A RUN-ON*

There are a number of ways we can fix a run-on sentence. How you choose to fix it will create a specific feeling or effect.

**Use a period to separate each sentence.** Don't forget to capitalize the first word in each sentence.

I am working on this assignment. **T**he students are taking a test.

*The up side:* Using the period creates a feeling of each part being equally important. The period brings readers to a stop and shows a clear distinction between each part. Using a short, simple sentence can emphasize the content in it and make it stand out.

*The drawback:* Too many short sentences can make your writing choppy and overly simplistic.

**Use a comma *and* a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) to join the sentences.**

I am working on this assignment, **and** the students are taking a test.

*The up side:* This shows some sort of connection depending on the FANBOYS you choose. (Addition = and. Exception or contrast = but, yet. Options = or, nor. Logical conclusions = so, for.) Showing the connection helps readers understand how each point relates to the next.

*The drawback:* Overusing the same FANBOYS, or relying on just one style of combining can make your writing dull or predictable.



### Use a semicolon ( ; ) to join the sentences.

I am working on this assignment; the students are taking a test.

*The up side:* The semicolon shows a tight connection between the two ideas. It emphasizes the importance of the ideas working together or being part of one another.

*The drawback:* Many writers mistakenly use a semicolon as a comma. *It is not a comma;* don't use it like one. In addition, as with the other remedies listed above, if it is overused, it will dull your writing. *Use the semicolon sparingly.*



### Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb with a comma to join the sentences.

**Conjunctive adverbs** are words like the FANBOYS that are used to connect. They generally give your writing a higher level of formality. Do an internet search for them and try them out in your more formal writings

I am working on this assignment; **moreover**, the students are taking a test.

*The up side:* Because there are a number of conjunctive adverbs, you have many options that can add variety to your writing. Also, the conjunctive adverb shows the relationship between ideas. In the example above, using *moreover* shows that the most important part of the sentence is the fact that the students are taking a test.

*The drawback:* Again, using the same style of connection each time will make your writing bland.

### Use a subordinating conjunction to join the sentences.

**Subordinating conjunctions** are words like the FANBOYS that are used to connect. They show something is of less importance. Do an internet search for them and try them out in your writings.

**While I am working on this assignment**, the students are taking a test.

*The up side:* This style of writing turns one of the parts into a dependent clause (not a sentence). It is similar to using a conjunctive adverb. In this situation, it shows a dependence of one thing on another.

*The drawback:* Yep, you guessed it: using the same style of sentences every time can make your writing dull and predictable.

In the end, learning each of these techniques and using them in combination will help you not only get your ideas across clearly, but add a flow and logic to how those ideas relate to one another. In short, by using a combination of these techniques you will add style to your writing.

## ADDING MORE DETAILS

Sometimes we're adding more details, or extra information. That is another time when we need to use commas. While we'll look at commas in more depth later, let's take a quick look at this situation now.

Subject:	<b>Some people</b>
Extra info/details:	<b>, both young and old,</b>
Predicate:	<b>play videogames for hours on end.</b>

Notice how the extra information, *both young and old*, is surrounded by commas. When we have information in our sentences that can be taken out without compromising our basic meaning, we typically surround it with commas. This shows readers that information is not part of the base sentence—it's extra.

Clayton Wood, **my father**, was a great man.

Here, *my father* gives you extra details about who Clayton Wood was. The main point of the sentences is that he was a great man.

**While watching TV**, I was working on my essay.

In this case, *while watching TV* is the extra information, so we need the comma at the end of it.

Sometimes we're adding more details, **or extra information**.

In this last example, *or extra information* is simply a restatement of the idea *more details*. Here the comma goes before that extra information.

If the phrase you use can be taken out of the sentence, use commas around it. However, if taking it out of the sentence changes the meaning or keeps readers from fully understanding you need to leave the commas out. Check this out:

The sentence **that comes before this one** has an understood subject.

Here, I get rid of the "that comes before this one," how will you know which sentence I'm referring to? There are lots of sentences in this document so far.

## ADDING EMPHASIS

Okay, so far we've made sure we have all the necessary parts of a sentence (subject, predicate, and complete thought), and we've talked about how to combine sentences and set off extra information, but we can do other things with sentences that create emphasis and tone. Let's think about this by considering a famous quote and thinking about how punctuation in it creates a specific feeling. Besides the basic idea, what do you think makes this sentence memorable?

To err is human; to forgive, divine. --Alexander Pope

Technically, this should have *is* after *forgive*: To err is human; to forgive *is* divine. However, it has a weightier feel without it. Notice how it also places more emphasis on the last part. It's almost as if there's a pause or drumroll making way for a more forceful ending because the verb *is* is left out, and the comma takes its place:

To err is human; to forgive,

*Insert drumroll here*



***divine.***

Words are sounds, even when we are reading them. Good readers learn to hear the sound and pace, and they do this by reading the punctuation. Even when we don't think about the rules and technical issues, we see them.

It's just like that driving example discussed earlier. When we have been driving for a while, we don't necessarily think about every single rule; we start to do things correctly out of habit and custom. This keeps us from having to think about all the rules and lets us think about the more important things: getting to our destinations safely, or getting our point across correctly.

As you move through your education, begin to listen to not only what is being said, but also how it's being said. As you read your textbooks, imagine the voice that is speaking through it. Pay attention to the stops, pauses, and drumrolls. Hear the voice of the writer, not just the words.

## SOME PUNCTUATION BASICS

By now, you should already be able to see that punctuation is important to get your voice and sound across in writing. Knowing how to correctly use it will make you more comfortable with your writing and allow you to get your message across with the tone and inflection you hear it with.

### . ? ! TERMINAL MARKS

Terminal marks are simply the punctuation marks that end sentences: periods, question marks, and exclamation points. If you don't have one of these at the end of your sentence, you haven't finished it. They are also a key part of making a sentence complete.

Use periods for regular sentences. Question marks for questions. Exclamation points for exciting things. Make sure to be *very careful* when using exclamation points in formal writing. By and large, you should avoid using them as much as possible.

### , COMMAS

These are not all of the comma rules. I don't cover basic conventions—in addresses or city/state divisions, etcetera. I don't give you the technical intricacies. What I give you here are a few basic ways commas are used. In more technical grammar books the extra information rule is broken down into various methods, but we're going for simple, so if you want more than that, find your favorite grammar guru.

Just remember commas work to show smaller parts of the big thing—smaller parts of a sentence. They do that in very specific ways, so once you learn these, you're well on your way to being more comfortable with commas in your writing.

Some of these we've already covered, but it never hurts to take a second look at them.

**Comma Rule #1:** Use a comma *and* one of the FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions) to combine complete sentences.

The FANBOYS are:

For  
And  
Nor  
But  
Or  
Yet  
So

---

**WARNING:** Always use a comma *before* FANBOYS that combine sentences.

---

I am going to college, **so** I hope to have a job with good benefits.

It seems like Joshua was born only a few weeks ago, **but** now he's almost thirty years old, **so** I must be getting old!

Becoming a chemical engineer is my goal in life, **and** I will achieve it with hard work.

**Comma Rule #2:** Use commas around direct address and mild exclamations. This is technically part of the "extra information" rule, but bears a bit more explaining.

Direct address is when we are talking to someone and use their name or something that takes place of their name.

**Kelli**, what are you thinking?

**Dude**, what's going on?

In both of these examples, the words *Kelli* and *dude*, are showing who is being addressed in the sentence, but we don't need them there to get the basic point across, so we set them off with the commas as direct address.

An exclamation is any word we use to show excitement or emotion. Each of these sentences have that:

**Hey**, what's going on?

**Wait**, I want to tell you more!

**Darn,** I am bummed I missed that.

Here, these are words of emotion. If we're really excited, we might use the exclamation mark:

**Hey!** What's going on?

**Wait!** I want to tell you more!

**Darn!** I am bummed I missed that.

Either is correct. Which you choose to use depends on how exciting things are in your writing and how formal it is. Generally, you want to avoid exclamation points in formal writing.

**Comma Rule #3:** Use commas to separate *three or more* items in a list. This applies to a simple list like this one:

This semester I am taking **English, history, art, and P.E.**

Notice that there is a comma before the last item. In addition, notice that it goes *before* the *and*. Technically, this comma is in the gray area of requirement. Always put it in if something could be confusing. If not, you can omit it in casual and business writing.

Use it in formal writing and in your college writing. By the way, the last comma in a list that goes before the *and* is called an Oxford Comma.

This rule about lists of three or more also holds true for longer lists like this one:

While doing my work I often am **watching something on TV, cooking dinner, and trying to get some laundry done.**

**Comma Rule #4:** When we have information in our sentences that can be taken out without compromising our meaning, we typically surround it with commas. This shows readers that information is not part of the base sentence.

Clayton Wood, **my father**, was a great man.

Here, *my father* gives you extra details about who Clayton Wood was. The main point of the sentence is that he was a great man.

**While watching TV**, I was working on my essay.

In this case, *while watching TV* is the extra information, so we need the comma at the end of it. This is extra information that sets the scene for the sentence.

Sometimes we're adding more details, *or extra information*.

In this last example *or extra information* is simply a restatement of the idea *more details*. Here the comma goes before that extra information.

Another way we can set of extra information is by showing contrasting items.

Dogs rule, cats drool.

It's Facebook, **not Instagram**, the olds use.

Today, **not tomorrow**, is when you should read about commas.

Do this, not that.

To sum up this rule, if the phrase you use can be taken out of the sentence and you still have your subject, predicate, and base meaning left, use commas around it. However, if taking it out of the sentence changes the central meaning or keeps readers from fully understanding, and then you need to leave the commas out.

## COMBINING THE COMMA RULES

Of course, in normal writing, we generally combine these. Check this out:

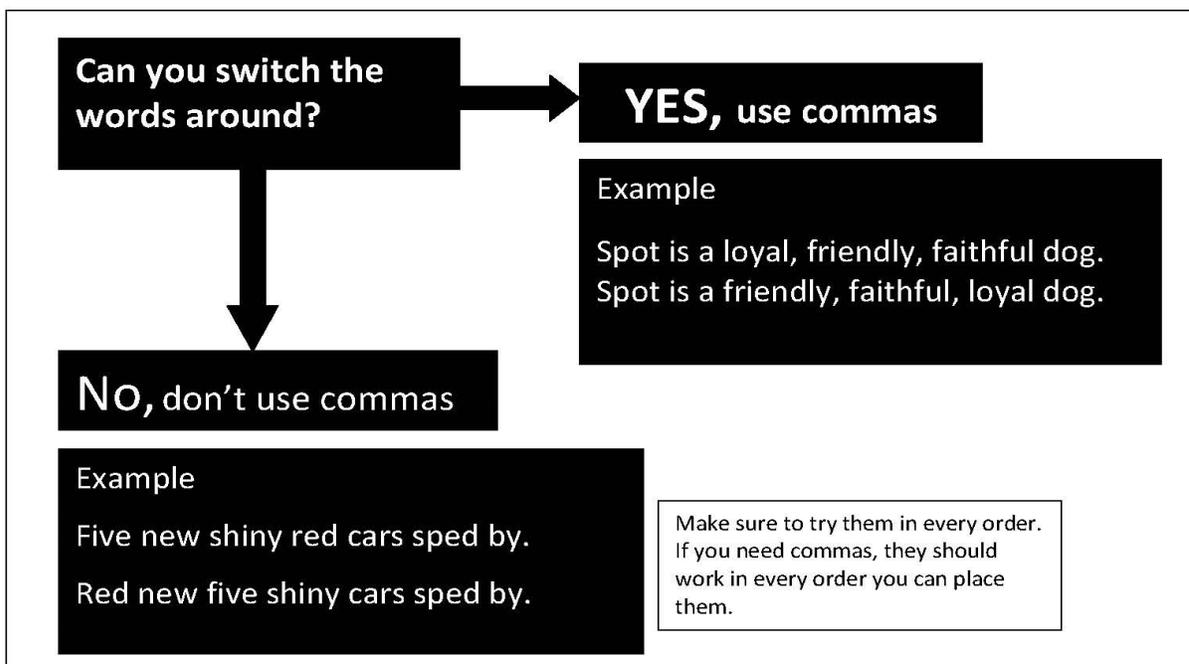
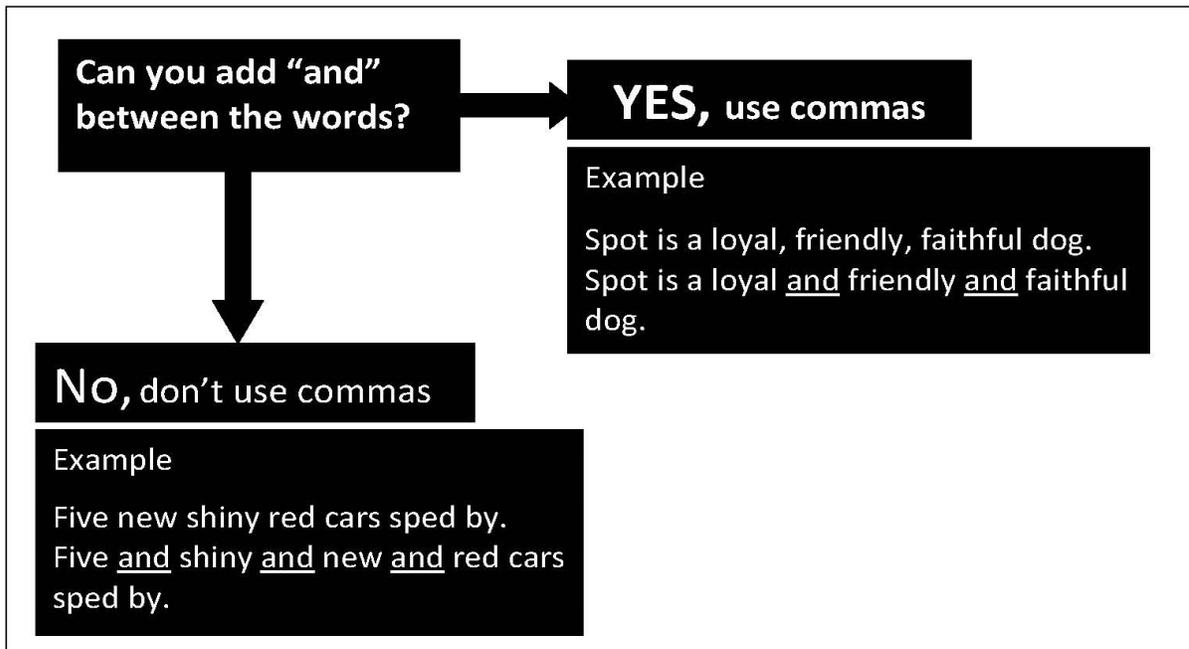
*(extra info)*  
 While I was looking out the window,  
*subject*  
 my dog Lil' Buddy, who is  
*(extra info)*  
 somewhat of a scallywag and at  
 times very sneaky, ran in and  
*predicate*  
 jumped on the counter, and  
*Connecting sentences*  
*subject*  
 much to my surprise, he started  
*predicate*  
 talking, saying, "Hey human,  
*direct address*  
 give me  
*(extra info)*  
 some bacon, eggs, and toast!"  
*list of more than 2 things*

*BONUS COMMA KNOWLEDGE*

One time commas are often confusing is when using a number of adjectives to describe something. Sometimes they get commas and sometimes they don't. Here's a flow chart to help you figure out whether or not you need them.

## Commas with Multiple Adjectives

To figure out whether or not you need commas, try these two tests.



## INTERMISSION FOR A SALTY TALE

Before beginning a discussion of the next section, we must pause for a story:



Long ago when I was first married, one of my husband's sisters-in-law brought over some fresh tamales to us around Christmastime. Now, if you're not familiar with the tamale making process, let me just say it's a labor-intensive one. It's not that tamales are that hard to make, it's simply that they take a lot of work. After she left, we were anxious to open them up and try them.

Biting into them, we immediately spit them out. They were so salty we couldn't eat them. I'm not just talking about a little bit of extra salt here. I'm talking about so much salt that we had to throw them away. What had been very good food, and something that was a product of both time and love, was ruined by too much of a good thing.

We all need salt. It is a vital part of our body's functions. It works as a preservative and has antiseptic qualities. However, we also know that too much salt in our diets and in our food can cause significant problems.

Why tell this story? Well, unusual forms of punctuation, (the semicolon, colon, dash, parentheses, and ellipsis) are like salt. When used in moderation, they are helpful and healthy in writing. When used to excess, they create a bad taste in the mouth that readers will often spit out. So, the moral of this little story is to use the following forms of punctuation wisely and sparingly. You don't want people spitting out your hard work.

### ; SEMICOLONS

There are two basic rules of semicolon usage you should know. We've covered the first one:



**Semicolon Rule #1:** Combine the sentences with a semicolon ( ; ) when you are combining sentences that have a tight relation or show stark contrast. Think of it as a soft period. In addition, you generally want to use it in writing that is more formal. Let's look at our examples again to review.

I am going to college; I hope to have a job with good benefits.

It seems like Joshua was born only a few years ago; now he's forty years old.

Becoming a chemical engineer is my goal in life; I will achieve it with hard work.

Notice that we do not use any of the FANBOYS with the semicolon. Again, remember, don't overuse this technique. It will not make your writing better.

The second rule of semicolon usage combines comma rule #2 and comma rule #3.

**Semicolon Rule #2:** Use semicolons to separate things in a list when each thing has extra information in it. Here is an example:

While doing my homework, I am often watching something on TV, most often documentaries and comic book movies; cooking dinner, which on school nights is likely to be something that goes straight from the freezer to the oven; and trying to get some laundry done, a chore that's never ending.

As you can see this is a very complex sentence, and this a technique you won't use very often, but when you do, you need to make sure and punctuate correctly.




---

I know! That rule contradicts what I said earlier: Don't use a semicolon like a comma! And I want to repeat, **don't use a semicolon like a comma!** At least, **not unless you have extra information in a list.** Really, that's the **ONLY** time it works like a comma.

It's **very rare**, and I've only had to use it that way once or twice in my more than half-century of life, so if you're sprinkling semicolons all over your writing, ask yourself why. Are you using them like commas? Is your punctuation making things too salty?

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While doing my homework, I am often  
<sup>1</sup> watching something on TV, <sup>Extra Info</sup> most often  
documentaries and comic book movies;  
<sup>2</sup> cooking dinner, <sup>Extra Info</sup> which on school nights is  
likely to be something that goes straight  
from the freezer to the oven; <sup>3</sup> and trying  
to get some laundry done, <sup>Extra Info</sup> a chore that's  
never ending.

## : COLONS



Colons are used to prepare readers for a list, a definition, specific explanation of a term or idea, or a quote that is a full sentence or more.

**Colon Rule #1:** If the words **before** the colon *cannot* stand on their own as a complete sentence, do not use the colon.

**✗ For example:**

books, buttons, and shoes are random items I just thought of.

Since “for example” is not a complete sentence, the colon is wrong here. This also happens a lot with “such as.”

**✗ I sometimes think up random words for these sample sentences such as:**

bookworm, machinery, and serendipity.

“I sometimes think up random words for these sample sentences such as” is not a complete sentence, so no colon! In fact, we don’t need anything there!

Don't use a colon in either of those cases. When you use "for example" and "such as" in a sentence, make sure to stop and think if you're tempted to put the colon in. Ask yourself if you have a complete sentence before the colon.

**Colon Rule #2:** Use colons to prepare readers for a list. For this to be correct, you must make sure that the opening part of the sentence is a complete sentence.

**There are four cardinal directions:**

north, east, west, south.

Notice that the first part, “There are four cardinal directions,” can be a sentence of its own. In the following sentence, you don’t use a colon because the words before the list are not a complete sentence.

**The four cardinal directions are**

north, east, west, and south.

On its own, the first part is not a sentence. It’s also not extra information. So, don’t separate these parts.

Here's an example of correct colon usage:

My parents gave me three gifts:

a good attitude, an appreciation of hard work, and an understanding of the importance of having fun.

As you can see, *My parents gave me three gifts* is a complete sentence. I don't have to tell you what they gave me, but since I do that, I put the colon before the list.

Just remember the basic colon rule: the part before the colon has to be a complete sentence.

**Colon Rule #3:** Colons are used to prepare readers for a specific explanation of a term or idea. In this case, it's almost as the colon is like an equals sign (=).

There is one thing you must have to be a good student: curiosity.

In this case, *curiosity* is an explanation of what it is you must have to be a good student. Of course, we could write that sentence this way:

To be a good student you must have curiosity.

Note how using the colon gives it a different feel. This is another example of a moment when you must think about the tone and feel you want your writing to have. Each version is correct, but each version has a different feel. *Again, note that in the first example, the first part before the colon is a full sentence on its own.*

**Colon Rule #4:** Colons are used to prepare readers for a quote that is a full sentence or more. Make sure the quote begins with a capital letter. Again, make sure you have a complete sentence before the colon.

I think one of my favorite ideas about writing is summed up by William Strunk in his book *The Elements of Style*: “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

Notice how the quote begins with a capital letter since it's a full sentence. Also, note how the period at the end goes inside the quotation marks (more on that later). Finally, *once again the first part of the sentence is a sentence that can stand on its own.*

**Colon Rule #5:** Use a colon to divide a title from a subtitle.

Some works have not only the main title, but also have a subtitle. Note the title of this book: *Writing down the Basics: An Everyday Guide to Grammar and Writing*. When you use a source in your formal writing, make sure to check and see if it has a subtitle that you need to include when you mention or cite it.

When you title your formal papers, you may include a subtitle. Often one part of the title will be something rather creative, and the other will be more descriptive. If you do include a subtitle in a formal paper, use that colon!

Just for fun, here are some books with wacky subtitles:

- *The Telling Room: A Tale of Love, Betrayal, Revenge, and the World's Greatest Piece of Cheese*
- *Moby Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost At Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them*
- *Love is a UFO: Oscar Updike's Incredibly Intelligent Observations on Life, Death and Other Freaky Phenomena*
- *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*
- *Stop Dressing Your Six-Year-Old Like a Skank: A Slightly Tarnished Southern Belle's Words of Wisdom*
- *Newton's Flaming Laser Sword, Or: Why Mathematicians and Scientists Don't Like Philosophy but Do It Anyway*
  - (This is a really great article! Read it here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20111114041242/http://school.maths.uwa.edu.au/~mike/Newtons%20Flaming%20Laser%20Sword.pdf>; okay, maybe it's just proof that I'm a nerd.)

In the end, remember that except for titles with subtitles, you need a full sentence before the colon. Keep that rule in mind, and you'll be golden.

## ' APOSTROPHES

The apostrophe is used to indicate missing letters in contractions and to show possession.

**Apostrophe Rule #1:** Use apostrophes to indicate that letters have been left out a contraction. We use them for contractions like *they're* (they are), *can't* (cannot), and *you're* (you are).

**Apostrophe Rule #2:** Use apostrophes to show possession or that something belongs to someone or something.

My **mother's house** is in West Texas.

This shows that the house, which belongs to my mother, is in West Texas.

My **sister's shoes** are always clean.

This shows that the shoes that belong to my one sister are clean.

Now, the trick comes along when we're talking about more than one person or thing. If that's the case, then we just add the apostrophe *after* the final -s.

My **sisters' shoes** are always clean.

That means that I have more than one sister, and all of them keep their shoes clean.

The simple way to figure this out is to ask if you're talking about something that someone or something owns. Then ask if it's more than one person or thing who is doing the owning.

### **DON'T FORGET THIS PIECE OF ADVICE:**

If it's just plural (more than one) and it isn't belonging to anyone in the sentence, DON'T USE AN APOSTROPHE, just add the -s!

**Look, there are four dogS over there!**

### **- THE HYPHEN**

The hyphen, just one keystroke -, is used to connect two words when they have a different meaning together than they do on their own.

Some people like a **super-soft** mattress to sleep on.

If we don't have the hyphen there we're saying that some people like mattresses that are super (really good) and soft. Instead, we want to say super-soft to indicate that the mattresses are extremely soft. The way to check this one is to divide it into two sentences and ask whether they both get the meaning across:

Some people like a **soft mattress** to sleep on.

Some people like a **super mattress** to sleep on.

Here you can see that *soft* and *super* on their own are something different than *super-soft* together. Think about this example: We should write well-developed paragraphs.

We should write **developed** paragraphs.

We should write **well** paragraphs.

While it makes sense to write *developed* paragraphs, writing *well* paragraphs just doesn't work. Good paragraphs, those are the kind we want!

#### —THE DASH



The dash, two keystrokes --, is used to show a shift in thought in a sentence or emphasize a particular point. (Many word processors will combine them into one dash, but you'll notice that it's still longer than the hyphen.) Basically, it's another option for setting off extra information. When you need a bit more than a comma to make something extra stand out, the dash can do it for you. It can appear in sets in the middle or at the end of a sentence.

Emphasize a point:

My vacation--**which was much too short**--was quite lovely.

Show a shift in thought:

Give it a good—**no, your best**—try.

#### ( ) PARENTHESES

As a rule, avoid parentheses in your sentences if at all possible. (You will use parentheses to enclose in-text citations when using formal documentation styles, but that's a different concept and section.) Parentheses in basic writing follow the same conventions as the dash when used to add emphasis or give extra information; however, they are more subtle and not as loud.



Manley Madison Wood (**my great-great-great grandfather**) was born in 1808.

As you can see, it would be just as easy to use commas here, and the wiser decision most of the time.



We met Rosa, Sunny (**Joe's sister**), and Gilbert at the library.

The example above is a great place from them. If we used commas instead of them, it would seem like we met four people: Rosa, Sunny, Joe's sister, and Gilbert. Notice too that the comma goes after "(Joe's sister)" as that keeps Sunny—the sister's name—with that note.

Of course, the second sentence in this introduction to parentheses uses them. In that case, I'm giving you some information that relates to a connected but different topic: use of parentheses in documentation as opposed to use of parentheses in your writing. That is the most acceptable use of parenthesis outside of documentation. Here's another example of that:



My alma mater, NMSU (**Go Aggies!**), is a great school.

There, I'm just inserting an exclamation to support the college's mascot. It really has nothing to do with the sentence. You can see why this wouldn't be acceptable in formal writing. In formal writing, we work toward straight-forward, concise information.

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Parentheses can be REALLY salty!

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## [ ] BRACKETS

Brackets are most often used within quotes you integrate into your writing. When you quote something, the quotation marks are saying that you've transcribed the text exactly as it is. Sometimes you need to change or clarify things and the brackets show that you have inserted those words or letters. Now, it's important to remember that you should never change it so that it has a different meaning. That is unethical and undermines your credibility.

Often when you quote something, the writer may be using a pronoun or skipping a word that is given or implied in the text before. But what if you don't want to quote the text before that part? Take a look at this by Clarissa Pinkola Estes:

The drive toward Life is protective, thoughtful, vulnerable, and invested in immaculate love. It is this last that marks the difference between a wise heart muddy with real life experiences in the trenches and a dry heart that functions on rote concepts alone.

Now, it's a great quote, but suppose you only want to use the last part of the final sentence. In that case, you'll have to clarify what the *it* that begins the sentence refers to by using brackets *and* put in ellipsis marks to show you left out some words:

**[Love. . .]** marks the difference between a wise heart muddy with real life experiences in the trenches and a dry heart that functions on rote concepts alone.

Here's another example where I've decided to make the quote more direct and instructional:

Original: "We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect." — Anaïs Nin

Integrated: Anaïs Nin said that we should be "**[writing]** to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect."

Other times you may need to *change the word form* to get a quote to flow smoothly with the grammar of your sentence. You may need to get it fit with the verb tense/time you're using:

Original: "I love teaching!"

Integrated: In looking back on her life, Kelli said that she "love**[d]** teaching!"

If there's a mistake or typo in the work, you can show that by putting the word *sic* (Latin for *thus*) after the mistake to show you didn't mess things up. Make sure *sic* is in italics, as you're using a foreign word in your English-language writing.

She said, "I'd rather have chocolate cake then **[sic]** anything else."

Of course, if we know what an incorrect word was supposed to be—and you need to make sure you can verify that—we can just fix it in the brackets:

She said, "I'd rather have chocolate cake **[than]** anything else."

You may be indicating that you changed capitalization, though often this is not necessary.

According to Kelli, "**[I]**t's important to remember that you should never change it so that it has a different meaning."

That, of course would be clearer, if I did it this way since the *it* is vague:

According to Kelli, "It's important to remember that you should never change **[a quote]** so that it has a different meaning."

You may change words to make something more accessible to any reader:

Original: Albert Einstein said, "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value."

Updated: Albert Einstein said, "Try not to become a **[person]** of success, but rather try to become a **[person]** of value."

In short, the brackets show that you changed something in a quote. Remember, you only do that for clarity, to make it flow with the grammar of your sentence, or to fix a known typo. **DO NOT** change the meaning. That is unethical.

### ...THE ELLIPSIS

The ellipsis is typed as three periods each separated by a space. You should make sure that your ellipsis is done with all of the periods appearing on the same line. You may need to add a space or two after the last period in the ellipsis. If you need to, you can get rid of the spaces between them. As Jack Lynch of Rutgers University notes, "In electronic communication it's sometimes convenient, even necessary, to run them together, since line-wrap can be unpredictable."

The ellipsis is used to show you've left words out of a quote. When writing in MLA style, use the brackets to show you put the ellipsis in quoted material. (See MLA section)

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* the main character asks "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer [...] or to take arms against a sea of troubles" (3.1.67).

If you are leaving out more than a full sentence, use the ellipsis and then include a period as well, for a total of 4: [...].

The ellipsis is also used to show a long pause or change in thought. This should be used in less formal or more creative writing.

I just remembered what I was going to say...oh, I forgot again.



### “ ” QUOTATION MARKS

As with other punctuation marks, quotation marks should be used responsibly. Pleasantly, their usage is straightforward. There are two times you use quotation marks.

**Quotation Mark Rule #1:** Use quotation marks to set off words that are used in non-traditional ways.



Okay, so that's easy. The hard part is knowing when to do that. Think about it this way if I say this book is "free," don't you get the feeling that there's some catch, or that it's not really free? The quotation marks give it an extra emphasis that implies that it's not truly free. The same thing applies to words like "cool," or "bad." Let's face it, most people get it.

Putting the quotes around words whose meanings are clear simply makes them sound forced and fake, and is often condescending to your readers. So, use quotation marks in this way very, very carefully. This is another instance of salt in writing.

**Quotation Mark Rule #2:** Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes—the exact words someone has said or written. That means you put them around any quote that comes from someone else. That includes something you might quote from something you’ve read or heard. In that case, you make sure to type it up exactly as you read it or heard it.

If you put it in your own words (paraphrase), don’t use quotation marks, just make sure to note who said it.

#### *PUNCTUATING IN AND AROUND QUOTATION MARKS*

When you use quotes, you’ll often have some other punctuation next to them. Does it go inside or outside? Well, it depends.

The rules below, apply to written American English. In the UK and other places, they punctuate around quotes differently, so make sure you look up the standard for the audience you’re writing for.

**'** The only instance that I can presently think of that you put any punctuation *inside the first* quotation mark, is when you have an apostrophe.

She said, “**’60s music is really cool.**”

Here the apostrophe shows we left something out: ’60s = 1960s.

**, .** When you use quotation marks in writing American English, *commas* and *periods* go *inside the final* quotation mark, “like so.”

**;** **:** *Semicolons* and *colons* are always placed *outside the final* quotation mark in American English.

**! ?** *Exclamation points* and *question marks* are placed with the part they go with.

If the exclamation mark or question mark **only goes with the quote**, place it **inside** the final quote mark.

She looked at me and asked, “What do you want to do today**?**”

Here, **only the quote is a question**, so the question mark goes inside the final quotation mark. If the exclamation mark or question mark goes with **the whole sentence**, place it **outside** the final quote mark.

Did she really ask, “What do you want to do today”?

Here the **whole sentence is a question**, so place the question mark at the very end.

#### *PUNCTUATING HE SAID/SHE SAID QUOTES*

Here are the basic rules for introducing your quotations, though you need to study the use of commas with quotation marks specifically to understand all of the nuances.

If you have a **phrase that could be translated into “he/she said,”** then put a comma after it. E.g.: she notes, he writes, Smith points out, etc.

Wood said, "Learning punctuation rules is important"

"I'm doing great," she replied.

If you have a **full and complete sentence** before the quote, and there's no “he/she said” kind of phrasing right before the quote, use the colon to introduce it: “Like I could do here.” Just make sure that first part is a full sentence.

My mother had a favorite saying: "You can be happy if you want to be."

Wood emphasized one point quite often: "Learning punctuation rules is important"

In any other case, ask how you would punctuate the sentence if the quote marks weren't there.

---

**Note:** Don't triple up punctuation if you have a quote with an exclamation or question mark in the beginning or middle of your sentence. You can think of it as the bigger punctuation canceling out the smaller one.

---

“You look marvelous!” **he** said.

**NOT**

“You look marvelous!,” **he** said.

#### *QUOTING A SOURCE WITH QUOTES OR DIALOGUE AND EXPOSITION*

Sometimes, especially when you are writing about a story or a non-fiction work that is telling a story, you may want to quote something in your essay that has both some dialogue in it as well as some exposition (non-dialogue writing). In that case, you need to put the whole thing in a quote, but what do you do with the quotes inside the quotes? Here are some answers.

## The Quote in the Quote

The first basic to remember is that if you want to quote something with a quote already in it, then you change the inside quotation marks (the ones that were in the original text) to single quotation marks—the apostrophe:

Original quote:

Experts in the field call it “referencing.” We reference, either intentionally or otherwise, to lifestyles represented to us (in the media or in real life) that we find attractive.

As used in an essay:

According to Dachis, “Experts in the field call it ‘referencing.’ We reference, either intentionally or otherwise, to lifestyles represented to us (in the media or in real life) that we find attractive.”

So, simply change any quotation marks to singles. If you have a quote in a quote in a quote, then just go back and forth making sure you have the regular quotation marks (doubles) on the outside: “ ‘ “” ’ ”.

If you are using a quote from a literary work, you may find you are quoting dialog that goes back and forth between characters and has some exposition woven in. Look at this quote from the story “The Perfect Match” by Ken Liu:

“Tilly doesn’t just tell you what you want,” Jenny shouted. “She tells you what to think. Do you even know what you really want any more?”

Sai paused for a moment.

“Do you?” she pressed.

Here, I need to fill you in on a few things we haven’t gotten to real quickly. If you’re quoting a long quote, you treat it differently than just putting it in quotation marks. In MLA, a documentation style used in English classes, you put anything that’s **more than 4** lines long, once it’s typed up, in a block quote. That means you type it up and then indent it (scoot it over), just like I’ve done with the example above. However, you don’t use quote marks around it. Scooting it over shows it’s a quote. The indentation takes place of the quote marks.

Now, even if the example above wasn’t four lines long, we’d still indent it because it has the paragraph breaks.

Integrated into an essay it would look like this:

One of the key moments in the story is when Jenny asks Sai about where his knowledge ends and Tilly’s begins:

“Tilly doesn’t just tell you what you want,” Jenny shouted. “She tells you what to think. Do you even know what you really want any more?”

Sai paused for a moment.

“Do you?” she pressed.

At this point, he can’t even answer the question, but rather just walks away. This is a clear indication that he is troubled by the relationship he has with his computer assistant, and it’s...

Notice how we don’t need to use the quotations around the whole thing because by scooting it over (indenting it) we are showing it’s a quote. So, we just leave the quotation marks around the dialogue.

However, this is a quote of 3 paragraphs. In the story, the layout uses block format, which is single-spaced with a skipped line between each paragraph instead of tabs.

In an academic essay, we use tabs. So, even though the original work is formatted differently, we have to make this fit our format. In that case, it will look like this:

One of the key moments in the story is when Jenny asks Sai about where his knowledge ends and Tilly’s begins:

“Tilly doesn’t just tell you what you want,” Jenny shouted. “She tells you what to think. Do you even know what you really want any more?”

Sai paused for a moment.

“Do you?” she pressed.

At this point, he can’t even answer the question, but rather just walks away. This is a clear indication that he is troubled by the relationship he has with his computer assistant, and it’s...

Don’t forget, even if the quote is shorter than the required length for a block quote, if it goes across more than one paragraph, we still block it so that we can show the paragraph breaks. However, don’t indent the first paragraph, just the ones after that. That’s why the first paragraph in the quote above is not indented.

## WE ALL HAVE TO AGREE

One of the most common errors—after sentence fragments and run-on sentences—in sentence construction is agreement. If you'll keep your eye on the logic of a sentence, you'll be able to sort this out. It's all about making sure things match in gender, number, and point of view.

### *SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT*

The subject, who or what the sentence is about, must match the verb, the action that goes with the subject.

Subject	<b>He</b>	
Verb	<b>is</b>	<b>going to win the race.</b>

Subject	<b>They</b>	
Verb	<b>are</b>	<b>going to win the race.</b>

It gets confusing when we have more than one subject. Then we have to look to the conjunction.

Subject	<b>Either Joe <i>or</i> Thomas</b>	
Verb	<b>is</b>	<b>going to win the race.</b>

This translates into two sentence like this:

**Joe is** going to win the race. OR **Thomas is** going to win the race.

In both cases, the word *is* is the correct verb. We're not saying they both are going to win, just one of them. However, that's not always the case.

Subject	<b>Joe <i>and</i> Thomas</b>	
Verb	<b>are</b>	<b>going to win the race.</b>

In this sentence we have the *and*, which says they **both** are going to win. Here, we can translate it to this:

**They are** going to win the race.

Here I substituted the people's names with a pronoun to check my agreement. This often helps so that you can see whether it matches or not.

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N.B.: If you are working in English as your second language (or third, or fourth) then there is a certain part of verb usage that must simply be memorized. Study, study, study. Read, read, and read more. Good advice for everyone.

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When the subject is separated from the verb by extra information, don't count the extra people or things in trying to figure out how to match it.

Subject	<b>The teacher</b>
Extra information	,as well as her students,
Verb	<b>was ready for the holiday.</b>

**The teacher *was* ready NOT The teacher *were* ready.**

If the subject ends in an –s but is a singular thing, make sure the verb is singular.

Subject	<b>Mathematics</b>
Verb	<b>is</b> a hard subject for many people.

Here mathematics is actually only one thing, even though it ends with an –s.

If the subject is a title or noun phrase (a group of words used to indicate one thing), consider that subject as singular.

Subject	<b>“Good Country People”</b>
Verb	<b>is</b> a great story by Flannery O’Connor.

*People* is plural, and we wouldn't usually say “people is,” but in this case, “People” is part of the title. We could say it this way:

Subject	<b>That</b>
Verb	<b>is</b> a great story by Flannery O’Connor.

Notice how I've again replaced the specific or proper noun with a pronoun to check my agreement. It's a good way to test for this.

#### *PRONOUN REFERENCE AND AGREEMENT*

The harder task in terms of agreement, but certainly not rocket science, is pronoun agreement. One of the reasons it is often challenging is because we try to avoid gender-biased language. For example, sometimes you'll see a sentence like this:

Single subject	<b>If a <i>student</i></b> wants to get credit for class,
Plural pronoun	<b><i>they</i> have</b> to pay tuition.

In this case, the sentence starts with one person—the student—but it ends with more than one person—they. If you're trying to avoid gender-bias, try to make it plural.

Plural subject	<b>If <i>students</i></b> want to get credit for class,
Plural pronoun	<b><i>they</i></b> have to pay tuition.

Often people will try to use the phrasing *he or she*. This can be awkward and bulky and should be avoided. Here's an example:

If ***a student*** wants to get credit for class, ***he or she*** must pay tuition.

Notice how this sentence is not as smooth as the example above it, it also assumes a knowledge of gender. If, for some reason, you must use "he or she," make sure to write out the *or* in formal writing; don't use the slash: he/she.

When ***a student*** studies hard, ***he or she*** will surely succeed.

However, grammar, like the times, is a changing.' The way we talk changes over time, and the way we write changes too. In the past they/their was considered both a plural pronoun and a singular word. It is again acceptable to use they/their as a singular pronoun (this also applies to singular pronouns like each). So one way to avoid the gender bias is to simply go with one of those.

If you can match according to the rules, do so. If you know gender, use the appropriate one. You should match anytime you can, but if you can't simply go with the plural, as in

When ***students*** study hard, ***they*** will succeed.

*GENERAL AGREEMENT*

Additionally, we have to have a general or logical agreement among the ideas in our sentences. Look at this sentence; can you figure out what parts don't match?

Then I heard *three* words I'd been longing to hear: "**Will you marry me?**"

Did you find the error? How many words are in the phrase "will you marry me?" Yep, four words, not three! Try this one out:

If a student wants to learn more efficiently, *you* should get enough rest.

Technically that means if *you*, dear reader, get enough rest, all students who want to learn more efficiently will.

The sentence moved from focusing on one unknown person (a student) to the specific reader (you). This is especially common with a shift to the word *you*. When you proofread, look for *you*. First, ask if it's appropriate in the kind of writing you're doing (more on that later), and then make sure you haven't mismatched things in your sentence.

This is often discussed in grammar guides as a shift in point of view. Find out more about it by consulting your favorite grammar guide.

## WORD CHOICE AND USAGE

One of the key things that will show off your knowledge and skill as a writer is choosing the correct words. There are some words you simply must know and study like *their*, *there*, and *they're*. Most grammar guides have whole sections related to this issue.

In terms of choosing the right words, heed Mark Twain's advice:

The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning. ("Letter")

Think about how very different those things are. Make sure you use the right word. That doesn't mean the biggest word, the most formal word, or the word that is least recognizable.

In general, the best writing is clean, simple, and straightforward. If a bigger more complex word is the one that is most accurate and best gets your ideas and intentions across, then use it. Otherwise, keep it simple.

Also, make sure to avoid vague words and phrasing. Think about what the images the following sentences, which are both communicating some basic information about a person, conjure.

The woman is nice.

My mother is warm and affectionate.

Because of the specific words, the second sentence creates a much better picture.

Make sure to avoid clichés and overused phrases. If you've heard it thousands of times, your reader has too.

Finally, you probably already know which words you confuse---their, there, they're? You're, your? Too, to, two? It's, its? Once you identify them, take the time to learn how to use them, and when you proofread your writing, pay close attention to those words.

Me? Well, I always want to write *it's*—I just can't help but put that apostrophe in there whether handwriting or typing, so I always proofread for that. Plus, I'm super glad that grammar check knows the difference between *affect* and *effect*! I can't tell you how many times I've looked them up then had to figure out if I wanted the noun or the verb.

Remember, with writing it's really not about getting it right the first time; rather, it's about getting it right in the end!

## SOME NOTES ON GENERAL CONVENTION

There are a number of rules in writing that don't often fit in specific categories. These conventions are simple straightforward guidelines. Here are a few of them. Make sure to review these occasionally until you know them; getting them wrong is not something you should lose points or credibility for. Once you move into a specific field or into your workplace, they may have conventions for these things you need to learn as well. However, they are simple rules you always follow, and it is worth your time to learn them, as they'll make you look even smarter.

**Spelling out Numbers:** A basic rule of thumb is to spell out numbers from 1-10. The technical rule is to spell out numbers that are written in one word. That includes hyphenated ones: one, twenty-three.

- The rules for formal use of numbers in formal documentation are covered in the MLA and APA sections.

**Using Symbols:** When using a symbols in your writing you need to make sure to *match your symbols*. Either spell out *percent* and the number, or use the symbols for each: *eight percent* **or** *8%*. If the percentage starts a sentence, spell it out. With money, you would write either \$8 **or** eight dollars.

**Using Words as Words:** When you use a word as a word, italicize it. So, if I say, "the word *serendipity* has an interesting sound," I do what I just did: italicize it.

**Using Foreign Words:** When using foreign words in your writings, italicize them.

**Titles:** When writing out a title you treat it in a specific way to indicate it is a title and to tell readers what kind of work it is. This rule applies wherever you write titles, and is **not** exclusive to the English classroom. While some publications may have their own rules, you should follow the rules below unless instructed to do otherwise.

**Titles of Short Works:** Titles of short works should be placed in quotation marks.

- **Short Works:** short stories, poems, songs, articles, essays, one page of a website, an episode of a TV show, etc.

**Titles of Longer Works:** Italics are used for long works. If you're handwriting, underlining is an acceptable alternative.

- **Long Works:** Books, Movies, Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, an album, the title of a whole website, etc.

Think about the difference in the time it takes you to go through the work. For example, to watch an episode of a TV show only takes a little while, whereas watching every episode of the TV show would take a great deal longer. So, the title of the TV show *The Wire* is italicized; however, the episode "The Target" is put in quotation marks.

## WRITING: FROM SMALL TO LARGE

In college, you will most often write essays, and as such, this section focuses mostly on them. However, outside of the academic world, you may find yourself writing email, memos, letters, blogs, brochures, and other works. The advice in this section can also be applied to those types of writing. Remember, in this day and age, writing often does not stop after college, so knowing the basics of both formal and informal writing is key to developing both your professional and personal image in those things you have to write.

### PARAGRAPHS

Paragraphs are units of sentences that build the points and smaller ideas you use in your writing to create the overall point. Making sure that your paragraphs are neither too short nor too long, and that they stay focused and are well developed can be challenging, but with practice, you will see how they work to more clearly convey your point. The basics below provide some general information on major paragraph concerns, but do not discuss them fully. Consult your grammar handbook or an online grammar resource for a complete discussion of paragraphing.

### TOPIC SENTENCES

Most paragraphs should have an opening sentence that points toward the main point of the paragraph. I say most, because there are some more artistic forms of paragraphs that will not use a formal topic sentence. We will discuss those later in the Personal/Familiar Essays section.

A topic sentence guides your reader toward your main point. It's important to remember that at any point in your writing, you know what you're saying, but your reader can't read your mind. I'm always taken back to when my son was very young. At times, he'd walk up to me and say something like "Mom, did you decide about that?" (I was very good at saying "I'll have to think about that" when he asked something.) Now, I knew that he was talking about something we discussed earlier, but when he asked, I might have been writing a paper, doing dishes, or any number of things, so *that* had no context and I'd have to ask him "Think about what?" That's what a good topic sentence does: it gives your readers context for the topic.

Let's look at a paragraph and then add a topic sentence to it. I think you'll really see the difference.

I went to the store, and it was packed with humans of all sizes. They pushed and pulled, never saying "excuse me," or "pardon me." On the bus, I stood with my hands wrapped around two cumbersome bags, wondering if no one realized that at eighty years old this was a difficult task. Still, no one offered me a seat. Then, just when I thought I

was safe, my neighbor came over and announced that she'd be keeping her five newborn puppies right outside my door. I'd been listening to them howl for the last week; now the din would only increase.

My, this lady has problems. In addition, she's doing a lot of things in this paragraph. However, the big question is "what do all of these things have to do with one another?" The topic sentence will provide an answer to that question. See what you think:

**Bad manners are rampant in our society, and this is apparent after the day I had yesterday.** I went to the store, and it was packed with humans of all sizes. They pushed and pulled, never saying "excuse me," or "pardon me." On the bus, I stood with my hands wrapped around two cumbersome bags, wondering if no one realized that at eighty years old this was a difficult task. Still, no one offered me a seat. Then, just when I thought I was safe, my neighbor came over and announced that she'd be keeping her five newborn puppies right outside my door. I'd been listening to them howl for the last week; now the din would only increase.

Here, the first sentence tells you what all of these things have to do with one another. It unifies the paragraph and gives it context. In short, you can think about each paragraph as a mini-essay. It should have a topic sentence that is followed by sentences that supports or explains it.

## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS AND A THESIS

One type of paragraph you'll have to write for every essay is the introduction. Before we go any further, please know that just because this paragraph comes first, you don't have to write it first. Think of a person who is going to have a baby two years from now. Is there any way she can introduce you to that child today? Of course not. It's not until she has the baby that she can do the introduction.

The same is true of an introduction to an essay. Sometimes it's better to start writing the body of the essay—explaining those main points—and later come back to your introduction. Of course, sometimes you may know exactly what you want to say in your introduction, so it might hit the page first. Whatever the case, your introductions should get readers thinking about the topic of your essay and provide a clear thesis. Here we need to stop and talk a bit about the difference between a topic and a thesis.

Every essay you write will be about a topic—some broad idea, but under the umbrella of that broad general idea, you will be focusing on a more specific idea, your thesis. Imagine you're going to make a cake; you may walk into the kitchen to make a cake (your topic), but you will have to decide what kind of cake to make (your thesis). It is, after all, unusual to make a vanilla-chocolate-banana-strawberry-coconut-lemon cake. I'm not saying it's impossible, but for the most part, we focus on only one or two flavors when making a cake. This is what you should do when you write an essay. To cover every aspect of a topic in one essay is as difficult as making a

cake with every flavor you can think of. Something that covers that much ground is suited for a book, not an essay.

So what does a thesis look like? Just like focusing on those one or two flavors in a cake, your thesis is the focus of your essay. It, like the introduction, is something that might not be fully solidified until you've written the whole essay. In the end, it is one concise sentence that expresses the main point you want your readers to know after they've read your essay. It should be expressed in one full and complete sentence that is a statement. Do not express your thesis in a question.

Additionally, your thesis should be a statement that requires more discussion and explanation. To say "the sky is blue" may be arguable in scientific communities, but beyond a scientific discussion of why the sky appears blue when viewed from Earth, there's not much to say about it. It is much too close to a fact to be something that can be discussed, proven, or weighed as pointed out in our definition of *essay*. However, to say "Various shades of blue in Vincent Van Gogh's paintings reflect his changing views and attitudes" is something subjective; it's something we'd have to explain and discuss. That is what makes it a good thesis.

That's an example for a very formal essay, but we also should think about how a thesis might work in a personal essay. In that case, we still need to have a controlling sentence that expresses our main idea. If we were writing about a significant person, we would want a sentence that expresses the overall effect of that person in terms of what we talk about. If I were writing an essay about my mom, I might have a thesis that goes something like this:

Throughout my life, my mother has not just been a moral compass and basis for my life's philosophy, she has also been my hero.

With the two examples of theses pointed out so far, I have gone beyond just the main topic, the color of the sky in Van Gogh's paintings and the importance of my mom in my life, and focused on very specific points.

If you are lucky enough to know what you want to express in your essay and you have a clear and specific thesis, you will know exactly what to talk about in your essay. If you can't quite come up with your thesis before you start your essay, developing that one sentence once you finish will help you clarify what you're talking about, and allow you to make sure that your entire essay is staying on track.

Now your thesis should go at the end of your introductory paragraph for the most part. So what goes before that? Well, you have a number of options. Generally, these are called "hooks" as they "hook the reader in." I like to think of them more as building context. You have no idea what your reader may be doing before they sit down to your writing. They could have been taking out the trash, doing the dishes, sleeping, or even reading another essay. In order to get them into your essay you need to give them an idea of what you're talking about. One of the most basic techniques is to begin with the general topic you are writing about.

For example, if you're writing an analysis of a story, you might begin with the overall topic of that story. In Edgar Allen Poe's story "The Tell-Tale Heart" one of the overall ideas is the way a cataract on the old man's eye drives the narrator to kill the old man. In a case like that, you might begin with a couple of sentences about how as humans we can often read mystery and suspicion into very ordinary things. Then you can move into the thesis.

Other techniques for beginning introductions include sharing:

- a brief story related to your topic
- a few interesting statistics or facts
- providing some history or background

## PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT

For most essays, you will need to fully develop each of your paragraphs. In general, you should avoid one or two sentence paragraphs, and view three sentence paragraphs as something you rarely do. Paragraphs should be like the porridge that Goldilocks liked in the story "The Three Bears": not too cold, not too hot, but just right. They should be neither too long, nor too short, but just right. Paragraphs that are too short lead to a choppy disconnected sound. Paragraphs that are too long lead to a bogged down feeling that may confuse your reader or obscure your message.

Developing your paragraphs may involve providing more details or explanation of your topic sentence. On the other hand, if as you review your writing, you find you have numerous short paragraphs, look at them and ask if you can either develop them or combine them. You may also find the modes of writing listed below as helpful in developing. If you're stuck for development options, check them out and see if you can integrate some of them into your short paragraphs.

## BODY PARAGRAPHS

As you write your essay, it's important that you make sure that each of your body paragraphs explain, discuss, or interpret your thesis. Each of your body paragraphs should have a clear topic related to your thesis, and be developed so around what that shows about the thesis. In a formal essay, each of them should have a specific, well-developed topic sentence.

Toward the end of my college days, I learned that a good way to keep on track with my thesis was to write it on a separate sheet of paper; each time I wrote a new paragraph, I would look back to the thesis I had written down and make sure that what I was writing was adding to or explaining my main point or claim. I still do this and find it very valuable.

In a straightforward essay, persuasive, or argumentative writing, you can think of this as a *basic* outline for a body paragraph:

- Topic sentence (1 sentence)
- Evidence: example, statistics, quote, etc. (2-4 sentences)
- Discussion of the evidence and connection to your thesis (2-3 sentences)

This is a *very basic outline and you shouldn't feel like the suggested number of sentences are any type of requirement*; however, if you're struggling with development, use it as a way to get started and lay out your ideas.

## STARTING A NEW PARAGRAPH

To a certain extent, deciding when to start a new paragraph is an art, but there are some things that can make that decision easier.

- The easiest time to start a new paragraph is when you move to a new topic or a new perspective or point about your current topic.
- Then there's the change in time. Often if you're using a story or telling about events that happen over the course of time, a shift in the time you're discussing may signal a need to start a new paragraph.
- You may find you have one very long paragraph that is all about one part of your topic. See if there's a place you can break it up. You might need to add a transition word to the second part to help it flow. Something like *additionally* or *furthermore* might work.

## COMBINING PARAGRAPHS

When you finish drafting, look through your essay to see if you have any undeveloped or short paragraphs. As I mentioned above, a short paragraph in an informal essay is okay now and then. However, in formal essays, you want to avoid those. If you identify a series of short paragraphs, look to see if you can't combine some of them. You may need to create transitions between them with phrases that connect the ideas. On the other hand, look to see if you can develop them. Have you fully explained the point you're making in each one? Do you have a clear topic sentence if necessary? Does the final sentence wrap up the moment and lead into the next paragraph?

## CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

It is important to remember that a conclusion should not just restate what you said in your essay. Your readers are smart, and they've read your essay. Instead, your conclusion should bring the various points you've made together and put them in a bigger perspective. Think of it this way. Imagine that each point you make in your essay represents a dollar. Then imagine that your conclusion adds them all up. If we did that as simple math, it would look like this:

Point 1:	\$1
Point 2:	\$1
Point 3:	\$1
Point 4:	\$1
<hr/>	
Conclusion:	\$4

We all know that four dollars is more than one dollar; that's something we learn when we're very young. In the same way, your conclusion is more than the individual points that you make in your essay.

Things you can do in a conclusion:

- Look for generalizations that summarize your main point and say something about the significance of the information.
- Write about the implications of the information you've uncovered.
- Look for a lesson or conclusion that arises out of the writing and/or research you've done.
- Provide an evaluation of what you've found.
- Look for a concluding example, focusing event, or quotation that will illustrate your point in a striking way, and then don't forget to comment on it. (**Never end your essay with a quote from someone else**; remember, the most important information in your essay is what you think, so if you use a quote, explain what it shows about the whole idea.)

## ESSAYS

A definition:

Essay: 1590s, "short non-fiction literary composition" (first attested in writings of Francis Bacon, probably in imitation of Montaigne), from M.Fr. *essai* "trial, attempt, essay," from L.L. *exagium* "a weighing, weight," from L. *exigere* "test," from ex- "out" + *agere* apparently meaning here "to weigh." The suggestion is of unpolished writing. The more literal verb meaning "to put to proof, test the mettle of" is from late 15c. (*Online Etymology Dictionary*)

In looking at this definition, we can see that the definition includes concepts like "trial," "attempt," "weight," "test," and "proof." When we put those things in the context of writing, we can see that the definition points to the idea of weighing or trying out ideas. That's the basis of any essay: to try to express our thoughts about an idea. If you keep that in mind as you write, and realize that each essay is simply your attempt to explain your idea, you will have a good start on every essay.

As you begin to write, it may be productive to think of an essay as something you're cooking. Imagine you are going to make a cake, so you walk into the kitchen. Even before you look up a recipe, you probably realize that you're not going to need to get chicken out of the refrigerator in order to make your cake. Therefore, what you have to do is decide what kind of cake you want to make and follow the recipe using the ingredients called for.

Essays, like cakes, come in different flavors and require different ingredients. Your job as a writer is to identify what kind of essay you're going to write and use the proper ingredients. The following sections discuss different types of essays you may encounter in college writing, and introduce techniques and tips that will help you as you write.

## A SHORT NOTE ON ESSAY LENGTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Remember that when a teacher asks you to write an essay of a certain length that represents the amount and depth of thinking you should be doing in the essay. An essay of two pages requires some thinking and doesn't delve very deeply into the topic, but an essay of ten pages will represent a greater depth of thinking and delve much deeper into the topic. As you go through college, keep this in mind when thinking about essay length. Also, remember that the modes below are tools you can use to develop your essay to length without adding empty filler.

### MODES: SOME OPTIONAL INGREDIENTS

Modes, sometimes called methods of development, are writing techniques that you can use in both formal and informal essays. Becoming familiar with these techniques allows you to have more tools to use as you develop your essays. The discussion below only covers a few of these modes; there are numerous other sources that can help you learn more about all of them, so taking some time to read more will help you use them with even more power.

#### *DESCRIPTION*

Description helps us see things clearly; however, when using it in an essay it involves more than just giving the basic details. It is important to think about why you would describe, what you want to describe, and what descriptions will best help communicate your ideas to your readers.

Why describe? By creating a picture of a specific time, place, or person in an essay you help your readers more vividly connect with the ideas and images you have in your head. By doing that, you more clearly communicate your message.

Additionally, in more formal essays, you may want to describe images you are analyzing, or a primary research process.

When describing:

Describe the unique qualities and avoid describing the common or assumed qualities.

- Your readers come to your paper with a great deal of knowledge. Instead of saying that a classroom has four walls, focus on what is unique about the walls, or if it's the case, the fact that the classroom has no walls. If you're describing a specific passage from a reading or film, you will need to describe the concepts you are analyzing, for example the sentence style or metaphors used.

Focus on the dominant impression.

- The dominant impression is the overall sensory feeling and emotion that the object or topic communicates. In this case, you'll need to describe the tone or mood involved. This gives your readers a sense of the emotional content of the thing or situation.

Use concrete words.

- Avoid words like *great, nice, good, bad, and wonderful*. These words are general and vague and don't create a clear description. Think carefully about things like colors. Which is more specific: *my grandmother had a yellow refrigerator, or my grandmother had a 70s-yellow refrigerator?* A small addition changes the clarity of the description.

Use sensory details.

- The sensory details include sight, smell, feel, sound, and taste. For most writers, the temptation is to rely on the sense of sight, and while you will want to describe what things look like, to fail to describe other applicable senses is to leave your description incomplete.

Use figures of speech.

- Sometimes writers are tempted to say, "I just can't describe it." If you're writing a descriptive essay, remember, your job is to describe it. Now, there are some things that are difficult to put into specific words, and here figurative language can help you. You might compare it to something else in a simile or metaphor. For more on figurative language there are numerous sources on the web that provide detailed explanations of the many types of figurative language.

## NARRATIVE

Narrative is simply storytelling. Telling a story is a great way to provide an example of something you're talking about. It also helps you connect to your reader. We are a species that loves stories. From the very first paintings on caves to TV, stories have been at the heart of the way we communicate.

Narrative asks you to actually show the story. To write narrative well, you should shed your ideas of the essay, and focus on the story. Remember that with stories we have to have characters and actions. Description plays an important role in narrative in that it helps readers imagine the settings and events.

For example, we would not just write "I was going to the store when something happened," instead a more fully developed narrative might look like this:

Getting into the car, I made sure I had everything I needed: keys, cell phone, wallet. “Got it all,” I said as I started the car and headed toward the store. I’d driven the route a hundred times before and wasn’t paying much attention. I turned up the radio and hoped that they were playing some good driving music. Outside, the sun was warming up the world after a cool fall night. There wasn’t a lot of traffic, so I rolled down my window and let the fresh air in for the ride.

WHAP! My body jerked, the world started to spin, and then it became white.

It took a minute—no more than seconds probably—for me to realize my car had been hit. As the air bag deflated, the white world I thought I’d been thrown into became a familiar world seen through cracked glass, splintered fiberglass, and metal. Strangely, all I could think about was the fact that I’d forgotten the grocery list on the counter at home. As I opened the door to face the reality of this world, I realized I’d have to go back and get it before I could go to the store.

Can you see how that really shows the story; it doesn’t just give a basic summary? Narrative should paint pictures in that way.

When you write narrative, just slow down and do it simply, step by step. Think about what happened and write it simply. What was done, seen, or said next? Write that down simply. And next? And next?

Good narrative is not magic. At its most basic, and often its best, it is simple and straightforward.

#### DEFINITION

We all know what definitions are, but in essay writing, we can use an extended form of a definition to get across our ideas about an abstract or broad idea. A good way to think about this comes out of something that happened to me when I was young. As a young girl who was destined to become an English teacher, I was the kind of kid who would occasionally flip through the dictionary and read definitions. Yeah, it was inevitable I’d become an English teacher. However, one day I happened to stop on the word *love*. As I recall it, the definition read like this:

Love: to care about deeply.

What a rip-off, I thought! Love is so much more than that. However, as a definition, that’s pretty accurate. Still, it doesn’t seem to really communicate the depth and breadth of love. An extended definition of love would better communicate the idea. In that case, we could use a number of definition techniques:

**Example:** Love is doing the dishes even though you haven’t been asked to do them. Love is letting someone else have the last slice of pizza.

**Comparison:** Love is like a favorite pair of jeans. Love is a warm fire on a cold day.

**Contrast:** Love is not a competition. Love is not a way to sell products.

There are other formal means of developing definitions in essays, but these are the most common. Clearly, you can extend any of these through the use of description or narrative to more fully explain the concept you are talking about. I might develop a paragraph about what love truly means in this way:

The word *love* is often used and tossed about in a casual fashion, and is most simply defined as “to care deeply about.” However, love is more than that. Love is doing the dishes without being asked. Love is picking up the gallon of milk on the way home from work just because it needs to be done. Love is the sweater that keeps us warm on a cold day, the inspiration that keeps us going when it seems all is lost. Yet, it is not a stepping-stone to material gain. Nor is it a fight to be fought or a race to be won. Love is a gift that no one can demand or give under pressure. It’s not an advertising slogan or quick fix. It is brother and sister to hope and desire.

See how that goes so much further than a basis definition? In this way, definition can help you further illustrate the idea behind an abstract or complex subject.

#### *DIVISION AND CLASSIFICATION*

Another method of development is division and classification. It’s similar to definition in that it looks deeper at the layers of a specific topic or idea. In this case, it takes a topic and divides it into different parts, looking at how the various parts fall into classes or groups. Let’s look again at the idea of love. In that case, we can immediately think of many different kinds of love:

- Familial love, which, includes love for parents, children, siblings, etc.
- Sexual love and romantic love, which includes love for spouse or partner
- Platonic love is the love between friends
- Religious love entails a love of a higher being and feelings based on those principles
- Superficial love might include love of ice cream

Each of these types of love has its own different way of being manifested and played out. For each one of these we can describe and explain it. As you can see, this is another way of developing a discussion of what something is: a definition.

## PERSONAL/FAMILIAR WRITING

Personal or familiar writing is a type of writing that is more conversational and informal. While it will always have a certain degree of formality, it does make room for more use of dialect and vernacular, slang or informal words, and personal and artistic styles. It is a type of writing which tries to get across one person's experience, feelings, and point of view.

Personal writings should read with a smooth fluidity and can be philosophical, dramatic, comedic, or a combination of all of those. It gives you a great deal of liberty and room to express yourself comfortably. The personal or familiar writing style encompasses everything from a letter or email to an essay or memoir. In between those, we can include other things like stand-up comedy, blogs, and editorials.

### PERSONAL/FAMILIAR VOICE AND STYLE

In writing in the personal or familiar style, it's important to use your own voice. Of course, you should always pay close attention to grammar and the rules of writing, but you do have some liberties in doing this. You may use informal wording and dialect. It is important to think about your audience. Who will be reading it? What context and knowledge do your readers have? What are their expectations? All of those things will help you make decisions about what is appropriate or not. The best way to figure that out is to read other things like it.

## FORMAL WRITING

Formal writing is generally used to relay educational, philosophic, business, or scientific communication. It can also be employed to make an argument to a specific community. It will employ the language and jargon of the community and audience it is aimed at, be that academic, medical, judicial, or scientific, to name a few.

The degree of formality is determined, as always, by the audience and publication setting. In addition, formal writing is often seen as part of a larger conversation. It often is written to address ongoing debates and research. It may help to think of it as a written conversation between people interested in the subject. Since everyone in the world interested in specific subjects can't all get together, writing provides a way for those people to share and discuss their ideas.

With formal writing, writers don't just explain what they think, they look at what other people have said and the previous research that's been done, and their writings integrate those things into their discussions.

Although the conventions for formal writing will vary by disciplines of study and practices of the specific type of writing, there are a few standard rules that apply.

### TREATMENT OF TITLES

The titles of various types of works should be treated according to the rules so that readers can identify what they are. While they are given earlier in this book, they bear repeating here. Make sure to treat them correctly in all of your writing whether familiar or personal.

- **Titles of Short Works:** Titles of short works such as an article on a web page or in a newspaper, an essay, short story, poem, or episode from a specific TV show should be placed in quotation marks.
- **Titles of Longer Works:** Italics are used for long works like the titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, a whole website, etc. If you're handwriting, underlining is an acceptable alternative.

### FORMAL VOICE AND STYLE

As with familiar writing, you should use your own voice in formal writing; however, it will be a slightly different tone. This is no different from what you probably do on a regular basis. Here's an example. Imagine you are writing about being stopped for speeding. You've decided to write to three different people: a judge, your parents, and a friend. In each case, you're going to tell

what happened. How would these stories differ? The facts may be the same in all of them, but the tone will change. Despite that, you will still be writing in your voice, communicating your point of view.

There are three simple things you can do to get a formal sounding voice:

1. Avoid personal pronouns (I/me/my/you/your).
2. Smoothly integrate your quotes and paraphrases.
3. Attribute your sources and give credibility.

### AVOIDING THE PERSONAL PRONOUNS

In much of your formal academic writing, you may be encouraged to avoid personal pronouns. Avoiding I/me/my is pretty simple. Just omit it. As long as you use proper attribution—letting readers know when an idea is someone else's, readers will get the fact that the rest is yours. Here's a simple example.

**I think that** learning the basic rules of grammar will make you look even smarter than you are.

Learning the basic rules of grammar will make you look even smarter than you are.

See how by simply getting rid of the "I think that" makes the sentence much stronger? Formal writing is a bold type of writing. If you've done your research and thought your ideas through, you should have no problem just laying those ideas out without the need to qualify them.

Then there's the use of *you*. This one is a biggie! Many teachers and professors will physically flinch at its usage. Fixing it is fairly straightforward too, but since we use it so much in talking, we have to watch for it more carefully. The key to fixing this one is, as mentioned previously, to ask who you really mean. In writing this document, when I say you, I mean you—my dear reader. But what about something like this?

When **you** climb any of the great Himalayan mountains, **you** may risk life and limb.

When **people** climb any of the great Himalayan mountains, **they** may risk life and limb.

As discussed in the agreement section, you can see that making sure to avoid the *you* makes this more specific. Besides, all of your audience may not have climbed any of the great Himalayan mountains.

## INTEGRATING QUOTES & AVOIDING DROPPED QUOTES

Dropped quotes are created when you take a quotation from a source and just plop it into your writing without integrating it into your sentences. The problem with them is that they create a disconnect for your reader. As you're moving through your writing with your discussion, you build transitions and bridges from one idea to the next. Dropping a quote into your writing without providing those connections and bridges creates a disruption in your voice and assumes the reader will see the same connections between your sentences and the quote that you make.

Let's suppose I'm going to make a cake and I put the ingredients in the pan: flour, eggs, baking powder, vanilla, cocoa, etc. Then I put it in the oven. Notice that I didn't say I mixed it up? I'd like you to picture the image of all those ingredients in a cake pan with the eggs cracked right on top. Would it be cake when it came out of the oven? It has all of the cake ingredients in it.

Of course not. It would be a horrible, gloppy, freaky mess. No one would call it cake.

When you just drop a quote into your writing and don't connect it to anything or use a signal phrase and proper in-text citation when required, it's like making a cake as I describe above. All the ingredients of your idea are there, but they're not integrated into your writing and thoughts. The smooth integration you want comes by using clear attribution and signal phrases.

When you integrate other peoples' ideas into your writing, it is important to provide credit to them. There are two ways to do this. The semi-formal way is through attribution; the formal way uses attribution, but also integrates the in-text citation. Both of these should be used in formal writings, but less formal writings may only require attribution or signal phrases. Always check with the boss or instructor to find out which of these you need to use. Specifics of in-text citation are covered in the MLA and APA sections.

### ATTRIBUTION

Attribution is the formal word for simply saying where you got your information from in your sentence. It's a version of what we do all the time when we say we heard something from somebody or some place:

Yesterday, **my mom told me** that the price of tea in China was on the rise.

**A recent study by the Review of Prices in China** reports that the price of tea is on the rise.

In both of these cases, I've given the source for my information. It doesn't give you a lot of information and it might be hard to track it all down if you don't know my mom or don't have access to the journal I'm talking about, but it lets you know the information came from somewhere other than me. The parts in italics are signal phrases.

In informal and semi-formal writing, this type of reference is often sufficient. It supports your credibility and gives your readers a clear indication of your sources.

Here are some of the most common signal phrases:

- According to
- Bradbury writes
- Gerbner observes that
- Kilbourne claims
- Smiler points out that

## ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

In formal writing, it is important to explain why the sources and people you use as references and whom you mention are trustworthy. Because formal writing is about sharing and developing knowledge and facts, it's important that the sources you use are actually written by people who know a lot about the field.

The expectation in formal writing is that you are using verified facts and seeking to contribute your voice to the conversation and knowledge related to your subject or issue. Therefore, you don't want to get your information from unreliable sources. For example, Stephen Hawking would be one of the best people to cite when talking about black holes because of his doctorate in theoretical physics and his research in that area since then. However, even though I have watched a lot of shows about him and his ideas, I am not a good source for that. Taking the time to explain why a person you are using as a source in your paper is worthy of being listened to is an important part of this style of writing.

The exception to this rule comes when you are writing to a community that is very familiar with the person. If I were writing a paper for a journal or website that is specifically aimed at other theoretical physicists, they would immediately know Hawking's credentials. I wouldn't have to explain that to them any more than I would need to tell them who Albert Einstein was.

On the other hand, if I'm writing for a general audience, not all of them may know him. In that case, it would be important for me to let them know that Hawking was one of the preeminent researchers and theorists in the field of theoretical physics, and that he specifically focuses on its application to astronomy and cosmology.

Making sure that your audience is aware of the qualifications of the sources you cite is a way of both establishing you as a smart and careful researcher and helping your readers understand the context of what you're sharing.

More importantly, it's essential that you know your sources are credible. If you don't know if your source is trustworthy, then you don't want it to be representing your knowledge. That is, after all, what your writing does.

What makes something credible? While these are not the only things you should go on, the primary thing to look for is the source's educational and experiential background:

- An expert—someone with degrees and/or years of work in the field or specialized study
- A department or group that specializes in the subject matter

There are other things that can help you evaluate credibility as well.

**Container/Source:** Where is this published? While *The National Enquirer* might be entertaining, we wouldn't say it's a valid source. It's a source that uses questionable resources for its articles, and is known to publish things without verification. In this case, reputation counts. If we're researching medical issues, *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, would be considered a good source; on the other hand, someone who does not have any medical education or experience might write a fine webpage, but would not be a credible source for a college-level paper in terms of the actual science.

They might be a good source for experience. The key is to clearly identify the difference and make that clear in your writing.

So, if you're not familiar with a magazine, journal, or website's reputation, take a moment and check it out online. You can simply search "credibility of [name of publication]" to get started.

It is also important to look carefully at a source and make sure it's not biased. Is the person or group funded by someone or something with a stake in a particular point of view or outcome for a study? Is there an underlying agenda? A *yes* to either of these questions is a signal that you should carefully analyze the information and look for support for it in other sources as well.

**Timeliness:** When something is published plays a role in its credibility as well. If you are researching current issues, you should work to make sure you are looking at current sources. While older sources may play a role in your research by providing background, historical, or foundational information, they should not generally be the bulk of your research.

If you do find something that is consistently mentioned in the research you do, even if it's older, it's probably considered a foundational or pivotal piece of research, so even if it's older, it's worth it to take a look at it and consider using it to set up the history or background of your topic.

Most databases and search engines allow you to set time parameters so that you can limit your searches to more recent dates. This will help you focus your research and make it more efficient as well. For your college papers, you should usually make sure you're using sources published within the last 10 years, though there are exceptions for historical documents, foundational studies and works that are key to understanding concepts and the field, and of course the arts and humanities or any other situation where the text/work itself is subject of study.

**Logic, Content, and Writing:** Another important part of determining credibility is looking at the writing itself. While perfect grammar is by no means an indicator that something is credible, problems with grammar, content, and writing do often point toward a lack of professionalism and expertise. Make sure and do some additional research on a work that suffers from any of these.

As you read, pay attention to how writers explain someone's credentials or background. As you move into your field, you'll learn more about what's specifically expected of you in your major. Here's one example from a newspaper article on Stephen Hawking:

The universe began as a tiny particle, Stephen Hawking, **the scientist and bestselling author** has concluded.

**The Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University** has turned his attention to what may have been happening in the fraction of a second before Big Bang. (Nuttall)

Notice how the italicized words explain who Hawking is. They tell what he does and let us know that he's published a book and is a professor at Cambridge. This information is key to our knowing that he is well qualified to be speaking about these issues. In writings in his field, simply the mention of his name would suffice as establishing credibility.

While many of the writers you read in college will have advanced degrees, do not give those with their abbreviation in formal writing. Do not use Ms. Mr. Dr. PhD. or other abbreviations like that. If you have writers with advanced degrees, then put that in your words the first time you mention the person, after that, you don't need to say it again.

Steven Hawking, **who has a doctorate in physics**, . . .

Robert Nichols, **a doctor who focuses on family practice**, says. . .

Many professional articles are written by multiple authors. In that case, you when you give credibility, you shouldn't list each one and their credibility separately. You can either talk about them in terms of having the same background, like this

Smith and his colleagues **who are all researchers in the field of communication . . .**

OR

Smith and his colleagues, **who teach and research at Columbia University. . .**

OR if they come from different places and backgrounds, you can talk about the first author (lead author):

**Smith, a researcher at Columbia University,** and his colleagues. . ."

In your essays, while you may use many of these things to establish credibility, you should always prioritize the author and their education and experience. Don't say that someone is credible because their work is published in a certain journal. That doesn't float. It's only one part of it.

If you have a source written by a reporter for a newspaper or magazine, make sure to tell who they write for. As long as that source is credible, the credibility suffices for the writer.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary sources are those that the original information comes from. For example if you were to write an essay about Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the play itself is a primary source. Any time you write about a literary work, an event, or a law, you are likely to have a primary source. It is important that you are familiar with that source and you use it in your writing.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources are those sources that are about the primary source. An essay written by an expert on Shakespeare is a secondary source you could use in a paper on *Hamlet*. It is important to make sure that these sources are credible.

## WHAT MAKES A COLLEGE-LEVEL SOURCE?

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NOTE: My constitutional law professor said that the right answer is often "it depends." He was right! While the things I point out in this section are a solid guideline, your instructor or situation may allow for differences in your sources, so always keep that in mind. Read your assignments carefully and ask your teachers questions.

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In college writing, not all sources are acceptable. Some of the first things you can eliminate are encyclopedias, like *Wikipedia*, and *Britannica*. This does not mean that they are not good sources for general knowledge; they are. However, in terms of college level writing, they are too general. Basically they are a lot of secondary sources (and sometimes even tertiary) woven together. When you write for college, you need to make sure your sources are much closer to the primary source. So, encyclopedias are a great place to get a general overview and to pick up some of the terminology that will help you as you research things. Just don't use them in college level writing.

Another thing you may often come across are blogs and general articles. Things on the web and/or in general interest magazines. Now, just because you can't use them in your college level writing doesn't mean they're bad. It just means they don't necessarily fit there. With those, you have to assess who the writer is. Does that person have the education and/or experience that provides a solid background? Or, is this just an article about the value of a low carb diet written by someone who is on one? The person's experience is not without merit, but in terms of citing them as a source, we'd look for someone with more background in medicine, science, and nutrition.

This point is just as true for books. Speaking of books, please make sure you use age-appropriate books. There are many books written for younger audiences that contain great information. However, if you're writing a college-level paper, use college-level sources. Don't use that book written for teens unless your paper is about books written for teens.

### SOURCES TO AVOID IN COLLEGE-LEVEL PAPERS

There are some sources you should **not** use in college-level papers.

#### Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias, for the most part, sources to avoid. Most encyclopedias are general sources that only provide a wide overview to a topic. Do not use general encyclopedias in a college-level research paper. This includes both print and electronic versions. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Encarta*, and *Wikipedia* are not acceptable. Of course, you may use them to give yourself a good overview of the subject as you begin writing, but for the most part, avoid them as sources.

The exceptions to this rule are content- or discipline-specific encyclopedias like *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *The Encyclopedia of Pharmaceutical Technology*. Many fields

have encyclopedias that are specific to the discipline. The entries in these encyclopedias are more technical and complex. They may be used as sources, but should not be overused. You should always double check with your instructor to make sure these are appropriate for the project you're working on.

### **Study Guides**

Do not use study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparks Notes, Grade Saver, e-Notes, or Monarch Notes in a college-level research paper. These are not acceptable. Like encyclopedias, they can help give you some general knowledge and places to start, but they should only help you in finding your other sources. Look for terminology and key words in those to help you start your research.

### **Book Reviews**

Do not use book reviews as sources for your paper. Book reviews are summaries of books, and using those instead of the book itself is using second-hand knowledge. You should seek out the book itself or a critical analysis of that book.

### **Content Farms or Content Mills**

In your academic writing, you should avoid using content farms (also called link farms, click farms, content mills, or link mills). According to Janet Driscoll Miller,

. . . content farms are essentially Web sites that produce a large degree of content, typically with the sole purpose of attaining search rankings. These sites and articles often provide less than the most-relevant information or results for a particular topic, outranking some very valuable and informative sites. Many content farms also essentially steal content from other sites. ("Content Farms")

In short, this is general information that is not consistently connected to experts or people with experience in the field. In fact, some writers for content farms readily admit knowing little about the subjects they write about. Examples include

- About.com
- Yahoo Voices
- Suite 101
- Articlesbase
- Answers.com
- Helium.com
- Buzzle.com

## DOCUMENTING RESOURCES

In formal papers, you need to document the sources you use. These styles are used so that readers can easily identify the various parts of a source and find it in the event they want to read more of it. It is imperative that you cite the works you use by other authors. Not to do so is plagiarism and theft. In addition, citing sources lends credibility to your work. It shows that you've done your research and have treated others' ideas with the respect they deserve. Finally, it helps readers participate in the academic conversation. Since all experts in a field can't get together to talk everything out, writing serves as a way to discuss issues within disciplines. By correctly citing, you are integrating others into your conversation.

In order for everyone to be able to understand the citation, documentation styles have been developed to create a standard that helps readers find information in research. It is simply a type of shorthand language that provides a quick and easy way to document the research used in a paper and help readers find that research themselves.

Like any other language, rules are important: they help us communicate. Take a simple word as an example. Let's say I write this

# TCA

and I expect you to imagine this:



How many people are going to imagine a cat if I write "tca"? Very few. That's because we have all agreed that the letters c-a-t, arranged in that way imply a cat. The letters have nothing to do with a feline or anything else that *cat* might imply in our writing, but because we have agreed to the meaning of those letters in that order, we can communicate about those objects. ACT, TAC, ATC, and TCA don't work for that purpose. The letters must be in the right order.

Documentation is like that too. Instead of letters, we're using things like position in the citation, quotation marks, italics, etc. to help show the meaning. Getting those things in the right order and punctuated correctly helps us make sure other readers know just what we mean. So, learning the rules of any citation style requires you to look them up and follow them precisely in the same way you learned to spell words and form sentences in orders that communicate your meaning.

Now, this is not something you'll generally memorize as you have done with so many words over the course of your learning—you no longer have to sound out *cat*, it's become something you see and know without the effort. If you do a lot of citation, you will most likely begin to memorize the form; however, you should always go back and double check. This is something you can get right in your paper as long as you dot your I's and cross your T's.

There are a number of documentation styles that are used by various fields and disciplines. The key thing to remember about documentation is that they all have specific instructions, and to get it right you need to read and follow those instructions. Do not expect to just know how to do this—no one is born knowing this. Read and follow the instructions.

While there are a number of citation styles, the most commonly use in college are APA and MLA.

### **American Psychological Association (APA)**

This style is used in the behavioral and social sciences as well as other fields.

### **Modern Language Association (MLA)**

This style is generally used in the humanities, especially English.

You'll notice that throughout this work I've used parentheses to note when I've cited something. That's an in-text citation. It shows you as a reader that I've used someone else's work and gives you a clue to where to find it. It's like a symbol on a map. In order to understand that symbol, you have to read the key or legend. The key or legend in citation is the Works Cited or Resources page at the end of the document. If you look at the end of this work, you'll find a Works Cited page. It gives you the whole list of sources I've used in writing this. It helps you find those sources if you want go look them up and read further.

Basically, it's old school hyperlinks. We can go look at the page that lists the sources and check out those sources ourselves and see what we think about them. If we have further ideas, we can write our own paper as a part of the conversation about the topic and use both the sources from the original as well as others. Again, we'd cite our sources so that the next reader can check those out and participate in the conversation too.

As you work on implementing documentation, there is one important thing to remember: You should be able to read your sentences without the documentation in them and come up with grammatically correct writing. If you're ever wondering whether something goes in parentheses or not, ask yourself what would happen if you took it out of the sentence itself—those parentheses are like the commas for extra information—you should be able to take that information out and read the sentence clearly.

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## **REMEMBER**

I've put some things in bold in the sections on citation to emphasize and point out key issues. Nothing in a citation should be in bold.

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## BUT I DIDN'T MAKE THAT MISTAKE: [SIC] AND CHANGING THINGS IN A QUOTE

Sometimes you will find a misspelling or grammatical mistake in a source you use for your research. If you find a lot of them, reconsider using the source: Sources appropriate to college-level and professional writing should reflect a good standard of usage and grammar.

However, we all make mistakes now and then, so that doesn't mean you can't use a source just because there's a typo or small mistake in it. On the other hand, you don't want your reader to think you made the mistake as that undermines your own credibility. Thankfully, there's a way to show readers that the mistake was not yours.

Put [sic] right after the mistake in the quote. That's a Latin abbreviation that means *sic erat scriptum*, "thus was it written." It just shows your reader that the mistake was in the original work. We don't fix it because when we quote, we are showing the original language. Note that *sic* goes in brackets [ ] not parentheses ( ).

Here's an example of a typo and how you would show it. This is from Theodore Dreiser's book *An American Tragedy*:

"...harmoniously abandoning themselves to the rhythm of the music -- like two small chips **[sic]** being tossed about on a rough but friendly sea" (328).

It should read "two small ships." You can of course, write around it or use the brackets to fix the mistake. You do have to confirm with another version or source that you've correctly fixed the word. In this case, it's easy to look at a different edition of Dreiser's book. So, since we know what the intended word was, we can do this:

"...harmoniously abandoning themselves to the rhythm of the music -- like two small **[ships]** being tossed about on a rough but friendly sea" (328).

The brackets show we've inserted something into the quote that wasn't in the original. On the other hand, we could avoid the whole issue by writing around the mistake:

"...harmoniously abandoning themselves to the rhythm of the music," Dreiser compares them to small ships "being tossed about on a rough but friendly sea" (328).

## MLA FORMAT AND DOCUMENTATION STYLE

The Modern Language Association (MLA) is a professional organization that focuses on the teaching of language and literature. As such, it develops the citation style used in fields associated with language and literature. In MLA citation, priority is given to the author and source title, so all citations will begin with that. The data following provides a path to find the source the author used.

In the 2016 update of MLA citation guidelines, MLA identified nine core elements that can go into a citation. Not all sources have all of the elements, and the challenge of citing correctly (communicating CAT not TCA to your readers—see above) is in providing each of these available.

### FORMATTING STUDENT ESSAYS MLA STYLE

Your first impression with any writing is a visual one. Before a person ever reads a word of what you're saying, she sees what it looks like. It may not be fair or just, but readers make judgments about you before they even read a word of what you've written. If you develop good formatting habits now, you can start out with that good impression every time.

1. **Heading:** Put your name, the instructor's name, course, and the date in left hand corner. This should only appear on your first page.
2. **Header:** Use a running header with your last name and the page number.
  - a. In Word, click on "Insert" on the ribbon, and then click on "Page Number."
  - b. A drop down menu will appear.
  - c. Select "Top of Page," then "Plain Number 3." This will put the page number in.
  - d. In front of the page number, type your last name and then put in a couple of spaces.
  - e. Make sure to click below the dotted line to close out the header. Whatever is above the dotted line will be on every page.

For other word processors, use the program's help function or Google "insert page numbers in a header" or something similar. Other good sources of help are the tutors at the writing center, and the computer lab staff.

3. **Spacing:** Double-space your work, but do not leave extra lines between paragraphs. In Word, you will probably have to change the settings so that this doesn't happen. In your paragraph settings, change the spacing before and after to 0. If you're not sure how to find paragraph settings use your word processor's help function, or Google it.
4. **Font:** Always use a standard 12-point font. There's nothing so telling as a reading response or essay that is done in a font larger than 12-point, or in a huge 12-point font

like Bookman Old Style. This is apparent to all people who deal with text on a regular basis as any teacher is likely to do. I suggest Calibri, Times New Roman, Ariel Narrow, or Palatino. Just remember, increasing your font, like increasing your margins, is a dead giveaway that you're trying to fool your teacher instead of develop your ideas.

5. **Margins:** Margins should be set at one inch on all sides. In Word 2003, the default is one and a half on the left side, but later versions generally default to one-inch margins on all sides. So make sure and double check it.

There are numerous videos on *YouTube* videos that walk you through formatting your essays, so take advantage of that help as well. If you format correctly, your reader has a good impression of you before he or she even starts reading your paper.

Okay, here's a sample of what your correctly formatted paper should look like with some notes on other issues you should consider as you put your final drafts or essays together.

Firstname Lastname

Professor Name

English 1301

Date

Use the header function in your word processor. Don't just type this in. Also, don't just type in the page number—every page will be page 1. Instead "Insert Page Number."

Lastname 1

### Spiffy Title

Notice that there are no extra spaces between paragraphs.

Notice that even the heading is double-spaced. This is standard for MLA format, which we use in this class. You would do well to check with each instructor you have to find out what style he or she would prefer. However, in this class, I expect to see this style. Notice also that this sample has a title and that title is in 12-point font: it's not in quotes, it's not italicized, it's not bold, and it's not underlined. Yours shouldn't be either. Now, what makes a spiffy title?

First, a spiffy title is not the topic of your paper. So I would not title an essay about my favorite meal "Favorite Meal," nor would I call it "Spaghetti." A spiffy title is generally taken from a phrase or image in the work. For instance, I might call my essay "Come and Get It!" or "Oodles of Noodles." Now I've used quotation marks here because I'm talking about the title in this text, but I wouldn't when I wrote my paper. Also notice that I capitalized all the major words in the title. Generally you should capitalize all nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. More formal essays will require more formal titles. We'll discuss that in class.

Finally, avoid using bold, underling, all caps, exclamation points, or italics unless you're quoting and that's the way it appears in the text or you have a technical reason to do so. Never use quote marks around a word unless it's a direct quote or used in an unusual way that is not part of the general knowledge. Let your words speak for you, not your font. Please don't do these things. They're a dead giveaway for lack of thought, and will give your reader a bad impression of you before he or she's even begun to read your words.

Tab to start each paragraph.

### Works Cited

Arrange the citations for sources you've used in your paper here. Make sure to format them with a hanging indent as shown here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Brzd0B-P5s>

Alphabetize your sources. If you have questions about that, this site may provide you with some answers. <https://blogs.transparent.com/english/english-alphabetizing-rules/> Do not use bullets or numbers here.

Always cite statistics and numbers you give. Always cite statistics and numbers you give.

Always cite statistics and numbers you give.

Double-check any citation you get from anywhere. Many places have slight variations or mistakes in their suggested MLA versions.

If you only have one source, make sure to title the page Work Cited. If you have more than one, title the page Works Cited.

If you used a source in your paper, it should be cited here. If you cited it here, readers should be able to find where you used it in your paper through both your in-text citation and signal phrases. If you do not cite sources in your paper, you do not need this page.

## MLA AUTHORS AND TITLES

Here are the basic rules for treating authors' names and titles in your MLA paper.

### Authors

- The first time you mention an author's name, provide their whole name as given on the source.
  - Do not include title or honorariums like Dr., Mr., Ms., PhD., Major, etc. If you want to mention that, write it out, for example "Stephen Hawking, who has a doctorate in in applied mathematics and theoretical physics, specializing in general relativity and cosmology. . ."
  - After that, only provide the last name.
    - The exception to this is if you have more than one author with the same last name. In that case, use the author's first and last name in a signal phrase *or* first initial with last name in the in-text citation.

### Titles

- Titles should be treated consistently in both your text and on the Works Cited page.
  - Long works are placed in *italics*: books, websites, movies, titles of TV shows.
  - Short works are placed in "quotation marks": articles, essays, short stories, poems, episodes of TV shows.
  - Capitalize all words except articles (a/an/the—unless it's the first word in the title or subtitle), coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS—unless it's the first word in the title or subtitle), and prepositions (in, on, over, around, etc. — unless it's the first word in the title or subtitle).

## USING NUMBERS IN MLA WRITING

### Don't start sentences with numbers

This is an exception to the "large round number" rule. If desired, reword the sentence so that it doesn't start with a number. Either option is correct, so go with the one that suits your style and voice best.

- Four-hundred and sixty eight screaming fans were at the concert.
- The concert had 468 screaming fans in attendance.
  
- Ninety-nine percent of all dogs like bacon.
- One study showed that 99% of all dogs like bacon.

Unless it's in a quote, spell out numbers zero through one-hundred, all one or two word numbers, and large round numbers

- Large Round numbers that end in zero
  - Twenty
  - Two million
  - Five hundred
  - Two-hundred and fifty
- Not round:
  - 468
  - 2,483
- Not large = 0-100; one- or two-word numbers
  - Four
  - Twenty-three
  - Ninety-nine

When you use percentages, go with either **all words** or **all symbols**

- twenty-five percent **OR**
- 25%.

Write out general times and eras

- The Twentieth Century
- The sixties
- Exceptions—specific dates:
  - In 1980
  - On July 4, 1776
  - From 1972-1974
  - 71 B.C.E.

Some Exceptions

- Figures
  - \$428
  - \$428.25
  - 132 gallons
  - 56 pounds

As with percentages, with money you use either **all symbols**, or **all words**:

- \$5
- Five dollars

- Time
  - 6 a.m.
  - 8:30 p.m.

If you don't use the a.m. or p.m. abbreviation for an hour designation, write it like this in formal writing:

- Eight o'clock

Never write "twelve midnight" or "twelve noon" as midnight and noon are always at twelve, so it's repetitive. Just say "midnight" or "noon." Don't write eight thirty o'clock, just 8:30.

- Addresses
  - 428 Main Street
  - 1002 College Boulevard

Note: The abbreviations St. or Blvd. are acceptable in informal and business writing.

- Identification
  - Room 1101
  - George III
- Numbers in a row
  - 72 six-year olds

Note that these are general rules for MLA academic writing. If you are writing in a specialized area, check the style guide that's used. When in doubt, ask the professor or boss what the protocol is for writing numbers in the field.

MLA IN-TEXT CITATIONS

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**WARNING**

This is a general overview. While it covers the most common things you will cite, you must refer to your handbook for works beyond the scope of this supplement. What you do about different situations with authors, editions, translators, and other important things are NOT covered in here.

**REMEMBER**

I've put some things in **bold** in this section on citation **to emphasize** and point out key issues. **Nothing in a citation should be in bold.**

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In-text citations work hand-in-hand with your citations on your works cited page. You can think of them like a map that has a legend or key. The marks on the map are simply shortcuts or clues. To know what they mean, we must look at the legend or key.

In citation, the legend or key is the Works Cited or References page. Putting the whole citation in the essay every time you used information from a source would be bulky and make it hard to read your essay, so the in-text citations help us give readers that clue or key so that they know which source listed on our final citation page the information we've presented came from.

Sometimes these are called parenthetical citations as they are always enclosed in parenthesis. When you use information from a source, you let readers know where it came from in two ways. One is with your words by using signal phrases. Things like "according to," "states," "acknowledges," or "points out" are some signal phrases we use to do this. The other thing we use is the in-text citation. It gives some extra information about where our information came from.

With in-text citation, MLA requires us to give the **author and location**. While there are variations to this, you will most likely deal with print and web sources most often, so I'll cover those here. For other sources, consult your handbook or a good style and grammar handbook.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

### SOURCES WITH PAGE NUMBERS

With sources that have page numbers, we always have to let readers know the **author's name** (or the name of the organization or the title for a source with no listed author), and the page number on which we found the information (**location**). Now, if we've said the author's name in our sentence or section, there's no need to repeat it in the in-text citation, so all we'll need is the page number.

DO NOT put the page number in your text/writing. Page numbers always go in the in-text citation.

Here are some examples. Notice the use of the signal phrases and in-text citations to include **author** and **location**.

**Sinclair Lewis** begins his novel *Elmer Gantry* with a description of his title character that immediately creates an image of Elmer's character: "Elmer Gantry was drunk. He was eloquently drunk, lovingly and pugnaciously drunk" **(1)**.

After a first mention of the author's whole name in your sentence in an MLA work, you'll only use the last name in your sentences. Here's another example of a way to do an in-text citation for a work with page numbers

The novel *Elmer Gantry* begins with a vibrant description of the character: "Elmer Gantry was drunk. He was eloquently drunk, lovingly and pugnaciously drunk" **(Sinclair 1)**.

In this case, I didn't put Lewis' name in my sentence, so it goes at the end of the sentence/section using the information from the source. So, **if you mention the author's name in the sentence or section**, only use the page number in your citation.

**If you do not mention the author's name in the sentence or section**, put it in the in-text citation. If you're in doubt, have someone else read it. Can your reader tell you where you got the information? If not, make sure to get that name in there!

Finally, remember, **never, never, never** put the page number in the text of your sentence!

### SOURCES WITHOUT PAGE NUMBERS

If you get your information from a source that does not have page numbers, it will be treated a bit differently. Think of it this way, when you read a webpage it is only one page. You may scroll and scroll and scroll, but it's still one page long. If you print it out it may be many pages long, but on the web, it's just one page. So, with text based sources on the web, you don't need any location. If you have a video or audio, give the time range for the quote or paraphrase: (00:03:34-00:04:02).

Here are examples of in-text citations with online text sources.

In her TED Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability," Brene **Brown** says, "This is what it's all about. It doesn't matter whether you talk to people who work in social justice, mental health and abuse and neglect, what we know is that connection, the ability to feel connected, is -- neurobiologically that's how we're wired -- it's why we're here" **(00:16:33 - 00:16:46)**.

There you can see I used the times that quote takes up in the video. If there's a section heading or other type of part, give the name of that preceded by the appropriate abbreviation: volume (vol.), book (bk.), part (pt.), chapter (ch.), section (sec.), or paragraph (par.)

So remember, when you use a direct quote or a paraphrase in formal writing, you may need to use an in-text citation; however, don't forget to use attribution/signal phrases as it adds to the formal voice you're developing, and finally, make sure you *always cite statistics*.

### USING JUST ONE SOURCE

When you use just one source in an essay or in a paragraph, you do not need to constantly repeat the author's name in the parenthetical citations. After you establish who wrote the source and it's clear which source it's from, you only need the page numbers, for example,

In his poem "Annabel Lee" **Poe** uses not simply repetition, but a pattern of paired repetition. He begins the poem saying "It was many and many a year ago" **(line 1)**. By the end of the verse, he writes, "Than to love and be loved by me" **(4)**. He continues with these pairs at the start of the next stanza: "I was a child and she was a child" **(5)**. However, in the rest of that verse, he moves from the simple paired repetition to a repetition that uses longer phrases and paired repeated images.

Notice how I've used Poe's name in my sentence so I didn't need it in the first in-text citation. I put the word *line* in the first parenthetical citation as that's what you do with poetry to remind readers that's a line number. After that each time I cite from the same work, I only need the page number. If don't cite any other sources in this paragraph, the only place I need Poe's name is anywhere I want to use it in my sentence.

The same applies to an essay where I only use one source. If I only use one source, after the first mention of it in the text, I only need the author's name when it fits nicely in my sentence.

*INDIRECT SOURCES (QUOTING SOURCES USED IN OTHER SOURCES)*

When you use a quote or paraphrase that's by an author mentioned in one of your articles or sources, you need to let readers know to look for the source the author was cited in—not that author's name—on your References page. For example, let's pretend that we really like this paragraph from Jean Kilbourne's article "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," and want to quote something from it.

Human beings used to be influenced primarily by the stories of our particular tribe or community, not by stories that are mass-produced and market-driven. As George Gerbner, one of the world's most respected researchers on the influence of the media, said: 'For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life and values are told not by parents, schools, churches, or others in the community who have something to tell, but by a group of distant conglomerates that have something to sell.'

If we don't have the original article or book that George Gerbner wrote that in to cite from, we need to cite Kilbourne's article, then let people know it was Gerbner who said it, but he said it in Kilbourne's article. Is that circular enough yet? It's not too hard. Let's try it out.

**George Gerbner** claims that we don't get our ideas and stories about people life an values from the places we'd most suspect anymore. We get them from " a group of distant conglomerates that have something to sell" (**qtd. in Kilbourne**).

If we didn't use Gerbner's name in the signal phrase, we might do it this way (though why we wouldn't use his name, I have no idea):

One media researcher claims that we don't get our ideas and stories about people life an values from the places we'd most suspect anymore. We get them from " a group of distant conglomerates that have something to sell" (**Gerbner qtd. in Kilbourne**).

In both cases, we're just telling reader to check out the Kilbourne article that's listed on our Works Cited page. That's where they'll find Gerbner quoted.

Note that this source is a webpage and doesn't have page numbers, so we don't need any location.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*PUNCTUATING IN-TEXT CITATIONS*

When the quote is four typed lines or less, it is **integrated with your sentence**, and the period goes after the in-text citation.

**Gary Taubes** points out that when we feed our children treats we've become so accustomed to we "may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it" **(63)**.

When you have a long, indented quote, **more than four typed lines for MLA style** at this writing, you put the period at the end of the sentence, and the in-text citation afterward. Do not use quotation marks, as indenting the passage shows it's a quote.

**Gary Taubes** makes a clear point in talking about how we so often mistake sugary foods for healthy ones and use food as love:

It's one thing to suggest, as most nutritionists will, that a healthful diet includes more fruits and vegetables, and maybe less fat, red meat and salt, or less of everything. It's entirely different to claim that one particularly cherished aspect of our diet might not just be an unhealthful indulgence but actually be toxic, that when you bake your children a birthday cake or give them lemonade on a hot summer day, you may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it. **(63)**

## MLA WORKS CITED PAGE CITATIONS

If you do your works cited page first, it will be easier to figure out what to put in your in-text citations.

On the Works Cited page, we give a complete citation with all information needed to find the source at the end of the paper. In MLA style, this page is titled the Works Cited. It is part of your paper as much as your head is part of your body. It should always bear the same header and it should be stapled or put together with the essay itself.

### Reminders:

- Not all authors are people; you may have an organization or group as the author.
- When you do your works cited, pay close attention to punctuation.
- All entries should be in alphabetical order based on the first word in the citation (with the exception of *A*, *An*, and *The*) on your works cited page.
- Use a hanging indent.
  - Type out all entries in alphabetical order. Only press enter at the very end of the citation.
  - In MS Word:
    - Highlight the citation,
    - Right click on the selected text,
    - select Paragraph,
    - under Indentation click on **Special** and select **Hanging**
- All citations should end with a period.
- When you don't have information, you just skip it. However, *if you find yourself with very little information, you should not consider that source a good source for information and should not use it!* Avoid using encyclopedias (especially *Wikipedia*) unless they are highly specialized.
- Do not put an extra space between citations; however, double-space all of them.
- When in doubt, refer to your handbook, or a good style guide.

Here are some of the most common sources you'll use in your college work. Consult a good style guide for things not covered here or for unusual versions/formats of things listed here.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*BOOKS*

The following information is required in citing a book:

Author. *Title of Book in Italics with Major Words Capitalized*. Contributors, Version, Publisher, Year of Publication.

For example:

Roberts, Edgar V. and Henry E. Jacobs. *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 2nd ed., Prentice Hall, 2002.

- With the authors' names the first one is last name first, but after that it's just normal. This is true throughout the citation: the only name that gets switched around is the very first one, after that they are written in the normal order.
- Organize authors' names within a citation according to how they are listed in the work. Note how to treat more than three authors, multiple works by the same author, and other unusual name situations in your handbook or style guide.
- If the book has an edition number, it goes after the title. Notice the period after the abbreviation for edition and the comma after that. The period shows the abbreviation, and the comma shows the end of the core element.
- See the *Writer's Reference* for how to treat editors, translations, corporate authors, multiple authors, and other situations unique to your source.

*MAGAZINE/JOURNAL ARTICLES*

The following is required for a magazine or journal article:

Author. "Title in Quotes with Major Words Capitalized." *Container: Magazine/Journal Title in Italics with Major Words Capitalized*, Number, Date, Location.

For example:

Dennis, Carl. "What is Our Poetry to Make of Ancient Myths?" *New England Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1997, pp. 128-40.

- Do NOT write out "volume or "number," simply use their abbreviations

If you have a specific date (month and/or day, with the year), format it in day, month, year format. For example:

Fay, J. Michael. "Land of the Surfing Hippos." *National Geographic*, 25 Aug. 2004, p. 100+.

- Note that the + after the page number(s) means that the pages are not consecutive—it starts on one page and is continued later in the journal or magazine. If it is consecutive, list all pages, i.e.: pp. 251-68.

#### THE LIBRARY SEARCH PAGE/DATABASE

If the article came from a database, you will also include the database name and the DOI or URL at the end. In essence, the database is a container for the container.

Author. "Title in Quotes with Major Words Capitalized." *Container: Magazine/Journal Title in Italics with Major Words Capitalized*, Number, Date, Location, *Container Title*, Location (DOI or URL to database).

So, here's what one for a journal article would look like:

Smith, Martin. "World Domination for Dummies." *Journal of Despotry*, vol. 86., Feb. 2000, pp 66-72, Expanded *Academic Index*, go.galegroup.com.

#### A DATABASE SERVICE THAT PRODUCES ITS OWN MATERIAL

If you are citing a service that produces its own material like *Opposing Viewpoints* or *Contemporary Authors* (check carefully, many produce their own and present others' works), you would just have the author's name and the title along with the rest of the container information as illustrated above. It will look something like this:

Gale Literature Collections. "T. Coraghessan Boyle." *Contemporary Authors*, Gale Group, Accessed 5 Nov. 2015, go.galegroup.com.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

## A WEBPAGE OR ARTICLE FROM A WEBSITE

Author. "Title in Quotes with Major Words Capitalized." *Container: Website Title in Italics with Major Words Capitalized*, Publisher if different from website name, Date, Location.

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If you are turning in a print copy of your papers, right click on any hyperlinks in your paper and select "Remove Hyperlink." If you are turning in a virtual copy of your paper, you can leave the hyperlinks in if your teacher does not object.

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Sometimes you will not have a publication or upload date. Here, notice the difference between the publication date and the date accessed in the next two examples.

Publication/upload date given:

Simler, Kevin. "Ads Don't Work That Way." *Melting Asphalt*, 18 Sep. 2014, [www.meltingasphalt.com/ads-dont-work-that-way/](http://www.meltingasphalt.com/ads-dont-work-that-way/).

No publication/upload date given:

Wood, Kelli L. "In-Text Citation Chart." *kelli.ninja*, Accessed 8 Aug. 2016, [www.kelli.ninja/public\\_html/intextCitation.pdf](http://www.kelli.ninja/public_html/intextCitation.pdf).

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

**And**

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

## APA FORMAT AND DOCUMENTATION STYLE

The American Psychological Association is the main professional organization for psychology and behavioral sciences. Many fields in both social and hard sciences have adopted the APA documentation style, and you may be asked to use it in your college courses. Like MLA, it has a standard format for order and organization. Once you learn that—like learning to read and understand *cat*—you will understand and communicate the basics of your sources in your APA research projects.

Like MLA, APA the end-of-paper citation for sources begins with the name of the author or creator of the work, and that can be a person, people, or an organization. However, APA next gives the publication date. Because the sciences change quickly and new research often relies on current information, placing the date early in the citation emphasizes the importance of that. Now, that doesn't mean you can't use older information: a great deal of older information may be foundational to key ideas in a field.

Additionally, the ending pages that list the sources you used are titled as References.

There are two major forms of APA papers. The traditional method was developed for scientific papers and uses fairly standard sections to organize. This form of paper is used for original research where the writer develops a hypothesis and sets up a study to test it, reporting and discussing the results. A common acronym for it is IMRaD, which stands for **Introduction – Method – Results – and – Discussion**. In a formal and/or scientific paper, you will often see these (as well as a few other) section headings.

In an academic paper where you are looking at research and studies that have been done by professionals, you will typically use more topical headings (often these types of papers are called a "review of literature" or "literature review" as you're reviewing the current literature—studies—published about a subject).

Never use the heading "Introduction," as APA notes that it goes without saying. However, if your paper is long enough, you might have sections that are more topically titled based on the major issues discussed in your paper. (You may also find this form used in professional papers depending on the author or publication's approach.)

This distinction is important for in-text citation when you don't have page numbers to cite. These days you can usually get a pdf version of an article you find online, and whenever you can, do so! It makes citation easier. However, if you don't have that, you'll need to remember this distinction as you'll be required to use section headings for the location you provide, which we'll discuss in future sections.

## FORMATTING STUDENT ESSAYS APA STYLE

An APA paper, unlike a MLA formatted paper is submitted with a title page unless your instructor tells you to do otherwise. In late 2019, APA issued the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*—the official guide to all things APA. In that edition, they made some changes to their guidelines for format with student papers. It generally takes a year or so for these changes to trickle out and become more accepted. You would do well to ask your teacher what specifics they require for format.

This edition of *Writing down the Basics* uses the 7<sup>th</sup> edition guidelines, though some of them are left to the discretion of the instructor. With those things, I will let you know what I expect, but make a note to ask your other instructors about them.

If you need instructions for formatting your paper with 6<sup>th</sup> edition guidelines, see [Appendix B](#).

The *APA Manual* points out that

a well-prepared paper encourages editors and reviewers, as well as instructors in the case of student work, to view authors' work as professional. In contrast, mechanical flaws can lead reviewers or instructors to misinterpret content or question the authors' expertise or attention to detail, and students may receive a lower grade because of formatting errors. (p. 43)

They are not overstating the importance of format. It is your first impression and speaks volumes about your investment in your work and learning.

Here are the basic elements of formatting an APA paper:

- Font should be a standard 12-point typeface. The 7<sup>th</sup> edition does not state a preference for a particular font, but it does note that the font should be the same throughout the text of the paper with these exceptions, *which are optional*:
  - Within figures (tables, charts, etc.) a sanserif font with a type size between 8 and 14
  - Presenting computer code: monospace font, e.g. 10-point Lucida Console or 10-point Courier New
  - Footnotes: the word processor's default setting is acceptable which is generally 10-point font single-spaced.
- **Double-space** your work throughout the paper, including title, headings, references, and captions.
  - You may add extra spacing around equations for readability, but never use single spacing except with tables, figures, or footnotes. In short, if you don't have a reason to do it, don't.
- **Do not** full justify your work. Use a left alignment (ragged right edge).
- Margins should be **1-inch** on all sides.

- **Indent** the first line of every paragraph **except** for the abstract (no longer required in student papers), block/long quotations, title and headings, table titles and notes, and figure captions.
- **Title page.** The *Publication Manual* advises students to follow instructors' guidelines, but if those are not given, requires the following:
  - Your **header** should be composed of simply the page number in the top right corner, beginning on the title page with 1.
  - **Identification information** should be placed in the top third of the page. Space down a few lines and center the following information:
    - The full title of your paper in **bold**, using APA capitalization rules for titles. This is the **ONLY** thing in bold on this page.
    - Your name (all authors' names for collaborative work)
    - The department, division, or discipline name and your school's name
    - Course number for which the paper is being submitted: use the school's common format—ENGL 1302, PSYC 2345, and the title of the course. See your syllabus for the complete course title and correct number.
    - Instructor name (always double check the spelling—everyone notices their names spelled wrong. Instructor names should be listed on your official course syllabus/policies.)
    - Date: Give the month, date, and year, written out: July 19, 2020.
  - The **Author Note** and **Abstract** are not required in the *APA Publication Manual* for student papers in the 7<sup>th</sup> edition, though instructors *may* require them. If you need to format in 6<sup>th</sup> edition format, or if your instructor requires either of these, see [Appendix B](#)—the format has stayed the same for those. I do not require them.
  - *Begin your paper* on the next page—page 2.
    - Center your title in **bold** on the first line. Do not skip a line before the title, and just use regular double space after it. Make sure to turn bold off for the text of your paper.
    - Indent the first line of each paragraph.
    - After your introductory paragraph (this may be longer as you write longer papers), you may begin using headings.
      - Consult your style guide for how to format your headings.
      - It is important to note that headings should **not** take place of smooth transitions. To test for this, read from paragraph to paragraph as if the heading was not there. If there's a jump and a bit of confusion, review paragraph transitions and topic sentences to smooth out those movements.
  - Your **References page** should be placed at the end of your paper. Press Ctrl+Enter to start a new page for it at the end of your essay.

- Organize your references alphabetically based on the first word in the citation. See your style guide for further information.
- When using **tables and figures**, you will need to provide citation information for them. Do not use any tables or figures that are not immediately relevant to your points.
- If you embed them in the text, make sure that they are in the right space and work visually with the format.
- These do not count toward page length assigned.

The *Publication Manual* says:

There are two options for the placement of tables and figures in a paper. The first option is to place all tables and figure on separate pages after the references list (with each table on a separate page followed by each figure on a separate page). The second option is to embed each table and figure within the text after its first callout....

When embedding a table or figure in the text, position it after a full paragraph, ideally the paragraph where it is first called out. Place the table or figure so that it fits on one page if possible. . . If text appears on the same page as a table or figure, add a blank double-spaced blank line between the text and the table or figure so that the separation between the text and table or figure is easier to see. (p. 198)

---

\*\*\*\*If you plan to use tables or figures in your essay, discuss it with me *before* you do. Your paper should be able to make sense without the table or figure, so make sure they're not taking place of your writing. Remember, they never count toward your page count in most courses.\*\*\*\*

---

## APA FORMAT SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS IN MS WORD

The following are step-by-step instructions for formatting an APA paper based on 7<sup>th</sup> edition guidelines and my preferences for anything APA has left up to the instructor's discretion. I have put the "instructor discretion" issues and issues that students also commonly make mistakes on in bold. So, double-check those

Begin by opening a new document.

### 1. Insert the page number in the header.

- a. In Word, click on "Insert" on the ribbon, and then click on "Page Number."
- b. A drop down menu will appear.
- c. **Select "Top of Page," then "Plain Number 3." This will put the page number in (inserts just the page number, aligned on the right side of the page).**
- d. Make sure to click below the dotted line to close out the header. Whatever is above the dotted line will be on every page.

For other word processors, use the program's help function or Google "insert page numbers in a header" or something similar. Other good sources of help are the tutors at the writing center, and the computer lab staff.

### 2. Type in your Identifying Information.

- a. Make sure the line spacing is set to double and that there is **no extra space between paragraphs**.
  - i. **In the HOME tab, click on the callout symbol in the Paragraph section.**
  - ii. **Make sure that Before and After are set to 0.**
  - iii. **Select the check box by "Don't add space between paragraphs of the same type."**
  - iv. Under line spacing, select Double.
  - v. Click OK
- b. Enter twice
- c. Type in you paper's title in bold with APA title case. Capitalize these in a title or heading:
  - i. the first word of the title or heading, even if it is a minor word such as "The" or "A"
  - ii. the first word of a subtitle
  - iii. the first word after a colon, em dash, or end punctuation in a heading
  - iv. major words, including the second part of hyphenated major words (e.g., "Self-Report," not "Self-report")
  - v. any proper noun
- d. Enter twice.
- e. Type your name

- f. Type the Course abbreviation and course number followed by a colon and the full title of the course.
  - g. Type the professor or instructor's name
  - h. Type out the date in standard format
  - i. Press Ctrl+Enter (Cmd+Enter on a Mac) to start a new page.
3. Begin the text of your essay.
  - a. Type your title centered in bold. Turn off the bold. Enter once.
  - b. Begin your essay. Make sure to indent the beginning of each paragraph.
4. Insert a references page. If you use sources other than yourself, common knowledge (things most people know or that are found in numerous sources like "George Washington was the first president of the USA"), you must cite those. They are listed at the end of the essay on beginning on a new page.
  - a. At the end of your essay, press Ctrl+Enter (Cmd+Enter on a Mac) to start a new page.
  - b. Center the word **References** at the top of the page in bold. Turn off bold.
    - i. If you only have one source, title the page **Reference**.
  - c. Enter and begin typing your references.
  - d. References should be listed in alphabetical order based on the first thing in the citation with the exception of A, An, The. In that case, leave those first, but use the next word to alphabetize.
  - e. Use a credible style guide for instructions on how to cite. Do not make it up. Do not try to remember it. Do not trust citation generators—always check their work.

---

NOTE: If you are using sources and know you'll have to cite, I suggest you go ahead and put in your References page after you put in the title for the first page of text. That way you can scroll down to this page and cite sources as you put them in your paper.

---

Don't want to go through this mess again? Save this document as APA Template. Then when you need an APA paper, just open it, and SAVE AS with the new paper name. You'll need to change the course, date, and title information, but all the details will be set up for you.

The next few pages illustrate these elements.

**Title of My Super-Great Paper:**

**The One that's Really Brilliant**

Ima Great Student

English Discipline, El Paso Community College

ENGL 1302: Composition II

July 19, 2020

**Title of My Super-Great Paper:****The One that's Really Brilliant**

Begin your paper here. Your title page does not count toward the length of your paper, nor do graphics, references pages, or any appendices. Remember, page length is about depth of thought, so think as deeply as your page length requires.

You should not have any extra spaces between your paragraphs. To make sure you don't, highlight all of your writing, select the paragraph call out arrow from the Home tab or right click on the highlighted section and select Paragraph from the pop-up menu. There, look under Spacing Before and After. Make sure that each of those is set to 0.

Do not use bold, italics, underlining, or any other adjustment to your font unless you have a technical reason to do so. The following pages discuss some of those, but when in doubt look it up in a reliable style guide.

**Using Headings**

*After* your introduction, you may begin to use headings. There is a difference in how you format first, second, and third level headings, so look that up if you need to. If you're only doing first level heading (major points without sub-points that need headings) they will be centered in bold with major words capitalized as shown above. For most of your academic papers, you will only need first-level headings.

Remember, you must be able to read your work without the headings and still have smooth transitions. Take time to read the paragraphs without the headings and make sure they flow logically and smoothly to check those transitions. If your paper is short, do not use headings unless you've been instructed to.

## References

Type out the citations for your sources here. Make sure to format them with a hanging indent as shown here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Brzd0B-P5s>

Do not use bullets or numbers here. Make sure to list them in alphabetical order as described here: <https://blogs.transparent.com/english/english-alphabetizing-rules/>

If you used a source in your paper, it should be cited here. If you cited it here, readers should be able to find where you used it in your paper through both your in-text citation and signal phrases.

Always cite statistics and numbers you give. Always cite statistics and numbers you give.

Always cite statistics and numbers you give.

Double-check any citation you get from anywhere. Many places have not updated their citations to fit the APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition standards.

If you only have one source, make sure to title the page Reference. If you have more than one, title the page References.

## APA AUTHORS AND TITLES

There are some notable differences in APA when it comes to treatment of authors and titles in your text and on the References page.

### Authors

- **In the text of your paper, only** use authors' last names.
  - The exception to this is if you have more than one author with the same last name. Then use first initials.
- **On your References page**, use last name with the first and middle initials (if given). Even if the author's whole name appears, just use the initials for any other than the last name.

### Titles

- **In the text of your paper**, treat titles as APA requires:
  - Long works are placed in *italics*: (books, journals/magazines, newspapers, websites, movies, the title of a TV show, etc.)
  - Short works are placed in "quotation marks": (articles, short stories, an episode of a TV show, etc.)
  - APA Title Case: In titles, capitalize these things:
    - the first word of the title or heading, even if it is a minor word such as "The" or "A"
    - the first word of a subtitle
    - the first word after a colon, em dash, or end punctuation in a heading
    - major words, including the second part of hyphenated major words (e.g., "Self-Report," not "Self-report")
    - any proper noun
    - Use APA Title Case for titles of sources in your essay. Do not use APA Title Case for many titles on the Reference page
- **On your Reference page**, titles are treated differently:
  - Both books and articles are in a regular font (no italics or quotation marks), and you only capitalize the first word of the title, the first word of a subtitle, and proper nouns (names of people and places).
  - Journal, Magazine, and webpage/article titles are placed in Italics. Capitalize all words of four or more letters, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns.
  - Make sure to see your book or style guide as there are times these are not treated consistently.
  - Basically, just read and follow the instructions—that's what I do.

## USING NUMBERS IN APA WRITING

In APA, the general rule of thumb for using numbers is to write out numbers 1-10, and use numerals for numbers above that:

- Only **seven** of the **20** regions reported growth
- **Ten** participants to part in the study
- **89%** of those surveyed said
- **40**-year olds were more likely to

Exceptions:

- Numbers in the abstract or in a graph in the paper
- Numbers before a unit of measurement: a 4 inch discrepancy
- Numbers that are part of times, dates, statistics, mathematical functions, fractional or decimal quantities, percentages, ratios, and numbers *after* a noun:
  - July 19, 2020
  - 5 days
  - 1 hour 34 minutes
  - 3%
  - a ratio of 10:1
  - 0.26 of the population
  - question 8, *but not, the eighth question (number after a noun)*
  - Chapter 4, *but not the fourth chapter (number after a noun)*

**Always** write out the number if it begins a sentence. If the number is too bulky to write out, reword the sentence:

- **Eighty-three** percent of people won't write out the number 83.
- Instead of writing out the number **83**, **83%** of people will just reword the sentence.
  - **Note that if you use the words with a percentage, you should also spell out percent.**

Write out common fractions and universally accepted usage:

- One half of the class
- The twelve days of Christmas

If you have back-to-back numbers, write out one:

- **Two 4**-year olds
- **Ten 5**-point lists

Remember to use **words with words** and **symbols with symbols**:

- 5% **OR** five percent
- \$5 **OR** five dollars
- **NOT** 5 percent or 5 dollars

APA IN-TEXT CITATION

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**WARNING**

This is a general overview. While it covers the most common things you will cite, you must refer to your handbook for works beyond the scope of this supplement. What you do about different situations with authors, editions, translators, and other important things are NOT covered in here.

**REMEMBER**

I've put some things in bold in this section on citation to emphasize and point out key issues. **Nothing in a citation should be in bold.**

---

Similar to MLA and other citation styles, APA requires that you integrate sources smoothly with a combination of attribution and in-text or parenthetical citations. In the simplest form, it is an **author/date/location** style that generally requires that you give the date of publication in parenthesis after you mention the author's last name(s), and then the page number(s) in parenthesis at the end of the cited material, though this may vary based on your sentence style. Just remember, always get **author, date, and location** into your sentence.

DO NOT put the page number in your sentence. Page numbers and video timestamps **always** go in the in-text citation.

*THE BASICS*

A basic reference with a direct quote might look like this:

According to **Shapiro (2015)** “the time to stand up for yourself and others is always now” **(p. 7)**.

Just remember that if you put the author's name in your sentence—something you should be doing now and then, make sure you put the year it was published in parenthesis right after that. In an example like the one above, the author's name isn't in parenthesis because the name is part of the sentence. The date isn't, it's part of the citation, so it goes in parenthesis. We could do it like this too:

In a **2015** study **Shapiro** said, “the time to stand up for yourself and others is always now” **(p. 7)**.

Notice there, 2015 is part of the sentence. Once you have it in the sentence, you don't need to repeat it in the citation. However, remember, page numbers and video timestamps **always** go in the in-text citation. They never, never, never, never go in the sentence.

A paraphrase from 1-2 consecutive pages would look the same. Remember, even if you put it in your own words, you need to cite it in the text and on your references page. Whether or not you give the location is optional. The 7<sup>th</sup> edition *Publication Manual* (2019) says

Although you are not required to provide a page or paragraph number in the citation for a paraphrase, you may include one in addition to the author and year when it would help interested readers locate the relevant passage within a long or complex work (p. 269).

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\*\*\*\*If you are writing for my course, I want you to provide the location. In other cases and courses, ask your instructor. Here's an example of a paraphrase. \*\*\*\*

---

According to **Hacker and Sommers (2015)** commas were not created to confuse people, but to keep parts of sentences from crashing into each other **(p. 287)**.

If you do not mention the author's name(s) in your sentence, put all information (author, date, location) in the in-text citation at the end of the cited material.

Some experts maintain that commas were not created to confuse people, but to keep parts of sentences from crashing into each other **(Hacker & Sommers, 2015, p. 287)**.

Here, note the difference in the *and* and the & in the signal phrase versus the in-text citation in these first two examples. When you are listing multiple authors **in your sentence**, use the word. When you are listing them **in your citation**, use the symbol.

Obviously, you should vary your wording for the sake of style and clarity, but don't forget to change the in-text citation to fit the situation.

If you integrate more information from a source you've just cited **in the same paragraph**, and you use the author name **in your sentence**, you do not need to repeat the date there. If the date is part of the citation at the end of the quote or paraphrase, put it in again.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*SOURCES WITHOUT PAGE NUMBERS*

Today, it is very likely that you can get a pdf version of professional articles online. If you can, always make sure to use the pdf as **having page numbers make it much easier to cite**.

However, for some articles, and of course articles on webpages, you may not have that. In that case, you will need to use a different approach to giving the location in your citation: section/heading titles and paragraph numbers.

APA 7<sup>th</sup> states that any of the following are acceptable.

If you have a source without page numbers, use paragraph numbers. Use para. to indicate a paragraph number. In that case, one of the above citations would look like this:

**FBI (2014)** research showed that... **(para. 19)**.

If the document includes headings and no page numbers, cite the heading and the number of the paragraph within the heading or section to direct the reader to the location of the quoted material. For an IMRaD paper, with formally named sections (Methods, Research, Discussion, Conclusions), do this:

**FBI (2014)** research showed that... **(Discussion section, para. 2)**.

If is not an IMRaD paper and has different section headings, use those. If the heading is really long, then shorten it. Remember, these are short cuts to help people find the right sections.

**FBI (2014)** research showed that... **(“How to Know,” para. 5)**.

(Original heading: "How to Know if You're Ready to Join the FBI.")

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\*\*\*\*In my courses, I expect you to give as much information as available with paraphrases that come from 1 or 2 consecutive pages. Again, if the pdf is available you will have page numbers, so always read the page you find the source on for an option to get the pdf version. Give the page number from the original source document unless that's not available, then just use the pdf page number. \*\*\*\*

---

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*VIDEO OR AUDIO LOCATIONS*

As of the newest version of the APA rules, putting in the time stamp for quotes or paraphrases from video or audio is required. In that case, you only provide the time stamp for the *beginning* of the section you are quoting or paraphrasing from. Give it in hours, minutes, and seconds, skipping hours or seconds if not available. Put a colon between each section: hh: mm: ss.

People often "confuse a semicolon with a colon. They are not the same" (**Wood, 2015, 05:22**).

*USING JUST ONE SOURCE*

When you use just one source in an essay or in a paragraph, you do not need to constantly repeat the author's name in the parenthetical citations. After you establish who wrote the source and it's clear which source it's from, you only need the page numbers, for example,

In his poem "Annabel Lee" **Poe (1849)** uses not simply repetition, but a pattern of paired repetition. He begins the poem saying "It was many and many a year ago" (**line 1**). By the end of the verse, he writes, "Than to love and be loved by me" (**4**). He continues with these pairs at the start of the next stanza: "I was a child and she was a child" (**5**). However, in the rest of that verse, he moves from the simple paired repetition to a repetition that uses longer phrases and paired repeated images.

Notice how I've used Poe's name in my sentence so I didn't need it in the first in-text citation. I put the word *line* in the first parenthetical citation, as that's what you do with poetry to remind readers that's a line number. After that each time I cite from the same work, I only need the page number. If don't cite any other sources in this paragraph, the only place I need Poe's name is anywhere I want to use it in my sentence, and I don't even need the date.

The same applies to an essay where I only use one source. If I only use one source, after the first mention of it in the text, where I would put the date after the author's name, I only need the author's name when it fits nicely in my sentence.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*INDIRECT SOURCES (QUOTING A SOURCE FROM ANOTHER SOURCE)*

When you have a source that quotes other people and you want to use them but don't have the original source, you can cite it as an indirect source.

Let's take this article as an example:

Lei, S. A. (2015). Variation in study patterns among college students: A review of literature. *College Student Journal*, 49(2), 195–198.

As mentioned elsewhere a review of literature is an article that examines the research that's been done and then discusses the overall findings (basically a very formal research paper), so there are many other sources cited in them. If you want to quote a source from the source you're reading, first look at the references given on the source you're using, and see if you can find the original source. If so, use that. If you can't find the original source, then do this.

To use information from one of the researchers in the Lei article, we'd need to show who the original author is, and also who readers should look up on our References page if they want to find that article.

Let's say we want to use some version of this information from the Lei article:

College students need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through these hidden locations when studying (**Newport, 2007**).

If you want to quote Newport but didn't read Newport's original work—just what Lei used here, Lei will be listed on your references page (in the prewriting or annotated bibliography as your citation). Then in the paper, you let people know the idea is from Newport, but they can read it in the Lei paper.

So, you can either put the writer's name in your sentence (there I mean Newport) and then use the in-text citation for the source information (Lei)

It could look like this:

**Newport (as cited in Lei, 2015)** points out that students “need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through hidden locations when studying” (**p. 197**).

OR

One researcher suggests that students find a number of secluded places to study and use them on a random basis (**Newport, as cited in Lei, 2015, p. 197**).

OR

Lei (2015) discusses a study by **Newport (2007)** who emphasizes the “need to identify a number of isolated study spots and rotate through hidden locations when studying” (**p. 197**).

Notice how all of those show who the author of the words quoted are, but also the author of the actual source we're citing in our paper is and the information for date and location so we can match it up to the source cited on our References page.

*THREE OR MORE AUTHORS: IN-TEXT CITATIONS (ET AL.)*

In your text if you have a work written by 3 or more authors, use the shortcut for the authors names after the first one: et al. That means “and others.” Always use the et al with the first author’s name, otherwise you’re talking about a different source—one written by ONLY the first author. All other parts of the citation stay the same. Here are some examples of using et al in your sentences. You can always check your grammar by substituting *they*.

**Bowen, et al. (2011)** state that “...” (**p. 248**).

Later in the article they point out the importance of “. . .” (**Bowen, et al., 2011, p. 253**).

**[Remember, don’t put anything in bold in your citations;  
that’s just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I’m making about the section of the citation!]**

*ORGANIZATIONS EASILY RECOGNIZABLE BY THEIR ABBREVIATIONS*

First Time:

If you name the organization in your sentence:

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2014)** research showed that... (**p. 248**).

Subsequent References:

**FBI (2014)** research showed that... (**p. 248**)

If you **do not** name the organization in your sentence:

One research project showed that . . . . **(Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2014).**

After setting up the abbreviation, you may just use the abbreviation in all places in the text and in-text citations.)

Subsequent References:

**FBI (2014)** research showed that... **(p. 248).**

One research project **(2014)** showed that . . . . **(FBI, 2014).**

#### *APA PUNCTUATING IN-TEXT CITATIONS*

When a quote is **40 words or less**, it is integrated with your sentence, and the period goes *after* the in-text citation.

**Gary (2012)** points out that when we feed our children treats we've become so accustomed to, we "may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it" **(para. 8).**

Note: since this article has no page numbers, sections, only the paragraph number is required.

When you have a long, indented quote, **more than 40 words for APA style**, you put the period at the end of the sentence, and the in-text citation afterward. *Do not use quotation marks*, as indenting the passage shows it's a quote.

**Taubes (2012)** makes a clear point in talking about how we so often mistake sugary foods for healthy ones and use food as love:

It's one thing to suggest, as most nutritionists will, that a healthful diet includes more fruits and vegetables, and maybe less fat, red meat and salt, or less of everything. It's entirely different to claim that one particularly cherished aspect of our diet might not just be an unhealthful indulgence but actually be toxic, that when you bake your children a birthday cake or give them lemonade on a hot summer day, you may be doing them more harm than good, despite all the love that goes with it. **(para. 8)**

Again, note that this article has no page numbers, sections, or headings, so only the paragraph number is used.

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

Oh, and. . .

**[Remember, don't put anything in bold in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

## APA REFERENCES PAGE

In APA style, the page that lists the sources used in the essay is titled References. It is part of your paper as much as your head is part of your body. It should always bear the same header and it should be stapled or put together with the essay itself.

### Important Details:

- Not all authors are people; you may have an organization or group as the author.
- When you do your references, pay close attention to details like capitalization, font style, and punctuation.
- All entries should be in alphabetical order based on the first word in the citation (with the exception of *A*, *An*, and *The*) on your references page. As with the rest of your paper, the page should be double spaced with no extra space between each paragraph (citation).
- Use a hanging indent.
  - Type out all entries in alphabetical order. Only press enter at the very end of the citation.
  - In MS Word:
    - Highlight/select the citation and press Ctrl+T
    - If that doesn't work, highlight/select the citation and then click on the selected text,
      - select Paragraph,
      - under Indentation click on **Special** and select **Hanging**
- All citations should end with a period if they do not end with a URL or DOI. If they do end with a URL or DOI, omit the period to avoid confusion.
- When you don't have information, you just skip it. However, *if you find yourself with very little information, you should carefully re-evaluate your source!* It's not always a sign of sketchy information, but it might be.
- Avoid using encyclopedias (especially *Wikipedia*) unless they are highly specialized.
- When in doubt, refer to your handbook, or a good style guide.
- Do not count on citation generators to get this right for you. If you use one or any other source to provide your citation, it's a good start but ***always*** double check it!

The following are some of the most common types of sources you may find yourself using for your college-level papers. Again, for other types of sources, consult a good style guide. In APA, the definitive guide is the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

**NOTE:** When you have a URL in your citation, you may end up with a big gap of space before a URL in your citation, other times your computer will divide it up. The new version of APA says you should **NOT** work to remove that gap.

**[Remember, DON'T put anything in BOLD in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

*BOOKS*

The following information is required in citing a book:

Author, F. M. (Date). *Title in italics: Only capitalize the first word of the title, the first word of a subtitle, and proper nouns (names of people and places)*. Location: Publisher.

For example:

Roberts, E. V. and Jacobs, H. E. (2002). *Literature: An introduction to reading and writing* (2d ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.

- With the authors' names all are listed last name first, and then initials given. This is true throughout the citation: all names are given last name first, followed by initial(s).
- Organize authors' names within a citation according to how they are listed in the work. Note how to treat more than seven authors, multiple works by the same author, and other unusual name situations in your handbook or style guide.
- If the book has an edition number, it goes after the title. Notice the period after the abbreviation for edition and the comma after that. The period shows the abbreviation, and the comma shows the end of the element.
- See your handbook for how to treat editors, translations, corporate authors, multiple authors, and other situations unique to your source.

For online books include the URL or DOI at the end of the citation. Do not put a period after either of these. If you have both, the DOI is preferred.

- DOI: #####. They can take a couple of different forms, so look at your source carefully for them:
  - <https://doi.org/10.1109/5.771073>
  - 10.1109/5.771073
    - If you don't have the hyperlinked version (with https in front, just add this to the front of the number and it will link to the article or the DOI information for the article) <https://doi.org/>
- If you have a URL, only include the URL—"retrieved from" is no longer necessary: <http://www.nameofwebsite.com>

For example:

Carroll, L. (1912). *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*. London: McMillan and Co.

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Alice\\_s\\_Adventures\\_in\\_Wonderland/hAfGn\\_hNA2sC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP9&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Alice_s_Adventures_in_Wonderland/hAfGn_hNA2sC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP9&printsec=frontcover)

*WHAT'S A DOI?*

DOI stands for Digital Object Identifier. These are number strings that identify various digital objects. *The DOI Handbook* states that the International DOI Foundation (IDF) was created in 1997 "for managing identification of content over digital networks." They recognized the need for this and envisioned it like an "equivalent of the analogue bar code," and saw it as more stable than a URL hyperlink because "digital networked content cannot rely on URLs as identifiers (e.g., due to 'linkrot': '404 not found')." So, even if a website disappears or goes out of business, that number still refers to that specific object.

*MAGAZINE/JOURNAL ARTICLES (PRINT AND ONLINE)*

The following is required for a magazine or journal article **with volume and/or issue numbers**:

Author, F. M. (Date). Title in a regular font: Only capitalize the first word of the title, the first word of a subtitle, and proper nouns—names of people and places. *Title of Magazine or Journal in Italics with Major Words Capitalized*.  
Volume(Number/Issue), Pages.

- If the article is retrieved from the web, include the DOI number or URL (the DOI is preferred if you have the choice). In the example below, notice that I've only given the basic URL for the site.
  - When you cite from an **online magazine or journal, only give the base URL**.
- Do NOT write out the words "volume or "number/issue," or use their abbreviations.
- If you have an issue number, it should be placed in parenthesis right after the volume number.
  - Note that sometimes publishers will use the term *issue*, sometimes *number*, and sometimes *issue number*. All of these mean the same thing.

For example:

Dennis, C. (1997). What is our poetry to make of ancient myths? *New England Review*.  
18(4), 128-40. <http://www.nereview.com>

If you have a **specific date** (month and/or day, with the year), format it in year, month, day format. For example:

Fay, J. M. **(2004, July 19)** Land of the surfing hippos. *National Geographic*, 46(8),  
100-115.

**Remember, DON'T put anything in BOLD in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!**

*THE LIBRARY DATABASE/SEARCH PAGE*

If the article came from a database, APA recommends you **do not** include the database information as that may change over time; simply cite the source as you would from the original source.

Note that the databases on the library search page usually include the URL in their suggested citation. **Get rid of it.** If you must give it for some reason, give **only** the base for the company's URL. For example: <https://ebSCOhost.com>

*WEBPAGES (NON-DATABASE/LIBRARY URL)*

Do not include a *whole* website on your References page. You do need to cite the specific web pages/articles you used.

The basic format for a webpage or article looks like this:

Author, F. M. (Date). *Title of article or page in italics: Do not capitalize major words other than the first word in the title or subtitle and proper nouns.* Name of Website. <http://www.wesitename.com/page-url>

For example:

Simler, K. (2014, September 10) *Ads don't work that way.* Melting Asphalt. <http://www.meltingasphalt.com/ads-dont-work-that-way/>

Sometimes you will not have a publication or upload date. In that case you use n.d. (no date) in place of the date. That looks like this:

\*No publication/upload date given:

Wood, K. L. (**n.d.**) *In-Text Citation Chart.* Kelli Dot Ninja. [http://www.kelli.ninja/public\\_html/intextCitation.pdf](http://www.kelli.ninja/public_html/intextCitation.pdf).

Use (n.d.) in your in-text citations as well.

If the source is from the author or organization's website and listing the title would be a repeat of their name(s), you don't need to give the title in the retrieval information:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** (2012, December 10). *Concussion in winter sports.* <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HockeyConcussions/index.html>

**Remember, DON'T put anything in BOLD in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!**

## AUDIO/VIDEO SOURCES

If a source is not printed, you tell readers what kind of source it is after you give the title of the work. The media—type of source—goes in square brackets. You will give 4-5 elements. I am only giving examples for online videos and Ted talks. For other media, please consult your style guide.

- Author
- Date
- Title
- Media: for example [Video], [Image], [Advertisement]
- Source (this includes publisher and URL)

Remember, DON'T put anything in BOLD in your citations; that's just done in these examples to highlight the point I'm making about the section of the citation!

For a YouTube video, it would look like this:

Wood, K. (2019, July 19). *Reading (and using) scholarly articles*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/sTtqp0MNqHE>

## TED TALKS

TED talks are a little different. If you get them from YouTube, you use TED as the author. In giving the source title, **give the speaker's name, a colon, and then the title of the video like this:**

TED. (2012, March 16). *Brene Brown: Listening to shame* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>

For the in-text citation, use the standard rules, but **make sure you get the speaker's name in your sentence** with any video from YouTube so that it's clear who is responsible for the information. For example, you might say,

Brown says, "That myth is profoundly dangerous" (TED, 2012, 04:03).

TED is listed in the author position in the References citation, so in your paper, use it in the in-text in that way. **Again, in your writing, always give the speaker's actual name so it's clear who is speaking.**

If the video is on the TED website ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) cite it this way:

Giertz, S. (2018, April). *Why you should make useless things* [Video]. TED Conferences. [https://www.ted.com/talks/simone\\_giertz\\_why\\_you\\_should\\_make\\_useless\\_things?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/simone_giertz_why_you_should_make_useless_things?language=en)

In this case, just follow the regular process for the in-text citation.

**[Remember, DON'T put anything in BOLD in your citations;  
that's just done in these examples to highlight the point  
I'm making about the section of the citation!]**

#### *PERSONAL INTERVIEWS*

In very formal APA papers, you do not cite **personal interviews** that are not published somewhere. However, in my research courses, I do allow students to use personal interviews as sources (consult your assignment and me about doing this though—I do have limits and claim first right of refusal), so you will cite them at the end of the essay on the references page. Here are the instructions for that.

References page citation:

LastName of Interviewee with initials. (DATE). Personal Interview. [Interview by author].

Here's a sample from one of the sample research essays on the 1302 Research page:

Molina. R. (2018). Personal Interview. [Interview by author].

For in-text citation, follow the general rules. When you use the person's name in your sentence the first time, you may give their whole name.

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**Remember, always check your style guide for things that aren't  
covered here.  
These are only the basics!**

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## ARGUMENT ESSAYS

An argument is simply a statement of belief or position that is backed up by logical reasons and points. Sometimes these will include using sources you've been assigned, and other times you will need to do your own research. Now and then, you'll just be making your argument from your experience and observation. This is the most common type of writing for college, and often in other places as well.

The essay has a general structure that you can use whether you're writing about a current issue, a literary work, or explaining and defending a point of view. The following outline illustrates that structure.

- Introduction
  - Provide an opening that gets readers into the topic. You might discuss the overall subject in general, provide some history or background, or use narrative to set the scene.
  - Provide a clear thesis.
    - Your thesis (main point) should be expressed in one clear sentence. It should meet these criteria:
      - It should be arguable (not a fact), and state your position clearly
      - It should bear further explanation
      - It should be supportable with credible sources and facts
- Body
  - Provide reasons for belief in your thesis (subtopic). Do this in clear topic sentences.
  - For each reason you should:
    - Provide evidence (facts, quotes, statistics, or narrative with a personal essay),
    - Explain and interpret how the evidence fits into or illuminates the thesis, and
    - Connect the evidence to your position on your thesis.
- Conclusion options include:
  - Discuss how all of the points you've given in your essay add up to illustrate something bigger about the issue
  - Explain how the points you've made lead to a logical view or way to progress on the issue.

This is a general outline, and much like a basic recipe, it is designed to be adapted. Writing, like cooking, uses a number of basic concepts, then allows the creator to play with and embellish on them to create something distinct and unique. However, this basic outline is present in everything from semi-formal to very formal writing. As you read look for the traits listed in the outline above in other works. Notice how they're used in different genres and for different purposes. Then use them as you work on your own writings.

## THE RESEARCH PAPER

One of the common formal essays you'll be asked to write in college is the research paper. While they can take many forms, the most common approaches are to either defend an idea or premise—make an argument, or to evaluate evidence and draw conclusions. In either case, there are some basic tips that can help you get started.

In academic research, everything is up for grabs. Often students want to research the most common things like capital punishment or the death penalty. Yet, academic research doesn't have to be so predictable. I advise that when you have a choice, you choose a topic that you are both interested in and that you find fun. For example, if you're a big fan of soccer, there's a lot you can research about it. One of the best ways to do that is to start with questions.

### START WITH A QUESTION

Begin by asking questions. With the soccer example, we might start with these questions:

- Where did soccer originate?
- Are there different rules or approaches?
- Where is it most popular and why?

Now, these questions will get us a lot of facts, and that's not a bad start, but most college research papers ask you to do more than just provide facts. So as you begin reading background or historical information, start to look for various *issues* that come up.

An issue is different from a topic. A topic is simply informational, whereas an issue is something that people debate or argue. In the academic world, the term *argument* does not imply a bad thing. Instead, it is centered around the idea that differing opinions are necessary to understand ideas and get to the heart of facts.

In soccer, there are a number of issues that go beyond specific facts. Here are some questions that we might ask that would lead to issues:

- How are teams seeded by the FIFA? How does that effect outcomes?
- Should goal line technology be used?
- Does FIFA have too much control?
- Is FIFA operated ethically?
- To what extent should drug testing be used in soccer?
- Why do soccer matches often result in violence on the part of the fans?
- What makes some soccer fans so fanatic?

As you can see, these are all questions that will have different answers behind them. They are issues. By starting with the basic questions then looking for the issues, you can identify a number of things to write about. In an essay on soccer, you would not want to address all of these unless it was quite lengthy, but they would give you some ideas to start with.

## FINDING RESEARCH

We've already gone over primary and secondary sources as well as evaluating credibility. We've also covered sources not to use in your academic papers. If you've forgotten any of this, now's the time to go back and review it. This is important information to keep in mind when researching. Making sure that sources you use are solid and credible makes you more credible.

### *PRINT SOURCES*

Many print sources have made their way online, and understanding the basics of their content and audience will help you in evaluating and choosing which sources to use, as well as with citation.

- Books provide a wide overview of topic or issue. Books can be used as a whole, but you may find that you will often use a chapter or two from a book.
- Magazines are general interest periodicals meant for a broad audience. They are written in a less formal language and aimed at the general reader.
- Journals are magazines that are more specialized and discipline specific. They are written for and by professionals in a field. Often they are peer reviewed, which means that before an article is published it is read and reviewed by other experts in the field to make sure that the information and research in it meets the standards of the discipline. The writing in these articles is often more technical and will use the jargon of the field. The benefit of using journals is that they are generally considered credible sources.
- Websites can be valuable, but you need to make sure that they are written by credible authors or organizations.
- Newspapers. Newspapers offer you good resources on current events and issues of local interest. They will have information on local issues that you will not be able to find elsewhere.

### *LIBRARIES AND DATABASES*

Your local library is the one of the best places to start your search. Even though the internet offers a wide array of sources, books should not be overlooked. Books can be used as a whole, but you may find that you will often use a chapter or two from a book.

Most likely, your library also subscribes to computer databases. While these are accessed via the internet, they are not considered websites. Databases are collections of articles and other

sources that originally appeared elsewhere. For example, a database may contain articles from newspapers, magazines, and journals. You can think of a database as a type of online library.

In using your libraries and the tools they offer, make sure to talk to your local research librarians; they are more than happy to help you in finding sources for your research and are an invaluable resource in your research.

## READING A FORMAL RESEARCH STUDY: WHAT TO MAKE OF ALL THAT TECHNICAL TALK

When you encounter technical research studies (IMRaD papers), they can be rather intimidating to read; however, once you know how they're structured, it makes it a little easier to deal with the information. A typical research study has these parts:

- **Abstract:** This is a short summary of the study. It provides a basic overview with considerations made during the study, and may have a basic summary of the findings. This part helps you decide whether you want to read it or not. **READ THIS PART.**
- **Introduction or literature review:** The section sets the stage. It may include a literature review which just means the authors go through and look at what research has been done thus far and discuss how their research differs from that, looks at something that hasn't been considered by other research, or how it sets out to replicate certain studies to establish whether or not the conclusions are repeatable—an important step in establishing scientific fact.

Review this to get a feel for what the goal of the study is and to look at the other research they mention. It might be that you want to read and use some of those studies in your paper as well. (Remember, good research has the list of works cited or a bibliography at the end that will have citations. Your librarian can help you track those down.) **READ THIS PART—mostly.**

- **Methods or methodology:** In this section, which may be very technical, researchers share how they did the research. While it's valuable for you to have a general sense of what they did, for a basic research paper, you don't have to know it inside and out, so you'll want to skim it to for the basic ideas. **SKIM THIS PART;** read it thoroughly if something stands out as important: something they considered specifically, something they left out, or the size of the study—if it's very small, how much can we apply the conclusions across the board—are important things to consider.
- **Results:** This section is usually very technical. It will give the statistics and numbers, charts and graphs. It simply reports what the researchers found but does not draw conclusions. It's the raw data. **SKIM THIS PART,** you'll decide later if you need to read it more thoroughly.
- **Discussion:** Here's where the interpretation goes on. In this section, the authors start to draw conclusions and apply the results. What does the research show? **READ THIS SECTION THOROUGHLY.**
- **Conclusion and Summary:** In the final section, the researchers put their findings in context. What do their results mean for the topic? How does it increase our understanding or clear things up? What other things need to be researched and considered? **READ THIS SECTION THOROUGHLY.**

When you read research studies, begin with abstract to decide if it might be relevant to your topic. Then read the introduction and the conclusion. Those will help you decide whether it is usable information. If it is, then go through the rest, skimming or reading as necessary.

Expect to look up words and concepts if you are new to the field. Note the specific words and phrases they use in talking about the topic. Use those to do your own searches and lead you to more specific information on your topic.

Most of all, don't be intimidated. Remember the heart of research is learning. You're not just looking for the answers, you're learning how to think about the field of study, how to speak the language of the field, and how others investigate things and make meaning in the field. The more you read technical studies, the better you'll get at it.

### THE DOWN-AND-DIRTY METHOD FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER: TWO OPTIONS

Depending on your instructor and situation, the pre-writing steps you take before writing your paper will vary, but you will at least have to gather research, and you may have been required to cite and summarize your sources in an Annotated Bibliography. If you have not been required to do the summary and citation, I highly advise that you take the time to do it for yourself. It will help you by saving time later on.

Whether required or not, you should outline your paper. This is the key to the down-and-dirty method of writing a research paper. If you're not doing it for the teacher, then it doesn't have to be formal. Remember that an outline is just a list of the things you want to talk about in a logical order. So start by making a list of the various aspects of your topic. Here's an example with . . .oh, let's go with imaginary friends. After doing my research, I would think about what major topics came up within it. (By the way, I found out that in psychology, imaginary friends in childhood are called imaginary companions, so I'll use that term from now on. See the importance of paying attention to terminology—that gave me a search term which helped me find more research.)

- The prevalence of imaginary companions among children
- Types of imaginary companions
- The role of imaginary companions
- The value of imaginary companions

Those would be the major sections or categories of my paper. It might look something like this:

- What is an imaginary companion?
- The prevalence of imaginary companions among children.
  - Ages of children who have imaginary companions
  - Statistics and percentages
- Types of imaginary companions

- Human
- Animal
- Fantasy
- Protectors
- Companions
- The role of imaginary companions
  - Creativity
  - Physiological shields/therapy
- The value of imaginary companions
  - Enhanced creativity
  - Therapy

*Option 1: Outline by Listing Your Research*

Once I have a basic list of my topics and categories, I can start thinking about the research I have and where parts of it would fit in.

Below is an example using part of the outline I did above.

[NOTE: For this sample, I am using APA format, as that is what many of your research papers will require.]

- What is an imaginary companion? (IC)
  - "An IC was originally defined as 'an invisible character named and referred to in conversation with other persons or played with directly for a period of time, at least several months, having an air of reality for the child, but no apparent objective basis. This excludes the type of imaginary play where an object is personified or in which the child takes on the role of a character' Thus, only an invisible friend (IF) was regarded as an IC" (Svendsen, 1934, p. 988 as cited in Moriguchi & Todo, 2018, p. 460.)
  - "ICs come in all species, sizes, ages, and genders—tailor-made for the children who create them" (Gleason & Kalpidou, 2014, p. 821)
- The prevalence of imaginary companions among children.
  - Ages of children who have imaginary companions
  - Statistics and percentages
    - Pearson et al. (1999) discuss many studies done looking at when and for whom ICs are present. Studies in the 1970s suggested that they were most common for 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 3 year olds. However, these statistics were gathered by asking the preschoolers parents, so may not have been very accurate. However, another study suggested that the presence of ICs may have a smaller peak in 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 10 years olds. Some studies even suggest that ICs may remain present into adulthood for some people, and another study suggested that they may be relatively common in the elderly (p. 15).
    - In a study of 1,795 children aged 5-12, 46.2% reported having or having had an IC (Pearson et al., 1999, p. 20).

There you can see how I've just begun putting in research that fits under the categories I've laid out. I would continue to do that with each one. Once that outline is done, I can develop my

thesis by reading through what I have so far and writing out the major conclusion I've drawn now that I know all of this.

The rest of what goes into the paper is you. Begin by reading through the research you have outlined and introducing ideas as you come to them, then explaining how the evidence you give shows or illustrates something about your main point after the evidence.

Make sure to integrate your quotes and paraphrases into your sentences with appropriate signal phrases and attribution.

1. Look at each section/paragraph you have and write out a clear topic sentence—what is the main point you're making in that section/paragraph? Write it out in a clear statement.
2. Integrate your sources smoothly and supply context, and after quotes and paraphrases, explain and make sense of it. Working on transitions and explanations that show your reader how the information makes sense.
3. At the end of each section/paragraph, make sure you explain how it all adds up and what it has to do with your main point (thesis).

That might look something like this—I've put the parts I added in to integrate the sources in *italics*:

*The imaginary companion (IC) is not any kind of childhood friend like a favorite stuffed animal. In 1934, Svendsen defined an IC as "an invisible character named and referred to in conversation with other persons or played with directly for a period of time. . .having an air of reality for the child, but no apparent objective basis" (as cited in Moriguchi & Todo, 2018, p. 460). It's also important to note that "this excludes the type of imaginary play where an object is personified or in which the child takes on the role of a character' Thus, only an invisible friend (IF) was regarded as an IC" (as cited in Moriguchi & Todo, 2018, p. 460). Additionally, "ICs come in all species, sizes, ages, and genders—tailor-made for the children who create them" (Gleason & Kalpidou, 2014, p. 821). Ics are more than just play acting with toys or other physical objects, and can take any shape and form based solely on the person themselves. This underscores the wide variety of ICs and their nature.*

Notice how I took the first bit of research I'd put in my outline and basically wrote around it, integrating it into sentences, putting it in context, and doing some explanation.

### *Option 2: Outline Your Ideas*

Another way to begin is writing what you think about the various topics now that you've done the research. Once you've made your list of major topics, ask yourself what you think. Start with a clear statement of the point, and then add on what's important to note about it and what it all shows or means for each topic or category you've listed.

Basically, you're writing a draft based on what you've learned in your research, and then going back and integrating your research into it.

Develop your thesis by reading through what you have so far and writing out the major conclusion you've drawn now that you know all of this.

Once that outline is done, the rest is integrating your research into your basic essay.

1. Look at claims you make: places where you're saying that something is so or where you make statements about something being right, wrong, important, notable, or a certain way.
2. Integrate research that supports your points in those places. Make sure you use signal phrases and in-text citations as needed.
3. Double check the beginnings and endings of sections/paragraphs to make sure you've started and ended with your discussion of those things and how they relate to your thesis.
4. Make sure you've used research in all of your paragraphs except the introduction and conclusion.

Either way you proceed, the point is to get your ideas across, and back them up with your research.

## FROM OUTLINE TO ESSAY

Do not feel like you have to start with writing or working on your introduction. Notice that in the sample outline I develop above, I don't even mention the introduction, but I'd need to create one.

Sometimes it's better to start by writing the body of the paper, work through to the conclusion, then finally go back and work on the introduction.

In developing your conclusion, start by reading through what you have, then set it aside and write down what you think overall and what it means for the topic, situation, or society as a whole. That will give you a draft of your conclusion.

To draft your introduction, start with the general topic or idea and then work your way toward giving your thesis, making sure to end your introductory paragraph with it.

Take time to read some sample research papers; that will help you get the feel for the voice and flow of research writing. Read them out loud to help you achieve that even more. Remember, this isn't a voice we speak in on a daily basis, so reading examples of formal writing is important. It's another language within English that you're learning. If you are struggling with the formal voice, try these things:

- First and foremost, keep in mind that formal language is not pretentious or pompous. It is simply straightforward. Only use technical words when they're the right, precise word to use. Do not throw them in just because you can.
- Read some paragraphs from sample essays out loud before you begin writing to get the sound of the formal language in your head. When you read, just skip over reading the citations so that you get the rhythm of the sentences.
- Have your computer or phone read it to you. Ask the internet how to get your device to do this for you and then listen carefully.
- When you're stuck, write simply and clearly. That is always valued over writing that tries to do too much. If you feel it's too simplistic once you've finished your draft, you can work on it then and, of course, get some advice from peers and the Writing Center.
- Get rid of the personal pronouns. No I/me/my/you/your. Review the advice on that in the section on formal writing earlier in the book.

## LITERARY ESSAYS

Another type of argumentative essay is the literary essay. You may find yourself asked to write about fiction, poetry, drama, or film. The following discusses an approach to developing a literary essay.

In a literary essay, you must have a clear thesis that makes an argument about how one of the elements of fiction or poetry works, or how the story illustrates one of the critical theories. The rest of your paper should use specific quotes and examples from the work and explain how those things illustrate the claim you made in the thesis. Review the outline in the Argument Essay section and use it!

There are some general guidelines you need to keep in mind with a literary essay. Of course, teachers may develop assignments that take a different approach and ask you to go contrary to these, but for the most part, keep these in mind when writing about literature.

- **Style:** It is a formal essay that should be written in your voice and from your perspective, but will use a higher level of diction and language. However, it should not be forced.
- Formal essays are written in the objective tone and do not use personal pronouns.
  - Instead, you should use the specific noun or group you're referring to.
    - I.e.: audiences, readers, advertisers, consumers, teens, adults, men, women, children, etc.
- **Purpose:** The purpose of this kind of essay is to look carefully at a specific work and analyze how it uses one or two elements, or how it can be seen through a specific critical theory.
- Do not try to convince or preach to your readers. Simply explain your analysis, provide your evidence, and discuss the conclusions you draw based on it.
- **Audience:** The audience for this essay is a general audience. Assume the audience has read the work. **DO NOT RETELL THE STORY OR POEM** unless your teacher has specifically told you to do so! The audience also has a general knowledge of the elements of literature and critical theories.
- You must use quotes and/or specific examples from the work to support your point.
- You should have a works cited page with the citation for the work you analyze. If you use other sources, they must be cited as well. Remember, that does not count toward page length for your essay.

Your thesis serves as your foundation and guide for the whole of your essay. You should have an idea of what it is at the beginning of your journey, but should also be flexible enough to change it to align with what you've finally said in your paper once it's done. This kind of writing is really about figuring out what you think, and you only do that by writing it down.

If you are given a question to answer, then your answer is your thesis. Make sure to state it clearly.

## HOW TO READ FOR WRITING ABOUT FICTION

To find your thesis you must be familiar with the work. It's recommended that you read the work you'll write about at least three times—ideally leaving some time between each reading. (With an audio or visual source, that means listening to or watching it multiple times.) This sounds like a lot of work, and as mentioned before, writing is work; however, **this process can save you time in the long run** and streamline your work on developing your argument.

### Your First Read

Begin by just reading or watching the work without looking to analyze too much. Just take it in and experience it. The first read is no place to start analyzing. You can't fully analyze something until you know what it is.

Once you're done, look through the elements of the genre, the critical theories you're studying, or the question(s) you've been given to answer and see which ones stand out for you in thinking back on it. Your paper should be focused on only one or two elements of analysis, one critical theory, or one question, so at this point you're just seeing if anything stands out for you after that first read.

### A Second Read

Read the work a second time, and as you do start making mental notes of what stands out in terms of various elements, theories, or questions. REMEMBER: focus on only one or two elements, one theory, or one question. Trying to do too much in a literary analysis will not only result in a paper that is surface, but also it will be bulky and frustrating to write. Make notes, highlight, and jot down ideas for different elements or theories.

After the second read, you will have started to form your ideas. Once you've decided what you'll focus on and what this work shows about that, read or watch the work a third time.

### The Third Reading

With this third reading or viewing, look for **specific moments** that relate to the element(s), theory, or question you're focusing on. Highlight or write those down moments.

Remember to only highlight or note things that **specifically** relate to your element/theory.

Focus on those moments you noted in your last reading and ask yourself these questions. Write down your thoughts about them.

How do those moments or examples

- create a specific message,
- illustrate something about a specific element of literature, or connect to a critical theory,
- show us something specific about human nature or circumstance?

Look over what you've written and decide what that shows about the element, theory, or question overall. Write it down in one clear statement! That's your working thesis.

Once you have those notes, you are ready to write your essay. Use those ideas and work them into the argumentative outline presented in the previous section.

**In the end, a good interpretation of fiction will**

- avoid the obvious. In other words, it won't argue a conclusion that most readers could reach on their own from a general knowledge of the work,
- avoid summarizing or retelling the work—remember, you're writing for someone who is already familiar with the story,
- support its main points with strong evidence from the work, and
- use careful reasoning to explain how that evidence relates to the main points of the interpretation.

Below you will find a list of the most common elements of literature and poetry, and beyond that a discussion of the elements of film. Each listing has a discussion of the element, an explanation of what an essay about the element would do, a list of questions that could lead you to a thesis, and a list of words that you should consider using when writing about the element.

## THE FORMAL ELEMENTS OF FICTION

### PLOT OR STRUCTURE

Plot or refers to the way the series of events unfolds in the story. In some stories, the author structures the entire plot chronologically, with the first event followed by the second, third, and so on, like beads on a string. However, many other stories are told out of order in a non-linear way or with flashback techniques in which plot events from earlier times interrupt the story's "current" events.

An essay about plot is an analysis of the conflict and its development, or of the way in which the plot is arranged and how it creates a specific effect or generates a particular message. The organization of the essay should not be modeled on sequential sections and principal events, however, because these invite only a retelling of the story. Instead, the organization is to be developed from the important elements of conflict. Here are some possible starting points for writing about plot:

1. If the conflict stems from contrasting ideas or values, what are these and how are they brought out through the plot?
2. How does the arrangement of the plot create a specific effect, emotion, or message?
3. How does the pace of the story—the slowness or quickness of actions and events—create a specific feel or effect?

#### Words to know:

**conflict:** The basic tension, predicament, or challenge that propels a story's plot

**complications:** Plot events that plunge the protagonist further into conflict

**rising action:** The part of a plot in which the drama intensifies, rising toward the climax

**climax:** The plot's most dramatic and revealing moment, usually the turning point of the story

**falling action:** The part of the plot after the climax, when the drama subsides and the conflict is resolved

**pace:** The rate or speed at which the actions occur.

### CHARACTER

In fiction, character refers to a textual representation of a human being (or occasionally another creature). Through the ages, literature has moved toward a more heavy focus on character, and in our culture, most literature is deeply vested in character. Authors can use round characters—those fully developed with detail, and flat characters—those that serve as agents of the plot or background, or to epitomize an unchanging or undeveloped individual. Characterization is what gives the people or actors in fiction their life. It includes the details that authors give us about the characters. It can be description or narrative about them, but also includes how other characters react to them and think about them.

When writing about character start by thinking about how you would describe this character to friend. What is he, she, or it like? What are the beliefs, prejudices, preferences, and personalities going on? In the essay, you should make a clear claim about the character and use quotes and examples to illustrate what makes you see that. In the end, it's often easiest to connect these ideas to how this shows us something about human nature, or what it means to be in this situation.

1. Who is the major character? What do you learn about this character from his or her actions or speeches or from the actions or speeches about this character? What does this show you about the human condition, circumstance, or the theme of the work?
2. Is the character reliable or unreliable? How does what he or she says match with what he or she does, or with what other say or do in terms of the character? If there's a difference, what does that signal or show?

### Words to know:

**protagonist:** A story's main character (see also antagonist)

**antagonist:** The character or force in conflict with the protagonist

**round character:** A complex, fully developed character, often prone to change

**flat character:** A one-dimensional character, typically not central to the story

**characterization:** The process by which an author presents and develops a fictional character

## POINT OF VIEW

When something happens in our world, how we learn about it influences our perspectives. Let's take an argument between a couple as an example. This is the classic tale of "he says," "she says." As a friend of one person or the other, you will only hear part of the story. Being friends with both parties may allow you to hear both sides of the story, but even that is not the entire story. As someone who has been around these people, you have also observed their behaviors and actions, and drawn your own conclusions about the facts of the situation. As readers, we're in the same position with a piece of literature. We always draw our own conclusions, but what we know is determined by who tells us the story. Who tells the story is point of view.

### Types of Points of View

Most stories are told from one of these basic perspectives, allowing for variations and combinations:

- *Omniscient Point of View:* Merriam-Webster defines point of view as "1: having infinite awareness, understanding, and insight; 2: possessed of universal or complete knowledge" ("Point of View"). In this point of view, the storyteller is like a supreme being that knows what all characters think, feel, and experience.

In looking at literature that is developed from the omniscient point of view, the motivations of all characters are known—in essence, there are no secrets here. The narrator is not a

participant in the story. In thinking and writing about this perspective, the conclusions that you draw as a reader are largely sociological or situational. It is very similar to a court case in which the jury is presented with the evidence and they have to determine what that means about the situation. In the case of literature, you are the jury.

- *Limited-Omniscient Point of View*: This is a variation on the all-knowing perspective, and it is based on a viewpoint that only knows what a limited number of characters are doing, thinking and experiencing. Again, the narrator is not a participant in the story. The viewpoint will most often be focused on the protagonist, so that the narrator is placing us in the shoes of the main character. While this can lead to the same questions presented above, it also allows you to draw conclusions about how others feel about the central character. You have to make your judgments about this based on what others say and do in relation to that main character—your evidence.
- *First Person Point of View*: This is a point of view in which the main character is telling the story. It is marked by the use of the personal pronouns I/me/my/mine, and sometimes a collective point of view with we/us/our. First person point of view reveals something about the individual, group, or situation. It is an insight into the psychology of the human mind. Of course, this means you only get one perspective and you have to make your judgments about the things the character says and the way that he or she interprets things.
- *Third Person Point of View*: In this point of view, the narrator is not a participant in the story; the story is being told as it happens and we are told how the main character thinks, what he or she knows and experiences. The difference between this and the limited omniscient is that as a reader you only know what that main character knows and experiences; some of those things may be wrong or take the character (and therefore you) by surprise.
- *Objective or Cinematic Point of View*: This point of view tells what happens, what characters say, and what characters do, but the narrator never gives any insight into the thoughts or feelings of the characters. It is much like watching a movie: we see what happens and what is said, but don't know what characters are thinking. In literature, this can create the effect of reporting. It is like being a fly on the wall in the story. It requires you to draw your conclusions about feelings and rationales based on dialogue and events.

### **Writing about Point of View**

If you find the storyteller intriguing or questionable that may be a first clue that point of view is something central to your understanding of the story. When writing about point of view you are examining how the way in which the story is told creates a specific effect or reveals something about human nature or specific situations.

You might find the following questions helpful to get started on a thesis about point of view:

1. What tone or mood is created through the use of the specific point of view?

2. How does the specific point of view push the reader toward a specific conclusion or frame of mind?
3. What does the point of view reveal about how humans deal with or react to certain situations?
4. What do the reactions of other characters in the work say about the narrator's true nature? (First person)
5. Do you believe the character is telling you the truth? You can make a decision about this based on what the character says and how he or she says it, as well as others' reactions to him or her. (First person)
6. How does the way the character tells the story reveal something about the character him or her -self? (First and third person)

The answer to any of these questions would provide a rough draft of your thesis. Remember, you would not focus on all of them in one essay. Rather choose one or two that fit the situation of the work you are analyzing, or allow them to inspire your own questions. Your job then is to pull evidence from the story and provide it in your essay, making sure to explain how it illustrates your thesis.

**Words to know (along with the types of point-of-view listed above):**

**narrative voice:** The voice of the narrator telling the story

**point-of-view character:** The character focused on most closely by the narrator; in first-person point of view, the narrator himself

## SETTING

The setting of a work of literature is the place or places in which the events happen. However, it can also include the time in history, or the cultural context. In many modern stories, settings may include various settings of the mind. Take *The Matrix* for example: there is the actual physical world, but also the world created in the minds of the characters through their interaction with computers. The setting of a story contributes to the mood, and may play a key role in the theme or in character development or revelation.

When writing about setting, it's important to look at the descriptions of the settings, but also to consider how the settings affect the characters. Additionally, looking at whether or not the settings bring out specific actions or reactions is important.

1. What connections, if any, are apparent between locations and characters? Do the locations bring characters together, separate them, or facilitate their privacy?
2. How fully are settings described? How vital are they to the action? How important are they to development of plot or theme? How are they connected the mental states of characters?
3. What is the state of the houses, furniture, and objects? What connections can you find between these conditions and the outlook and behavior of the character?

4. How important are sounds or silences? To what degree is music or other sound important in the development of character and action?

**Words to know:**

**social context:** The significant cultural issues affecting a story's setting or authorship

**mood:** The underlying feeling or atmosphere produced by a story

## TONE AND STYLE

The tone of a work is the overall attitude or emotion that is created in the work. The tone can shift and move throughout the work in the same way that the tones of our days may shift and move as we go through them. Tone is an emotional aspect, so should always be equated to a specific emotion.

When writers discuss style, they are generally referring to the way in which the author uses the language. This can include word choice, diction, sentence structure, as well as description and pacing. As you know, styles change through time—Shakespeare's writing is very different from the writing we do today, so different periods also work to create different styles. Writing style creates the sound we get in our heads when we read. It is the voice we hear. To write successfully about style, it's important to look at the specific things that create that overall voice and feeling in the work. It will often lead to writing about the overall effect or tone that is developed in the work.

When writing about tone and style, you need to identify attitudes that you find in the work and then explain how attitudes are made obvious by the author's style. Additionally, you might discuss how the style contributes to the overall pacing or mental image. Consider how works describing characters, scenes, thoughts, and actions indicate attitude. Here are some questions to get you started:

1. How strongly do you respond to the story? What words or descriptions bring out your interest, concern, indignation, fearfulness, anguish, amusement, or sense of affirmation? How does that affect your reading of the story or perception of characters or events?
2. For passages describing action, how vivid are the words? How do they help you picture the action? How do they hold your attention?
3. How does the tone or style underscore or emphasize a character's traits?
4. What are the various tones of the story, and how do those moves from one tone to the next create a specific feeling or effect?
5. What are the various tones of the story, and how are they created through the writer's style?
6. Does the pace feel slow, fast, choppy? What makes it so, and how does that create a specific effect on the reader?

**Words to know****diction:** The author's choice of words**connotation:** the mood or intent behind a word (contrast with denotation)**pace:** the speed with which the reading or moments flow in a work of literature

## IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

Imagery refers to the level at which an author creates the scenes, sounds, and flavors in the writing. Imagery can be those things we see, hear, smell, touch and taste. Imagery is part of what makes a work of literature more lively and real.

A symbol is an object that has a significant meaning in the story. Symbols in literature can be things that we see as symbols in the everyday world—universal symbols, or they may be things that are symbolic only to the work's world/society itself. For example, an author might use a red rose to symbolize love, but in another case, a black wooden box may be used to symbolize brutal, broken traditions. Here you can see that we generally associate red roses as a symbol of love in everyday life, but in the case of the box, it's something that only carries meaning in the specific story. A symbol may be an object that represents a character, an emotion, an underlying psychological state, or a theme. On the other hand, things such as actions, clothing, habits, or repeated phrases may be symbolic.

1. What cultural or universal symbols can you discover in the names, objects, places, situations or actions in a work? What do those represent, and how do they add to the depth of the story or character?
2. What imagery is present in the story? How does the imagery reveal something about the characters or situations? What does it imply?
3. What contextual symbolism can be found in a work? What makes you think it is symbolic? To what degree does it strengthen the work or theme?
4. How clearly does the author point you toward an allegorical reading? (I.e.: through names and allusions, consistency of narrative, literary context.) How does the reading differ or reveal something new about the original or inspirational text or story?

**Words to know****visual imagery:** Imagery of sight**aural imagery:** Imagery of sound (e.g., the soft hiss of skis)**olfactory imagery:** Imagery of smell (e.g., the smell of spilled beer)**tactile imagery:** Imagery of touch (e.g., bare feet on a hot sidewalk)**gustatory imagery:** Imagery of taste (e.g., the bland taste of starchy bananas)

## THEME

The theme of a work can generally be defined as the meaning or overall message we get from a work of literature. In older works, the major theme is often very clear and obvious. It often took the form of the moral or lesson. In more modern works, this is not always the case. Often the theme is not as simple as a lesson to learn, but instead a more subtle comment on the human condition or experience.

It's important to remember that in writing about theme you do not want to focus on the most obvious. You want to look at the deeper nuances and examine them. Additionally, in writing about theme you may find it useful to combine your analysis of it with a look at another element like character, setting or symbolism, and consider how the theme is developed or revealed through one of those. These questions will get you started:

1. What does the overall theme say about human nature? How is that idea developed and supported through the beliefs, actions, and reactions of the characters?
2. What does the theme show about human circumstance? How does it comment on the ways of the world or society in general and the effect those have on an individual?

## WRITING ABOUT FILM

While writing about film will include many of the elements discussed in the “Elements of Fiction” section, it also requires you to know and understand certain elements that are specific to film.

In looking at film, you may analyze the way in which the characters, themes, settings and other elements work in the same way you do in written works. However, you may also be asked to analyze the technical aspects of cinema: *auteur*, *diegesis*, structure, genre, *mise-en-scene*, shot, lighting, and sound.

### AUTEUR/DIRECTOR

*Auteur* is French for *author*. In film, it refers to the director. In a work of literature, we refer to the author as the person responsible for the final work. In film, though there are numerous people without whom the film would not be possible, we look to the director as the person who bears the final responsibility for the film. He or she is the one who sets the overall tone and develops a cohesive vision of the work.

When writing about an *auteur* it's important to look at multiple films by a specific director. An essay about an *auteur* would focus on the ways in which the director deals with specific themes, uses specific element or technical methods, and finally evaluate those in terms of what message or focus can be seen though looking at the body of work.

### STRUCTURE

Structure in film is very similar to that of written works, and is concerned with narrative order. How a film is arranged—chronologically or in a non-linear way—will have an effect on viewers. It may give them inside knowledge that others in the film are not aware of, or it may put them in the shoes of the main character, leaving them to guess and figure things out as they go along. Additionally, a non-linear structure may use flashbacks or flash-forwards to build the tension, pace, and rhythm of the film.

In looking at structure, it's good to think about the sit-com. Most TV sit-coms' humor often revolves around some bit of knowledge. The audience may know it or may not. Take this scene for example:

MARY (on the phone with JANE): Oh, Jane, I can't believe you're so in love with him! I never thought there would be anyone in the world for you other than Tom.

MARVIN (after overhearing the conversation calls Tom): Yeah, I'm serious dude, she said your wife was in love with someone else!

What's our initial assumption? Jane is having an affair?

How does it matter if we know that Mary is referring to the dog that Jane and Tom just bought?  
How does it change if we don't know that?

This is one way that comedy ensues: someone knows some information and makes assumptions about the rest. How we view that depends on whether or not we are aware of all of the information as well. When that information is revealed—do we know about the dog when Mary mentions it, or do we find out at a later point—is a key part of how structure creates an effect on us as viewers—do we think Marvin jumps to conclusions, or do we think Mary is a cheater? What we know and don't know affects how we feel about each of these characters.

Writing about structure requires you to consider how the audience is moved through the film. How does the audience's knowledge, or lack of it, create tension, comedy, or any other emotion or effect?

## GENRE

In all literature, some consideration of genre is important, but in film, the ways in which it's played with are often more evident to the modern student. Genres are simply types, for example drama, comedy, horror, westerns, action, musicals, etc. We come to expect specific things from certain genres. For example, in a traditional western, the good guy—often in the white hat—should come out on top.

Writing about genre becomes interesting when directors decide to play with or challenge the general conventions of a genre. In order to write well about genre it's important to first understand what the major expectations are in the genre you're looking at. Then you have to outline and discuss the ways in which the film challenges or strays from that. Most often, there will be some underlying message or commentary on society to be found in examining that.

It may be worthwhile to consider the ideas about parody discussed later on as often play with genre falls into that category.

## MISE-EN-SCENE

*Mise-en-scene* is simply everything that you see on the screen. It includes the settings, the décor, lighting, and the costuming. In short, it is all of the incidental things that contribute to the feel of the movie's world. It is probably best to focus on just a few things in *mise-en-scene* when writing an essay about it so that you have a more focused thesis and essay.

## CINEMATOGRAPHY

This refers to the camera angles, framing, and movement. The way in which the camera is positioned and moves communicates a great deal. It can say something about a character or emotion, or it can replicate a mood or tone.

Paying close attention to the cinematographic techniques used often results in a deeper understanding of the situation, or appreciation of the aesthetics in the film.

## SOUND

Sound can be critical to the emotions and moods developed in the movie. In film, we consider two types of sound. Diegetic sound is that which is part of the actual events in the movie—the doors shutting, bees buzzing, or music coming from the radio. On the other hand, non-diegetic sound is the sound track. It's the overlay of romantic music that springs out of nowhere as the long-separated couple rushes toward one another, or it's the creepy music that warns us the bad guy is around the corner.

Sound can also contribute to the rhythm and pace of a scene. If you are going to analyze sound, consider not simply watching it in the film, but simply listening without watching, then watching with the sound off. That will give you a good idea about how much the sound effects various scenes.

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT PARODY AND ITS ANALYSIS

Parody is defined as “the imitation of either formal or thematic elements of one work in another for humorous purposes” (Lynch). Furthermore,

A parody imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work in order to make fun of those same features. The humorist achieves parody by exaggerating certain traits common to the work, much as a caricaturist creates a humorous depiction of a person by magnifying and calling attention to the person's most noticeable features. The term parody is often used synonymously with the more general term spoof, which makes fun of the general traits of a genre rather than one particular work or author. (Wheeler)

In analyzing parody, you must first be familiar with the original inspiration, meme, or theme, as Robert Vaux points out in his article “What is Parody?” He says parody “recognize[s] the tired, clichéd or pompous aspects of a target, and . . . point[s] out such foibles via the same methods and techniques that were used to create them in the first place.” So, the first part of analyzing a parody is comparing it to the original and analyzing the basic methods and techniques therein.

Once you’ve recognized those, it’s important to list them and draw some conclusions about what making fun of those is pointing out about the genre, culture, or society. In fact, “sophisticated parodists will illuminate the target's perceived flaws with an eye to pointing out why they are worthy of ridicule (“What is Parody?”). In analyzing a parody, your job is to discuss those “flaws” or overused themes. What’s made fun of, and what is that saying about the original, society, or human nature?

Vaux further points out that “[p]arody functions most effectively as a type of satire, mocking not only a specific piece of work, but the broader social trends that work embodies. In so doing, the parody expands its role to become an agent of social change” (“What is Parody?”). Therefore, an analysis of parody might also look at the kind of social trend that’s being mocked or the change that’s implicitly being suggested.

Think of the movie *Scream* and how it is a "horror" movie making fun of horror movies.

How do these things compare to the parody? Noticing what things are the same is key to explaining how the parody is well done. Noticing the things that are different is key to analyzing the message that the parody is making fun of. In the end, an essay about a parody will

- Compare the versions noting
  - Similarities
  - Differences
- Comment on the message being made about the original through the use of those similarities and differences
- Conclude with the overall message or theme that the parody is implying and a discussion of that in the larger context of the parody’s culture and time.

## BUSINESS WRITING

In writing for business, the style and tone of writing can fall anywhere from the personal to the formal. This is where knowing your audience, whom you're writing to, becomes very important. You need to evaluate your position in relation to the person you're addressing, your relationship with him or her, and your goals. The tone you decide to take—formal or more informal—will be determined by all of these things.

Let's think about writing to teachers as an example since we've all had a few of them, and the relationship is, at its core, a business relationship. Usually you can tell the moment a teacher begins class for the first time the kind of tone and the level of formality you can take with them. Some teachers have a very formal tone and approach and you would address them in the same way. Other teachers are more laid back and casual, and while you wouldn't be overly casual with them, you would address them a bit less formally.

In short, you have to use your abilities to read people to make decisions about how to write to them. Would you write to your teacher starting with "Dear Professor Wood" or "Hi, Kelli"? Would you write to your boss, coworker or client by starting with Mr./Ms./Mrs. Surname, or just by using his or her first name? It all depends on the type of relationship you have.

That's a decision you have to make on a case-by-case basis. If you're not sure about it, ask a fellow student, coworker, or even the boss. My theory is that you be brave once and ask the question, then save yourself anxiety later on. If you're really not sure, it's better to lean more toward the formal than the causal, but don't overdo it, as it may come across as trying to pander or kiss-up. Writing "Esteemed Professor Wood:" would really come across as way too much!

Basically, it would fit into what Ernest Hemingway meant when he said, that good writers need good BS detectors. We have them as readers and we can generally tell when someone is writing to us with an overly-affected or placating tone. One of the hardest parts of writing is learning to read your own writing. Yes, I know you wrote it and know the words, but we all tend to read from our perspective. Learning to read from our readers' perspectives is the ultimate goal in writing to communicate, especially in business. If you can get to the point of anticipating what kind of mood, situation, or state-of-mind your reader might be in, you can better think about how to write to them.

## BUSINESS LETTERS

You may need to write a formal letter for your own needs—expressing some problem or issue to a company, for your job, or for school. For a professional job, you may be asked to submit a cover letter with your resume and application. Many teachers ask for cover letters with assignments. Learning to format and write a good letter is a skill that will pay off well in your life as both a student and a professional.

### *CONTENT*

Most business letters will have **at least** three paragraphs.

1. The opening paragraph is where you identify yourself if the person to whom you're writing doesn't know you, and where you identify your main point. This paragraph does not need to be long, and in fact, it may often be just one or two sentences.
2. The body paragraph(s) are where you discuss and explain your issue. Of course, you may have more than one of these.
3. The closing paragraph may just be a sentence or two, but you should thank the reader for his or her time and attention and ask for response if appropriate.

### *FORMAT*

Here I explain a standard full block style. It is the most common and basic style. There are other styles, and if you are reading this for the workplace, make sure to look at how your organization formats letters and use that style.

- Single space the letter.
- Skip one line between paragraphs and sections; make sure you do not have extra space between paragraphs. Do not indent paragraphs—the space between them shows the change.
- Use a standard 11 or 12-point font.
- Once done writing your letter, enter at the top a few times as necessary to center your letter vertically on the page or use your word processor's tool to do this.
- Make sure to physically sign your letter. This verifies that it came from you.
  - NOTE: If you are in my course, we will turn letters in online, so make sure and pay attention to what you need to do for the signature in the assignment instructions.
- If you use the MS Word tool for your letters, remember that **nothing should be in bold**—you'll need to fix that in your letter. The template puts the salutation and closing in bold—that is wrong.
- While **you should keep business letters to one page**, there are times that you may have to go beyond that. When you do, make sure to use plain paper (no letterhead) on the

second page. Minimally, put in a header with the page number at the right. Remember, you will NOT have the page number on the first page. If you choose to do so, you may do an extended header. In the header, type the recipient's name on the left side, the page number in the center, and the date on the right side. Both of these are illustrated below.

The sample on the next page illustrates the basics of format.

123 Your Address  
Your Town, ST 12345  
Date

Recipient Name  
1234 Address  
City, ST 79924

Notice the colon at the end of the salutation.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

Here you should introduce yourself if the recipient doesn't know you. Clearly state your purpose for writing here. This should be only a few sentences long.

Use your body paragraph(s) to explain in depth. As with an essay you should begin each body paragraph with a clear topic sentence then go on to explain the issue.  
Explain.  
Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain.  
Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain.  
Explain.

Skip one line

Explain.  
Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain.  
Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain.  
Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain. Explain.

The closing paragraph should only be a sentence or two long. Thank the person for his or her attention. If appropriate, note that you look forward to hearing from him or her.

Sincerely,

*Sign Your Name Here*

**DO NOT forget to sign your name!**  
It's so important that in my classes, I deduct 20 points off any letter that does not have a signature!  
  
If you are sending your letter via the internet, you can place a picture of your signature here, but make sure to save your letter in .pdf or some other format that doesn't leave that signature as a separate picture that is easier for someone to use.

Your Name Typed

Skip three lines here and type your name on the fourth line.

Any ensuing pages should be formatted in either of the following ways. The second version is much more formal, including the recipient's name.

Page 2
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Prof. Kelli Wood
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Page 2
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June 21, 2019
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To get the header above centered, I simply typed in each section and spaced between them to get them approximately even, then I centered that line to make sure the whole thing is centered. Make sure this does NOT appear on the first page. (Look around in your header options for "different first page" or "suppress first page header.")

Remember, you really don't want more than one page unless you must have it. If your letter only goes on to page 2 by moving your printed name on to the next page, work to revise so that you can get it moved up a bit. You can also decrease the size of your bottom margin a little bit or change from a 12 point font to an 11 point font. Don't make it any smaller than .5 inches.

## EMAIL

Email is the bane of the modern business world. At the time of this writing, summer 2019, studies estimate that the average office worker sends or receives around 121 emails per day. Email is an efficient way to communicate at work, but it can also be overwhelming. Unless there's a specific reason to send a very long email, you should avoid it. If you need to get a lot of information to someone, consider giving him or her a call or just sitting down with the person to go over things face-to-face.

Keep these things in mind as you write emails in the academic and professional world:

- Always make sure to give your email a logical and clear subject line! When dealing with email, many office workers use subject lines as a way to prioritize what will get read when (and in many cases, what will be deleted). If your subject is clear and specific, it helps the reader make the choices he or she needs to make.
- If you are writing an email to someone outside or your organization, use the same formality and organization as a business letter, with one exception: don't put the addresses at the top. Simply start with Dear \_\_\_\_\_:
- Pay attention to your grammar and make use of paragraphs. However, keep paragraphs short and to the point.

- You can close with a signature line that includes your name and relevant contact information—no need to include your email address, as that’s part of the email itself. Do be courteous and don’t include copious quotes or inappropriate graphics in your email signature. Your friends may be amused, but others may not.
- **DO NOT SEND ATTACHMENTS TO PEOPLE WITHOUT INCLUDING A SUBJECT LINE AND AT LEAST A BIT OF A MESSAGE.** If the person is expecting something from you, it can be as simple as “here is that document we talked about.” Nor should you open attachments to emails that don’t include some clear indication that the email is from an actual person.
  - **If you are in my classes, please note that I delete emails that do not have a subject line or that have an attachment with no message.**

## MEMOS

Email is based on the memo format. Memos are often used within organizations to distribute information and announcements.

Notice how the heading below includes the basics that are in an email header. Where email is electronic, memos are print (usually). Where email already has all of the heading information laid out in the system, with a memo you have to type it in yourself. The heading should look something like this, though you should look at the standard for your organization.

<b>MEMO</b>	
<b>To:</b>	Professor Wood
<b>From:</b>	Great Student <i>JD</i>
<b>Date:</b>	June 21, 2019
<b>Subject:</b>	How to Write a Memo

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I recently encountered some good information on how to write a memo. It is very similar to writing a business letter or email, and really, the only difference is the format.

Some examples suggest you write "Memo" or "Memorandum" at the top in a larger font that should be centered, while others say you can skip that part. If you're writing one for work, look at memos you've received, or ask a colleague about company standards.

If you are sending it to the recipient in print form, then make sure to sign your initials by your name. That's similar to having your signature on a letter. If you're emailing it—rare, but it does happen, it will come from your email account and that will serve to verify it's from you.

## FINAL NOTES

You will learn more about writing every day. The more you read and write, even the more you talk, the more you will become a better writer. The best advice I can give you, short of what's already in here, is to be yourself, read what you write, and, when you can, have fun with it.

As you work on your professional writing, pay attention to what you have to read in your field—those things give you good examples of the tone, voice, format, and other nuances of the way you're expected to write. Most of all, never be afraid to look things up and ask questions. Smart people know they can always learn more.

I'd really appreciate it if you'd give me some feedback on this book and let me know what you thought of it. I hope it's been helpful, but I can only make it better if I know what to change.

Thanks and good luck, Kelli

[Share your feedback on \*Writing down the Basics\*](http://www.tiny.cc/wdb)

[www.tiny.cc/wdb](http://www.tiny.cc/wdb)

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## APPENDIX A: EMAILING ME

If you are one of my students, remember that my office hours are set aside for your convenience. If you cannot come to see me during those times, let me know and we can schedule some time to work together on your writing. The best way to contact me about a bigger issue or for specific help is to come by and see me!

If it is easier for you to contact and work with me via email, please feel free to do that, but follow these protocols to make the experience good for both of us.

- When you email me, make sure to identify who you are and which course you are taking with me. Do this with all of your teachers. Remember, they have lots of students and are very likely teaching different sections of the same course.
- Use your course day and time as the subject line. If you are in an online course, you only need to put the course and online: "1301 online."
- Ask specific questions and give examples as necessary.

For example, you might say something like this:

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Hi, Kelli. This is Jessica from your MW night 1301 class. I was looking over my essay and have a few questions.

In a number of places you marked CS (comma splice) on my paper. Here's an example of the sentence you marked: "As I looked up at my mom I realized something I'd never known before, she was and still is my hero." I read the part in the Writer's Reference that you referred to, but I'm still not sure about that and would like a little more explanation.

Also, at the end, you suggested I develop a bit more. I was thinking I could talk about . . . .

---

Can you see how that first part is very specific and gives me an example to work with? That way I can help you by talking about a sentence you've written and not just another example from a book. Make sure and do that with any grammar help you want: identify the issue and give an example from your essay. With questions about your essay, remind me of your topic and give me context for the part you're talking about.

I do my best to respond in a timely manner, but do not generally check email after 4 or 5 pm on weekdays or on the weekends.

**DO NOT EMAIL ME ON BLACKBOARD; USE THE EMAIL LISTED ON YOUR SYLLABUS!**

## APPENDIX B: APA 6<sup>TH</sup> Edition Format—The Old Version

### FORMATTING ESSAYS APA STYLE—*PUBLICATION MANUAL*, 6<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

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If your instructor requires the older 6<sup>th</sup> edition format for your APA paper,  
use this step-by-step guide.

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An APA paper, unlike a MLA formatted paper is submitted with a title page unless your instructor tells you to do otherwise. Like the MLA formatted paper, it includes a header with identifying information and page numbers, but unlike MLA, it is not one standard header. While MLA does not discourage headings, especially in longer works, APA encourages them.

It is important to note however, that headings should not take place of smooth transitions. To test for this, read from paragraph to paragraph as if the heading was not there. If there's a jump and a bit of confusion, review paragraph transitions and topic sentences to smooth out those movements.

Here are the basics needed in an APA formatted paper:

- Font should be a standard 12 point typeface. APA, as of the most recent update, prefers **Times New Roman**.
- **Double space** your work throughout, including your title, headings, references, and captions.
  - You may add extra spacing around equations for readability, but never use single spacing except with tables or figures. In short, if you don't have a good reason to do it, don't.
- **Do not** full justify your work. Use a left alignment.
- Margins should be **1-inch** on all sides.
- **Indent** the first line of every paragraph **except** for the abstract, block/long quotations, title and headings, table titles and notes, and figure captions.
- **Title page**. This should include your running header, title, author byline, institutional affiliation (your college or university), and author note (in college, this is generally the course the paper is written for and the date).
  - Your **header on the title page** should be composed of the words "Running Head" followed by a colon and your paper's title. The title should be in ALL CAPS. Insert the page number after that, and space between it and your title so that the title is flush with the left side of your page, and the number with the right.
    - If your title exceeds 50 characters, use a shortened version of the title.
    - The best way to figure out how to do this is to watch a *YouTube* video or two.

- After the first page, do not include the words “Running Head” before your title. Search the internet for information on how to create “different headers on first and subsequent pages.”
- **Your identification information** should be placed about halfway down the page. Space down center the following information:
  - The full title of your paper, using APA capitalization rules for titles.
  - Your name
  - Your school’s name
- The **Author Note** should be placed at the bottom of the page to give specific information about the course, project, or contact information. It will have the course, section number, and professor name.
- The next page will be your **abstract**. An abstract is a short (150-200 word) summary of your paper. It should share your main idea and key points. Write this once you’ve finished the paper. To insert a page before the beginning of your paper, go to the beginning of your text and press Ctrl+Enter. That will insert a blank page above for your abstract.
  - Center the word “Abstract” (no quotation marks) at the top of the page.
  - Begin your abstract on the next line, but **do not indent** to begin the paragraph.
  - Below that provide a list of keywords, beginning that list with “Keywords:” (no quotation marks). Keywords are the basic topics you cover in the paper.
  - Not all instructors require an abstract. If your instructor does not say you don’t need one, assume you do.
- *Begin your paper on the next page.*
  - Center your title at the top of the page.
  - Indent the first line of your paragraphs.
  - After your introduction of a paragraph or two (this may be longer as you write longer papers), you may begin using headings.
    - Consult your style guide for how to format your headings.
    - It is important to note that headings should **not** take place of smooth transitions. To test for this, read from paragraph to paragraph as if the heading was not there. If there’s a jump and a bit of confusion, review paragraph transitions and topic sentences to smooth out those movements.
- Your **References page** should be placed at the end of your paper. Press Ctrl+Enter to start a new page for it.
  - Organize your references alphabetically based on the first word in the citation. See your style guide for further information.

- When using **tables and figures**, you will need to provide citation information in both your caption and on the References page. Do not use any graphics that are not directly related to your discussion, and place them so that they are in a location that connects your text and the graphic.

#### APA FORMAT SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS IN MS WORD

Begin by opening a new document.

1. Click on the INSERT tab.
2. From the HEADER drop down list, choose BLANK
3. Select "Different First Page" from the Header DESIGN options
4. Type "Running head: YOUR TITLE IN ALL CAPS"
5. Tab over until the cursor is on the right side, and then click on PAGE NUMBER, CURRENT POSITION, and PLAIN NUMBER
6. Make sure all of that is in Times New Roman, 12 point font.
7. Exit or click out of the Header space.
8. Type the title of your paper in standard capitalization, your name, and your college/university's name on separate lines.
9. Make sure these are in Times New Roman, 12 point font, double spaced with **no extra space between paragraphs**.
10. Use the zoom slider in the bottom left corner of Word to get a better look at your whole page, and with your cursor at the very beginning, enter so that you have centered that information in the approximate middle of the page.
11. Enter a few times at the end of that to get to the bottom of the page.
12. Type your Author note there. Include the course, section, and professor's name centered at the bottom of the title page:

#### Author Note

This paper was prepared for English 1301, CRN 12345, taught by Professor Wood.

13. Press CTRL + Enter to get a new page.
14. Click on the heading space and type in only your title in ALL CAPS (no "Running head" this time). Insert the page number as described in step 5. Make sure it's all in Times New Roman, 12 point font. Make sure you have checked "Different first page" in step #3.
15. Click below the header line to exit the header.
16. Make sure the document is double spaced, then center and type your title in regular title case.
17. Return and begin typing your paper. Remember to tab to indent each paragraph.
18. If you need an abstract, do it after you finish writing the paper. Simply go back to the beginning of your essay, right before the title and press CTRL + Enter to get a hard page,

and above that center the word Abstract. Below that, type up the summary of your essay. Include the main point you're making as well as your overall conclusions. If required type your keywords below that.

19. If you will be using a References page, take a moment to press CTRL + Enter, the first time you use a source and that will give you a page break. Type References centered at the top of the page, then type in your citation. As you use new sources, make sure to scroll down and add them in as you go. Put them before or after other sources so that they are listed in alphabetical order based on the first word in the citation.
20. Don't want to go through this mess again? Save this document as APA Template. Then when you need an APA paper, just open it, and SAVE AS with the new paper name. You'll need to change the header and title information, but all the details will be set up for you.

The next few pages illustrate these elements.

Running head: TITLE OF MY SUPER-GREAT PAPER

1

Title of My Super-Great Paper

Your Name

El Paso Community College

Author Note

This paper was prepared for English 1302, CRN 20495, taught by Professor Wood.

TITLE OF MY SUPER-GREAT PAPER

2

## Abstract

This is a 150-200 word paragraph that provides the main point you make in your paper—your thesis, and a general overview of the issues you cover and points you make to support it. Write this part **after** you have finished your paper. Do not indent to begin this paragraph. Think of this as the summary someone would read to get a feel for what the paper discusses. Begin with a basic explanation of what the paper covers or is about. Then briefly explain your main points. Finally, give a brief summary of your overall conclusions and the implications of what you've written about. You should use keywords in your abstract, or better yet, take your keywords from the abstract—though this isn't a hard and fast rule. Remember, the start of this paragraph is not indented. Also note that the header on this and following pages no longer has the words “running head” in it.

*Keywords:* provide any keywords here. (These are just the topics, concepts, issues—don't make it harder than it is, just be logical and think about what your main topics are.) Simply list them with commas between each, and do not put a period at the end. Notice that the start of this section is indented like a paragraph. Example: media analysis, advertising, gender roles, social expectations.

### Title of My Super-Great Paper

Begin your paper here. If your instructor does not require an abstract, your paper will start on page 2; otherwise, it begins on 3. Those do not count toward page length, nor do your references. Remember, page length is about depth of thought, so think as deeply as your page length requires.

You should not have any extra spaces between your paragraphs. To make sure you don't, highlight all of your writing, select the paragraph call out arrow from the Home tab or right click on the highlighted section and select Paragraph from the pop-up menu. There, look under Spacing Before and After. Make sure that each of those is set to 0.

Do not use bold, italics, underlining, or any other adjustment to your font unless you have a technical reason to do so. The following pages discuss some of those, but when in doubt look it up in a reliable style guide.

### **Headings**

*After* your introduction, you may begin to use headings. There is a difference in how you format first, second, and third level headings, so look that up if you need to. If you're only doing first level heading (major points without sub-points that need headings) they will be centered in bold. For most of your academic papers, you will only need first-level headings. Remember, you must be able to read through your work without the headings and still have smooth transitions. Take time to read the paragraphs without the headings and make sure they flow logically and smoothly without the headings to check your transitions.