

WRITING GUIDE FOR STUDENTS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Students should follow the guidelines provided in the APA publication manual. This guide distills principles related to the most common student errors in writing assignments. As you write papers for your courses, do not guess about writing and documentation rules. When in doubt, consult the rules in this writing guide and/or in the APA manual.

BOLDFACE TYPE

Do not use boldface type anywhere in an academic paper. This directive includes headings and subheadings.

CITATIONS IN THE BODY OF A TEXT

All citations in the body of a paper must have a corresponding entry in the reference list.

DOCUMENTING CLAIMS

When making a claim, provide support for the claim and document the support. Reference citations make the difference between undocumented claims and documented claims.

UNDOCUMENTED CLAIM: Researchers have demonstrated a correlation between eye contact and physical attraction.

DOCUMENTED CLAIM: Researchers (Roper & Jones, 1988; Smith 1993; Trexler, 2000; Wexler, 2001) have demonstrated a correlation between eye contact and physical attraction.

FONT

Use "Times New Roman" 12 point font for all papers.

HEADINGS

Some papers require headings to subdivide papers. For the purposes of this class, two levels of headings will be sufficient. Examples are provided following the descriptions below.

LEVEL ONE HEADINGS: Centered and typed in uppercase and lowercase letters. See example below.

LEVEL TWO HEADINGS: Flush left, italicized, and typed in uppercase and lowercase letters. See example below.

Review of Literature

Interpersonal Marital Conflict

ITALICS

Use *italics* rather than underlining for titles of journals and books.

MARGINS

Margins should be one inch on all sides--top, bottom, left and right.

MARGINS, JUSTIFICATION

Disable right margin justification. The right margin should appear ragged.

NONSEXIST LANGUAGE

Use nonsexist language. When singular pronouns are indefinite, use he or she.

INCORRECT: As a student completes the survey, he should submit it to the research assistant

CORRECT: As a student completes the survey, he or she should submit it to the research assistant.

ORGANIZATION

A paper submitted for course credit should be organized and should emerge from an outline.

PAGE NUMBERING

Pages should be numbered using headers, beginning with the title page.

PARAGRAPHS

The first line of each new paragraph should be indented one-half inch.

PARAGRAPH LENGTH

Writers use paragraphs to develop ideas in an organized manner. Avoid one sentence paragraphs. You will find it difficult to develop an idea in a single sentence. Conversely, in page length paragraphs writers either wander from idea to idea, thereby losing their organizational thread.

PAPER SIZE

All papers should be composed and/or submitted on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper.

PRINTING

Print papers for submission on one side only.

PUNCTUATION, SPACING

Space one after:

1. commas, colons, and semicolons;
2. punctuation marks at the ends of sentences;
3. periods that separate the parts of a reference list entry or reference citation; and
4. the periods in the initials in personal names (e.g., M. L. King).

Do not space after periods used in abbreviations (e.g., i.e., e.g., p.m., a.m., U.S., etc).

QUESTIONS, USE OF

Avoid rhetorical questions in academic essays. For example: Should people be allowed to avoid taking responsibility for their actions? Also avoid use of questions as an organizational device. For example: What does the frequency with which people rely on nonverbal communication suggest about its significance in the communication process? The only acceptable questions for a scholarly paper are the research questions that you are attempting to answer.

QUOTATIONS, LENGTH

Quotations of fewer than 40 words are incorporated into the text, enclosed in quotation marks, and cited appropriately

Quotations of 40 words or more should be written in a double spaced, indented block with no quotation marks.

QUOTATIONS, INTRODUCING

Avoid starting a paragraph with a quotation. Quotations must be introduced so the reader understands their significance.

REFERENCE LISTS

Reference lists always begin on a new page. All items in the reference list must be cited in the text.

SCHOLARLY WRITING STYLE

A paper for class is not an informal conversation between its author and its reader. Papers should be edited to achieve a scholarly style. Running spell-check does not constitute editing.

WRITING MECHANICS

ACTIVE VOICE/PASSIVE VOICE

In selecting verbs, use active voice rather than passive voice. Active voice emphasizes the agent (the doer of the action) by making the agent the subject of the sentence. Passive voice, on the other hand, minimizes the agent by focusing on the object of the action.

Note: Passive voice may be appropriate in some cases where the action is more important than the agent. For the purposes of this course, however, you will write exclusively in active voice.

PASSIVE: The ball was thrown by Bill.

ACTIVE: Bill threw the ball.

PASSIVE: A survey instrument was designed by the research team.

ACTIVE: The research team designed a survey instrument.

PASSIVE: Mistakes were made in processing the reports.

ACTIVE: The clerks made mistakes in processing the reports.

PASSIVE: The participants were informed about the potential side effects of the trial drug and were asked to sign consent forms.

ACTIVE: The researchers informed the participants about potential side effects of the trial drug and asked them to sign consent forms.

AGENTS OF ACTION

The agent of action should be evident. Sentences that include phrases such as "there is," "there are," "there was," "there were," and "there have been" should trigger alarms. Such sentences are often written in passive voice and either do not include an agent of action or the agent of action is misplaced within the sentence.

WEAK: There are not many people who live in the north central United States.

BETTER: Few people live in the north central United States.

WEAK: There was no measurable response.

- BETTER: The participants demonstrated no measurable response.
- WEAK: There have been many astronauts who have orbited the earth
- BETTER: Many astronauts have orbited the earth.

AMOUNT/NUMBER

Use the term *amount* to indicate phenomena that cannot be counted but are measured, like flour or water. Use the term *number* to refer to items that can be counted, like people or animals or surveys.

- INCORRECT: A large amount of freshman and sophomore students participated in the study
- CORRECT: A large number of freshman and sophomore students participated in the study
- INCORRECT: The research assistants processed a large amount of surveys.
- CORRECT: The research assistants processed a large number of surveys.

ANTHROPOMORPHISMS

Avoid anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphisms attribute human qualities to inhuman or inanimate objects.

- INCORRECT: The article argued that sex typing is learned through observation.
- CORRECT: Perry and White (1984) argued that sex typing is learned through observation
- INCORRECT: This article recognized that family systems influence the development of a child's gender roles.
- CORRECT: Researchers (Crouter, 2001; McHale, 2003; Whiteman, 1999) have recognized that family systems influence the development of a child's gender roles.
- INCORRECT: The findings demonstrated that text messaging was rapidly becoming the most popular form of computer mediated communication among adolescents.
- CORRECT: Through their survey, the researchers determined that text messaging was rapidly becoming the most popular form of computer mediated communication among adolescents.

COLLOQUIALISMS

Avoid colloquialisms in academic writing. Strive for an educated style.

- INCORRECT: The researcher interviewed each kid and his or her mom individually.

- CORRECT: The researcher interviewed each child and his or her mother individually.
- INCORRECT: Dr. Olmos freaked out when the surveys were returned because of a clerical error
- CORRECT: Dr. Olmos was frustrated when the surveys were returned because of a clerical error.
- INCORRECT: Walters and Beldan (2003) looked at eye contact among close friends.
- CORRECT: Walters and Beldan (2003) studied eye contact among close friends.

COMMAS IN A SERIES

Use commas after all items in a series, including the item preceding the *and* or *or*.

- INCORRECT: Measure the length, width and height of the cylinder
- CORRECT: Measure the length, width, and height of the cylinder.
- INCORRECT: The lab assistant measured pulse rates before, during and after the experiment.
- CORRECT: The lab assistant measured pulse rates before, during, and after the experiment.

CONTRACTIONS

Avoid contractions in academic writing.

- INCORRECT: The research team *hadn't* anticipated the overwhelming number of responses.
- CORRECT: The research team *had not* anticipated the overwhelming number of responses.
- INCORRECT: In designing our survey, *we're* relying on items that have been validated in prior research.
- CORRECT: In designing our survey, *we are* relying on items that have been validated in prior research.

DANGLING MODIFIERS

Avoid dangling modifiers. Dangling modifiers fail to modify any particular word or phrase in the sentence.

- INCORRECT: Our conversation ended by exchanging email addresses and promising to contact each other on-line. [Your conversation exchanged email addresses and promised to contact one another?]
- CORRECT: We ended our conversation by exchanging email addresses and promising to contact each other on-line.

- INCORRECT: Having arrived late, the experiment was closed to the participants. [The experiment arrived late?]
- CORRECT: Having arrived late, the subjects were not allowed to participate in the experiment.
- INCORRECT: Hearing the good news, my mood lifted. [Your mood heard the good news?]
- CORRECT: Hearing the good news, I forgot my bad mood.
- CORRECT: My mood lifted when I heard the good news.

INDIRECT REFERENTS

Avoid using indirect referents. Students often use the terms "it," "this," "that," "these," and "those" without specifying to what these words refer. Although these words can be indirect referents anywhere within a sentence, they are particularly troubling at the beginnings of sentences.

- WEAK: This could be remedied with careful planning.
- BETTER: This situation could be remedied with careful planning.
- WEAK: These were coded independently by two research assistants.
- BETTER: These interviews were coded independently by two research assistants.
- WEAK: It usually is preceded by a loud whining noise.
- BETTER: The muffled thump usually is preceded by a loud whining noise
- WEAK: After that, the researchers required the participants to complete three surveys related to their significant others.
- BETTER: After providing a brief overview of the study, the researchers required the participants to complete three surveys related to their significant others.

JARGON

Jargon is the specialized, technical vocabulary associated with a particular discipline or field. While a certain amount of technical vocabulary is unavoidable in academic writing, continuous use of such vocabulary irritates the reader and inhibits communication. When the use of specialized vocabulary is unavoidable, be sure to define unfamiliar words or concepts for the reader the first time you use them.

NOUN/PRONOUN NUMBER AGREEMENT

Be sure that nouns and pronouns agree in number. Singular nouns require singular pronouns. Plural nouns require plural pronouns.

- INCORRECT: Each student should proofread their paper.
- CORRECT: Each student should proofread his or her paper.
- CORRECT: Students should proofread their papers.

- INCORRECT: The success of any student depends on their ability to complete assigned tasks in a timely manner
- CORRECT: The success of any student depends on his or her ability to complete assigned tasks in a timely manner
- CORRECT: Students' success depends on their ability to complete assigned tasks in a timely manner.

NOUN/VERB NUMBER AGREEMENT

Be sure that nouns and verbs agree in number.

- INCORRECT: The sound of hammers mingle with the screech of seagulls.
- CORRECT: The sound of hammers mingles with the screech of seagulls.
- INCORRECT: The participants and the investigator was in the waiting room.
- CORRECT: The participants and the investigator were in the waiting room.
- INCORRECT: Writing a letter and writing an academic paper is not equivalent.
- CORRECT: Writing a letter and writing an academic paper are not equivalent.

NUMBERS

In general, use words to express numbers below 10; use numerals to express numbers 10 and above. For exceptions and special usages consult your APA manual sections 3.42 through 3.44.

- INCORRECT: The article included forty-two tables and charts.
- CORRECT: The article included 42 tables and charts.
- INCORRECT: Of the ten participants, nine completed their demographic questionnaires incorrectly.
- CORRECT: Of the ten participants, 9 completed their demographic questionnaires incorrectly.

Exception: Whenever you use a number as the first word of a sentence, express it in words.

- INCORRECT: 41 percent of the respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with their doctors' communication skills.
- CORRECT: Forty-one percent of the respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with their doctors' communication skills.

OMNISCIENCE

The term omniscience refers to a sentence construction that suggests that you can determine the thoughts and/or feelings of the researchers whose work you are reporting.

- INCORRECT: Jefferson (1998) thought that gender is established during infancy and is fixed and immutable.
- CORRECT: Jefferson (1998) argued that gender is established during infancy and is fixed and immutable.
- INCORRECT: Cleburne (2003) felt that performers experience greater anxiety when they were underprepared.
- CORRECT: Cleburne (2003) determined that performers experience greater anxiety when they are underprepared.
- INCORRECT: Gleason (2001) believed doctors have an affirmative obligation to listen actively to their patients.
- CORRECT: Gleason (2001) claimed doctors have an affirmative obligation to listen actively to their patients.

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Parallel ideas should be presented in parallel form.

- INCORRECT: The scores of the participants were difficult to decipher and record.
- CORRECT: The scores of the participants were difficult to decipher and to record.
- INCORRECT: To register students must either have a valid student identification card or a current driver's license.
- CORRECT: To register students must either have a valid student identification card or have a current driver's license.

PERIODS, COMMAS, AND QUOTATION MARKS

Without exception, periods and commas are placed inside quotation marks. Colons, semi-colons and question marks may go inside or outside depending on use. Check APA for correct usage.

- INCORRECT: Sherburne exclaimed, "I quit".
- CORRECT: Sherburne exclaimed, "I quit."

Exception: If the quotation is followed by a source citation, the period follows the citation.

- INCORRECT: Sykes (2003) described organizational entry as a process "fraught with potential pitfalls for neophytes." (p. 313).
- CORRECT: Sykes (2003) described organizational entry as a process "fraught with potential pitfalls for neophytes" (p. 313).

PREPOSITIONS

Avoid ending sentences with prepositions.

- INCORRECT: Where are you going to?
CORRECT: Where are you going?
- INCORRECT: The instructor told the students to choose the word processing program they were most familiar with.
CORRECT: The instructor told the students to choose the word processing program with which they were most familiar.
- INCORRECT: Before being accepted as participants in Dr. Bingham's study, students had to list all previous studies they had participated in.
CORRECT: Before being accepted as participants in Dr. Bingham's study, students had to list all previous studies in which they had participated.
- INCORRECT: Before allowing the couple to proceed, the police officer asked where they had come from.
CORRECT: Before allowing the couple to proceed, the police officer asked where they had been.

Common Prepositions:

about	beneath	in	regarding
above	beside	inside	round
across	between	into	since
after	beyond	like	through
against	by	near	to
among	concerning	of	toward
around	despite	off	under
as	down	on	unlike
at	during	out	until
before	except	outside	up
behind	for	over	upon
below	from	past	with

REDUNDANCY

Avoid redundancy. Redundancy is needless repetition; the use of more than one word to express the same essential idea.

- WEAK: He made the same careless mistake throughout the entire paragraph
BETTER: He made the same careless mistake throughout the paragraph.
- WEAK: Their responses on the questionnaire were exactly the same.
BETTER: Their responses on the questionnaire were the same.

RESTRICTIVE CLAUSES

Restrictive clauses are essential to the meaning of a sentence and are introduced with the word *that*. Nonrestrictive clauses, which are set off by commas, provide additional information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and are introduced by the word *which*. Writers who introduce restrictive clauses with *that* and nonrestrictive clauses with *which* produce writing that is clearer and more precise.

- NONRESTRICTIVE: The mice, which were kept in optimal physical condition, functioned proficiently in the experiment. [We keep all of our mice in optimal physical condition.]
- RESTRICTIVE: The mice that were that were kept in optimal physical condition functioned proficiently in the experiment. [The writer of this sentence implies that those mice that were not kept in optimal physical condition did not function proficiently in the experiment.]
- NONRESTRICTIVE: The focus group, which is scheduled for Thursday, will meet in the performance space. [The only focus group that is scheduled will meet in the performance space. By the way, the group is scheduled for Thursday.]
- RESTRICTIVE: The focus group that is scheduled for Thursday will meet in the performance space. [The focus group scheduled for Friday will meet in some other space.]
- NONRESTRICTIVE: The cat that went to sleep on the dryer purred. [None of the other cats purred.]
- RESTRICTIVE: The cat, which went to sleep on the dryer, purred. [She is our only cat.]

SECOND PERSON

Avoid using second person in academic writing.

- WEAK: When you entered the laboratory, you were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire.
- BETTER: When participants entered the laboratory, they were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire.
- WEAK: When you use computer mediated communication [CMC] to maintain a long distance relationship, you have to ask yourself how much you trust this person.
- BETTER: Trust is a significant issue for individuals who use computer mediated communication [CMC] to maintain long distance relationships.

SPLIT INFINITIVES

Avoid split infinitives. A split infinitive occurs when a word, usually an adverb or an adverbial phrase, comes between *to* and an uninflected form of the verb. While split infinitives occur

frequently in creative writing and popular culture (e.g., *to boldly go* where no one has gone before), they are unacceptable in scholarly writing.

INCORRECT: He failed to completely close the door.

CORRECT: He failed to close the door completely.

INCORRECT: She vowed to only go when he returned.

CORRECT: She vowed to go only when he returned.

INCORRECT: The participants were advised to thoroughly and carefully read consent forms before signing

CORRECT: The laboratory assistant conducting the experiment advised the participants to read the consent forms thoroughly and carefully before signing.

TRANSITIONAL WORDS

Transitional words help writers create continuity in their writing by establishing relationships between or among ideas. A number of different relationships can be created by the writer's choice of words

TIME
RELATIONSHIPS: then, after, next, while, since

CAUSE-EFFECT
RELATIONSHIPS: therefore, consequently, as a result

ADDITIVE
RELATIONSHIPS: in addition to, additionally, moreover, furthermore, similarly

CONTRAST
RELATIONSHIPS: conversely, nevertheless, however, although, whereas

VERB TENSES

Use verb tenses appropriately and consistently.

For literature reviews . . .

. . . use past tense when reporting published scholarship conducted at a definite time in the past (i.e., citation of a single source).

CORRECT: Evans (2004) *argued* that immediacy behaviors on the part of instructors have no measurable effect on student learning among autistic children.

INCORRECT: Evans (2004) *argues* that immediacy behaviors on the part of instructors have no measurable effect on student learning among autistic children.

. . . use present perfect tense when reporting scholarship that did not occur at a single definite time (i.e., multiple citations covering a number of years).

CORRECT: Researchers (Evans, 2004; Hildred, 1988; Jaworski & Jones, 1995) *have demonstrated* that autistic children present numerous challenges to classroom teachers.

INCORRECT: Researchers (Evans, 2004; Hildred, 1988; Jaworski & Jones, 2005) *demonstrated* that autistic children present numerous challenges to classroom teachers.

INCORRECT: Researchers (Evans, 2004; Hildred, 1988; Jaworski & Jones, 2005) *demonstrate* that autistic children present numerous challenges to classroom teachers.

Avoid shifts in verb tense.

CORRECT: Jiminez (2001) *claimed* that while most employees perceived conflict as negative, most employers recognized that conflict can be productive. He *argued* that when employees engaged in conflict focused on tasks rather than personalities, they frequently arrived at creative solutions

CORRECT: Jiminez (2001) *claimed* that while most employees perceive conflict as negative, most employers recognize that conflict can be productive. He *argued* that when employees engage in conflict focused on tasks rather than personalities, they frequently arrive at creative solutions.

INCORRECT: Jiminez (2001) *claimed* that while most employees perceive conflict as negative, most employers recognize that conflict can be productive. He *argues* that when employees engage in conflict focused on tasks rather than personalities, they frequently arrive at creative solutions.

WORDINESS

Wordiness is the use of more words than necessary to convey an idea.

WEAK: He made a decision not to participate in the study *based on the fact that* he did not need extra credit.

BETTER: He made a decision not to participate in the study *because* he did not need extra credit.

WEAK: She scheduled the laboratory for the purpose of conducting her focus group.

BETTER: She scheduled the laboratory to conduct her focus group.

WEAK: There were several students in attendance when the alarm sounded.

BETTER: Several students were in attendance when the alarm sounded.

