

Your Name
Appropriate Course Title
Fall 1999
Word Count: 2,890

Standard Paper Requirements¹

Abstract

This paper contains suggestions on what to do before you write, how to write well, various rules for composing standard English, some principles of essay organization, text layout design, and editing, and college rules concerning academic honesty. If you don't follow these instructions your grade will be lowered. If you don't follow the rules of referencing, you risk committing plagiarism. Don't wait until the last minute to read this paper. Study it carefully before you write, and use it as a check list for final editing.

Introduction

This document spells out the required grammatical, format, and stylistic standards for papers in academic courses. Papers that don't meet these standards will be penalized, and in particularly bad cases, returned for revising. The purpose of these requirements is to ensure the quality of writing and paper design in my courses. Before even selecting your topic, read this paper.

Your goal should be to produce great-looking, well-written papers in standard English. There are other forms of English, but standard English is "the standard" for academic and business communication in the USA. If you want to substitute other forms of expression, you must get permission from your instructor in advance.

¹ Some material in this guide was freely adapted from *The Style Guide* (web edition), published by *The Economist*, July 13, 1999. *The Economist* is arguably the best-written weekly publication on social and economic issues in the English language, hence its use as an authority in matters of style. (http://www.economist.com/editorial/justforyou/library/index_styleguide.html). Detailed references are avoided in the interest of overall readability. Curt Raney makes no claim of authorship of any specific portion of *Standard Paper Requirements*.

Your paper should look like this paper in every detail except the bullets. They are used only for lists of short items. They are not appropriate for paragraphs.

Consult this document thoroughly before you begin writing. Check off () each item after you've completed your paper to make sure you haven't missed anything. There are too many details to remember off the top of your head.

Before Writing

- Approach writing your paper in a responsible mood. If you are complacent or feel the desire to procrastinate, deal with it or wait until a better time to work. But don't wait too long. Set yourself a new deadline for getting down to work before postponing a session.
- Give a great deal of thought to your topic. Choose one that interests you, that you feel strongly about, or think you would enjoy exploring.
- Use the library to choose or refine your topic by pouring over books and journal articles in the appropriate areas.
- After you've chosen your topic, select your sources wisely. Make sure they're appropriate for the paper and its requirements. Don't be lazy about this part of the project. Your sources are the foundation of your paper. Poor sources make for a poor paper.
- Once you have your sources in hand, skim them to get their feel.
- Give a great deal of thought to your thesis. As you zero in on it, give your major sources an in-depth reading.
- As you read, continue thinking about your thesis. Mull over your ideas in relation to your sources for several days until your thinking has settled. Jot ideas down as they occur to you if you're away from your desk.
- Take notes on material that's especially useful in writing your paper, such as an occasional quotation, or a particularly good idea or concept. Be sure to include author, title, and page number(s) for references.
- Be very careful at this stage to clearly indicate whether you've quoted or paraphrased. If you've paraphrased, be thorough. Don't mix paraphrases with quoted material, not even a little. Carelessness at this stage can cause you to accidentally plagiarize. There's no way to prove decisively that the plagiarism was accidental after the paper has been turned in.
- Start with an outline, and fill it in as you write. Don't be afraid to reorganize the paper on the fly. Writing is to some extent an evolutionary process.

- Write about *your* opinions and feelings. Your instructor wants to know what *you* think. Also write to convince your instructor that you studied the sources carefully and gave the issues they pose a great deal of thought.

Suggestions to Improve your Style

Follow George Orwell's six elementary rules for English writing:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech that's in fashion. Such expressions lack impact and originality.
 2. Never use a long or uncommon word where a short or common one will do.
 3. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
 4. Never use the passive voice where you can use the active. (For example, use *George told Fred to go home*, not *Fred was told to go home*.)
 5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific term, or jargon if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
 6. Break any of these rules rather than write clumsily.
- Make your writing sound like you, not someone else.
 - Write as if you're speaking to a friend, but grammatically correct.
 - Use contractions occasionally to give your writing a sense of immediacy and informality, but not so often as to appear vulgar.
 - Keep your sentences short, especially if the subject is complex.
 - Express only one idea at a time. Start a new paragraph for each new idea.
 - Use examples to clarify what you're saying.
 - Give your paper an attention-grabbing title. Use it to seize the reader's attention and to suggest the thesis of the paper. But add a descriptive subtitle if necessary to ensure that readers understand the topic of the paper.
 - Use only your own words. AVOID using quotations except to share an exceptionally well-stated idea with readers, or to allow them to follow a detailed analysis of a statement.
 - Use metaphors and similes for impact. Don't be afraid to jazz up your paper with an occasional poetic device, but don't *overdo* it.
 - *Man* sometimes includes *women*, just as *he* sometimes makes do for *she*, when you can't find an elegant alternative. It is often possible to phrase sentences so

that they neither give offence to women nor become hideously complicated. Using the plural is a helpful device. Thus *Instruct the reader without lecturing him* is better put as *Instruct readers without lecturing them*. But some sentences resist this treatment. For example: *Find a good teacher and take his advice* is not easily rendered gender-neutral because the statement's meaning would be distorted if expressed in the plural. [That is, without adopting the grotesque construction *his/her* or the mildly objectionable *his or hers*. *His or hers* is acceptable in a pinch, but using the plural is preferable. Repeated use of *his or hers*, *he or she*, or *him or her* quickly stands out and draws unwanted attention to the device, detracting from the natural flow of communication, quickly marring otherwise elegant expression.] Avoid, above all, the sort of scrambled syntax in the following example: *We can't afford to squander anyone's talents, whatever their sex*. Avoid also, trendy, strained expressions such as chairperson (chairwoman is permissible), businesspeople, postpersons, firepersons, and the person in the street. The principle underlying these suggestions is that good writing should take precedence over a show of moral perfection.

- Mark Twain described how a good writer treats sentences: “At times he may indulge himself with a long one, but he will make sure there are no folds in it, no vagueness, no parenthetical interruptions of its view as a whole; when he has done with it, it won't be a sea-serpent with half of its arches under the water; it will be a torch-light procession.”
- Long paragraphs, like long sentences, can confuse the reader. “The paragraph,” according to Fowler, “is essentially a unit of thought, not of length; it must be homogeneous in subject matter and sequential in treatment.” One-sentence paragraphs should be used only occasionally.
- Clear thinking is the key to clear writing. “A scrupulous writer,” observed Orwell, “in every sentence that he writes will ask himself at least four questions: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?”

Author's Persona

- Don't sound arrogant. Those who disagree with you are not necessarily stupid, immoral, or insane. Nobody needs to be described in such unflattering terms: let your analysis show that.
- When you express opinions, do not simply make assertions. The aim is not just to tell your instructor what you think, but to persuade me. If you use arguments, reasoning, and evidence, you may succeed.

- Go easy on the oughts and shoulds. Nobody likes being lectured at. Ultimately, they're a matter of preference, not fact.
- Don't be too pleased with yourself. Don't boast of your own cleverness.
- Don't be too chatty. *Surprise, surprise* is more irritating than informative. So is *Ho, ho*, etc.
- Do not be too didactic. If too many sentences begin *Compare, Consider, Expect, Imagine, Look at, Note, Prepare for, Remember* or *Take*, your readers will think they are reading a textbook or, indeed, a style pamphlet such as this).

Accents

- On words now accepted as English, use accents only when they make a crucial difference to pronunciation, as in: *cliché, soupçon, façade, café, communiqué, exposé* (but *chateau, elite, feted*).
- If you use one accent (except the tilde—strictly, a diacritical sign), use all of them: *émigré, mêlée, protégé, résumé*.
- Put the accents and cedillas on French names and words, umlauts on German ones, and tildes (but not other accents) on Spanish ones: *Françoise de Panafieu, Wolfgang Schäuble, Federico Peña*.
- Leave the accents off other foreign names.
- Any foreign word in italics should, however, be given all its proper accents.

Punctuation, Document Format, and Reference Style

- Place one blank space after commas, colons, semicolons, and periods. If you're in the habit of using two spaces, use your word processor's find and replace commands to eliminate multiple spaces.
- Don't use any blank spaces after a colon in scriptural references, to designate the time, or for volume or page numbers in references.
- Place periods and commas, inside quotation marks, even if they're not in the original statement you're quoting. [*She said "Yes," and walked slowly away.*]
- Place colons and semi-colons outside quotation marks, unless they're part of the material you're quoting.
- Use dashes for dashes, not hyphens. Double hyphens are appropriate only when using a typewriter. A single hyphen is never appropriate as a dash. Some word processors require the use of a special or extended character set to insert a dash. Most access the dash from the keyboard by entering a

- combination of keys simultaneously with the hyphen key. Which keys depends on the operating system and word processing software you're using.
- Don't place a blank space before or after hyphens and dashes, except to force a line break where desirable, in which case the blank space won't be apparent.
 - Italicize titles of books and journals. Don't underline them. Underling titles is appropriate only when using a typewriter that can't italicize. Place titles of articles in quotation marks.
 - Use footnotes. Academic journal styles placing authors' names, publications dates, and page numbers in parentheses are not acceptable. Use Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* as a guide to constructing footnotes.

Organization

- Organize your paper around a central thesis.
- Write in a logical sequence with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Write your introduction in a way that draws the reader into the paper.
- Jump right into the rhetorical aspect of the thesis so the reader quickly grasps your point of view.
- Conclude with a conclusion, not merely a restatement. Save the most forceful or clearest expression of your thesis and deliver it as a *coup de grâce*.
- Don't start your paper with a bland description of the purpose of the paper, a rehash of the purpose in the middle, and a restatement of the purpose at the end. It insults your reader's intelligence and triggers boredom.

Layout and design

- Make the final product look polished and professional. Never turn in messy, wrinkled, carelessly executed work.
- Use the Times, size 12 font for the text of your paper. Format reference numbers in superscript. Use font size 10 for indented quotations, footnotes themselves, and page numbers.
- Put *your* name, the course title, the semester, and the word count for *your* paper in the upper, left-hand corner of the first page, imitating the beginning of this paper.
- Center the title, with three blank lines preceding it and two following it. You may increase the font size for the title, or make it bold, but don't underline it. Don't use multiple devices to make the title stand out. One is enough.

- Be sure to capitalize all but the trivial words in the title. If the title is long, break it into two or more lines in a way that makes it look balanced, centering all the lines, with no line wider than approximately 3/4ths of a normal line width.
- Don't use a separate title page. Begin your paper on the same page as the title, as shown in this paper.
- Include an abstract so readers can quickly learn about your paper. An abstract is an after-the-fact summary of a paper's contents, including your conclusions. It's not just a statement of the purpose of the paper.
- Place the abstract underneath the title, and indent left and right margins at least 1/2 inch. The abstract should be in font size 10, a moderately smaller font than the size 12 used in the rest of the paper. Full justification is standard practice for abstracts.
- Use 1 1/2 inch margins all around. That means top and bottom, and for references, too.
- Single-space the text of your paper.
- Place quotations longer than a sentence or two in separate paragraphs. Indent both left AND right sides, and insert a blank line before AND after the paragraph. Also, use font size 10 for these type of quotations.
- Paragraphs should be in block style, fully justified, as in this paper. With block style, paragraphs are separated by a blank line, and they're NOT indented.
- Hyphenate the abstract and the text of the paper to improve spacing of words.
- Number the pages, except for page one. Do not number page one.
- Place page numbers at the bottom of the page, centered, one half inch to one full inch from the bottom edge of the paper. Don't use the *Page X of Y* format used in this paper. It's a device used only to ensure that readers know whether they have all the pages from a legal or technical document, when they might otherwise not realize they don't.
- NEVER make handwritten corrections.
- You must have a bibliography in addition to references. Place an asterisk (*) at the beginning of each of bibliographic listing of a book or article that counts toward the minimum number of scholarly sources required for the paper.
- Print on a laser or ink jet printer. Dot matrix printers are not acceptable for finish-quality work. The college's computer labs have laser printers.

- If you write your paper away from SMCM, without access to a laser or ink jet printer, transfer the paper to a college lab for final touch-up and printing. Be sure to write the paper with software that Microsoft Word can easily and correctly translate. Don't do your work on some crummy machine with obsolete software or a word-processor that's not in widespread use or that can't execute the instructions for the paper properly.
- Staple pages together at the upper, left-hand corner. DO NOT use a paper clip or any other method of joining pages together.
- Please don't put your paper in a binder. It makes my work more difficult because I'm handling papers in bulk quantities. Binders will be thrown away.
- Place your paper in an envelope or file folder during transport to keep it in mint condition. Messy-looking papers will not be accepted.

After Writing—Editing

- Give your paper a rest after writing. It takes a day or more to tackle editing with a fresh state of mind.
- Give your paper to one or more friends for feedback.
- Ask yourself: "Does my paper sound like someone speaking in standard English? Are my ideas clearly communicated? Is it obvious that I read and understood the sources?"
- Think about what you can do to improve any and all aspects of the paper before you consider it finished. Make quality your final goal.
- Use your word processor to count the number of words in your paper. Place that number in the information section before the title, as in this paper.

Avoiding Plagiarism

USE REFERENCES! Any use of written or spoken words, ideas, or information other than your own personal experience must be referenced unless it is widely considered common knowledge. Many students believe that only quoted material needs referencing, and if they fiddle a little with the wording of material, it is no longer a quotation. WRONG! If you rephrase a writer's statements, put the entire selection in your own words. Still, you must reference the material. Plagiarism results in an *F* in the course, and a referral to the Academic Judicial Board for extra-course punishments.