

Checklist of other writing rules

- Here is a short checklist of some common problems to avoid and good practices to develop. These items reflect established standards, and you should note them carefully to eliminate flaws in future writing.
- Obtain a style manual and consult it to learn the proper forms to use in your text and in your bibliographic citations.
- All written documents require a title (or something that says what the document contains) and an Introduction.
- It is an aid to the reader to use subheads for the individual parts of your paper.
- A table may be placed within the text, otherwise it should be placed on a separate page immediately following the page on which it is first cited.
- The title of a table goes on top of the table, and the source (properly cited) goes at the bottom. Tables are numbered in a single sequence: Table 1, Table 2, etc.
- Figures such as maps, diagrams, photos, and so forth, may be placed within the text if they are small, otherwise they should be placed on a separate page following the text page on which they are first cited.
- Every figure needs a caption, which goes below the figure. The caption must include the source, properly cited. Figures are numbered in a single sequence: Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.
- You may use end notes for explanatory material that does not belong in your text.
- Use footnotes (at the bottom of the page) or in-text citations to cite material that you quote or paraphrase. If you quote, always use quote marks. There are several correct methods for citing sources. You must use an acceptable method. You are not permitted to make up your own citation form. An increasingly common form cites the source in the text (Smith 1999). No comma between author and date.
- If you quote, use quotation marks and give page numbers (Smith 1999, 74) or (Smith 1999:74-5). The citation goes before the period.
- If you discuss information in a table, present your discussion or interpretation, then cite the table (Table 1). Do not write, "Table 1 shows." The same rule applies to your discussion on information in figures.
- Consult a style manual to learn how to construct your bibliography at the end of your paper. You may not make up your own method.
- Eliminate all grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. Avoid run-on sentences. Do not begin sentences with numerals. Avoid contractions in formal writing. Capitalize names of regions ("the West"), but not directions ("north of the city").
- If you include a table or figure in your paper and it must be placed sideways, the top of the table or figure goes on the left margin.
- When beginning a sentence with "This" it is a good idea to follow it with a noun so that the reader knows what you are referring to. Usually sentences beginning with "This" have an indefinite antecedent.
- When referring to decades, write 1970s, 1980s; not 70s or '70s, or seventies.
- Avoid contractions in formal writing.
- The personal pronoun "its" has no apostrophe. (e.g., The dog chased its tail.)
- Past tense of "lead" is "led." (He led his troops into battle.)
- Plurals of acronyms are formed by adding an "s" as in NGOs, MSAs.
- The period goes inside quote marks. He commented wearily, "I'm tired of reading term papers."
- No space before or after an em-dash—do it like this—it's a rule. Make a dash with two hyphens, or use the dash in your word processing program. Don't use a hyphen in place of a dash.
- Avoid British usage in America: amongst, whilst, amidst, railway, etc., unless quoting.
- Number the pages of your paper.
- Always cite sources and page numbers when quoting statistics.
- Avoid paragraphs with single sentences.
- Strictly speaking, the word "alternative" is used when there is only one; otherwise you should speak of "options."
- Again-tables and figures should appear immediately following the text page on which they are first cited, not at the end of the paper.
- When using a comparative form, make the comparison explicit.
- Spell out "percent" following a numeral; otherwise say "percentage." Some style manuals OK % when the numerals are inside parentheses (37%); otherwise write: "There was a 37 percent increase in"
- An ellipsis is three dots (...), but when it precedes a period, there will be four dots (....).