

Guidelines for writing papers

1. Papers should be double spaced, with 1” margins at the top and bottom and 1 ¼” margins on each side. Use 12 point, Times New Roman font or equivalent.
2. *Always* number your pages.
3. Check spelling, punctuation and capitalization. These should be *perfect*.
4. Correctly cite your sources, even if you paraphrase an author. You may use footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical citations.

Example: “A wise prince, therefore, has avoided these arms and turned to his own” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 86).

Example: Machiavelli wrote that wise princes rely on their own resources rather than relying on the arms of other men (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 86).

General reminders on style:

5. Vague and unclear writing is the product of vague and unclear thinking. If you are having a difficult time conveying an idea, it is because you are unclear about that idea.
6. Read your essay aloud several times before you submit it. If it sounds awkward or unclear, rewrite your essay until it becomes clear. Remember, the reader does not know what you are trying to say, only what you *are* saying.
7. Organize your ideas in paragraphs; avoid huge leaps from one idea to another between paragraphs. Each paragraph should have some thematic relation to the preceding and following paragraphs.
8. Eliminate wordiness, flowery language, and overly complex or run-on sentences.
9. Avoid pusillanimous phrases such as “I believe,” “I think,” or “In my opinion.”
10. Always strive for clarity. Try to avoid vague words such as “thing,” “stuff,” “this,” and “that.”
Bad: The main thing that Churchill disliked was this.
Good: Churchill most disliked inactivity.
11. When quoting another author, make sure the reader knows who is speaking. Never simply drop a quote into your paper.
Bad: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”
Okay: As James Madison wrote, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”
Better: “If men were angels,” James Madison wrote, “no government would be necessary.”
12. Never introduce a new paragraph with a conjunction; never introduce a sentence with “however” or “therefore.”
Unacceptable: However, the evidence suggests that he is wrong.
Acceptable: The evidence, however, suggests that he is wrong.
13. If you quote another author, and the quote is more than four lines in length, use a block quote: single space, full justify, and indent the text an additional ½ inch on each side. For example:
In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions (Madison, 232).
14. For further advice, consult William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*. It has gone through many editions, is short, inexpensive, lively and invaluable.

Common grammatical mistakes:

15. *Never* write in sentence fragments.
ALL sentences must have a subject and a verb:
Fragment: The extreme hostility toward those against the measure.
Prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses can not stand alone without a main clause:
Fragment: Although he could not go to class.
16. Make sure nouns and verbs agree in number and tense:
Incorrect: He had went to class early.
Incorrect: Cindy, along with most of her friends, believe that it was unfair.
17. Never use “he or she” or “they” to indicate a single person; use “he.”
Incorrect: If a person (singular) decides to write, they (plural) should write well.
18. Avoid comma faults.
Incorrect: She was able, to understand the economy.
19. In a series of three or more terms, use a comma after each (except the last).
Correct: red, white, and blue
Correct: He baked the cake, iced it, and ate it after supper.
20. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.
Incorrect: The executive, as Hamilton envisioned should hold a very long term of office.
Correct: The executive, as Hamilton envisioned, should hold a very long term of office.
21. Use “that” and “which” correctly. “Which” introduces a subordinate clause and must follow a comma.
Incorrect: He sat on the chair which was empty.
Correct: He sat on the chair that was empty.
Correct: He sat on the chair, which was not being used by anyone.
22. Whenever possible, use active verbs.
Passive: The problem was understood by him.
Active: He understood the problem.
23. Avoid contractions, such as don’t, can’t, wouldn’t, doesn’t, she’s
24. Use “being” correctly; it is not a substitute for “as,” “since,” or “because.”
Incorrect: Although he did not win, Tom accepted the praise, being that he had raced well.
Correct: Although he did not win, Tom accepted the praise, as he had raced well.
25. Use apostrophes correctly.
Incorrect: Sharons car is red.
Incorrect: I solved three problem’s.
26. The possessive of “it” does not use an apostrophe; “It’s” means “it is.”
Incorrect: It’s paw was stuck in the rocks.
Correct: Its paw was stuck in the rocks.
27. Beware of homonyms (words that sound the same but have different meanings).
Incorrect: Their were two problems to be red.
Incorrect: There car was read.
Incorrect: He lead the others in the fight.
Incorrect: The society excepted him as a new member.
28. Do not confuse “than” and “then.” “Than” indicates comparison; “then” indicates time.
Incorrect: If he does, than I will go with him.
Incorrect: His wisdom is greater then mine.
29. Keep related words together.
Incorrect: He noticed a large stain on the rug that was right in the center.
Correct: He noticed a large stain right in the center of the rug.
30. Use “second, third,” etc., rather than “secondly, thirdly,” etc.