

Expectations for Written Work
Modified from Handouts developed by
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The following points reflect some, NOT ALL, of the expectations of good writing.

Introductory remarks:

First of all, **review the directions** for your specific paper and follow them to the letter.

Late papers: Check with your course instructors, A number of department faculty will not be accept your paper late without their permission and may in fact, grade your paper down for being late.

Format - Use unless otherwise directed by your course instructor:

All papers, essays, homework should be **typed in black ink, double-spaced, with one inch margins, in Times New Roman or Courier New, with ten-point or twelve-point font.**

Title Page (optional unless specified): This usually comprises the title you have given your paper or essay, your name, the course, instructor's name, and due date.

Pagination is a must. Page numbers should be at the top right or bottom center.

Do not skip extra lines between paragraphs.

Notes and Bibliography: If notes or bibliography are required they must conform to the formats shown in *A Manual for Writers* by Kate L. Turabian.

Style

1. Do not announce your organization. Do not begin with "This paper will show" or "In this essay it will be shown" or any similar phrase. Do not start a paragraph with "The first topic I will talk about is...." If you need help with this, ask your instructor or stop by the writing lab in Case Annex.

Incorrect: This essay will show the differences and similarities between the the Civil War and World War One.

Correct: There are many differences and only a few similarities between the Civil War and World War One.

2. Use the third person only. No first or second person pronouns should be in your paper: do not use I, me, we, us or you..

Incorrect: I believe strongly that the Aztecs were a great civilization.

Incorrect: You would not believe how great the Aztecs were.

Better: The Aztecs were a great civilization.

3. Write with precision and clarity. Avoid awkward and unclear phrases.

Incorrect: Sparta controlled somewhat of a variety of items that seemed fairly helpful to them in many ways, but not in all ways.

Correct: Sparta controlled a strong infantry and a slave-labor agriculture, but these strengths were also weaknesses when faced with a naval power or a slave rebellion.

4. Slang. Do not use colloquial expressions.

Incorrect: Brahmins were really cool in the way that they never beat around the bush.

Better: Brahmins excelled in speaking clearly and directly.

5. Write complete sentences. Avoid fragments, comma splices and fused sentences.

Incorrect: Doing well on every paper. (Sentence fragment)

Incorrect: He did well on every paper he followed directions (Fused sentence/run-on sentence)

Incorrect: He did well on every paper, he followed directions (Comma splice)

Better: He did well on every paper because he followed directions.

6. Tense. Historians write in the past tense. At minimum, keep the tense consistent within each paragraph.

Incorrect: Genghis Khan ruled wisely because he understands people.

Better: Genghis Khan ruled wisely because he understood people.

7. Avoid faulty parallelism.

Incorrect: They bought three pizzas, five Cokes, and they found a watermelon.

Better: They bought three pizzas, five Cokes, and a watermelon.

8. Do not use contractions in a formal paper.

Incorrect: Thomas Jefferson didn't support the abolition of slavery.

Better: Thomas Jefferson did not support the abolition of slavery.

9. Avoid words such as "very," "really," "incredibly," "significantly," "even," "merely," or "just."

Incorrect: The Declaration of Independence is a really important document.

Better: The Declaration of Independence is an important document.

10. Keep direct quotations to a **minimum** particularly in regard to quotations from secondary sources. Direct quotations from primary sources are more permissible especially if these are accompanied by good analysis of the quotations and your analysis furthers your paper's arguments. In general, paper should be written almost entirely in your own words. If you **must use quotations, keep them short**—just a few words. Only use a direct quotation if there is something special or unique about the author's idea or phrase. In any formal paper, if you have a quotation that is more than three lines, it should be single-spaced and indented within the paper.

11. When introducing a direct quotation, use a colon (:) before. A comma is used when writing dialogue. **You will never** use a comma before a quotation in a history paper.

12. Spell out numbers above twelve except for dates.

Grammar

1. Noun-pronoun agreement is a must.

Incorrect: When **a person** uses **their** strength to intimidate others it is wrong.

Correct: When **a person** uses **his or her** strength to intimidate others it is wrong. OR
When **people** use **their** strength to intimidate others it is wrong.

2. Noun-verb agreement is also a must.

Incorrect: The people of New Mexico and the government was in a disagreement over taxes.

Correct: The people of New Mexico and the government were in a disagreement over taxes.

3. Most adverbs have an “ly” on the end.

Incorrect: The author writes *elegant*.

Correct: The author writes *elegantly*.

4. Compound adjectives take a hyphen. These are descriptions in which two words go together to make a single idea such as “four-door car,” “one-inch margins,” “off-white shirt,” or “twentieth-century”.

Incorrect: He made a person to person phone call.

Correct: He made a person-to-person phone call.

5. Proper Punctuation:

A) End punctuation such as periods, commas, question marks and exclamation points **go inside quotation marks.**

Example: She believed the worst argument in the world was “might makes right.”

B) Colons and **semi-colons** go **outside quotation marks.** A **colon (:)** indicates that what follows is a list, or is a rewording of the thought that has just been expressed. In the latter instance, a colon is another way of expressing the thought “in other words.”

Example: World War One can be described in numerous ways including: bloody, deadly, catastrophic, and horrifying. Jefferson found the idea unacceptable: a travesty of his ideals.

C) A semi-colon (;) is used to separate two closely related **complete** sentences.

Example: Ivan the Terrible was reared as an autocrat; he believed completely that he was the highest authority in the realm.

D) Apostrophes are used to show 1) contractions (there should be none in your paper) and 2) possession. Many students confuse proper plural forms of nouns with possessive forms. Be sure you are clear on this subject. When you are putting a noun into its possessive form, the following rule can be used: if the word already has an “s” at the end, then just add an apostrophe.

Example: Charles’ [singular] cup lay on the rug.

Example: There were three **babies** [regular plural] in the room, but there were four **babies’ [possessive plural] rattles** on the floor.

If the word does not have an “s”, then put in apostrophe followed by “s” (baby’s rattle).

Example: Angela tripped over the baby’s rattle and when she fell, found William’s cup under the couch.

6. Check your spelling; use a dictionary; do not rely on your computer. Be sure you know the difference among they’re, their, and there or between to and too.

Final Remarks

1. Proof read your work yourself and then ask a competent friend to proofread it for you.

Computer spell check and grammar check programs are useful, but not authoritative, and they frequently miss obvious errors. Your instructors will be helpful if you have questions.

2. Learn from your mistakes. Review previous written work and avoid making the same errors.