Writing Hints

Includes:

Basic good writing suggestions
APA guidelines for references
Recognizing a journal article
Database searches
Guidelines for writing about people
Common errors
Avoiding plagiarism
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Some Basic Good Writing Suggestions


- Choose your words carefully. Write exactly what you mean. Every word should be there for a good reason.
- Avoid slang. It is unprofessional. Use “young men” or “boys” instead of “guys.” Use “mother” instead of “mom.” Instead of a term like “fizzled out,” use “didn’t succeed” or something similar.
- Avoid words such as “always,” “average,” “perfect,” or “all.” These words can be unclear and misleading.
- Avoid sexist language. Use “Ms.” instead of “Mrs.” or “Miss.” Use “woman” instead of “lady.” Use “homemaker” or “woman who does not work outside of the home” instead of “housewife.” Do not call adult women “girls.”
- Avoid labeling people with terms such as “sleazy,” “strange,” “ punks,” “slobs,” or “low class.”
- Do not abbreviate. Some people may not understand abbreviations. You can spell the term out the first time and put the abbreviation in parenthesis right after it. Thereafter, you can just use the abbreviation. For example, “The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the major professional organization for social work practitioners. NASW provides members with a journal and newspaper focusing on current practice issues.”
- Be concise. Determine if a sentence could use fewer words. Consider dividing long sentences into two or more smaller ones.
- Use paragraphs to divide content into different topics, points, or issues. A solid page of text without paragraph breaks is hard to read. Each paragraph should have a unifying theme. Avoid using one-sentence paragraphs.
- Distinguish between verified facts and your impression of the facts. Examples of ways to phrase your impressions include “My impression is . . .,” “It appears that . . .,” and “It seems that . . . .”
- Proofread your written products before they go out. Failure to do so can ruin the impact of your message. Consider the social worker whose letter to another professional raised the problem of “drive-by-shooings” and the need for her adolescent client to “absent himself from sex.” Clearly, this letter was not proofread before it went out.
More Good Writing Suggestions

Simpler Is Usually Better

As a general rule, when writing professionally, simplify your sentences and language. Omit unnecessary words. “That,” “the,” and “in order” often are unnecessary words.

Examples:

NO: I learned that I can accomplish more by way of partnering with other social workers than I can accomplish alone.
YES: I learned I can accomplish more by partnering with other social workers than I can accomplish alone.

NO: I can help you get the services you are in need of.
YES: I can help you get the services you need.

NO: This is the textbook that you will need for your next class.
YES: This is the textbook you will need for your next class.

NO: I am assigning essays in order to improve your professional writing skills.
YES: I am assigning essays to improve your professional writing skills.

NO: We should provide child care for children and vocational training for the parents.
YES: We should provide child care for children and vocational training for parents.

NO: Toledo General Agency serves the low-income individuals.
YES: Toledo General Agency serves low-income individuals.

Active and Passive Voice

Generally, use the active, rather than the passive voice. The following material is excerpted from NASW Press Author Guidelines, Section 8-2-C (http://www.naswpress.org/resources/tools/01-write/guidelines_toc.htm, retrieved 8-15-05)

The active voice usually makes for livelier and more vigorous writing, according to Strunk and White, authors of Elements of Style. While there are rare occasions when the passive voice is preferable to the active, writing that relies on passively worded sentences lacks force, is less concise, and is less attractive to readers.

Following are some suggestions:

- Try to avoid using passive verbs unless there is absolutely no way to get around it, or you need to use it to emphasize a particular subject:

  Examples:
  Active: The kitten jumped on the catnip mouse.
  Passive: The catnip mouse was jumped on by the kitten.

  Active: She patted the dog.
  Passive: The dog was patted by her.
Using the passive voice changes the emphasis in a sentence. There are times when this is desirable (not often); it is a useful tool to master, and can help you highlight a specific point or subject.

**Examples:**
Active: The parents loved the child. (emphasizes the parents)
Passive: The child was loved by its parents. (emphasizes the child)

Active: A three-alarm fire blazed through an apartment building on King Street last night, leaving several residents homeless. (emphasizes the fire)
Passive: Several residents of an apartment building on King Street were left homeless when a fire blazed through their building last night. (emphasizes the people)

The passive voice usually results in long sentences, which can sap the writing’s energy, as well as your readers’ enthusiasm. Often, readers end up feeling unsure about who has done what to whom…

Always distrust "there is" and "there are" at the beginning of a sentence (the verb "to be" offers little chance of action (a state of being is, in itself, a passive concept). It often leads into a bland, unenergetic, passive-voice sentence.

**Examples:**
Original: There was no one who helped him move the desk.
Good: No one helped him move the desk.

*(Note how the second sentence is shorter, punchier, and has more energy...)*
SUMMARY OF APA EDITORIAL STYLE

Adapted from http://www.utexas.edu/ssw/apss/forms/resources/apa.html and updated

The following is a brief presentation of paper organization and major forms of citation from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fourth Edition (1994) and Fifth Edition (2001), including its guidelines for reducing bias in language. There are advantages to using this format, particularly as most social work journals have adopted this editorial style.

Note:

- If you have trouble with writing, contact the Writing Center.

General Guidelines:

- Use non-sexist language in your writing. Often the easiest way to avoid sexist language in writing is to “pluralize” the referents in a sentence. For example, you may change “The client may want to talk about his or her problem early in the interview” to “Clients may want to talk about their problems early in an interview.”

- Use the active voice whenever possible. Passive voice constructions are generally poor prose. For example, “The experiment was designed by Smith” is weak; “Smith designed the experiment” is better.

- Be certain that a verb agrees in number (i.e., singular or plural) with its subject, despite intervening phrases. Avoid dangling modifiers. An adjective or adverb, whether a single word or a phrase, must clearly refer to the word it modifies. Place an adjective or adverb as close as possible to the word it modifies and you will have fewer problems.
  - Unclear: “The investigator tested the subjects using this procedure.” (It is not clear whether the investigator or the subjects are using “this procedure.”)
  - Clear: “Using this procedure, the investigator tested the subjects.

Preparation of the Paper:

Every page and every line of the text should be double-spaced, including every line in the title, headings and quotations. (Note: this may not apply to all documents you write, so check with the intended reader for guidelines.) Number each page, placing numbers in the page location preferred by the intended reader of the paper. Use ample margins, at least one inch on all sides. Indent the first line of each new paragraph five to seven spaces. Use size 12 font on all text.

Citation of Sources:

Whether paraphrasing or quoting an author directly, you must credit the source. For a direct quotation in the text, give the author, year, and page number in parentheses. Include a complete reference in the reference list. Depending on where the quotation falls within a sentence or the text, punctuation differs. When paraphrasing or referring to an idea contained in another work, authors are not required to provide a page number. Nevertheless, authors are encouraged to do so, especially when it would help an interested reader locate the relevant passage in a long or complex text.

In mid-sentence: End the passage with quotation marks, cite the source in parentheses immediately after the quotation marks, and continue the sentence. Use no other punctuation unless the meaning of the sentence requires such punctuation.

She stated, “The ‘placebo effect’ . . . disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner” (Miel, 1993, p. 276), but she did not clarify which behaviors were studied.

At the end of a sentence: Close the quoted passage with quotation marks, cite the source in parentheses immediately after the quotation marks, and end with the period or other punctuation outside the final parenthesis.

Miele (1993) found that “the ‘placebo effect,’ which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when [only the first group’s] behaviors were studied in this manner” (p. 276).
At the end of a block quote: Cite the quoted source in parentheses after the final punctuation mark.

Mield (1993) found the following:

The “placebo effect,” which has been verified in previous studies, disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner. *Furthermore, the behaviors were never exhibited again* [italics added], even when reel [sic] drugs were administered. Earlier studies (e.g., Abdullah, 1984; Fox, 1979) were clearly premature in attributing the results to a placebo effect. (p.276)

Citations in the Text:
When quoting, always provide the *author, year, and specific page citation* in the text and include the complete reference in the reference list. Place all direct quotes in quotation marks within the ongoing text. For quotes of less than forty words, use either of the following formats:

Leahey (1992) states that “divorce is a complex process with diverse social, psychological, legal educational and economic implications. Similarly, adjustment and adaptation following divorce are part of a complex process involving family and professional interaction in many contexts” (p.315).

OR:

“Divorce is a complex process with diverse social, psychological legal, educational and economic implications. Similarly, adjustment and adaptation following divorce are part of a complex process involving family and professional interaction in many contexts” (Leahey, 1982, p. 315).

For quotes longer than forty words, ‘block’ the quote *without quotation marks*, but still including reference to author, year, and page:

In her comprehensive review of the findings from research on divorce, Maureen Leahey (1992) notes that:

Outside the nuclear family are the many supra-systems which are affected by divorce. The extended family can enhance or detract from the adjustment following separation. . . Highly anxious grandparents can enhance family anxiety, impair parental functioning, and negatively influence adjustment. Extended family members who take sides may promote polarization and conflict. On the other hand, they can often provide economic contributions which assist family stability. (p. 300)

In the text of the paper, use the author’s name and the year to identify your source. You may do this either of two ways:

2. The problem-solving process (Hepworth & Larsen, 1996) includes five components.

Multiple authors:

- When a work has *two authors*, always cite both names and the year every time the reference occurs: (Jones & Smith, 1994).
- When a work has *more than two authors and fewer than six*, cite all authors and the year the first time the reference occurs: (Jones, Smith, Williams & Frence, 1994). After the initial cite, you can cite only the surname of the first author, followed by “et al.” and the year.
- When a work has *more than six authors*, you may cite only the first author and “et al.” with the initial and later citations (Jones, et al., 1994).

Do not use “and” within a citation parenthesis; use the symbol “&.” The opposite is true in the text, outside of the parenthesis: “Jones, Smith, Williams and French (1994) stated that . . . .”

Within parentheses, use only the authors’ last names, unless there is more than one author with the same last name. In this case, identify each with first initials: (Williams, B. & Williams, J., 1996).

For identical multiple references within a paragraph, omit the year from subsequent citations after the first citation.
Citations in the Reference List:

Every entry in the text must appear on the reference list. Start the reference list on a new page. Type the word “REFERENCES” at the top (or REFERENCE if there is only one). Arrange the references alphabetically by authors’ surnames. If you cite more than one work by an author, arrange the works by dates, listing the earliest publication first. *In the following examples, look carefully to see where the commas, colons, periods and spaces belong.*

**Books:**

Author, A. (year). *Title of book italicized with only first word and any word following a colon capitalized.* City: Publisher.


**In reference to an edited book, place the editors’ names in the author position, and enclose the abbreviation “Ed.” or “Eds.” in parentheses after the last editor’s name.**


**Periodical Articles (e.g., journals, magazines, scholarly newsletters):**

Author, A., & Author, B. (year). Title of the article not italicized, with only first word and any word following a colon capitalized. *Name of Journal Italicized and Each Major Word Capitalized, Volume number italicized (issue number not italicized), ###-###.* [do not put “p.” in front of page numbers]


**Nonperiodical Articles:**


**Reference to a chapter in an edited book:**


**Report available from the Government Printing Office (GPO), government institute as group author:**


**Report available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC):**


**Government report not available from GPO or a document deposit service such as the NTIS or ERIC:**

Citing Electronic Sources:

- **Internet article based on a print source:**

  If you believe article has been changed from the original or includes additional data or commentaries, add date you retrieved document and the URL:

- **Article in an Internet-only journal**

- **Document available on university program or department Web site:**

- **Report from a private organization, available on organization Web site:**
How Do I Know a Professional or Scholarly Journal Article When I See One?

prepared by Reva Allen, PhD, with thanks to
the University of Guelph-Humber’s library website:
http://guelphlib.guelphhumber.ca/LibEd/journal-types.htm

Note: This document is written from the perspective of the social sciences. It may not fit natural science journals as well as it does those of the social sciences.

- Most professional or scholarly journals are published by a professional association, society, research association, or academic institution.
- Journals are concerned with academic study.
- Journal articles are written for scholars rather than the layperson. They are scientific. They seldom have photographs, and they are laid out in traditional formats.
- Journal articles are usually written by experts in the field.
- Journal articles often report original research, review and evaluate material that has already been published, or expand and refine theory.
- Articles in professional or scholarly journals are peer-reviewed (refereed). Multiple readers evaluate the quality of all submitted materials, and editors select those they feel are of sufficient quality and appropriate for their publications. Editorial board information usually is on the first or second page of each issue.
- Journal articles include the author’s credentials and institutional affiliation.
- Journal articles often start with an abstract (a short summary of the content).
- Common sections of research-oriented journal articles:
  - Introduction/literature review
  - Methodology
  - Findings
  - Discussion
  - Implications
  - References (bibliography, works cited)
- Journal articles usually are about 7-15 pages long (at least 20 typewritten pages, double-spaced).
- Not all professional or scholarly journals have Journal in the title.
- One way to evaluate whether a publication is a professional or scholarly journal is to visit its web site and read what the publisher has to say about the type of publication it is.

Note: Not all documents in a scholarly journal are articles. Journals also include pieces such as editorials, book reviews, commentaries, and practice notes.

Examples of scholarly journals used by social workers:
- Social Work
- Child Welfare
- Social Service Review
- Families and Society
- Affilia
- Health and Social Work
- Journal of Social Work Education
- Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare
- Journal of Adolescent Research
- Journal of Poverty
- Journal of Aging and Social Policy
- American Journal of Orthopsychiatry
Magazines Are Not Scholarly Journals

- Magazines are collections of articles about diverse topics of popular interest and current events.
- Magazine articles appeal to the layperson.
- They are not peer-reviewed.
- Magazine articles seldom cite sources or have reference lists.
- They often are unsigned.
- Magazine articles may contain advertising.
- Magazines are published by commercial publishers.
- Just because *Journal* is in the title doesn’t mean the publication is a journal.

Examples of magazines:
- *The Wall Street Journal*  
- *Children’s Voice*  
- *Social Work Today*  
- *Time*  
- *Psychology Today*  
- *Newsweek*

Newspapers Are Not Scholarly Journals

- Newspapers disseminate news on a daily or weekly basis.
- Their content is usually determined by current events.
- They cover a vast array of topics.
- Their contributors are usually local staff, newswire services, and syndicated columnists.
- Just because *Journal* is in the title doesn’t mean the publication is a journal.

Examples of newspapers:
- *The Wall Street Journal*  
- *The Blade*  
- *Christian Science Monitor*

Some Other Types of Publications That Are Not Scholarly Journals

- Newsletters
- Individuals’ and organizations’ websites
- Reports
Electronic Database Searches: Getting Started

An electronic journal database (or index) is a tool used to find articles on a specific topic, by a specific author, from a specific journal, etc. Journal databases include documents from selected journals, all of which relate to a particular topic or profession. The organization that produces a particular database decides which journals are included in that database. For example, NASW produces Social Work Abstracts, so NASW decides which journals it includes in the database.

Electronic databases are searchable. For example, you can enter a keyword or phrase, and the database will locate all the materials it has that include that keyword or phrase. You are presented with a listing of these documents that includes citation information (author, title of article, title of journal, volume and issue number, page numbers). Some databases also will provide the abstract for the article at that point. In some cases, you will be able to link to the full text of the article.

Searching Journal Databases from the UP Web Site

Go to the Libraries home page (click on “Libraries” in the menu at the top of the UP home page).

Click on the link for “Find Articles” and choose the database you’d like to search. Remember that there are lots of different databases you can search (e.g., for aging, social sciences, medicine, women’s and gender studies, etc.). Don’t limit yourself to just one database.

The searching procedure for each database will vary a bit, so you may need to experiment a bit to discover how your database works.

Additional Information

Each database has its own set of keywords. If you search by keyword and obtain fewer documents than you need (or none at all), try another keyword. For example, an ArticleFirst search using “alcoholism” and “aging” yields 22 results. Exchanging “elderly” for “aging” yields 37 results.

Cautionary Notes

1. Not all of the documents produced by your search will be helpful to you. In fact, you’ll wonder how in the world some of the documents ended up in your list. So you’ll need to go through the list and select those that look relevant for your purposes.

2. Not all of the documents produced by your search will be journal articles. Some databases include every document in a journal, including things like articles, book reviews, editorials, practice notes, announcements, and memorials. Be sure that the document you select meets the criteria for the document you need for your project.
How To Prepare an Annotated Bibliography

Michael Engle, Amy Blumenthal, and Tony Cosgrave
Reference Department, Olin & Uris Libraries, Cornell University
Revised 08 August 2005
http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm

What Is an Annotated Bibliography?
An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

Annotations vs. Abstracts
Abstracts are the purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes. Annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

The Process
Creating an annotated bibliography calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: concise exposition, succinct analysis, and informed library research.

First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.

Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style.

Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article. Include one or more sentences that (a) evaluate the authority or background of the author, (b) comment on the intended audience, (c) compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or (d) explain how this work illuminates your bibliography topic.

Critically Appraising the Book, Article, or Document
For guidance in critically appraising and analyzing the sources for your bibliography, see How to Critically Analyze Information Sources. For information on the author's background and views, ask at the reference desk for help finding appropriate biographical reference materials and book review sources.

Choosing the Correct Format for the Citations
CUL Publications 7 and 8, MLA Citation Style and APA Citation Style, are available at the Uris and Olin Reference desks. Style manuals for some other formats are also kept in the reference collections. Check with your instructor to find out which style is preferred for your class. Online citation guides for both Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA) are available in the Library Gateway's Help section, under the "Research Strategy and Process: Citing sources" link.
Sample Annotated Bibliography Entry for a Journal Article

The following example uses the APA format for the journal citation:


The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that nonfamily living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living.

This example uses the MLA format for the journal citation:


The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that nonfamily living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living.

Information added by Dr. Reva Allen:

NOTE: I located these resources by searching “social work” “annotated bibliography” (entered both phrases) on Google. These are a few of my findings. You may repeat the search to locate additional resources.

Additional Web Pages Describing Annotated Bibliographies and Their Preparation


Examples of Annotated Bibliographies Located on the Web


Guidelines for Writing About People

Unbiased Writing

Biased and Unbiased Terms

NASW Press Author Guidelines, Sections 8-3-A, 8-3-B, and 8-3-C
http://www.naswpress.org/resources/tools/01-write/guidelines_toc.htm
retrieved 8-12-05

8-3-A Guidelines for Writing About People

By writing in a way that engages readers, encouraging them to absorb your content and put it to use, it is possible to communicate social work-related information, while also improving human lives. Eliminating the old “shorthand” for describing people will necessarily add some length to a paper—substituting members of racial and ethnic groups for minorities, or people with disabilities for the disabled, adds words—but it is more accurate and eliminates bias.

- **Seek and use the preference of the people about whom you are writing.** Ask people you work with how they prefer to be described, and use the terms they give you. If people within a group disagree on preference, report the different terms and try to use the one most often used within the group.

  NASW Press, for example, does not object to using alternate terms, such as black and African American, within an article or chapter as long as the content is clearly written so readers are not confused. Be sensitive to real preferences and do not adopt descriptions that may have been imposed on people, such as senior citizens.

- **Be as specific as possible.** Whenever possible, use specific racial or ethnic identities instead of collecting different groups under a general heading.
  
  *For example:* If you have studied work experiences among Cuban Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans, report on these three groups, rather than lumping them together as Hispanics.

- **Describe people in positive terms.** Describe what people are, rather than what they are not. For example, do not use the terms nonwhite or nonparticipant.

- **Remember that you are writing about people.** Help the reader see that you are writing about people, not subjects or objects. Use the terms sample or subject for statistics, and describe participants as respondents, participants, workers, and so forth. Keep in mind that a group of 100 people who share certain characteristics also have many traits unique to them, even if these traits are not included in your report. Imagine you are a member of the group about whom you are writing and see how you would react to the terms you have used to describe them.

- **Avoid using terms that label people.** When adjectives that describe a person’s condition or status are used as nouns, they become labels that often connote a derogatory intent. For example, people who do not earn enough money to provide for their needs are often referred to collectively as the poor. Use poor people if you are referring to them in the aggregate. People who have lived a long time become the elderly or the aged. If you cannot use specific ages or age ranges, use terms like elders or older people. Do not refer to people with disabilities as the disabled or the handicapped. Note that the use of the article the in front of a noun is a good warning sign that you may be using a label.
Specific Populations

►Age

Use boy or girl only for children and adolescents, though, for high school students, young man or young woman may be preferable. Do not use terms like senior citizen, oldster, or graybeard for people older than 65. Use specific age ranges whenever possible. Use aging and elderly as adjectives, not as nouns.

►Class

Classism often creeps into our language. Instead of assigning class to people, you should describe their situations. This does not mean you should assume all people have the same socioeconomic advantages, but that you should describe the advantages or lack of advantages, rather than assigning attributes to people.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor Usage</th>
<th>Better Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lower class</td>
<td>people who are poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underclass</td>
<td>with low incomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poverty class</td>
<td>living under poverty conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper class</td>
<td>with high incomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the disadvantaged</td>
<td>with socio-economic disadvantages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classism is often combined with bias toward people in terms of race or ethnicity; it is important to take care with language that might perpetuate discrimination.

►Disability

Remember that people, themselves, are not disabilities—they have disabilities. Additionally, the disabilities may be barriers, like stairs or curbs that handicap people.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor Usage</th>
<th>Better Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the handicapped</td>
<td>people with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schizophrenics</td>
<td>people diagnosed with schizophrenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenged</td>
<td>person who has ___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wheelchair-bound</td>
<td>uses a wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the blind</td>
<td>people who are blind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

►HIV/AIDS

Say people with AIDS, not AIDS victims or innocent victims of AIDS. Avoid language that may imply a moral judgment on behavior or lifestyles. Instead of high-risk groups, which suggests demographic traits may be responsible for AIDS exposure, use high-risk behavior.
Race and Ethnicity

Ascertain what the population group prefers and use that term. Whenever possible, be specific, and describe individual population groups rather than collecting many different groups under one term.

- Avoid using minority and nonwhite. Many people described in this way view the terms as pejorative and discriminatory. Assuming white people are the predominant population group is an inaccurate portrayal of most countries in the world, as well as many areas within the United States.

- Many people prefer to use people of color, but it is not a precise term. Not all people who might be included in the group under such a heading would describe themselves in this way.

- Black and white are adjectives that should be used (in lowercase only, unless they begin a sentence) to modify nouns, such as black Americans, white men, or black women.

- African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans are all proper nouns that should be capitalized; hyphens should never be inserted in multiword names, even when the names are modifiers. Some individuals prefer to use Hispanic or Latino as the descriptive terms for people who have a Spanish background, and some use the two together.

- Native American or American Indian—there has been considerable discussion over which of these terms is preferable. Many people prefer the former, because it is a more precise description.

- The U.S. government combines Asian and Pacific Islander, but most Pacific Islanders prefer that they be separated.

- Like other racial and ethnic groups, many people who are white prefer not to be described by a collective term. If it is possible to be more specific—using Italian American or Eastern European, for example—do so.

- Take care with modifiers when describing racial and ethnic groups, ensuring that you are not suggesting or assuming they are in different socio-economic groups. For example, "We compared the reactions of African American and Hispanic men with those of middle-class white men," suggests that the first two groups are in a different status. Given historical stereotyping, the assumption would likely be that they were in a lower status.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor Usage</th>
<th>Possible Substitutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>minorities</td>
<td>specific population or racial and ethnic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tribes</td>
<td>people or nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blacks</td>
<td>black people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonwhites</td>
<td>specific populations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sex

- Use plural forms when possible, or, if writing a how-to article, address the reader directly, using I, you, and we. You can often substitute we for he, and our or the for his.

- Do not use contrived forms, like s/he or he/she. Also, try to avoid using alternating masculine and feminine pronouns within an article. Instead, use he or she, interspersing it equally with she or he throughout the document.
Examples:

**Poor Usage**
The social worker will find that he…
Every employee should select his best option.
He calls his children "kids."
The teacher should encourage his/her student
She should be careful…

**Better Usage**
Social workers will find that they…
Employees should select the best option for them.
We call our children "kids."
Teachers should encourage their students
You should be careful…

- Avoid words that suggest judgment, that describe women in patronizing terms (like *the little lady*), suggest second-class status (like *authoress*), demean a woman’s ability (*lady lawyer*), or are rarely used to describe men (*co-ed*).

- Do not suggest that women are possessions of men, or that they cannot carry out a role or perform a job that men do.

Examples:

**Poor Usage**
Doctors often neglect their wives
policemen
man a project
chairman
housewife
pioneers and their wives and children
mankind

**Better Usage**
Doctors often neglect their families
police officers
staff a project
chair
homemaker
pioneer families
humans, human beings

- Do not construct feminine versions of words that carry a masculine connotation. *Chair* or *representative* should be used instead of *chairman, spokesman, chairwoman, or spokeswoman.* Never use *chairman* to refer to a woman.

- Do not specify sex unless it is a variable or is essential to the discussion. Be sure to use parallel construction: *men and women, not men and females or girls and men.* *Men* and *women* are nouns, whereas *female* and *male* are best used as adjectives.

➤ Sexual Orientation

- *Orientation* is a state of being, while *preference* is a choice. You should not use the latter to refer to homosexuality or heterosexuality.

- *Homosexual* should only be used as an adjective. You should use *lesbians, gay men, or bisexual men or women* to refer to people whose orientation is not exclusively heterosexual.

- Distinguish between sexual orientation and sexual behavior. You should write, "the client reported *same-gender* sexual fantasies," instead of, "the client reported *homosexual* fantasies." When describing sexual activity, the appropriate terms include: *female-female, male-male, male-female,* and *same-gender.*
Accurate Historical Reporting

When quoting any document, you must quote it exactly as the words were written or said. If describing a historical situation, you will likely want to use the words that were used in that context. You should, however, make that context clear. If you find the language too egregious, you may want to add a footnote saying this is not your language but the language of the time in which it was written.

Unbiased Writing

NASW is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all individuals and groups. The material published by the NASW Press should not promote stereotypic or discriminatory attitudes and assumptions about people.

Language that might imply sexual, ethnic, or other kinds of biases, discriminations, or stereotyping may not be used. Language can reinforce either inequality or balanced, accurate, and fair treatment of individuals.

Gender

Recast writing that uses male pronouns to include all people. Use plurals when possible to avoid gender reference. Be sure that terms for groups of men and women are parallel. (In other words, do not use "male" doctors with "women" doctors(use "female" doctors instead.) Change terms that give the impression that only people of one sex perform certain duties or work in certain professions. (For example, use "police officer" instead of "policeman." ) In case examples, use both masculine and feminine names for clients, social workers, doctors, patients, and others.

Race and Ethnicity

Styles and preferences for nouns referring to ethnic and other groups change over time. In some cases even members of a particular group disagree about the preferred name at a specific time. Try to ascertain the most acceptable current terms and use them. Change or expand terms for groups that could be read as negative or pejorative.

When referring to members of a group, do not use adjectives as nouns (for example, use black Americans, white Americans, African Americans, Puerto Rican individuals, gay men, people with disabilities, and poor people, rather than blacks, whites, Puerto Ricans, gays, the handicapped, or the poor).

Avoid language that implies a moral judgment on behavior or lifestyles. For example, say "people with AIDS" rather than "AIDS victims" or "innocent victims of AIDS." "High-risk groups" implies that some kind of demographic trait, rather than behavior is responsible for AIDS exposure. A more appropriate term is "high-risk behavior."
### Biased and Unbiased Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biased</th>
<th>Unbiased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bag lady/bag man</td>
<td>street person, homeless person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>executive, business executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td>chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congressman</td>
<td>member of Congress, representative, senator, legislator, delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con man</td>
<td>con artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary, an epileptic</td>
<td>Mary, who has epilepsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fits, spells</td>
<td>seizures, epilepsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male nurse</td>
<td>nurse; specify gender only if important to the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man a project</td>
<td>hire personnel, employ staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mankind</td>
<td>humans, human beings, people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manpower</td>
<td>workforce, personnel, human resources, workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mothering</td>
<td>parenting, nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peeping Tom</td>
<td>voyeur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**More examples:**

**Incorrect:** An African American student, John James works as a part-time clerk.
**Correct:** John James works as a part-time clerk.

**Incorrect:** Not the type to stay at home, Betty Wong has chosen a career in politics.
**Correct:** Betty Wong has chosen a career in politics.

Common Errors – and Ways to Avoid Them

Sources:
Ace Writing (http://www.geocities.com/fifth_grade_tpes/longfellow.html)
*NASW Press Author Guidelines* (http://www.naswpress.org/resources/tools/01-write/guidelines_toc.htm), retrieved 8-12-05
Guide to Grammar and Writing, Capital Community College (http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm) [CCC]
Revelle Humanities, University of California-San Diego (http://humanities.ucsd.edu/writing/grammar/21parallel.htm)
Write101.com (http://www.write101.com/W.Tips208.htm)
WriteGuide.com (http://www.writeguide.com)
Writing Lab, Bellevue Community College (http://www.bcc.ctc.edu/writinglab/Parallel.html) [BCC]

Punctuation

If you’re not sure which punctuation to use, try reading the sentence aloud and placing punctuation according to the pauses you naturally use when reading the sentence.

**Apostrophes** (NASW Press; Dr. Allen)

- When you want to show possession with singular nouns (except when the singular noun ends in *s*), place the apostrophe between the noun and the *s*. If the singular noun ends in *s*, place the apostrophe at the end of the word. (Consensus is lacking regarding this last rule.)
  Joanna’s desk the Association’s conference room
  Myles’ computer Mrs. Harkness’ cookies

- When you want to show possession with plural nouns that end in *s*, place the apostrophe at the end of the word. If the plural noun does not end in *s*, add ‘*s* to the end of the word.
  the Smiths’ house all those social workers’ jobs
  people’s homes women’s roles

- Use apostrophes to indicate where the omitted letters are in contractions.
  can’t should’ve
- **It’s versus Its**
  - *It’s* is the contraction of “it is.”
  - *Its* is the possessive noun that indicates ownership of something by “it.” It does **not** have an apostrophe.
  - Examples:
    
    Incorrect: I went to the park for lunch because its a beautiful day.
    Correct: I went to the park for lunch because it’s (meaning: it is) a beautiful day.

    Incorrect: Each hotel has it’s own unique view of the ocean.
    Correct: Each hotel has its (possessive form) own unique view of the ocean.

- Do **not** use apostrophes when writing about days of the week.
  - Incorrect: Monday’s at noon
  - Correct: Mondays at noon

    Incorrect: in the 1970’s
    Correct: in the 1970s

- Do **not** use apostrophes when creating plural nouns.
  - Incorrect: a variety of cheese’s
  - Correct: a variety of cheeses

**Commas** (APA)

Use a comma
- between elements (including before *and* and *or*) in a series of three or more items:
  - the height, width, or depth
  - in a study by Stacy, Newcomb, and Bentler (1991)
- to set off a nonessential or nonrestrictive clause, that is, a clause that embellishes a sentence but if removed would leave the grammatical structure and meaning of the sentence intact
  - Switch A, which was on a panel, controlled the recording device.
- to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction [an independent clause is a clause in a complex sentence that can stand alone as a complete sentence; a conjunction is the part of speech that serves to connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences (such as *and*, *but*, *as*, and *because*)]
  - Cedar shavings covered the floor, and paper was available for shredding and nest building.
- to set off the year in exact dates
  - April 18, 1992, was the correct date
  - *but*
  - April 1992 was the correct month
- to set off the year in parenthetical reference citations
  - (Patrick, 1993)
  - (Kelsey, 1993, discovered . . .)
- to separate groups of thee digits in most numbers of 1,000 or more
Do **not** use a comma

- before an essential or restrictive clause, that is, a clause that limits or defines the material it modifies. Removal of such a clause from the sentence would alter the intended meaning.
  - The switch that stops the recording device also controls the light.

- between two parts of a compound predicate [a predicate is the section of the sentence that describes the action taken by the subject; a compound predicate includes more than one verb pertaining to the same subject. In the sentence below, the compound predicate includes “contradicted” and “indicated”]
  - The results contradicted Smith’s hypothesis and indicated that the effect was nonsignificant.

- to separate parts of measurement
  - 8 years 2 months
  - 3 min 40 s

**Semicolons** (APA)

Use a semicolon

- to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction
  - The participants in the first study were paid; those in the second were unpaid.

- to separate elements in a series that already contain commas
  - The color order choices were red, yellow, blue; blue, yellow, red; or yellow, red, blue.

**Colons** (APA)

Use a colon

- between a grammatically complete introductory clause (one that could stand as a sentence) and a final phrase or clause that illustrates, extends, or amplifies the preceding thought. If the clause following the colon is a complete sentence, it begins with a capital letter.
  - For example, Freud (1930/1961) wrote of two urges: an urge toward union with others and an egoistic urge toward happiness.
  - They have agreed on the outcome: Informed participants perform better than do uninformed participants.

- in ratios and proportions
  - The proportion (salt:water) was 1:8.

- in references between place of publication and publisher
  - New York: Wiley.

Do **not** use a colon

- after an introduction that is not a complete sentence
  - The formula is \( r = e + a \)
  - The instructions for the task were
    - Your group’s task is to rank the 15 items in terms of their importance for the crew’s survival.
    - When your group has come to an agreement, . . .
Sentence Structure

Incomplete Sentences  (writeguide; Dr. Allen)

An incomplete sentence may be defined as any word or group of words that creates the subject of a sentence, but fails to create a predicate. An example will help explain.

The brown dog with a bushy tail ran through the woods.

In the sentence above, the complete subject is “The brown dog with a bushy tail.” The subject is complete in that it includes all the words that describe the word “dog,” which is what we would call the simple subject.

The rest of the sentence, “ran through the woods,” is the predicate. A predicate is the section of the sentence that describes the action taken by the subject. You can usually identify the predicate by asking yourself what the subject of the sentence did, like this: “What did the brown dog with a bushy tail do? He ran through the woods.”

If we were to create an incomplete sentence out of “The brown dog with a bushy tail ran through the woods,” all we’d have to do is eliminate the predicate, like this:

The brown dog with a bushy tail.

Writers sometimes accidentally create incomplete sentences by placing periods between a complete sentence and a phrase they add after it to clarify or emphasize some part of the sentence. For example:

Here are some major points we have not been able to resolve in the negotiation process.

Points I think you might be interested in knowing.

In this example, the second sentence is incomplete. There are at least two ways to correct the sentence:

1. Replace the period with a long dash: “Here are some major points we have not been able to resolve in the negotiation process—points I think you might be interested to know.

2. Add and rearrange words to the second sentence to make it complete: “I share them because I believe you might be interested in knowing about them.”

Parallel Construction or Structure, including elements in a list  (CCC; Revelle; Write101; BCC; Dr. Allen)

Parallel construction requires that expressions of similar content and function should be outwardly similar. It shows a parallel relationship between two concepts of equal weight. It requires using the same pattern of words, phrases, or clauses to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance.

Incorrect: Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method, while now the laboratory method is employed.

Correct: Formerly, science was taught by the textbook method; now it is taught by the laboratory method. (Note how the clause after the semicolon is in the same form as the clause before it.)

Incorrect: Students spend their time going to classes, studying, working, and they wish they had time for a social life.

Correct: Students spend their time going to classes, studying, working, and wishing for a social life.

Incorrect: UT social work students hope that classes they need will still have openings when they try to enroll, and parking close to the HH building is important, too.

Correct: UT social work students hope that classes they need will still have openings when they try to enroll and that they will be able to park close to the HH building.
An article or a preposition applying to all the members of a series must either be used only before the first term in the series or else be repeated before each term.

Incorrect: *The* French, *the* Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese all enjoy vacationing on the coast of the Mediterranean.
Correct: *The* French, Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese all enjoy vacationing on the coast of the Mediterranean.

or

Correct: *The* French, *the* Italians, *the* Spanish, and *the* Portuguese all enjoy vacationing on the coast of the Mediterranean.

When deciding how to write a series of words or phrases, identify the word or phrase that introduces the series. Then write each word or phrase that follows it in such a way that the sentence reads correctly without all the other words or phrases in the series.

Incorrect: The social worker’s responsibilities include working one-on-one with clients, community leaders, completing administrative tasks, and resolving problems among neighbors in the agency’s catchment area.

The sentence is incorrect because the phrase “community leaders” does not make sense when combined with the introductory phrase (“The social worker’s responsibilities include”) : The social worker’s responsibilities include community leaders. Other phrases do work: The social worker’s responsibilities include resolving problems among neighbors . . .

Correct: The social worker’s responsibilities include working one-on-one with clients, meeting with community leaders, completing administrative tasks, and resolving problems among neighbors in the agency’s catchment area.

The example above also illustrates how the verb form needs to remain constant in each item in the series. In the corrected version, all verbs end in *ing*: working, meeting, completing, resolving.

Parallel construction applies when the members of a series are presented in a bulleted list, rather than in a sentence.

Incorrect: Students in Field I are expected to
- arrive at their field agencies on the days and at the times agreed to with the field supervisors
- to complete a log every week and have the field supervisor sign it
- interviewing agency staff to collect information needed to complete essays

Second bullet is incorrect because it repeats the word “to,” which is part of the introductory phrase (“Students in Field I are expected to”).
Third bullet is incorrect because it begins with an incorrect verb form (“interviewing” rather than “interview”). “Students in Field I are expected to interviewing . . .” is clearly incorrect.

Correct: Students in Field I are expected to
- arrive at their field agencies on the days and at the times agreed to with the field supervisors
- complete a log every week and have the field supervisor sign it
- interview agency staff to collect information needed to complete essays
Parallel construction also applies to the use of prepositions after words. Again, each phrase in a series needs to make sense in the sentence when all the other phrases in the series are eliminated.

*Incorrect:* The student’s speech was marked by *disagreement* and *scorn for* the teacher’s position. The sentence “The student’s speech was marked by *disagreement for* the teacher’s position” does not make sense.

*Correct:* The student’s speech was marked by *disagreement with* and *scorn for* the teacher’s position.

**Starting Sentences with “And” or “Also”**

- While it’s no longer considered by some to be incorrect to start a sentence with “And,” do not overdo this practice.

- I’m not sure how others feel about starting sentences with “Also,” but I consider it incorrect (or, at best, not the preferred word for starting a sentence).

**Subject-Verb Agreement (APA)**

A verb must agree in number (singular or plural) with its subject, regardless of intervening phrases that begin with such words as *together, with, including, plus,* and *as well as.*

*Incorrect:* The percentage of correct responses as well as the speed of the responses increase with practice.

*Correct:* The percentage of correct responses as well as the speed of the responses increases with practice.

**Paragraph Structure**

**Topic Sentence** (Ace)

Every paragraph needs a topic sentence. The topic sentence gives the reader an idea of what the paragraph is going to be about. The topic sentence is usually located at the beginning of the paragraph.

All the sentences in the paragraph need to be about the idea presented in the topic sentence. Each should “fit with” or belong to the topic sentence.

Example of a paragraph with an appropriate topic sentence and all other sentences relating to it:

*I had a wonderful summer.* First, I started sleeping in every day. I would then go swimming with my friends. I stayed up late watching TV a lot, and I went to camp for a week. I wished my summer would never end!

This paragraph also demonstrates the use of an appropriate concluding sentence, which sums up what the writer wanted to communicate in the paragraph.
Spelling

Accept versus Except  (O’Conner)

To accept something is to take it or agree to it.

Except usually means “other than” – but it can also be a verb.

“I never accept presents from men,” said Lorelei, “except when we’ve been properly introduced.”

Access versus Assess  (dictionary.com)

Access means (among other things) “the act of approaching” or “the ability or right to approach, enter, exit, communicate with, or make use of”:

Jennifer, who uses a wheelchair, was unable to access the agency’s services because the building in which it was located did not have a ramp.

Assess means (among other things) “to determine the value, significance, or extent of; appraise”:

We need to assess how accessible our services are to people who are physically challenged.

A lot versus Alot

Alot is not a word. Use a lot.

Incorrect: I have to write alot of papers in this class.
Correct: I have to write a lot of papers in this class.

Cannot versus Can not

Can not is incorrect. Use cannot.

Incorrect: I can not for the life of me figure out what the professor wants!
Correct: I cannot for the life of me figure out what the professor wants!

Choose versus Chose versus Choice

Choose is present tense, meaning “to select from a number of possible alternatives”:

Today you must choose whether to take the exam or write a paper.

Chose is the past tense of choose, meaning that you selected from a number of possible alternatives some time in the past:

The class chose to take the exam.

Your choice refers to the alternative you chose:

“Dr. Allen, we have made a choice. We will take the exam.”

Definitely versus Defiantly  (dictionary.com)

Definitely means “indisputable” or “certain” or “clearly defined”:

I am definitely going to ace the final.

Defiantly means “boldly resisting,” “marked by defiance,” or in a rebellious manner:”
After Adam’s supervisor told him to ignore information suggesting Senator Lusty had abused a child, he *defiantly* insisted on reporting the suspected incident of abuse to the authorities.

**Everyday versus Every day**

*Everyday* is an adjective that means “commonplace” or “ordinary” or “appropriate for ordinary days or routine occasions”:

- Being late for class was an everyday occurrence for Jim.

*Every day* mean the same thing as *each day*:

- Jim came to class late every day.

**Lead versus Led** (*dictionary.com*)

The verb *to lead* means (among other things) “to show the way to by going in advance,” “to guide the behavior or opinion of” or “induce,” or “to play a principal or guiding role in”:

- The teacher asked to Sue to *lead* the class in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

*Led* is the past tense of *lead*:

- Sue *led* the class in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

And just to make things more confusing, *lead* is also a noun with quite a few meanings. In some uses, it is pronounced with a long *e* (the same as in to *lead*); and in other uses, it is pronounced with a short *e* (the same as in *led*):

- Sam was chosen to play the *lead* in the school play.  [long *e*]
- Tiger Woods took the *lead* at the 13th hole.  [long *e*]
- The house was *condemned* because *lead* paint had been used throughout the interior.  [short *e*]
- Come on!  Move it!  Get the *lead* out!  [short *e*]

**Lose versus Loose** (*dictionary.com*)

To *lose* means (among other things) “to be unsuccessful in retaining possession of” or “to mislay” or “to fail to win”:

- Please do not *lose* the book I lent you.

*Loose* means (among other things) “not fastened, restrained, or contained” or “not tight-fitting or tightly fitted” or “not bound, bundled, stapled, or gathered together” or “lacking conventional moral restraint in sexual behavior”:

- The dog broke *loose* from its owner and chased the squirrel.

**Maybe versus May be**

*Maybe* is an adverb meaning “perhaps” or “possibly”:

- *Maybe* today will be the day I bowl 300.

*May be* is used when one is referring to being allowed or permitted:

- I *may be* going bowling tonight.
**Noone versus no one**

Noone is incorrect. Use no one:

No one is going bowling tonight.

**Pass versus Past versus Passed** (dictionary.com)

Pass means (among other things) “to move on or ahead; proceed”:

If she keeps running at this pace, she will pass him in two minutes.

Passed is the past tense of pass, meaning “moved ahead”:

Sure enough, in two minutes and 15 seconds, she passed him.

Past (same pronunciation as passed) refers to time, meaning “no longer current; gone by; over” or “having existed or occurred in an earlier time”:

He was able to beat her in the past, but now she is faster than him.

**They’re versus Their versus There versus There’s versus Theirs** (O’Conner, modified)

They’re is the contraction (shorthand) for they are:

They’re prepared for the exam.

Their and theirs are the possessive (ownership) forms for they:

They lost their study guides.

The study guides you found are theirs.

There means “in or at that place,” as opposed to here:

Sit there to take the exam.

There’s is the contraction for there is:

There’s a tricky question on the exam.

**To versus Too versus Two**

To means “toward” or “as far as”:

She is going to the library after class.

Too means “also”:

I want to go to the library, too.

Two (2) is the whole number between 1 and 3:

We are leaving for the library in two minutes.

**Toward versus Towards**

In the U.S., it’s always toward (no s):

She is moving toward the door.

Same for forward, backward, upward, onward, downward, etc.
Word Usage

**Affect versus Effect**  (Dictionary.com; Dr. Allen)

*Affect*, pronounced with the accent on the second syllable, is a verb (refers to an *action*) meaning (among other things) “to have an influence on” or “to act on the emotions of”:

Lack of sleep may *affect* her ability to concentrate on the exam.

*Effect*, as a noun (referring to a *thing*), means (among other things) “something brought about by a cause or agent; a result” and “the condition of being in full force or execution”:

Lack of sleep had an *effect* on her test score.

A new regulation about online testing goes into *effect* tomorrow.

Examples:

- Social workers look for the *effects* of traumatic events on individuals.
- Social workers sometimes are able to *affect* someone’s behavior by providing accurate information about all their options.
- Mary Richmond *affected* the development of the social work profession, and you can see the *effects* of her work today.

Now, just to make things more complicated, *affect* is also a noun, and *effect* is also a verb.

*Affect*, pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, is a noun meaning “feeling or emotion, especially as manifested by facial expression or body language”:

Carla’s angry *affect* surprised her social worker.

*Effect*, as a verb, means “to bring about or execute”:

Changes made to the TANF program may *effect* savings for the county.

**Among versus Between versus Amid versus Amidst**  (O’Conner, modified)

*Between*: Use when referring to two.

There was a heated exchange *between* Miss Addams and Miss Richmond.

*Among*: Use when referring to three or more individuals.

The professor walked *among* the students as they completed their exams.

*Amid*: Use when the reference is to a quantity or something you don’t think of as individual items.

As Darcy stalked off, she lost sight of him *amid* the shrubbery.

*Amidst*: Do not use.

**Literally**  (O’Conner, modified)

*Literally* means “actually” or “to the letter.” Do **not** use it unless you are referring to something that is exactly as you describe it. For example, when the newspaper reporter covering a Midwestern Pioneer Days celebration wrote that spectators “were literally turned inside out and shot backward in time,” do you think that really happened? I doubt it—and if it did, I’m glad I wasn’t there! This was an incorrect use of the word (they were *figuratively* shot backward in time).

Incorrect: I’m so confused that I am literally out of my mind.

Correct: She literally tore the shirt off his back! [describing a woman actually tearing a man’s shirt off]
**Virtually** (dictionary.com)

_Virtually_ means “almost but not quite; nearly” or “in fact or to all purposes; practically”:

_Virtually_ everyone gets a headache now and then.

**Which versus That** (O’Conner)

Bite on one of these: _Nobody likes a dog that_ bites or _Nobody likes a dog which_ bites.

If they both sound right, you’ve been spooked by _whitches_ (the first example is the correct one).

The old _that-versus-which_ problem haunts everybody sooner or later. Here are two rules to help you figure out whether a clause (a group of words with its own subject and verb) should start with _that_ or _which_.

- If you can drop the clause and not lose the point of the sentence, use _which_. If you can’t, use _that_.
- A _which_ clause goes inside commas. A _that_ clause doesn’t.

Now let’s put the rules to work. Look at these two sentences:

_Buster’s bulldog, which had one white ear, won best in show._

_The dog that won best in show was Buster’s bulldog._

The point of each sentence is that Buster’s dog won. What happens when we remove the _that_ or _which_ clause?

In the first example, the _which_ clause (_which had one white ear_) is disposable—without it, we still have the gist of the sentence: _Buster’s bulldog won best in show._

But in the second example, the _that_ clause (_that won best in show_) is essential. The sentence misses the point without it: _The dog was Buster’s bulldog._

Some people consider _which_ more refined or elegant than _that_. Not so! In fact, _that_ it is more likely to be grammatically correct than _which_. That’s because most of us don’t put unessential information in the middle of our sentences, especially when speaking.

Here’s a little memory aid:

**Common Sense**

_Commas, which cut out the fat,_  
_Go with which, never with that._
Avoiding Plagiarism
The Writing Place, Northwestern University
http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/avoiding_plagiarism.html
retrieved 8-12-05

- What is plagiarism, and why should writers worry about it?
- Some tips for avoiding accidental plagiarism when you use sources
  - Applying these tips: avoiding two common forms of accidental plagiarism
    o Paraphrases with no citation
    o Misplaced citations
- Example of acceptable paraphrase: putting the idea in your own words

**What is plagiarism, and why should writers worry about it?**

Deliberate plagiarism is cheating. Deliberate plagiarism is copying the work of others and turning it as your own. Whether you copy from a published essay, an encyclopedia article, or a paper from a fraternity's files, you are plagiarizing. If you do so, you run a terrible risk. You could be punished, suspended, or even expelled.

Otherwise mild-mannered professors tend to turn into vigilantes when confronted with plagiarism. Why borrow trouble?

But there is also another kind of plagiarism—accidental plagiarism. This happens when a writer does not intend to plagiarize, but fails to cite his or her sources completely and correctly. Careful notetaking and a clear understanding of the rules for quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing sources can help prevent this.

Any college handbook (such as the *St. Martin's Handbook*, quoted in this document) will offer more guidelines for avoiding plagiarism when you write a paper. See also the excellent [CAS page on plagiarism](http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/avoiding_plagiarism.html), put together by Professor Jean Smith of the Writing Program. It has numerous examples of the right and the wrong ways to attribute sources.

**Some tips for avoiding accidental plagiarism when you use sources:**

- Cite every piece of information that is not a) the result of your own research, or b) common knowledge. This includes opinions, arguments, and speculations as well as facts, details, figures, and statistics.

- Use quotation marks every time you use the author's words. (For longer quotes, indenting the whole quotation has the same effect as quotation marks.)

- At the **beginning** of the **first sentence** in which you quote, paraphrase, or summarize, make it clear that what comes next is someone else's idea:
  o According to Smith...
  o Jones says...
  o In his 1987 study, Robinson proved...

- At the **end** of the **last sentence** containing quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material, insert a **parenthetical citation** to show where the material came from:

  The *St. Martin's Handbook* defines plagiarism as "the use of someone else's words or ideas as [the writer's] own without credititing the other person" (Lunsford and Connors 602).

  (Notice the use of brackets to mark a change in the wording of the original.)
Applying these tips: avoiding two common forms of accidental plagiarism

1. Paraphrases with no citation

Because a paraphrase is supposed to contain all of the author's information and none of your own commentary, a paraphrase with no citation is an example of plagiarism. The St. Martin's Handbook defines an appropriate paraphrase as follows:

A **paraphrase** accurately states all the relevant information from a passage *in your own words and phrasing*, without any additional comments or elaborations [it] always restates all the main points of the passage in the same order and in about the same number of words. (Lunsford and Connors 596)

Lunsford and Connors go on to give two examples of unacceptable paraphrases: one that uses the author's words, and one that uses the author's sentences structures (597).

Lunsford and Connors also state that "even for acceptable paraphrases you must include a citation in your essay identifying the source of the information" (597). This point is crucial: *without the information about the source, an appropriate paraphrase becomes plagiarism.* Even if you have avoided using the author's words, sentences structure, or style, an *unattributed paraphrase is plagiarism because it presents the same information in the same order.*

2. Misplaced citations

If you use a paraphrase or direct quotation, it is important to place the reference at the very end of all the material cited. Any quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material that comes *after* the reference is plagiarized: it looks like it is supposed to be your own idea.

This is one reason why accurate notetaking is so important; it is possible to forget which words are yours and which are the original writers.

**Original source:**

Paraphrasing material helps you digest a passage, because chances are you can't restate the passage in your own words unless you grasp its full meaning. When you incorporate an accurate paraphrase into your essay, you show your readers that you understand that source. (Lunsford and Connors 596)

**Plagiarism (misplaced citation):**

Lunsford and Connors say that paraphrasing is useful because "[p]araphrasing material helps you digest a passage, because chances are you can't restate the passage in your own words unless you grasp its full meaning" (596). When you incorporate an accurate paraphrase into your essay, you show your readers your understanding of that source.

The reader would logically assume that the sentence following the citation is your own comment on the quotation, when it is actually part of the original quote.

Finally, a point about multiple citations from the same source: cite them all individually. It is not adequate to give one citation at the end of the paragraph for a bunch of individual points abstracted from a source.
Parenthetical citations are intended to make citing your sources easy to do; don't be shy about using them.

*Example of acceptable paraphrase: putting the idea in your own words*

Taken from **Lunsford and Connors 597-98**. Key words and phrases in the original are in boldface. The changes in wording and sentence structure in the paraphrase are underlined.

**Original**

But *Frida's outlook was vastly different* from that of the Surrealists. Her art was not the *product of a disillusioned European culture* searching for an *escape from the limits of logic* by *plumbing the subconscious*. Instead, *her fantasy was a product of her temperament, life, and place*; it was a way of *coming to terms with reality*, not of *passing beyond reality* into another realm.

Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (258)

**Paraphrase**

As Herrera explains, *Frida's surrealistic vision was unlike* that of the European Surrealists. While *their art grew out of their disenchantment with society* and their desire to *explore the subconscious mind* as a *refuge from rational thinking*, Frida's vision was an *outgrowth of her own personality and life experiences in Mexico*. She used her surrealistic images to understand better her actual life, not to *create a dreamworld* (258).

**Works Cited**