

**East Carolina University**  
**Master of Public Administration Program**  
**Guidelines for Writing**  
**November 1, 2019**

These guidelines are for use while you are in the MPA Program. In January 2012, all MPA courses began using the APA writing style and formatting of papers. This document is only an abbreviated guide intended to be only a quick overview to common writing and formatting issues. More complete references are cited below. The MPA Committee has adopted this writing style to ensure consistency across our courses and to facilitate the development of clear writing and communication on the part of our students.

**General Writing Tips**

The aim of your writing should be to communicate your thoughts and results clearly to your readers, so consider the following tips as you write for your courses and your professional paper. Be consistent in style and format. The specified guidelines for style create a smoother, more professional presentation.

- **General Formatting** The entire document should be accurately typed and double-spaced. All textual pages should be numbered, beginning with the first page of the text. You may begin the actual numbering on the first page or on the second page – just be sure you use the appropriate page number. Textual pages do not include title pages, abstracts, executive summaries or tables of contents. Use only a basic, widely available font like Arial, Courier or Times New Roman, 12 point.
  - Do not use extra-large spaces after paragraphs. Do not justify or break words at the right margin.
  - Use proper, consistent format styles for section headings, citations within the text, quotations, tables and figures, endnotes and footnotes, appendixes, and references.
  - Use the Spelling and Grammar check before submitting your work. The red and green lines indicate problems and you should address them. Please note that the system misses correct spelling of an inappropriate word and often offers suggestions you might not wish to take.
  - Avoid placing two spaces after the periods at the end of a sentence. This spacing pattern used to be what we were taught in typing or keyboarding to enable the reader to identify clearly where one sentence ended and another began, but contemporary word processing software does this spacing automatically. If you do this out of habit, a simple way to fix it is to use the “find/replace” feature to eliminate the additional spaces when you are done.
  - Reading a paper aloud often helps you find ways to improve your writing.
  - Proofread and proofread again. And then, perhaps, proofread once more.

- **Be Specific**
  - Be specific about all references to time, quantity, etc.
  - Instead of using *currently* or *recently*, specify *last spring*. Often when *now* and *currently* are implied, these words can be deleted without loss of meaning. Instead of saying several units were added, give a number or a rough estimate, such as *almost 100*.
- **Use Shorter Words**
  - Choose short, familiar words whenever possible.
  - When more than 15 percent of your words (except verbs and proper nouns) are three or more syllables, readers work too hard to understand your message.
- **To reduce larger words, consider these tips:**
  - Use ‘about’ instead of ‘approximately’; use ‘use’ rather than ‘utilize’.
  - Convert nouns ending in -ion into verbs. For example, use "We considered..." instead of "We took into consideration ...."
- **Delete Extra Words**
  - Making your point without extraneous words helps readers clearly understand your message.
  - Evaluate every "that" in your text. Often "that" can be deleted without loss of meaning. ○ Avoid starting sentences with "In order to ...." By deleting the words "in order," you lose no meaning.
  - Rarely is the word "very" needed. Consider deleting it or choosing another word. Very good can be excellent, and very important can be key.
- **Use Shorter Sentences**
  - Keep at least 75 percent of your sentences an average length of 10-20 words. If a sentence is longer than three typed lines, consider shortening it.
- **Use Shorter Paragraphs**
  - If a paragraph is more than ten typed lines, consider shortening it.
  - Each paragraph should have at least three sentences.
- **Avoid Clichés & Jargon**
  - Choose original ways of writing your message, avoiding well-known phrases such as, *When push comes to shove*, *In order to*, and *By the same token*. These clichés and well-worn phrases will bore your readers.
  - Avoid the use of jargon whenever possible. This type of language or terminology will serve only to confuse readers who may be unfamiliar with your field of study. Be sure to define any such terms when used.
- **Watch Use of "It" and "There"**
  - Following the advice to use words intentionally and sparingly, avoid introductory clauses that have little value in the sentence. For example, limit use of *there*.
  - *It* can be vague.
  - Avoid starting a sentence or clause with *It* unless the pronoun has a clear antecedent.
  - Avoid starting sentences with "*There*" to prevent the use of empty introductory language.

- **Verb Tense**
  - Choose a verb tense and maintain its use throughout the document.
  - Carefully consider use of the future tense, as often it is unnecessary.
  - In discussions of the literature, use the past tense, as in "Valauskas (1990) remarked that ...."
- **Use Strong Verbs**
  - Use "strong" verbs whenever possible. Forms of the verb to be (e.g. *am, is, are, was, were*) do not maintain readers' interest.
  - Instead of saying, "The meeting was productive," consider, "The meeting generated ideas for ...."
- **Favor the Active Voice**
  - Favor the active voice over the passive voice to avoid vagueness unless the action is more important than the doer of the action. When the verb of a sentence is in the **active voice**, the subject is doing the acting.
  - Use of the imperative is a good technique for attracting readers and minimizing the use of passive voice constructions. *Imperatives* are verbs used to give orders, commands and instructions.
- **Avoid contractions**
  - Do not use such contractions of verbs in formal writing
  - Avoid "don't, isn't, won't, etc."
  - Remember "It's" is the contraction for "it is" and, therefore, does not belong in a paper.
- **Avoid beginning sentences with "However, But, or And".**
  - Each of those words implies a continuation of the previous sentence's main thought.
  - These words should only be used when one wishes to make a very strong point about something being an exception to the main point of the preceding sentence. If you use them too often they lose their power to signal the reader of the significance of your exception.
- **Using hyphens**
  - If you use hyphens, like this "Alternative 1-the", do it like this "Alternative 1 – The".
  - While this seems petty, the hyphen without spaces means that it is all part of the same word like "over-drawn."
- **People deserve proper pronouns**
  - Do not refer to people by the word "that". "That" is a reference to an inanimate object.
  - Use "who" or some other appropriate pronoun when referring to people.
  - Be sure to use singular pronouns to refer to singular nouns and plural pronouns for plural nouns.
  - A common error involves using "they" and "their" to refer to individuals as opposed to groups of individuals.
- **Ask "So what?"**

- After you've written your text, evaluate every sentence by asking yourself, *Why is this particular piece of information important to my readers?*
- If you cannot answer the question adequately about a sentence, consider deleting it.
- **Acronyms**
  - Acronyms and abbreviations should be spelled out the first time they are used. Any that are in languages other than English should be spelled out in the original language and in English.
  - For example, state World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), allowing the use of WIPO later in the manuscript.
  - After you introduce an acronym use it. Be consistent in its use. Do not introduce and acronym only to repeat the full term throughout the remainder of your document.
- **Dates**
  - Dates should appear in day-month-year format
  - For example, November 30, 2004 would appear as 30 November 2004.
- **Electronic Mail and Internet**
  - Refer to electronic mail as e-mail or E-mail, but not email or Email.
  - The Internet should be called the Internet, not the internet, the net, the Net, or the Net
  - Use the *Web* or the *World Wide Web*, but not the web.
- **Other Languages**
  - Correct diacritical markings are essential in all languages that have them.
  - Commonly used foreign words do not require italics.
- **Numbers**
  - The numbers zero through nine should be spelled out except when referring to data or measurements, such as "The figure measures 3 pixels by 2 pixels ...." All whole numbers above nine should appear as Arabic numerals, such as 10, 11, 12
  - Ordinal numbers should be spelled out, as in twentieth.
  - A number at the start of a sentence should be spelled out, as in "Fourteen search engines were examined"
- **Percentages**
  - Write *percent*, not %.
  - Do not repeat % in every cell of a table. Use it once in the title of the column. Use only numbers in the cells.

- **Person**

- Favor the use of the second-person pronoun, *you*, over the indefinite third-person singular pronoun, *one*.
- Do not assume that the pronoun for a third-person singular noun is *him* or *he*.

To avoid awkward constructions like *he/she*, revise sentences.

- **Tables & Figures**

- Capitalize all references to your own tables and figures, such as "see *Figure 1*" or "see *Table 2* below".
- Always spell out the words *Figure* or *Table* in reference to illustrations in the course of the paper.
- Cite the sources of the data in your tables and figures even if you are the source.
- Use lower case for references to figures or tables in cited literature, such as (*Kokomo, 1999, figure 8*) or (*Dolton, 1968, table 5*).

### In Text Quotations

- A quotation is a reproduction word for word of material directly taken from another author's work.
- If you are basically using the same words as the original author, you need to cite this material. Changing a few words does not make the material your own. To make it your own, incorporate the ideas into your own words and organization. Even so, you should cite the original source material if you use it to frame your own thinking on a subject.
- When quoting, always provide the author, year and specific page citation or paragraph number for non-paginated material in the text.
- Include a complete reference in the reference list.
- Credit direct quotations of online material by giving the author, year and page number in parentheses.
- Many electronic sources do not provide page numbers. If paragraph numbers are visible, use them in place of page numbers and use the abbreviation *para*.
- If a quotation comprises fewer than 40 words, incorporate it into the text and enclose the quotation with double quotation marks.
- If the quotation comes in the middle of a sentence, end the passage with the quotation marks, cite the source in parenthesis immediately after the quotation marks and continue the sentence.
- **EXAMPLE:**

*According to Jones (1998), "Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time" (p. 199). Jones (1998) found "students often had difficulty using APA style" (p. 199); what implications does this have for teachers? If the author is not named in a signal phrase, place the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number in parentheses after the quotation. She stated, "Students often had difficulty using APA style," but she did not offer an explanation as to why (Jones, 1998, p. 199).*
- If a quotation comprises 40 words or more, display it in a freestanding block of text and omit the quotation marks.

- Start the block quotation on a new line and indent the block about a half inch from the left margin in the same position as a new paragraph
- Type the entire quotation on the new margin, & indent the first line of any subsequent paragraph within the quotation five spaces from the new margin. Maintain double spacing throughout.
- **EXAMPLE:**  
*Jones's (1998) study found the following: Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time citing sources. This difficulty could be attributed to the fact that many students failed to purchase a style manual or to ask their teacher for help. (p. 199)*

### **References Format**

- Endnotes in the manuscript should be consecutively numbered and collected at the end of the paper after the conclusion and before the References section.
- Footnotes are placed at the bottom of each manuscript page.
- Additional APA citation resources can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- Each reference cited in the text must appear in the reference list and each entry in the reference list must be cited in the text. These must also be identical in spelling of author's names and year.
- After the first line of each entry in your reference list, all other lines should be indented one-half inch from the left margin. This is called hanging indentation.
- Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the last name of the first author of each work.
- **General Formatting for In-Text Citations**
  - The last name of the author of a cited work should appear in the paper, followed by the year of publication of the book, paper, report, or document, as in (Jones, 1990).
  - If there are several references to authors with the same surname, initials should be used to differentiate between the authors, as in (C. Jones, 1990; D. Jones, 1985).
  - **Two Authors**
    - For references containing two authors, list the authors in order of their appearance in the original publication, followed by date of publication,
    - Example (Smith and Jones, 1986).
  - **Three or More Authors**
    - If a reference contains three or more authors, list only the lead author, the abbreviation et al., and the date.
    - Example a paper written by Gene Rodgers, Joe Smith, Dana Eisner and Sandra Jacobson in 1980 would appear as (Rodgers et al., 1980).
  - **Unknown Author**
    - If the work does not have an author, cite the source by its title in the signal phrase or use the first word or two in the parentheses.

- Titles of books and reports are italicized or underlined; titles of articles and chapters are in quotation marks.
- Example: *A similar study was done of students learning to format research papers ("Using APA," 2001).*
- **Publications in Press**
  - Cite publications in press (i.e. those documents accepted for publication but not yet published)
  - Example: (Rivers, in press).
- **Direct Quotations**
  - Cite direct quotations and include the page number from which the quotation was derived.
  - Example: (Merrell, 1994, p. 98).
- **Indirect Quotations**
  - A citation can refer to text written by one author embedded in the text of a book or paper written by another author
  - Example: (Ransmayr in Rothenberg, 1995).
- **Multiple Quotations**
  - Multiple citations can appear in whatever order the author deems relevant, such as alphabetical, numerical, or significance.
  - Example: (Shane and Cushing, 1991; Chalmers, 1990; Kendall and Wells, 1992).
- **Personal Communication:**
  - For interviews, letters, e-mails, and other person-to person communication, cite the communicator's name, the fact that it was personal communication, and the date of the communication.
  - Do not include personal communication in the reference list.
  - (*E. Robbins, personal communication, January 4, 2001*).
  - *A. P. Smith also claimed that many of her students had difficulties with APA style (personal communication, November 3, 2002).*
- **The DOI System**
  - Developed by a group of international publishers, the DOI System provides a means of persistent identification for managing information on digital networks.
  - Often times trying to get to a source using a URL doesn't work because the "link" is no longer working.
  - The DOI System is implemented through Cross Ref which provides the citation-linking service for scientific publishing.
  - A DOI is a unique alphanumeric string assigned by the registration agency to identify content and provide a persistent link to its content location on the Internet.
  - The DOI is typically found on the first page of the electronic journal article near the copyright notice in the upper right corner but can be found in various places depending on the journal.

- DOIs can also be found in the data base page for an article when searching. It is midway down the page and is labeled “Digital Object Identifier.”
  - The DOI in your reference list functions as links to the content you are referencing.
  - When a DOI is used, no further retrieval information is needed to identify or locate the content!
  - Article From an Online Periodical with DOI Assigned.
  - Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Date of publication). Title of article.
  - *Title of Journal*, volume number. doi:0000000/000000000000.
  - Brownlie, D. Toward effective poster presentations: An annotated bibliography. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(11/12), 1245-1283. doi:10.1108/03090560710821161.
- **Other Resources**
  - To assist you in editing process your own work, please consult the following resources.
  - **APA**
    - *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. (2020). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 7<sup>th</sup> ed
    - *APA Formatting and Style Guide*, OWL Materials from The OWL at Purdue
    - Retrieved November 1, 2019, from
    - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
    - This is a magnificent resource.
  - **APA Style Homepage**
    - Content includes: APA style, style tips, electronic resources, frequently asked questions, what's new and ethics of publication.
    - Retrieved November 1, 2019, from
    - <http://apastyle.apa.org/>
  - **APA Style Online: Electronic Resources**
    - Retrieved November 1, 2019, from
    - <http://www.apastyle.org/eleceref.html>
- **Webgrammar**
  - <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>
  - This site offers advice and guidance for writers at all levels of scholarship as well as a portal to other sources of help for writers.
- **The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation**
  - <http://www.grammarbook.com>
  - This site is online companion to the print version of *Jane Straus's The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*, an



excellent resource for examining the rules of punctuation.

- **Common Errors in English**

- <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html> Written by Paul Brians, Professor of English at Washington State University this informational page examines the most common errors in the English language. While the site focuses on the proper use of American English, it also offers valuable tips for anyone writing in English.
- Strunk, Jr. W. and White, E. B. (2009) *The Elements of Style*. New York, NY: Longman. This is an easy to use gold standard for clear writing.
- Truss, L. (2006) *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. New York, NY: Gotham.
- Ross-Larson, B. (2003) *Edit Yourself: A Manual for Everyone Who Works With Words*. New York, NY: Barnes & Noble's Books (2003 – reprint of 1996 ed.)

Acknowledgements: This style guides owes much to multiple sources, including the Guidelines for Submission to the *Journal for Nonprofit Management* prepared by the School of Social Work at Rutgers University and the APA Concise Rules of Style(2010) and from the OWL at Perdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> .