

Guidelines for Writing Research Papers

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Formatting

1. Paper and spacing. Your paper should be typed, double-spaced, on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper.
2. Presentation. Do not use a folder or plastic sheets. Staple paper in upper-left hand corner. Do include a title or cover page that has the title of your paper centered in the middle of the page and your name, course title, and term (i.e., Winter 2005) centered in the bottom third of the paper.
3. Margins. Use 1 inch margins all around, except on the first page. On the 1st page, put title of text about 1 1/2 inches down from the top, then start text about another inch below that.
4. Font. Use a font like Courier or Times New Roman. Font size should be 12cpi (characters per inch).
5. Page numbers. Page numbers should go in the upper right hand corner except on the first page. Either center page number at the bottom of the 1st page (if your word processing software allows you to easily do that—**Word** does not), or skip the page number on the first page.

Content

1. Your paper should include an introduction (where you tell me what your paper is about and why it is important), a review of any relevant literature, the results of your library research (this will form the core of your paper), then a conclusion that answers or resolves your research question.

Your work should revolve around a central question or problem to be resolved by the paper. You need to tell the reader (me!), within the first or second page of your paper, the central focus of your work and why it is important.

Pick a topic you are interested in and start your work early.

2. The text of your paper should be about the length specified in the syllabus for the assignment. Any figures and your bibliography count as separate pages.

While the length of the paper is not a measure of its value, your paper should reflect a thoughtful choice of topic, and a serious effort at research.

3. It is often helpful to organize your paper with headings and subheadings. A primary heading is usually capitalized in bold type and centered. A secondary heading is lower case, bold, flush left. If you need a third level heading it is in bold type as the first phrase in the

paragraph (indented 5 spaces and followed by a period). Or you may follow any conventional style.

Grammar, spelling, and style

1. We are all in the process of becoming good writers. It is something that takes work and practice. Many good writing manuals are available for advice about matters of style and punctuation. Even the very best writers continually use and refer to books on grammar and word usage, to dictionaries and thesauruses, and to style manuals.

At a minimum a university student should have and use:

Turabian, Kate. 1996 (6th ed.). *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Strunk, William and E. B. White. 1972. *The Elements of Style*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. [Now readily available on the web. Just search for ‘Strunk and White’ or ‘Elements of Style’.]

Refer to these or similar books for questions of style.

2. Do not rely heavily on computer spell checks or grammar checks. I do not recommend a grammar check at all. The Spell Check function is useful for a 1st run-through to check your spelling. It is no substitute for proofreading your paper.
3. Re-read, edit, and revise your paper before you turn it in.

Grammar, spelling and style ARE important.

Referencing and Bibliography

1. You must cite the material you have used to write a paper.
2. I prefer the ‘within-text citation’ format or APA citation style, but you may use any acceptable referencing format.

If you use ‘within-text’ or APA format, cite references within the text by placing the author's last name and the date of publication in parenthesis at the end of the idea or sentence when citation is necessary. If you need to include a page number, the page number follows the date, separated by a comma.

EXAMPLES:

The study identified four types of tropical soils (Sanchez 1990, 242).

According to Sanchez (1990, 242), there are four types of tropical soils.

If an idea or concept requires citation of more than 1 author or more than 1 work by the same author, the works are separated by a semi-colon.

EXAMPLE:

Several studies confirm a high variety of tropical soil types (Sanchez 1986; 1990; Bandy 1985; Ribera 1993).

Many academic or scholarly publications use this style. I recommend referring to the *Annals, Association of American Geographers* (G3 .A7--PSU library), or copies available in the Geography Department at PSU for more examples.

3. You need to cite information that is not common knowledge and any ideas or information that derived from someone else's research.
4. Do not cite lecture material from the instructor.
5. Use direct quotes only when essential to make a point. Avoid the use of long quotes. Any quotes greater than 4 lines in length must be indented and single spaced. Any direct quote must have a page number.

Bibliography

1. The Bibliography is more properly called a References Cited section. It should include only the material you have used to write your paper. (In other words, it is not a general bibliography of your topic.)
2. List sources alphabetically by the last name of the author. Here are some examples:

Book: (note that the second and subsequent lines are indented)

Leighton, Ann. 1976. *American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Article:

Grigg, David. 1996. The Starchy Staple in World Food Consumption. *Annals, Association of American Geographers*. 86:412-431.

Note: the numbers following the journal title are the volume number and pages of the article.

Internet:

Knapp, Greg. 2000. Geography of Latin America [course syllabus].
<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~gwk/courses/grg319/grg319.html>. Internet, accessed 13 January 2004.

If you have any questions about how to cite a source check a style manual, check examples in the *Annals*, *Association of American Geographers*, or ask me.

3. An encyclopedia is not an acceptable reference for a college paper. Nor should you rely heavily on popular magazines such as *Time* or *National Geographic*.

Figures (photographs, tables, charts, diagrams, maps)

Technically, ‘Figures’ are photos, diagrams and maps; tables and charts are Tables. I’m not concerned about that distinction for your research paper.

But, these things are important:

1. Figures and Tables should appear as close as possible following their mention in the text. Put them either on the same page (if they fit) or on the page immediately following their mention.
2. Do not refer directly to figures. Refer to them parenthetically. Examples:

Don't write: Figure 1 shows that Mexican immigrants in Oregon come primarily from Michoacán.

Do write: Mexican immigrants in Oregon come primarily from Michoacán (Fig. 1).
The same is true for maps, tables, etc.

3. The title and number of your figure or table should go immediately below the graphic. It should include the figure or table number (numbered sequentially through the text), the title of the figure or table, and the source, if necessary.
4. If you have more than 5 figures you might want to include a list of figures in your paper.
5. The reference or source for your figure should appear in your references cited.
6. You must refer to any figures you use in the text. In other words, figures should not be floating around, unconnected to your text. Figures and tables must be relevant to the text.

Writing your paper

After you have selected your topic and located and read the sources you need for your paper, it is useful to write an outline to help you organize your ideas. When you begin writing make sure your ideas follow one another in logical order. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces the ideas you will discuss in that paragraph. The final sentence of the paragraph should either lead directly or indirectly to the ideas you will discuss in the next paragraph. Research and writing are hard work. Be patient and keep working at it. Even the best writers revise and rewrite their work several times before publication.

What do I look for when I grade a paper?

- _____ Is the topic appropriate to the assignment?
- _____ Is the topic creative and focused?
- _____ Is there a statement of purpose? Does the reader understand the point of your paper?
- _____ Is there a sense of problem? A sense of importance?
- _____ Is the paper well-organized? Can the reader easily understand the flow of your ideas?
- _____ Is the paper based on research? Is there clear evidence that the ideas expressed in the paper are based on research and that any opinions are thoughtful reflections based on an understanding of the topic? Or, are there gross misstatements of facts? exaggerations? unwarranted statements of opinion related as facts?
- _____ Is there evidence that you have investigated something and learned something?
- _____ Is the paper well-written?
- _____ Are spelling and grammatical errors at a minimum (i.e., a result of genuine oversight and not sloppy writing)?
- _____ Is the presentation neat and conscientious?