



A Style Sheet for Research Paper Writers

- Contractions: Standard English does not permit words like "don't."
- "Its" and "it's": "It's" is a contraction for "it is," and should not appear in a research paper. "Its" is the possessive form of "it," as in "The corporation gave its assent to proceed."
- "However" is tremendously over-used. Avoid it if possible. It is only properly used to contrast one point with another. It seldom belongs at the beginning of a sentence.
- If you must use a word like "however," "for example," or "nevertheless," place it in the middle of the sentence, and use a comma both before and after the word.
- "Hopefully" is another heavily mis-used term. It does not mean "it is hoped." It is an adverb which modifies a verb or adjective. "Hopefully, the truck will make it on time" is incorrect. "Hopefully, I await the truck's arrival" is correct. "Hopefully" should rarely if ever appear in your papers.
- Students often use "therefore" to demonstrate a logical connection between two points. If the connection is clear, "therefore" is unnecessary; if it is not clear, "therefore" will not make it so. The same also applies with "thus."
- To "beg" the question does not mean to raise it, or demand that it be asked, current improper usage notwithstanding. Begging the question is a form of logical fallacy, wherein a conclusion is assumed without proof. How do we know Darwin's theory of genesis was wrong and the Bible's is right? Because God created the world in seven days.
- Avoid splitting infinitives and compound verbs, as in "The general ordered them to frequently march" ("to march frequently"). Also applies to compound verbs: "has often wondered" becomes "has wondered often."
- Lead and led: Lead is only present tense. Led is the only correct past tense.
- The word "unique" does not take modifiers. Either something is one of a kind, or it is NOT! You can not be more or less unique than someone else.
- "Very" is overused. Many words cannot be qualified, so "very" is inappropriate ("very unique" is an error; something cannot be only somewhat unique). A better word exists; it is your job to find it. As in: very tired (exhausted), very happy (elated), very unhappy (miserable).

→ Learn the difference between "fewer" and "less." Fewer refers to numbers, less to amounts, degree, or value. Try and convince your local grocers that their signs should read "ten items or fewer!"

→ The present tense of "lay" and "lie" are different words. You lay something down. You lie yourself down.

→ Things can only be different from one another, NOT different than each other.

→ Use "between" with two items or people and "among" with three or more.

→ A comma separates phrases; a semi-colon separates two otherwise complete sentences. A colon is used only for a list of items and illustrative quotations.

→ When referring back to a person, use "who," not "that." "Mary, who wanted to buy a new dress, went shopping." "People who shower, do not smell." Not, "people that shower, do not smell."

→ Be careful about noun-verb agreement. If the subject is plural, the other references, the adjectives, the verb must be in plural form. Students prepare themselves, not himself or herself.

→ Be aware of incorrect capitalization--some writers capitalize unnecessarily, others do not capitalize when it is necessary. If in doubt, look it up in a dictionary or style manual.

→ Use exclamation marks and italics only for emphasis, and then, very sparingly.

→ Do not abbreviate the names of states or the United States. Never end sentences with abbreviations.

→ Never use "etc." and "and so forth." These terms are too vague to use in a research paper.



Grammar



Here are some common grammatical problems that arise in research papers, listed with the correction mark for each, and the solution to the problem.

→ **Mixed verb tenses ("tense"):**

"Bernal Diaz presented a positive view of the Spanish because he wants to protect himself from recrimination." Put "wants" in the same tense as "presented."

→ **Passive voice ("passive"):**

"The Aztecs were destroyed in droves, and finally defeated." Identify the proper subject of this sentence and re-work, as in "The Spanish destroyed the Aztecs in droves, and finally defeated them."

→ **Run-on sentence ("run-on"):**

"Coffee contains caffeine furthermore, chocolate, tea, and cola also contain significant amounts of caffeine." Add a semi-colon after "caffeine" to properly conjoin two independent clauses.

→ **Comma splice ("splice"):**

"Many industrialists thought workers lazy, as a result they paid their employees poorly." Replace comma after "lazy" with a semi-colon to properly conjoin two independent clauses.

→ **Sentence fragment ("frag"):**

"The little town of Dayton, Tennessee, in the tumultuous 1920s, caught in the international limelight." The sentence needs a verb for its subject, Dayton.

→ **Faulty pronoun reference ("ref"):**

"The Spaniard hated the Aztec because of their religious beliefs." The referent for "their" ("Aztec") is singular; change "their" to "his."

→ **Subject-verb agreement ("s-v"):**

"The army required each one of the soldiers to carry their own entrenching tool." "Their" is plural, yet refers to the singular "one," not "soldiers." "The army required each soldier to carry his own entrenching tool."

→ **Faulty predication ("pred"):**

"The belief in Manifest Destiny cannot conceive of Indians having rights." "Conceiving" is a verb that "belief" is incapable of carrying out. Identify proper subject for the verb: "People who believe in Manifest Destiny cannot conceive of Indians having rights."

Grammar continued...

- **Dangling modifier ("mod"):**
"Arriving by boat in the New World, the weather was brutal." The weather cannot arrive by boat in the New World; identify the proper subject for the first clause, as in "Arriving by boat in the New World, the Puritans found the weather brutal."
- **Faulty parallel structure ("parallel"):**
"Ways of preventing blacks from voting included the Grandfather Clause and holding all-white primaries." A noun, "Grandfather Clause," is listed in series with a verb, "holding." Re-work so both are the same, as in ". . . included the Grandfather Clause and the all-white primary."
- **Colloquial ("colloq"):**
"Some critics try to straddle the fence between standard and revisionist interpretations of history." Substitute non-colloquial phrase for "straddle the fence," as in "Some critics endorse elements of both standard and revisionist interpretations of history."
- **Word choice ("w.c."):**
"One slave tells of how he was able to get a job after the war and earn enough money to travel to North Carolina to find his long separated mother." His mother had probably remained in once piece; substitute "lost" for "separated."



“Must Have” List

Spacing and Flow	
is it double-spaced?	
is the text large enough to read but not too big?	
are the margins 1 inch all around the page?	
if tables were included in the paper, do they have a table number and title? are they referred to in the text of the paper? if there was information copied directly from a source, was each section cited?	
is the font consistent throughout the whole paper and the Works Cited?	
is the paper in paragraph form?	
are the concepts broken into appropriate paragraphs?	
does it read smoothly?	
does it read smoothly between paragraphs?	
is the reader unaware that there were questions you answered?	
Citations and Works Cited	
is all researched information quoted (or paraphrased) and cited from a source?	
are there at least three unique sources for the section?	
are all paraphrases and quotations either parenthetically cited with the first unique word(s) of the entry in the Works Cited or cited within the text of the paper?	
was any phrase of 3 or more words from a source put in quotes and cited?	
is a Works Cited included (without it, you get no credit)?	
are the sources in alphabetical order in the Works Cited?	
did the Internet sources have an author, a publisher (organization/company), or both?	
was the MLA format from the LRC Web site, <i>Writers Inc.</i> , or the Maine West Research Manual used and followed to the exact wording (every period, underline and quote)?	
Spelling, Grammar and Common Sense	
did you spell-check the document? did you spell the name(s) of your group members and teacher correctly with no nicknames?	
did you use appropriate vocabulary?	
did you use the grammar check of the document? (passive voice is correct for technical writing)	
is the entire paper in third person? (there should be no personal pronouns ANYWHERE!) (examples: you, me, us, I, we, etc.)	
did you use the correct terms? they're vs. their vs. there two vs. to vs. too cite vs. site affect (verb) vs. effect (noun) since vs. scents vs. cents vs. sense	