Writing Handbook

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Writing Handbook for History & Humanities
Introduction

Why I Assign Essays

I assign essays for a number of reasons above and beyond my need to give you a grade at the end of the semester. To a large extent, I assign essays because of my beliefs about how people learn. These beliefs are not simple hunches but rest upon the current consensus of cognitive psychologists, based upon decades of research. The long and the short of it is that "a mind must work to grow," to quote Charles Eliot's 1869 inaugural address as president of Harvard.[1]

All learners have to construct knowledge for themselves. While it is true that you can memorize facts, building deep knowledge (what educators often call "understanding") requires a learning process that's much more complex than memorization. Please know that I have not left you entirely to your own devices to "construct knowledge" by yourself. Instead, I have tried to design a series of assignments that will allow you to learn in community with both your fellow students and me. Writing essays plays a crucial role in that learning experience, because as you write, you are collecting and analyzing evidence, drawing conclusions, and organizing an interpretation or argument—in short, you are quite literally building knowledge.

Writing an essay, then, is not mere busy work, and I hope that you don't approach it as such. The process of writing should allow you to consolidate and demonstrate what you have learned. When you write and defend a thesis statement, you are in fact showing me that you have constructed knowledge using the raw materials of the course: the lectures, discussions, and, perhaps most importantly, the readings.

A solid essay, though, is more than a demonstration of your knowledge: it is also a demonstration of your skills. Writing and revising an essay is a challenging process. I am never asking you merely to recite factual data. Instead, I ask for analysis and interpretation. Writing an essay requires not only that you think but also that you discipline your thought by expressing and organizing your ideas clearly, by providing sufficient evidence to support your point of view, and by explaining the larger significance of your ideas. In addition to all of that, I require you to use standard written English, because it facilitates clarity and communication in ways that broken sentences, confusing syntax, and misspelled words simply cannot.

In the end, then, writing an essay is not only about constructing knowledge but also about your ability to effectively share what you know. I hope that you are well on your way to becoming a thoughtful and educated person, and I trust that you won't keep your knowledge to yourself. Even in this age of text messages and Facebook, writing in sentences, paragraphs, and—yes—pages, is still one of the most powerful ways to communicate about the complex problems and tasks that we face in this world.

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[1] "A Turning Point in Higher Education: The Inaugural Address of Charles William Eliot as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1869), 42.

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Avoiding Plagiarism

Introduction

Scholars constantly borrow ideas from one another, and this exchange makes for an exciting conversation, but all writers must acknowledge their debts. In the academic world, borrowing phrases, facts, or ideas without citing your sources is a form of intellectual theft. Because the entire academic enterprise depends on honesty, students convicted of plagiarism face a serious consequences, from the failure of an assignment to the failure of the course. Repeated or especially egregious violations can lead to other sanctions, including academic probation or dismissal. (See UWGB's Student Academic Disciplinary Procedures.)

It is your responsibility to understand these rules and actively to avoid plagiarism. This document cannot cover every possible type of plagiarism, but it does point to some common varieties and suggest how to avoid them.

Warning! It is possible to cite a source and still plagiarize from it. You must use quotation marks to indicate direct copying of words from a source. See #2 below for more details.

Basic Guidelines

1. When you borrow an idea or piece of information, you must cite your source. The various academic disciplines use different citation formats, but they all require citation of sources. See your assignment instructions or syllabus for information about which format to use. The main exception to this rule involves **simple facts that are considered** common knowledge, which means that they are widely known and can be found in any number of basic works on the subject at hand. You would not need to cite the source that you used to find out what year Thomas Jefferson was first elected president (which is a simple fact), but you would need to cite the source that you used to learn how and why he was elected (which is an interpretation).
2. If you borrow exact words or phrases, it is not enough merely to cite the source—you must use quotation marks to show exactly what you have borrowed. Please note that you cannot put quotation marks around a paraphrase just to be safe. Quotation marks indicate a direct and exact quotation, with any additions enclosed in brackets or deletions indicated by ellipses. (Click here for help with brackets and ellipses.)
3. Instead of quoting directly from a source, you may paraphrase it (put it in your own words). When paraphrasing, you cannot simply substitute your words into someone else's sentence structure. **You are obligated to rewrite the passage completely.** The following passages are quoted from James West Davidson, et al., *Nations of Nations: A Concise Narrative of the American Republic*, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999). Notice how the poorly paraphrased versions plagiarize—despite the citations.

    - Original Passage: "Equally *important in preserving local order* was the church."

- Poor Paraphrase (Plagiarism): Ministers were very significant figures in colonial New England, because the churches were very *important in* ***preserving local order*** (Davidson, 69).

- Comment: The original passage has been cited here, but this paraphrase has borrowed a significant phrase (in bold) from the source without using quotation marks.

§§§

- Original Passage: "British troops found themselves regularly cursed by citizens and occasionally pelted with stones, dirt, and human excrement."

- Poor Paraphrase (Plagiarism): British soldiers were often cursed by the townspeople and were sometimes targeted with dirt, human excrement, and stones (Davidson, 131).

- Comment: The author of this sentence essentially borrowed the sentence structure from the original source, plugged in a few synonyms, and switched around the order of a few words. This is not a satisfactory paraphrase. A paraphrase must totally restate the original source.

4. Beware of plagiarizing from lectures, PowerPoint slides, assignment sheets, and handouts from your instructors. Treat these sources as you would any outside source, either using quotation marks or paraphrases and indicating your borrowing of words or ideas. Cite lectures or presentations using their titles or dates and the name of the speaker.
5. Follow this rule and you will be safe: If you borrow an idea or fact, phrase it in your own words and attribute it to the source from which you have borrowed it. If you cannot adequately rephrase the idea or fact, then use quotation marks and cite your source.
6. There is a fine balance to strike between paraphrasing and quoting. You must always worry about being safe before you worry about being eloquent. If you constantly quote basic facts, however, your writing will become encumbered and clumsy. It is a good idea to paraphrase secondary sources whenever possible (unless the idea or wording is particularly distinctive or powerful). Obviously, you do not want to have to put quotation marks around single words. You are writing in the same language as your source, and you will sometimes have to use some of the same words. If you have really restated a fact or idea, your use of a couple of the same words as your source is not plagiarism. But if you copy a sentence structure or borrow whole phrases from your source, you have crossed the line into plagiarism. A reasonable compromise is to paraphrase what you can and quote key phrases

as needed. Going back to the example above, a paraphrase and short quotation might look like this:

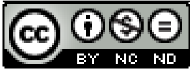
- As historian James Davidson has pointed out, churches in colonial New England were critical for "preserving local order" (Davidson, 69).

A Special Warning about the Internet

The Internet can be a wonderful resource, but the bulk of web sites are not reliable sources of historical information, and the web is also a very tempting source of plagiarism. The Internet is not a collective brain that you may pick freely without citation. If you borrow substantial ideas or language from the internet, you must cite your source. **Never copy and paste from the Internet directly into your paper without immediately adding quotation marks**. To paraphrase responsibly, you must completely rewrite a passage. If you copy, paste, and make a few changes to someone else's words, you are committing plagiarism.

Additional Resources

- Ch. 6 of Mary Rampolla's *Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.
- American Historical Association "Statement on Plagiarism"



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Writing with a Thesis

Even when you write for yourself, you almost always have a purpose. You write a diary, for instance, to record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. If you keep a diary and you were to look back at it many years from now, you might find it difficult to understand why you wrote certain things, unless of course you explained the significance of what you were writing. When you write for someone other than yourself, the importance of stating your point clearly and succinctly becomes fundamental. Your readers only know what you tell them in writing, and they will not be pleased if you ask them to read something that has no apparent point. For this reason, every paper that you write as a student, every letter to the editor that write as a citizen, and every report that you write as an employee should make, somewhere near the beginning, a clear statement of its main point, or thesis.

A paper without a thesis is a mere grocery list: a little of this, a little of that. A thesis-less paper may convey some interesting information, but it will fail to express the importance of the information or to assemble it into a meaningful whole. Generally, you write because you have done some thinking and you want to communicate the results of your thinking to your audience. Your thesis statement, then, is your chance to show that you have figured something out: it reveals your analysis or interpretation of the materials at hand.

Your thesis statement does not simply state the topic of your essay: a good thesis statement actually presents an argument, which you will support with evidence. Not every thesis that you devise will stun your readers with its profundity, but it should at least present a position that your essay (or letter or report) defends. You can ask two questions of a thesis statement to make sure that it is argumentative. First, could somebody disagree with it? Second, does it require evidence to prove it? If a statement meets these criteria, it is probably a workable thesis.

Readers will be frustrated if your writing reads like a mystery novel, but your thesis statement will not usually be the first sentence of your essay. The thesis statement should usually come at the end of the introduction, which in a short piece of writing is no longer than a paragraph. The sentences that precede the thesis help ease the reader into the paper, providing background information and setting the context for your argument. Then the thesis statement launches the readers into the argument. When you place your statement of argument in this conspicuous place, your readers will recognize your main point right away.

How do you come up with a thesis? You may already have some insight into the topic at hand. If not, you need to develop a question that will lead you to an interpretation. Some assignments already ask such a question. If that's the case, be sure that your thesis statement does not merely turn the question into a bland statement. When you try to formulate a question of your own, you will quickly discover that some questions work better than others and some don't work at all. A question that you can answer easily—such as, when did the United States officially enter World War I?—isn't likely to lead to an interpretation. For short writing assignments, you'll also find that you won't be able to answer broad questions, such as: what caused World War I? To write a good essay, you need something in between. Think about the sources that you have available to create an interpretation. Let's assume that you've read President Woodrow Wilson's 1917

"War Message," in which he asked Congress to declare war. You might ask something like this: How did Wilson try to persuade the country to enter the war? This question works well because:

1. It is focused enough to be manageable.
2. You have the source that you need to answer it.
3. Answering it will require interpretation.

Having settled on a question to answer, you are ready to gather evidence. For a focused essay, this process may be as simple as reading one or two primary sources and identifying the passages that will help you answer the question. For a more synthetic essay (e.g., for an essay exam), you will need to cull material from a wider variety of sources. In both cases, you will often be able to gather more evidence than you need to support your point. It is worth the trouble to gather extra evidence, however, because you then have the luxury of choosing the evidence that works best.

As you search the sources for evidence, you should begin to work out an answer to your question. Once you have some inkling of the answer, it becomes a hypothesis that you can then test and refine. Avoid fully committing yourself to a position until you have considered all of the available evidence. You may find some evidence that forces you to rethink your argument or even to change your mind completely. To construct a persuasive essay, you need to account for evidence that might seem to weaken your argument, so you should pay careful attention to relevant material that does not support your thesis. Often, the process of confronting anomalous evidence will lead you to a more sophisticated or subtle thesis.

The fact that the thesis statement comes near the beginning of the finished essay does not mean that you have to write the thesis statement before you can begin drafting. Some writers can do this; many writers who try to do it produce an essay that doesn't state the main point clearly until the conclusion. You can avoid this mistake if you use drafting as an exploratory process. You need to have some idea of your main point before you start drafting, but the writing process can allow you to refine your idea, to increase its specificity, sophistication, and clarity.

When you begin drafting, then, don't spend too much time fretting over the exact wording of the introduction and thesis statement. Instead, get started by organizing and analyzing your evidence, one idea and one paragraph at a time. Having pieced everything together, you will have a much better sense of your overall argument; you will be more prepared to write a clear and specific thesis statement. After you articulate the thesis, you will need to bring the rest of the essay into line with it. That's why it is crucial to plan on writing multiple drafts. Revising is about more than proofreading; it is about making sure that all of the parts of the essay work together to convey your main point.

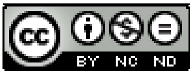
Whatever your writing process, you should always be sure that the thesis statement of your final draft expresses your main point as clearly as possible. Often, the conclusion of an early draft reflects the main point better than the original thesis statement. If you find this characteristic in your writing, consider using the insight of the conclusion to rewrite the introduction and thesis statement. Then, write a new conclusion that moves beyond summarizing the main point.

Although a thesis statement should be very specific, it cannot convey everything that you want to say. It will introduce neither your evidence nor the many pieces of your argument. Instead, it will concisely state your understanding of the issue at hand. For example: “Despite his strong admiration for the historical figure of Jesus, Thomas Jefferson was a deist— not a Christian.” This thesis is an argumentative assertion, and a paper would need evidence to prove it. Your readers will not need you to say, “My argument is . . .,” but if you can add that phrase to the beginning of your thesis statement, you are probably on the right track.

Stating the thesis is only the beginning of the process of writing an essay. Your thesis statement is a promise to the reader. Be sure that you keep that promise by providing ample evidence for your argument. If you can learn this skill, it will serve you well in our society, which needs people capable of making sense of an overwhelming flood of unorganized information.

See also:

- Avoiding a Pseudo-Thesis
- Using Topic Sentences



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Writing Process

1. **Choose a Topic.**
    - In many cases, this step is already done for you. If not, you need to pick something (or some things) to write about, such as an event, a person, a text, or a work of art.
2. **Do Preliminary Research.**
    - Use the library and the Internet (but not the Internet exclusively) to learn about the broad contours of your chosen topic. Find out what is out there and what piques your interest. (In some cases, of course, you may simply be using the assigned readings from your course.)
3. **Narrow your Topic.**
    - Often, your starting topic is too broad. If you start with the American Revolution, for instance, you will need to do some reading to find a more manageable sub-topic, such as the so-called "Boston Massacre." As you do research on this narrower topic, you may find that you need to repeat this narrowing process multiple times.
4. **Form a Question.**
    - The first step to developing an argument is to form a question that you can answer. This question should take both thought and research to answer. Generally, questions about "how" or "why" will help lead you to an interpretation. Questions that seem to center on basic facts, on the other hand, probably won't lead you to an argument.
5. **Gather Evidence.**
    - After you have formed a question, you need to review what you already know and seek out additional information in order to develop an answer. With any luck, you will soon formulate a hypothesis that will help focus your search for evidence. Your evidence will likely include facts and figures, examples, and perhaps some key quotations. It is a good idea to gather more evidence than you need and then select the best specimens.
6. **Begin Writing to Explore Thesis.**
    - This is the hardest step. If you like, make a quick outline or brainstorm on a blank sheet of paper. Do whatever it takes to get some ideas flowing. Then start writing! Write briefly about the broader context of your question. Do some analysis of the relevant evidence that you have gathered. Repeat this step multiple times in order to make sense of your evidence. Step back and see what you have.
7. **Solidify Thesis and Revise.**
    - You will probably need to repeat steps 5 and 6 until you have both an answer to your question and all of the evidence that you need to support your answer. The next step is to turn your answer into a clear and concise thesis statement—a sentence (or two) that presents your argument. You now have the main building blocks of your essay, but you still have plenty of work to do. Your next step will be organize the material you have generated. You will need an introduction to lead up to the thesis, paragraphs (with one main point each) to present your evidence, transitions to connect paragraphs, and a conclusion that pulls together your argument and reflects on its significance. After you have completed a draft, you will then need to revise it!

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Using Topic Sentences

The “topic sentence” that you should have at the beginning of every paragraph in an essay is probably misnamed—at least if you are writing to make an argument. In an argumentative essay, topic sentences need to do more than simply mention a “topic” for the paragraph. To be effective, a topic sentence should both state a specific main point for the paragraph and implicitly refer back to the essay’s thesis.

Just as the defense attorney explains why the witness’s testimony clears her client, the topic sentences of an essay should move your argument along, explaining how and why the forthcoming evidence supports your main point. If a paragraph lacks an argumentative topic sentence, it is merely dispensing information, which may well seem pointless to your readers.

To test whether a would-be topic sentence is actually doing its job, you might ask: does the sentence have a built-in answer to the “so what” question? If not, you probably need to revise. Often, you will need to write a somewhat more complex sentence that links together multiple concepts. (If you start applying this test, you might notice that no sentence that simply states a fact—that merely describes—can meet the “so what” criterion.)

Here, for instance, are a couple of weak topic sentences for a paragraph about the U.S. Constitution, in an essay that says it argues that the Constitution forged a legitimate representative government:

> The convention that framed the Constitution met in Philadelphia.
>
> The framers had difficulty figuring out a system of representation.

The first sentence above is merely a statement of fact—it doesn’t have any power to advance an argument. The second sentence at least includes an idea, that the issue of representation posed difficulties, but it is too vague: it neither attempts to explain why there was a problem nor why the problem mattered. Here, by contrast, is a sentence that could help advance the thesis in question:

> The ratification debate and process allowed ordinary voters, including the majority of free men, to give the Constitution their approval.

This sentence works because it puts together two ideas—the ratification process and voter approval—and these ideas in turn help support the thesis. (I have to add, though, that this argument is far from airtight,

historically speaking, given that the ratification process excluded the majority of the adult population, including all women and unfree servants and slaves.)

Topic sentences often need to do the additional work of helping make the transition from one paragraph to the next. You can usually make a transition with just a word or phrase that refers to the main idea of the previous paragraph. (Note that you do not need to make the transition twice—at both the end of one paragraph and the beginning of the next. On my essay rubric, I call this "overwriting" a transition.) But you usually need to gesture at the connections between each paragraph. Again, the purpose of doing so is to help move your argument along by connecting one idea to the next and explaining why each idea matters.

The well-written topic sentence thus plays a crucial role in the development of your essay's argument. An essay without argumentative topic sentences will probably leave your reader unpersuaded and unsatisfied. You may be filling the pages, but you won't be making your point.

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Avoiding a Pseudo-Thesis

A pseudo-thesis is an attempted thesis statement that falls flat because it fails to state a specific argument.

Often, the pseudo-thesis appears in the form of a rhetorical question, such as, "Was it really necessary for the United States to enter the Great War?" Although this kind of questioning is important to the writing process, it is counter-productive within the context of an argumentative essay. The point of the essay, after all, is to attempt to answer the question. If you do ask a rhetorical question in your introduction, you also need to answer it. To withhold the answer—to withhold your position—is to risk losing your reader. It is only with the thesis in mind that the reader can make sense of the essay's evidence.

Another way to write a pseudo-thesis is to tell the reader what the essay is going to do. For instance: "This essay will explore the significance of foreign trade for the U.S. entry into the Great War." This sentence is fine, but it only reveals the topic of the essay—not the argument. It begs the question. Likewise, the pseudo-thesis might simply list the subjects that the essay will cover: "This essay will consider the role of political idealism and economic interest in connection with the U.S. entry into the Great War." In this case, the author should go ahead and make the nature of that connection explicit.

Most commonly, a pseudo-thesis is simply vague, as in the following examples:

> The U.S. entered the Great War for several reasons.
>
> The U.S. entry into the Great War was very controversial.

Each of these examples begs the question. What were the reasons? Why was it controversial?

A pseudo-thesis is not only ineffective, but it often symptomizes a larger problem: the need for revision. Writing a good essay requires embarking on a process of drawing some significant conclusion and arguing on its behalf. It takes time and thought to sharpen a thesis. Many good writers actually start out with a pseudo-thesis, just to get going, and only gradually refine that statement into a specific and precise statement about the position to be argued. If you take this route, be sure to revise your thesis statement after you have drafted the body of the essay; then, revise the draft in order to make each paragraph support your thesis.

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Using Evidence

Introduction

Many historical essays rely heavily on textual evidence (quotations from written sources) to support their arguments. Historians draw textual evidence from many kinds of sources, such as letters, novels, political treatises, and advertisements. Textual evidence is sometimes presented by paraphrasing (summarizing in one's own words), if the particular language used seems insignificant, but historians often find it more effective to quote key phrases and brief passages. As you practice using quotations to provide evidence for your own historical interpretations, consider the following principles as guidelines.

Introduce All Quotations

When you quote, keep your purpose in mind. Generally, you are using the quotation to support a particular point of an argument, usually reflected in a paragraph's topic sentence and connected to a larger thesis. In order to function as evidence, then, a quotation needs to be properly introduced. If you are quoting a historian or scholar—an authority on the subject at hand—you should say so. (In most cases, it is not necessary to provide an institutional affiliation for a scholar; it is enough to note that the person is an expert scholar of the topic at hand.) For example:

> As colonial historian Jack Greene has argued, . . .
>
> According to Kathryn Kish Sklar, a scholar of American women's history, . . .

Likewise, when you quote a primary source, you need to provide relevant context, so that your readers can understand the quotation's significance. For example:

> In her 1861 memoir, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Harriet Jacobs described the horrors of slavery as experienced by a young woman: "[T]here is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men."[1]

In sum, you need to be sure that you adequately describe the source of your quotations. Without such information, your readers will be unable to determine the relevance of the quotation or the validity of the evidence. Rather than serving as convincing evidence or an illuminating illustration, a quotation without context will simply frustrate or confuse your readers.

Integrate All Quotations into Your Own Sentences

Avoid the temptation to "drop" unconnected quotations into your essays. Generally, short quotations can be worked directly into your own sentence. For example:

> In his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson declared slavery to be a "cruel war against human nature itself."[2]

If you are quoting an independent clause or multiple sentences, however, the rules of syntax (sentence structure) require that you use a colon to set off the quotation. Additionally, when you incorporate a quotation into your own sentence structure, you need to make sure that you create a grammatically correct sentence. (See more examples of how to integrate quotations.)

Choose Quotations Carefully

Don't quote regarding simple facts. Don't quote just to quote. Quote to support or illustrate your point, and be sure to quote accurately. If you decide to paraphrase rather than to quote, be sure to completely rephrase the passage—you need to do more than merely rearrange a few words or plug synonyms into a copied sentence structure. Whether you paraphrase or quote or a source, you need to provide a citation.

Analyze or Comment on Quotations

If a passage is worth quoting, it is also worth explaining how the passage supports the point that you want to make—especially in the case of primary source evidence. For complex quotations, you may well need to start by restating the passage in your own words. Here you can use key phrases such as: "In other words, . . ."; or "What Fuller was saying was that . . ."; or "Emerson meant that . . ."; or "The law implied that . . ." Even for relatively self-explanatory quotations, you need to comment on the connection between the quotation and the point that you are trying to make. In sum, always follow quotations with some sort of analysis or explanation of significance. Quotations do not speak for themselves—at least not fully. It is your job to connect them to your main points.

Use Ellipses and Brackets Correctly

Enclose any insertions that you make in a quotation in brackets. If there is a typographical error in the quotation, you should reproduce the error, but follow it with [*sic*], which will indicate to your readers that the error is in the original. (You don't need to do this if you are quoting a pre-modern writer who used a good deal of non-standard spellings.) If there is an unclear pronoun (he, she, they, *etc.*) or other referent in the quotation, you can insert a clarifying explanation in brackets. Furthermore, part of quoting accurately means

using ellipses (. . .) to show when you have left out words. If you skip end punctuation mark, such as a period, and effectively combine two sentences you should use four ellipses. If you merely skip a phrase within a sentence, just use three ellipses. When you use ellipses to shorten a quotation, make certain that you are not changing its meaning!

Cite Specific Page Numbers

When you quote or paraphrase from a book, article, or primary source, you need to indicate the specific page number from which you quoted, paraphrased, or drew your information. It is not enough simply to cite the entire text. See Avoiding Plagiarism for more details.

Notes:

[1] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 22.

[2] *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson,* vol. 1, ed. Albert Ellery Bergh (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 34.

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Integrating Quotations

All quotations should be properly integrated into your own sentences.

When using quotations to provide evidence or examples, you should connect them to your own sentences. This connection is necessary to help the reader see both the source of the quotation and your reason for using it. (The relationship between your own words and a quotation should be immediately apparent; readers should not have to look for the citation or footnote to figure out the source of a quotation.) A quotation dropped into your prose from out of nowhere is confusing rather than helpful.

Short quotations can often be integrated directly into your own sentences, but quotations that include a new grammatical subject or that consist of more than one independent clause should be set off with a colon. (You cannot effectively incorporate a multi-sentence quotation into the syntax of your own sentence.)

Please note that you never need to say "in a quote by …" The words you are quoting are not a "quote" until you quote them. Instead, you can say "according to" or "as [author's name] has said," etc.

Example 1:

Wrong: Powhatan's famous daughter was not the infatuated girl from Disney's version of the story. "Pocahontas was a dutiful child who fulfilled a very traditional function in Native politics and diplomacy."[1]

Right: Powhatan's famous daughter was not the infatuated girl from Disney's version of the story. As Daniel Richter argued in *Facing East from Indian Country*, "Pocahontas was a dutiful child who fulfilled a very traditional function in Native politics and diplomacy."

Comment: In the wrong version, the source of the quotation is unclear. The purpose of quoting a secondary source is to supply evidence or an especially insightful idea. To achieve the intended effect, the quotation must come from an apparent and reliable source.

Example 2:

Wrong: In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln noted the surprising length and severity of the Civil War, "Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease."

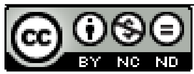
Right: In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln noted the surprising length and severity of the Civil War: "Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should

cease."

Comment: Notice that the wrong version creates a comma splice, because the first comma is followed by an independent clause without an intervening conjunction. Furthermore, the syntax collapses, because the multiple independent clauses of the quotation are erroneously inserted into the syntax of the primary clause. Unfortunately, some published authors do not follow this rule.

Notes:

[1] Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 77.



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Sample Paragraph

The following paragraph comes from an essay that Meg Gregory wrote for my Problems in American Thought class during the Fall semester of 2006. (I made only a couple of small edits.) Each of my comments in red matches up with the previous underlined passage. –DV

Although Transcendentalism would have been considered to be a pack of heresies by the Calvinistic Puritans of the past, it drew upon many of the basic seeds for religious thought that were present in the Puritan teachings. *{Note the specific and argumentative topic sentence.}* Leading Puritan historian, Perry Miller explains that, "From the time of Edwards to that of Emerson, the husks of Puritanism were being discarded, but the energies of many Puritans were not yet diverted—they could not be diverted—from a passionate search of the soul and of nature, from the quest to which Calvinism had devoted them."[1] {*Note the introduction of Perry Miller—we can tell why his views matter.}* In other words, the Transcendentalist quests for finding God in nature as well as the desire for deep connection with God were simply carryovers from the Puritanical past. *{Note the explanation of Miller's words.}* A good example of this is the close relationship between Emerson's sentiment of virtue and what the leading Calvinist Preacher Jonathan Edwards called "the divine light." *{Note the connection of the primary source with the point being made.}* In his famous "Divine Light" sermon, Edwards explained the divine light: "He [the believer] does not rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart."[2] *{Note the introduction of Edwards and his sermon.}* Emerson was speaking of the same idea when he wrote: "[T]he sentiment of virtue is a reverence and delight in the presence of certain divine laws… They will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. They elude our persevering thought; yet we read them hourly in each other's faces, in each other's actions, in our remorse."[3] *{Note the explicit connection drawn with Emerson and the use of a colon to set off the multi-sentence quotation.}* Each of these men wrote of an innate feeling or connection between God and humanity that could not be explained, only felt by the believer. *{Note the concluding comment that ties the pieces together.}*

Notes:

[1] Perry Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press. 1956), 202.

[2] Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" in *Problems in American Thought Reader*, ed. David J. Voelker (University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, 2006), 2.

[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Divinity School Address," in *Problems in American Thought Reader*, 2.

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Using Footnotes

Introduction

Historians generally use the footnote citation style outlined in the *Chicago Manual of Style* to cite their sources—and for good reason. First, historians often use footnotes to carry on a conversation with other historians whose work they are building upon or criticizing. Second, historians know that other historians are likely to read their footnotes and to seek out their sources to verify their interpretations. Many historical sources are difficult to find and therefore require a more specific description than can be accomplished through other citation methods. In short, footnotes or endnotes make good sense for historians.

A Few Basics

- Learn to use the "insert footnote" function in your word processing software, which automatically takes care of footnote superscripts and numbering. (Do not type notes into the footer of the document, as every note will then appear on every page. This approach will not allow you to give specific page numbers for each citation.) Get help: Microsoft Word || Google Docs.
- Footnotes are normally rendered in 10-point font (or two points smaller than the font for the main text). I have used 12-point font in the examples below, however, for your reading comfort.
- If a source is paginated, you must include a specific page number for each citation for a paraphrase or quotation. If there are no page numbers but some other means of identifying specific locations, use that marker instead (i.e., location number, paragraph number, etc.).
- As a general rule, if your first footnote citation of each source is a complete citation, you do not need to provide a bibliography or works cited page, though some instructors may beg to differ.
- Make sure that you use footnote rather than bibliography format in your footnotes. Bibliography format is designed to create a list that can be alphabetized. Footnotes, however, are in a sentence format.
- For additional examples and citation formats, see the *Chicago Manual of Style* citation page at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) (use the menu on the left side of the OWL page).

Getting Started

- **First Citation**
  - The first citation of a source needs to give complete information about the source. When you cite an article or source that is part of a larger work, you need to provide both the page range for the complete article or source (in the first citation) and the specific page numbers that you refer to or quote from. See the sample footnotes below.
- **Repeated Citations**
  - Repeated citations normally need to state only the author's last name, an abbreviated title, and page numbers. (If you are citing works by two or more authors with the same last name, you would need to use the first name as well.) Here are some sample subsequent citations:

        - [4] Fox, "Niebubr," 254.
        - [5] Edwards, "Sinners," 3.
- **Using Italics and Quotation Marks for Source Titles**
    - In footnotes as well as in the body of an essay, you should *italicize* titles of books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and films. The titles of articles, short stories, and poems are simply placed inside quotation marks.

Citing Books

Single-Author Book

[6] Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995), 45.

Book with an Editor and Introduction

[7] Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*, edited with introduction by Jay Fliegelman (New York: Penguin, 1991), 67.

E-Book

[8] David S. Reynolds, *John Brown: Abolitionist* (New York: Vintage, 2006), Kindle edition, chap. 5. [Give the citation of the paper version and then note the kind of e-book edition (Kindle, Nook, Google, etc.) and the chapter number, assuming page numbers are not available.]

Essay in Edited Book

[9] Nathan O. Hatch, "The Second Great Awakening and the Market Revolution," in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the Early American Republic*, edited by David T. Konig (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), 243-64, see 245. [Note: The page range is for the entire essay, and it should be included with the first, complete citation. The "see 254" refers to the specific page being cited.]

[10] Karen Halttunen, "Early American Murder Narratives," in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, edited by Richard W. Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 66-101, see 68-72.

Primary Source in Edited Collection

[11] Lidian Emerson, "Transcendental Bible," in *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 175-77.

Editor's Headnote on Primary Source in Edited Collection

[12] Lawrence Buell, headnote for Lidian Emerson, "Transcendental Bible," in *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, edited by Lawrence Buell (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 175.

Citing Articles

Article in Scholarly Journal

[13] Neal Salisbury, "The Indians' Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of Europeans," *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996): 435-458. [Note: 53 is the volume number. Note that if you are citing an article from a scholarly journal, you don't need to cite the online database, such as Ebscohost or JSTOR, and you do not need to provide the link. Instead, give the full citation for the journal.]

Article in Reference Work

[14] James T. Kloppenberg, "Enlightenment," in *A Companion to American Thought*, edited by Richard W. Fox and James T. Kloppenberg (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), 207-09.

Article in Magazine

[15] Thomas Adolphus Trollope, "Some Recollections of Hiram Powers," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, Feb. 1875, 205-15, see 207-08.

Citing Online Resources

Online Document

[16] Abraham Lincoln, "The Emancipation Proclamation," January 1, 1863, http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=34&page=transcript.

Online Photograph

[17] Alison Smith, "The Fox River," March 18, 2013. http://www.gblocalreports.com/waterways/riverwatch.html

Online Audio or Video

[18] Hannah Tiedt, "Baird Creek Greenway: Local Wilderness," Part 1. Dec. 10, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tA1L5DL3ms

Podcast

[19] Krista Tippett, interview with Robin Wall Kimmerer, "The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life," *On Being*, podcast audio, Feb. 25, 2016, https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-in-all-kinds-of-life/.

Citing Course Materials

Class Lectures, Slides, and Handouts, etc.

[20] David Voelker, class lecture, 15 October 2012.

[21] David Voelker, "Transcendentalism," PowerPoint slides, 15 October 2012.

[22] David Voelker, "The Enlightenment," History 302 Handout, Fall 2012.

Article in Coursepack

[23] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," in *Problems of American Thought Reader,* edited by David J. Voelker (Green Bay, Univ. of Wisconsin–Green Bay, 2005), 67. [Note: If you are using a published secondary source that appears inside a coursepack or on D2L, please cite the original source using the citation information provided with the source, usually on the first page. Do not provide links to D2L. Instead, give the most complete citation that you can with the information available.]

Coursepack Article Authored by Instructor

[24] David Voelker, introduction to William Ellery Channing, "'The Moral Argument Against Calvinism' (1820) and 'Likeness to God' (1828)," in *Problems in American Thought Reader* (2007)*,* 32.

Quotations in Books, Articles, etc.

[25] Margaret Fuller, Sept. 4, 1841, letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in . . . [Then give the full citation of the source in which the quotation appears. Give as much information as you have about the quotation, such as the date, etc., and cite the book or article and the page number.]

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Grammar & Style

We know from folk wisdom and fables that appearances can be deceiving. Wolves sometimes wear sheep's clothing, and good books sometimes have bad covers. Nevertheless, when it comes to your writing, appearance as well as content will shape your readers' opinions of your work. The conventions of spelling and grammar may be mere conventions, but they are conventions that facilitate communication. Readers will notice if you fail to observe the rules. Sometimes a misspelled word or misused punctuation mark will alert your readers that you did not take the time to proofread. More seriously, an error may leave readers unsure of what you meant: content and style are not easily separated.

Following the conventions and rules of grammar and style is a skill that takes practice. What better time to practice than during your college career, when you have the ability to get feedback and and learn from your mistakes, so that you can improve the next time?

This section of the handbook includes guidelines in just a few areas:

- Complete Sentences
- Gender-Inclusive Language
- Using Consistent Tenses

I encourage you to make use of the following additional resources, as you hone your writing abilities:

- Common Errors in English Usage, by Professor Paul Brians, Washington State University

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Complete Sentences

Every sentence should be a complete sentence, with an independent clause consisting of both a subject (noun) and a predicate (verb).

Sentence-level errors will frustrate your readers, forcing them to stop to retrace their steps in order to figure out what you really meant to say.[1] Notice the effect of the following error on your reading process:

> The Aztecs conquered many peoples and established a tributary system, under Aztec power the subordinate villages paid tribute in the form of corn and other valuable items.

After reading the initial independent clause—the words leading up to the comma—you might naturally have expected that *under* would have begun a prepositional phrase modifying the word *system*. As the sentence runs on, though, it becomes clear that it means something else.

The sentence would have been fine, if it had proceeded as follows:

> The Aztecs conquered many peoples and established a tributary system, under which subordinate villages paid tribute in the form of corn and other valuable items.

Instead, the first version of the sentence violates basic rules of punctuation and syntax by splicing together two independent clauses with a comma, thus creating a RUN-ON SENTENCE. The original sentence above, then, would stymie careful readers, requiring them to reread the sentence while mentally correcting the error.

Our rules about punctuating sentences exist for a very good reason: the human mind does not easily cope with syntactical uncertainty. The only way to makes sense of such a sentence is to go back to the beginning and start over.

Below are a few more examples of other common sentence-level errors:

> Wrong: Although the United States entered the Great War in 1917.
>
> Right: Although the United States entered the Great War in 1917, the conflict actually began in 1914.
>
> Comment: Notice that the wrong version would be a complete sentence without “although.” With

"although" at the beginning, however, the clause is no longer independent—it is a FRAGMENT.

***

Wrong: Abraham Lincoln, writing a great speech, called the Gettysburg address.

Right: Abraham Lincoln wrote a great speech called the Gettysburg Address.

Comment: This error also creates a FRAGMENT. Notice that there are verb forms in the wrong version ("*writing*" and "*called*"), but they do not function as predicates.

***

Wrong: The Populist Party grew rapidly during the early 1890s, it lost its strength after backing the Democratic presidential candidate in 1896.

Right: The Populist Party grew rapidly during the early 1890s, but it lost its strength after backing the Democratic presidential candidate in 1896.

Comment: This problem is known as a COMMA SPLICE. The two parts of the sentences are both independent clauses, and they should either be joined by a comma and a conjunction (*but*, in the right version) or separated by a period or semicolon.

***

Comment: Please note that "however" is not a conjunction. If you use "however" in place of "*but*," as in the first example below, you create a COMMA SPLICE.

Wrong: I enjoy visiting the zoo, however I am afraid to set foot in the reptile house.

Right: I enjoy visiting the zoo, but I am afraid to set foot in the reptile house.

Right: I enjoy visiting the zoo; I do not, however, set foot in the reptile house.

For more help with sentence errors, see this online handout on commas at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center.

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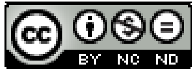
[1] Please note that in poetry and creative prose, it can be acceptable to intentionally defy grammatical rules.



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Gender-Inclusive Language

Use gender-inclusive language when appropriate.

Avoid using language that apparently excludes women when you actually mean to include them. Use *humanity* or *humankind* instead of *man* or *mankind*. Do not use *he* or *him* or *his* to refer to a generic person. Instead, alternate male and female pronouns, use both pronouns together, or switch to a plural construction. (But do not use *s/he*, which is a non-word, or *she/he*, which is clumsy.) Please note that in some cases, you would be distorting the past by using gender-inclusive language. If you are writing about American voters in the 1830s, for instance, it would be misleading to write about men *and* women casting ballots, as only men could vote at the time (and, in most states, only white men).

> **Not Inclusive:** In order to become a full member of the congregation, a Puritan had to tell about his conversion experience.
>
> **Inclusive:** In order to become a full member of the congregation, a Puritan had to tell about his or her conversion experience.
>
> **Inclusive:** In order to become full members of the congregation, Puritans had to tell about their conversion experiences.

Note: It is becoming increasingly accepted to use the plural *they* as a singular pronoun rather than using some combination of *he* and *she.* This construction takes a bit of getting used to, and many writers and editors still avoid it, but it has the virtue of avoiding a binary conception of gender–making it even more inclusive than the other options noted above, especially in contemporary contexts.

For more information about the singular "they," see: Celeste Mora, "What Is the Singular They, and Why Should I Use It?," *Grammarly* blog.

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Using Consistent Tenses

When you are writing about the past, use the past tense consistently.

Use the past tense to write about the past. You should only use the present tense in a historical essay when you are writing about the present. Note that your historical interpretation itself is taking place in the present; so it may be appropriate to write that evidence "suggests" a particular conclusion, etc.

> **Wrong:** The coming of World War II finally ends the Great Depression.
>
> **Right:** The coming of World War II finally ended the Great Depression.

> **Wrong:** Thomas Jefferson says that "all men are created equal," and this principle helped inspire American democracy.
>
> **Right:** Thomas Jefferson said that "all men are created equal," and this principle helped inspire American democracy.

Comment: Although it is technically acceptable to write "Thomas Jefferson says," because you are writing about a text that exists in the present, this use of the "historical present" does not work well in historical writing—it will lead to unnecessary and confusing tense switching.

Avoid using "would" to indicate repeated actions in the past:

> Before the invention of plumbing, "night soil" men would collect human waste to sell to farmers for use as fertilizer. **(Avoid)**

Instead, use standard past-tense forms:

> Before the invention of plumbing, "night soil" men collected human waste to sell to farmers for use as fertilizer.

or

> Before the invention of plumbing, it was common for "night soil" men to collect human waste to sell to farmers for use as fertilizer.

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Additional Resources

This page is under development.

- The opening section of Diana Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual* (7th edition) on "Clarity," pp. 3–20, provides excellent suggestions for writing clearly and concisely.
- If you have had problems in the past with sentence errors, such as fragments, comma splices, and run-ons, review Hacker, sections 14–15.
- If you aren't sure about the difference between a colon and a semicolon, or a semicolon and a comma, please review Hacker, section 18.
- Common Errors in English Usage

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