Quick Guide to Writing Errors

Overview

This report describes the most common errors committed by students in preparing papers of all types for classes taught by Dr. Bates. The report is an accompaniment to the separate report, *Technical Report Writing Guidelines*. Reading and paying attention to both these reports will guarantee your best chance at good grades on papers for these classes. If you are uninformed about the use of special features of your word processor, you will not be able to do this easily. Get a book like **Word for Dummies** and use it. This report only deals with the major issues. For details, see the full *Guidelines* report, and refer to the APA Style Manual (American Psychological Association) for anything not addressed here.

Format

You are expected to follow these formats precisely, not because there are no other good formats, but because once you can achieve a specific format, then you will be qualified to make and use your own formats.

> **Physical Format**. Learn to set and modify settings for page, paragraph, and font formatting. Use the following settings for this class:

> *Margins*: Left, 1.15", Top, Bottom, and Right margins 0.8". Use left-justified text.

> *Header*: when a cover page is not used, you must set the page header to be different for the first and following pages. The first page needs the standard class header information (see sample below) but no page number. Pages two plus need *at least* the page number but not the class header. You may place the page number wherever you like as long as it is in the header or footer area.

> *Font*. It is preferred that you use a serif-type font such as Times Roman or Times New Roman, as these are especially easy to read. Set the font size to 11 points. You can increase the font size to 12 points for headings only, and headings may also be set in a sans-serif font such as Arial or Helvetica. Indented quotations should be set to 10 points, italicized.

> Paragraph formats include line spacing, indents, and spaces between paragraphs.

> *Line spacing* should be set to 1.5 lines or 18 points for electronic submissions, 20 points or double spaced for hard copy submissions (gives me room to write between the lines).

> *Indents*. You may either indent the first line of each paragraph, or add an extra 6 points of spacing (not a whole line) between paragraphs. Do not do both, and do not fail to do one of them. An extra line should be inserted BEFORE headings, but not after them.

Outlines and Headings

You have probably been asked to prepare a synopsis and an outline for your paper before it is approved. The reasons for this are that you must have a topic that is appropriate and that you can deal with, and you must structure your paper to achieve your communication goals. A paper that just starts and rambles on for a while, then ends, is neither interesting, nor communicative. Make sure that your paper is structured in the same way as your approved outline, and that you use explicit headings to show the reader where the sections begin and end. 'Explicit' means that the headings from your outline, or something quite like them, appear as headings for the sections of your actual paper.

Grammar and Spelling

This is a university, and it is expected that you will write at a university level. Papers which are submitted with frequent spelling and grammar errors may be rejected outright, especially if it is clear that the errors are from lack of effort. Not all of you are going to be starting out as good writers. All that I expect is that you do your absolute best, working hard to control errors, and that you improve during the semester. Your end of term papers should reflect your best abilities in grammar, spelling, and usage.

References and Citations

You are not an expert. That is, you may be, but it is not acknowledged by the rest of the world until you are published and have graduated. Until you are, you must write papers with content that you read in books, journals, and other sources that are written by experts. These sources are called 'references'. When you use information from a reference, you must normally

1. paraphrase the information, using your own words, then
2. provide the reader with information about the reference so they know where it came from.

There are two types of reference entries required: in-text citations, and a reference list.

1. ***in-text citations***. Before the period ending the sentence or paragraph, use an in-text citation to show which reference was used. The format is (Author, year, page); eg: (Bates, 2002, p. 21)
2. ***reference list***. At the end of the paper, before any appendices, you must list all the references you actually used to write the paper. They must be listed in correct and complete APA format, and sorted alphabetically using the author's last name.

If you think about it, you will see that this means that every in-text citation must be reflected by an entry in the reference list, and likewise, every reference list entry must relate to an in-text citation in the paper. Sources that were read but not actually listed should not be listed in the reference list. If you like, you can put them in a separate "Bibliography", but a bibliography (unlike a reference list) is not required for this class. ***Do not use footnotes***. If you do not give credit to the sources you used, your paper is likely to receive a grade of zero, and there may be other consequences (see number 8. below)

Most Common Errors

Here is a list of the most common *errors* I see in student papers. You might want to use this as a checklist…

1. Margins left at Word's default settings (instead of changing them as expected)
2. Class header information appears on every page, and no page numbers are provided.
3. Weird paragraph formatting; hard line returns at the end of lines within a paragraph,
4. Use of spaces instead of tabs for indents or locating text in columns; use of line feeds rather than manual page break to move text to a new page.
5. Use of personal pronouns including "I", "you", "we", etcetera when it is not necessary,
6. Changes in font size or type in various parts of a paper.
7. Line spacing that is too small or too large, or that varies.
8. Failure to check spelling (a spell checker is a good start, but not enough to finish the job)
9. Failure to check grammar and sentence structure.
10. Verb forms that do not agree with nearby verb forms (tenses do not agree, or singular-plural disagreements)
11. Failure to give credit with citations in text and references. ***This is plagiarism – a form of cheating – and can result in a grade of zero for the paper or even the course, or in university sanctions.***

Technical Report Writing Checklist

As you prepare your outlines and write your reports, the following checklist may help you to be sure that you have not made any serious errors or omissions:

_____ ***If this is a lab report***, have you conducted your test according to a **standard test method**? If not, is it because there is no standard method? Have you listed the number and **full** title of the method in the <u>procedures</u> section of your report?

_____ ***If this is a lab report***, have you **identified** all the **variables** related to the materials and conditions of your test? Have you attempted to control all the variables that you are not interested in studying? Have you discussed any uncontrolled variables?

_____ Are you working from an **outline**, or making it up as you go?

_____ Are the **sections** of your report provided with appropriate and meaningful **headings**, APA style, to make the report easier to read and understand?

_____ Do the individual **sections** of your report contain the information that is indicated in the report writing guidelines?

_____ Have you done enough **background reading**, to help you understand the materials theory and implications of your study? ***If this is a lab report***, have you compared test results to published values?

_____ Does your discussion or main report body reflect the knowledge gained from these **readings**? Do you understand what you are writing about? Have you given credit where it is due?

_____ Have you indicated, by **citations** in the text of your report, where ideas or information come from either books or journals that you have read?

_____ Does each **citation** in the report have a corresponding entry in the reference list?

_____ Does each entry in the **reference list** have a corresponding citation in the text?

_____ Are your entries in the **reference list** correct and complete, and in alphabetical order by author as specified by APA?

Is the report **neatly typed** and **proofread** for:

_____   spelling errors?

_____   grammatical errors?

_____   poor sentences and poorly chosen words?

Examples of Incorrect Writing

See how many errors you can find in each sentence or psuedo-sentence.

- Although, the success rate is relatively low, couples have sought this means as an alternative to adoption.
- Most individual's learn about various sciences from their educational resources.
- why were there no building blow up by the technology?
- As gunpowder was developed in China, 400 years before it got Europe, history might tell us that due to its lack of walls and castle structures that we may think gunpowder did not impact China, but the fall of the Tang dynasty shows otherwise.
- So I hope that here it is, and I hope it is right this time. Please dont hesitate to email me back if it is incorrect or if there is any questions you have for me.