

# ***Writing Effective Essays and Reports***

**7<sup>th</sup> Edition**

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## **Printing the Booklet**

This booklet is available in the Adobe Acrobat format:

[www.environment.uwaterloo.ca/u/rdeloe/writing\\_booklet/](http://www.environment.uwaterloo.ca/u/rdeloe/writing_booklet/)

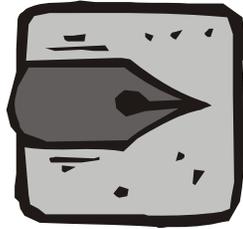
Future versions of the booklet will be available at this site.

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# 1. The Importance of Writing Well



Writing is a skill and an art. Good writers know the basics of grammar, language, and style. Their writing communicates ideas clearly and efficiently. Great writers have a gift for language. Arguments that seem merely reasonable in the hands of a good writer become powerful and convincing in the hands of a great writer.

Learning to write well requires a lot of hard work and practice – but it’s worth making the effort. Here are two reasons:

1. *If you can’t communicate your ideas effectively, then they won’t have the desired impact.* Most people don’t have the time or patience to read your work more than once in an effort to figure out what you’re really trying to say.
2. *Your written work, whether it is an essay for a course, or a memo to your boss, is a reflection of you.* Many people will not look beyond that reflection. If your writing is weak, then people may overlook your other skills and talents. By the same token, strong and polished writing creates a positive impression of you as a professional and serious person.

Good writing skills can be learned – but usually only with a lot of hard work. Practice and lots of constructive feedback are essential. There are no shortcuts. Word processors are excellent tools, but they can’t turn bad writing into good writing. Words that are spelled correctly, but used incorrectly, may not be caught by your spell checker, and awkward sentences may be

accepted by your grammar checker. Computer software simply isn’t a substitute for learning the basics of writing.

## 1.1. Purpose of the Guide

There are countless different accepted writing styles and conventions. This booklet offers a mainstream approach to preparing essays and reports that should be acceptable in most social and natural/engineering science courses. Conventions in the humanities are quite different. Thus, while much of the general advice will be pertinent to students in the humanities, instructions regarding citation and the organization of essays and reports will be less relevant.

This booklet is not a comprehensive grammar, style and writing guide. Readers interested in more detailed instructions regarding writing, grammar, and style should consult the resources listed in the appendix. Think of this booklet as basic instructions for preparing essays, reports and theses in university or college.

The guidelines and conventions outlined in this book are widely accepted. Nonetheless, you should check with your course instructor for specific expectations.

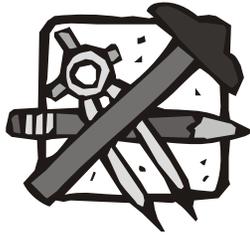
## 1.2. Organization

This booklet is organized into five main sections and an appendix.

- Section 2 outlines a straightforward system for organizing essays and reports, and presents some widely-accepted conventions for improving clarity. The advice in this section is tailored to common expectations in the social and natural/engineering sciences, where theses, reports and essays tend to be written in a fairly straightforward, structured style.

- Section 3 explains why and how to cite sources and presents basic rules for quoting text written by other authors. The author-date system that is common in the social and natural/engineering sciences is described in this section.
- Section 4 explains how to organize a reference list according to a mainstream style that should be acceptable in most social and natural/engineering sciences courses.
- Section 5 provides a checklist that you can use to ensure that you've addressed the various concerns covered in this booklet.
- The appendix addresses three additional topics:
  - Section 6.1 offers tips and suggestions for finding literature and evaluating the relative quality of different kinds of sources.
  - Section 6.2 provides a list of selected word usage and grammar problems that are common in student writing.
  - Section 6.3 suggests a few writing, style and grammar books that you can consult for more information.

## 2. Organizing and Presenting Your Essays and Reports



Essays, reports and theses that communicate effectively have several characteristics in common: they are well written, well researched, clearly organized, and neatly presented. Problems in any of these areas can frustrate readers and reduce the impact of your work. This section provides tips and conventions for organizing and presenting the different elements of your paper, and identifies some common writing and style problems.

The guidelines in this chapter are generic. Don't forget to consult requirements for assignments provided by your course instructor. For example, *research proposals*, *essays*, and *literature reviews* are organized differently.

If you're not sure how to organize your document, then prepare an outline and discuss it with your course instructor.

### 2.1. Beginnings, Middles, and Endings

Have you ever read something, and wondered why you were reading it, or what the point was? All too often people dive right into a topic without setting things up properly. At the same time, we often know that a paper has ended only because we've reached the last page and there's no more text. These are basic organizational problems that are easy to avoid.

No formulas or templates work in all cases. Different kinds of documents lend themselves to different kinds of document or-

ganization. Nevertheless, all of your reports and essays should have at least the following major elements: a beginning (the introduction), a middle (the body), and an end (the conclusion).

### Baiting the Hook: The Introduction

The introduction of a paper or report is your first and best chance to grab the reader's attention and to convince him or her that what you have written is worth reading. Some people (such as course instructors!) have to read the entire essay, no matter how weak the introduction. However, many readers won't bother. If you don't catch their interest right away, then you've lost them.

A well written introduction should accomplish the following:

- *Establish the importance of the problem under consideration.* While you may be convinced of the importance of your topic, its significance may not be obvious to other people. Therefore, it's important that you establish the problem context and provide necessary background material early in your document. Typically you'll need to refer to pertinent literature. This often is a good place to locate your "hook" – the lead that will capture the attention of readers and encourage them to continue reading.
- *Provide an indication of the purpose of the document.* This may be a general statement of the goal or aim of the essay, or it may be a formal statement of the purpose and related objectives of the assignment. In a research proposal, you will be asked to specify the purpose and objectives of the *proposed research*; this is distinct from the purpose of the document.
- Depending on the kind of document that you're writing, it may be important to *state your central position*. For example, in an essay where you have to make an argument, it is important to let the reader know at the outset what position you will take with respect to the issues under consideration. If you are reporting findings from a study where you

tested hypotheses, then you should *state your hypotheses* in the introduction.

- In some essays and reports it will be appropriate to summarize the research approach used in preparing the document. If you are reporting the findings of a study that involved data collection or experiments, then this is your opportunity to provide an overview of data sources, procedures, etc. (In this kind of paper, you'll frequently have a methodology section. Therefore, a brief overview in the introduction may be enough.) Even if you relied exclusively on the literature in your essay or report, you still can give the reader some indication of the approach that you used. For instance, did you compare two important papers? Did you outline a set of evaluative criteria and then apply them to a particular case?
- Finally, it's often helpful to provide an overview of the structure of the document. This doesn't have to be very detailed, but it should alert the reader to the major elements.

### **Delivering the Goods: The Body**

A report that presents findings from a research study will have a different organization, and contain different elements, than a critical literature review, a research proposal or a thesis. Therefore, you should organize the body of your document in a way that reflects its purpose and any specific instructions you've received. The following are some general principles that should apply in most cases:

- Make sure that the body has a logical structure and flow, and that you do not stray from the topic or include material that is not directly relevant. Good writers have learned how to be ruthless, and will cut all extraneous material no matter how long they've laboured to write it in the first place.
- If the assignment is more open-ended, and especially if it is meant to be an essay that presents an argument, then you'll have to think carefully about how to structure the body. Will you use your strongest arguments first, or will

you save them for last? Is there a certain sequence to the arguments? Do some topics only make sense coming before or after other topics?

- In well written essays, theses and reports, authors use introductory and summary sentences and paragraphs in the body to help readers keep track. This is especially important when a complex case is being developed in a paper using several building blocks. It's all too easy for readers to lose track; you never want people to ask themselves "why am I reading this material?" Through careful use of linking and bridging sentences and paragraphs, you can avoid this problem by making connections between arguments or topics.
- Before you consider your paper complete, double-check to ensure that you've addressed the specific requirements of the assignment. If you are writing an argument paper, then it's especially important to ask yourself whether or not you've addressed the topic properly.

### **Wrapping Things Up: The Conclusion**

Inexperienced writers often leave the conclusion to the last minute, or omit it altogether. This is unfortunate because the conclusion can be the most important part of the essay, report or thesis. Think of the conclusion as your best chance to cement your case and convey your findings.

In a complicated, lengthy document, readers may have lost track of your arguments by the time they reach the conclusion. They may have skimmed key points, or simply missed the main point. The conclusion allows you to drag the reader's attention back to the case you're trying to make. In a well written conclusion you can highlight your main findings, draw attention to their importance, and address implications for the literature.

The following bullets summarize some of the main characteristics of a good conclusion:

- If your report or essay is lengthy and complicated, it may be helpful to restate the problem briefly and to summarize key findings. Do not rehash everything you covered in the body.
- Summarizing or highlighting the main points or messages that follow from your analysis is a key task in the conclusion. However, these points *must* be supported by the arguments and evidence that you presented in the body of the document. In other words, it is not appropriate to introduce new data or new arguments that do not follow directly from prior analysis and evidence.
- Finally, it may be appropriate to point the reader towards directions for future inquiry. As someone who has thought about an issue or problem, what issues do you think deserve more attention? What are the next steps? If you are reporting findings from a research project, it will be appropriate to clarify the extent to which you made progress in advancing our understanding of the problem you studied.

## 2.2. Presentation and Layout

A poorly written and incoherent document cannot be saved by attractive formatting. At the same time, the impact of an insightful and innovative essay can be reduced by poor organization and annoying presentation problems. This subsection provides suggestions for organizing and presenting your work. Your instructor may have additional requirements.

Essays and reports can have numerous elements. Common elements include a title page, preface, acknowledgments, glossary of acronyms, table of contents, abstract, list of figures, body, reference list or bibliography, index, and appendices. Theses, which are much longer than essays for courses, also have specific requirements; check with your program or advisor.

Most undergraduate essays and reports require only the basic document elements: a title page, main pages (including the introduction, the body of the essay or report, and the conclusion), and a list of references. Unless you've received different instructions, you should only include these three basic elements in a simple essay or report.

## Headings

Use headings and subheadings to divide your written work into logical chunks. This makes it much easier for the reader to follow your arguments. Your headings and subheadings should be informative. Thus, they should signal the topic or theme of the section that they head. Also, ensure that you use a consistent style for your headings.

There are countless different systems, some using numbers and some not. The system used in this booklet has three levels:

# 1. Headings for Chapters

## 1.1. Headings for Major Sections in a Chapter

### Headings for Main Subsections

Some people like to use additional levels of subheadings beyond the three shown here, with all levels of headings and subheadings numbered. This can become awkward when subsections are very short, or when the numbering system takes over the heading (e.g., "2.2.3.2.1. Overview of ..."). In most student essays and reports, it is usually not necessary to have more than two or three levels of headings.

## Page Numbers

Number your pages. The first page of the main part of the essay or report is numbered page "1". Preceding pages are numbered using roman numerals ("i", "ii", etc.), with the cover page counting as "i" but not numbered. Some style guides indicate

that the first page of each chapter should not be numbered. Unless your instructor insists otherwise, number those pages too.

### Footnotes and Endnotes

Footnotes and endnotes are commonly used in some disciplines to provide additional information about a point; this is normal practice in the humanities. They are rarely used in the natural sciences and engineering.

Too often, notes are used to present tangential information, or to “back fill” last minute ideas. If a point deserves to be in your paper, then you should build it into the body of your text. Therefore, I recommend that you avoid using footnotes or endnotes.

In some fields, footnotes and endnotes are used instead of author-date citations (see Section 3 for an explanation of the author-date citation system). You should never mix citation systems in the same document.

This booklet uses the Turabian (Reference List) author-date citation system.

### Fonts, Line Spacing and Margins

Word processors allow for endless variety in the appearance of documents. However, you have to exercise judgment and discretion. Poor writing and weak arguments can't be disguised using fancy fonts and colours.

In the absence of specific instructions from your course instructor, the following are basic principles you should follow to ensure a clean, readable document:

- Use a readable font size (12 points is a good size). Some people try to turn a 15 page paper into a 10 page paper by using a very small font size (less than 10 points). This is annoying and quite obvious.

- Avoid mixing typefaces (e.g., “Times New Roman”, “Arial”, etc.) in the body of the text. One exception is in headings and subheadings, where the use of one font in the body and one font for headings can clarify rather than confuse. This booklet uses Times New Roman for paragraphs and Arial for headings and subheadings.
- For block quotations, indent the left margin and use a font size one point smaller than the one used for body text. (Block quotations are discussed in Section 3.3.)
- Use generous margins (usually 2.5 cm around all sides is adequate). It's always obvious when you try to turn a paper that is too long or too short into one of the correct page length by changing the margins.
- Use 1.5 line or 2.0 line spacing for body paragraphs. Single spacing is used only for block quotations. To save paper, single-space your reference list.
- It isn't necessary to use coloured type. Black is just fine.
- Emphasize text using *italics* or underlining, but not both in the same document. **Bolding** is reserved for headings and subheadings.
- Text that should be emphasized using italics or underlining includes foreign words, titles of books, and words or brief phrases that you think should be stressed in a sentence or quotation. Frequent use of italics or underlining to emphasize words or phrases is distracting.

### Figures, Tables, Boxes and Equations

Figures, tables, boxes and equations can be used to summarize data, to present complex ideas or relationships in graphical form, or to locate features on maps.

- *Figures* are used to portray graphical elements such as maps, diagrams, flow charts, and images.
- *Boxes* are used to present important information about a topic separately from the text in the body of the document.

Writers typically use a box when including the text in the body would break the flow of an argument.

- *Tables* are used to present information that can be organized in rows and columns. A table must have at least two rows and two columns.
- *Equations* are used to express relationships among variables using symbols and numbers.

These special elements of your document must be placed in the correct location in your paper, and they have to be used properly. In the absence of different instructions from your course instructor, you should adhere to the following conventions in your essays and reports:

- Place figures, boxes and tables in the main part of the paper, as close as possible to the first place in the text that you refer to them. Do not collect them at the back of the document.
- Figures, tables and boxes must be labeled properly, with a caption and a consecutive number (e.g., Figure 1, Figure 2, Table 1, Table 2). Conventions vary regarding the position of captions relative to the table, figure or box. Unless instructed otherwise, place the caption above the figure, table or box. Equations are numbered consecutively, with the number in parentheses on the right-hand side of the page.
- All figures, tables and boxes must be self-explanatory; in other words, they must be able to stand alone. The reader should not have to study the accompanying text to understand the information in the figure or table.
- Make sure that you refer in the text of your paper to any figures, tables, boxes and equations that you include. Assume that many readers will skim or skip these elements if they're in a hurry. Therefore, do not just refer to a figure or table and hope that the reader will see the same thing that you do. Instead, use the text to highlight what you want the reader to see in the figure or table.

- Large figures, boxes and tables can occupy a page by themselves. However, smaller ones should be embedded in the text on a page.
- If you include maps and diagrams from other sources in your essay or report, then make sure that you cite the source, and that you use your own figure or table number. Including illegible figures is pointless, so make sure that you use clear photocopies, or scan at a sufficient resolution.
- Check with your instructor to see whether or not you are permitted to use photocopied or scanned tables, figures and diagrams. Some instructors will insist that you redraw or retype such material.

### 2.3. General Writing Style Conventions

The following points outline selected general conventions that you should adopt in your essays and reports. If you follow the conventions outlined here, then you will be using a widely accepted style appropriate throughout the social and natural/engineering sciences.

- Convoluted sentences and jargon are barriers to understanding rather than signs of sophistication and maturity. Assume that your reader is intelligent but less familiar than you are with the subject matter. From this perspective, your goal should be to use straightforward language and clear writing.
- Many disciplines use technical terms that may not be understood by people outside of those disciplines. This is appropriate if the intended audience is people in those disciplines. However, the same terminology may be inappropriate for a general audience. Always ensure that the style and language that you are using is appropriate for the intended audience.

- Assume that formal writing (the kind you would use in an essay or report) should be in the third person unless you're explicitly told otherwise.
- Make sure that in using third person you do not overuse the passive voice. For example, do not say "Respondents were asked...". Instead, write "The researchers asked the respondents...". In the first case, how is the reader supposed to know who did the asking?
- Avoid contractions in scholarly writing. For instance, "don't" and "can't" should be written as "do not" and "cannot." (This rule is broken in this booklet because the writing style is meant to be casual and accessible rather than scholarly.)
- Scholarly writing should not include slang or colloquialisms. For example, don't use expressions such as "the explorers were screwed once the food supply ran out", or "Jones' (2009) recent paper sucked".
- Use gender-neutral terms whenever possible and appropriate.
- Choose British or American spelling and be consistent. In Canada, most instructors prefer British word forms (e.g., "favour" instead of "favor").
- The Metric system (SI) has become the standard in scientific writing. Report all units and measurements using SI. If you are quoting material that uses other units (e.g., Imperial), then you can use square brackets [ ] to provide the SI unit.

### Grammar and Punctuation

Your arguments may be clear and powerful, and your essay may be organized effectively and presented well. However, the impact of your work will be greatly diminished if your paper is riddled with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors (and you probably won't receive a good grade).

Selected grammar and punctuation issues are addressed throughout this booklet. For instance, rules for positioning punctuation relative to quotations are discussed in Section 3.3., and the appendix contains a list of common grammar and punctuation problems (Section 6.2). Nonetheless, this booklet is not a grammar and punctuation manual.

- If your knowledge of proper grammar and punctuation is poor, then you should invest in a good reference book (see Section 6.3), take a course from your English department, or work with your writing centre (most universities and colleges have one).
- Even if grammar and punctuation are not a major problem in your writing, you should have at least one reference book on your shelf.

## Using Word Processor “Styles” to Simplify Document Formatting

Most word processors (including Microsoft Word and Google Docs) use “styles” to ensure that text is formatted consistently. Chunks of text that end with a paragraph mark (created by pressing the <Enter> key) are treated as a “paragraph”; each paragraph has its own style that specifies the font, line spacing, indents, etc.

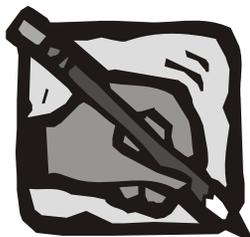
Styles used in this booklet include the following:

- Different styles for headings and subheadings
- A “normal” style for all body paragraphs
- Styles for different kinds of bulleted lists
- A style for numbered lists

Careful use of styles (whether they are defined by you or provided in a predefined template in your word processor) ensures consistency and contributes to a professional looking document. Other benefits of using styles include the following:

- If your document is long enough that a table of contents is warranted, you can generate one automatically if you used proper heading styles throughout.
- If your system of headings and subheadings uses numbers (as is the case in this booklet), then your word processor can assign the numbers automatically.
- Changes to the appearance of your entire document are easy. For instance, if you decide that you want to increase the space between body text paragraphs, you can change the body text style and all the body text paragraphs in the document will be updated at once.

### 3. Citing Sources and Quoting Text



Citing the source of quotations, ideas, facts, etc., is the foundation of scholarly writing. Consider the following three reasons:

- Knowledge is cumulative. Citing sources to support your arguments shows readers that you are building on a foundation laid by others. This is important even if you plan to *reject* that foundation.
- When you use other peoples' facts, data, and ideas to support your arguments, readers need to know where the material came from. Without a source, they will be unable to verify what you have written.
- Not citing sources for material that you acquired from someone else is called *plagiarism*. As discussed in Section 3.3., plagiarism is a serious form of academic misconduct.

There are two main ways of citing sources: (1) footnotes or endnotes, and (2) author-date citations (also known as the “reference list” style). Both systems have numerous variants. The author-date system is commonly used in the social and natural/engineering sciences, and is recommended in this booklet. The footnote/endnote system is described in other style guides (see the appendix for selected examples).

There are thousands of “author-date” styles. This booklet uses the *Turabian Reference List style (6<sup>th</sup> edition)*.

Quotation – reproducing another person’s words in your own document – is a commonly used tool in scholarly writing. However, quotations can be overused, and are frequently misused. This section also explains how to use quotations, and highlights some common pitfalls.

#### Can I Use my Own Ideas?

Having to cite sources and use the literature to support positions does not mean that you can’t express your own ideas. Indeed, the opposite is true. In scholarly and scientific writing we use the literature to build a stronger foundation for *our own* positions. This occurs in several ways:

- Referring to key sources in your work demonstrates that you are familiar with the literature, and helps to build your credibility.
- Demonstrating familiarity with major viewpoints, theories, and schools of thought is especially important if you plan to reject them. You don’t want to leave yourself open to the criticism that you have failed to consider something important in building your case.
- Citing other authors who share your viewpoint – especially well-regarded authors – doesn’t mean you’re automatically correct. However, it does show that your viewpoint is shared.

It’s worth remembering that the literature on most topics is vast. The sources that you choose to cite – and the ones that you don’t use – say as much about your own personal viewpoint as the arguments that you make.

#### 3.1. When You Should Cite a Source

If a quotation, idea, fact, statistic, equation, table, map or diagram that you use in your paper is not your own, then you must cite its source. Given that we often learn from other sources,

this seems to suggest that we have to cite sources for everything. Fortunately, that isn't the case. You do not need to cite sources for ideas, facts, statistics, etc. that are "common knowledge." For example, you don't need to identify a source for the fact that birds fly. You would, however, need to identify the source of the statement that there are 293 distinct species of birds in your city.

### 3.2. Building the Citation Into the Text

In author-date systems, the citation is built into the text. The conventions for citing sources with one author, two authors or three or more authors vary depending on the specific style.

#### Automating Citations

Citations can be incorporated into your essay or report by typing them in as you would any other text. However, powerful tools are available to automate the process of citing sources in your documents, and then generating reference lists. These tools allow users to switch easily between thousands of common citation styles and reference list formats.

Three common tools that are available at most universities include the following:

- *RefWorks* is a web-based tool that many university libraries make freely available to students, faculty and staff.
- *EndNote* is a commercial software package that Mac and Windows users can buy and install on their own computers. Some universities have site licenses under which students can purchase these applications at low cost.
- Microsoft *Word* includes tools for automating reference lists.

Importantly, these three systems all support the *Turabian Reference List style (6<sup>th</sup> edition)* used in this booklet.

### Citing Sources With One Author

The following examples show how the author-date system works in a simple case (one author). More complicated cases are discussed in the next subsections.

Brown (1975, 23) states that swallows that had coconuts attached to their legs flew with 87 percent less efficiency than swallows in a control group, where the birds were unladen.

In this example, "Brown" is the author of a document that was published in 1975. The specific point that you are citing was made on page 23.

Check with your instructor to see whether or not you should provide page numbers in author-date citations. For example, in the natural sciences quotations are rarely used, and thus page numbers normally are not provided.

In this booklet, the convention is that page numbers are used only in citations for quotations and facts or pieces of information that occur on specific pages. Providing page numbers in these cases allows readers to verify what you said without having to search the entire document.

Initials of authors are not normally included in the citation. The exception is the rare case where your reference list contains two distinct authors with the same last name who published documents in the same year. In such a case, using "J. Smith (1978, 12)" and "B. Smith (1978, 342)" in the citations allows the reader to make the distinction.

If you are using reference management software, then the process of sorting out whether or not special measures are needed in a case like this will be automated.

In the above example, the citation was at the start of the sentence. Citations also can be placed at the end of the sentence. This is illustrated in the following example:

In a well-known experiment, swallows that had coconuts tied to their legs flew with 87 percent less efficiency than swallows in a control group, where the birds were unladen (Brown 1975, 23).

Notice that in this example the parentheses now contain the entire citation, whereas in the previous example they contained only the year and the page number. Additionally, notice that there is no comma between the author and the date.

Where you position the citation in your sentence depends entirely on how you wish to structure the sentence. Keep in mind though that if you place citations at the end of a sentence, readers will conclude that the citation supports just the point you made *in that sentence*. Placing a citation at the end of a paragraph, and assuming that the reader will know that you mean for the citation to support the *entire paragraph*, is a common mistake.

In some cases you may need to include multiple citations in one sentence. This can be handled as follows:

Some researchers suggest that European swallows can fly further than African swallows (Smith 1978), while others attribute this finding to sampling errors (Jones 1979).

In this example, placing both citations at the end would have been misleading because the two key points are made by separate authors.

## Citing Sources With Two Authors

The approach for two authors is almost the same as for one author:

Bloggs and Brown (1987) discuss the mechanics of avian flight.

*or*

Birds could not fly without hollow bones (Bloggs and Brown 1987).

## Citing Sources With Three or More Authors

Some sources can have many authors. Listing them all in the citation would be very awkward. Therefore, the convention for three or more authors is to refer to the first one, and then use the phrase “*et al.*” (a Latin term meaning “and others”) to signal to the reader that there are additional authors.

Smith, *et al.* (1991, 3-33) discuss duck mating habits.

*or*

Ducks are not the geniuses of the animal world (Smith, *et al.* 1991, 5).

The phrase “*et al.*” is italicized because it is a non-English word (Latin in this case). Notice that there is a comma between the author and the term “*et al.*”.

## Works by Same Author Having the Same Date

Authors may publish two or more items in the same year. If you need to use both of them in your document, then you can distinguish between the sources using the “a” and “b” system.

Bloggenberg (1987a, 23) observes that water freezes below 0° C. In another article (Blog-

genberg 1987b, 456) states that frozen water is slippery.

The “a” and “b” attached to the date signal to the reader that these are different works. Assign the “a” to the work with the title that appears first in alphabetical order in your reference list. Make sure that in your reference list, you use “a” and “b” for the correct documents.

If you are using reference management software, then the process of assigning “a” and “b” to citations by the same author that are published in the same year will be automated.

### Using Multiple Sources to Support One Point

If two or more sources make the same or similar points, and you want to cite them all, then separate the citations with semicolons. The convention is illustrated in the following example:

Recent studies have suggested that between 27 and 30 species of birds live in the area (Bloggs 2007; Smith 2008).

Notice how the two authors are listed chronologically (earliest to latest), and then alphabetically.

### 3.3. Using Quotations Effectively

Quotations can be used effectively to support arguments in your essay or report. However, they should be used judiciously, and must be integrated into your text.

Overuse of quotations is a sign of poor writing. As a general principle, quote text only under the following circumstances:

1. An author whose work you are using makes an important point that you can't possibly write more clearly or effectively.
2. You do not wish to be accused of misinterpreting an author's words.

3. You believe that it is important that something a person has said is expressed in his or her own words. For example, in qualitative research it's common for authors to allow interview subjects to speak in their own voices through quotations.

Quotation marks are sometimes used to draw attention to words or phrases. For example, in the third numbered point, above, the phrase “speak in their own voices” could have been placed in quotation marks for emphasis. Overuse of this technique can be irritating; unless absolutely necessary, avoid using quotation marks for emphasis.

### Building the Quotation Into the Text

Quotations that involve one or two sentences should be built directly into your paragraphs. In the following example, notice how the entire sentence containing the quotation is grammatically correct:

Smith and Jones (1987, 87) report that “no credible scientific evidence of bovine aviation has ever been presented.” This position has not subsequently been challenged.

The quotation ends the writer's sentence in this example. Therefore, the period appears *inside* the quotation. The same approach is used when the quotation ends with a question mark or an exclamation mark.

Smith and Jones (1987, 87) posed the question “Has credible scientific evidence of bovine aviation ever been presented?” This question has not been answered by contemporary scholars.

In both of the above cases, no additional punctuation is used after the quotation mark.

Occasionally you will want to use quoted text as part of a question that you are posing. In these cases, the question mark appears outside the quotation marks, as in the following example:

Is it still reasonable to claim that “no credible scientific evidence of bovine aviation has ever been presented” (Smith and Jones (1987, 87)?

In cases such as this, a period is not used after the last word of the quoted text even though a period was used in the original. The writer’s question mark (which appears following the citation in this example) is used to signal the end of the sentence.

### Single Versus Double Quotation Marks

Use *double* quotation marks “ ” around text that you quote (as in the examples above).

Use *single* quotation marks ( ‘ ’ ) to indicate that material you are quoting included a quotation. This is illustrated in the following example:

Bloggs and Smith (2008, 11) claim that “bovine aviation is ‘patently ridiculous’” and that all research on this question should cease.

### Block Quotations

If you use a significant amount of an author’s material (a rough guideline is three or more sentences), then you should use a *block quotation*. The following example illustrates how block quotations are formatted:

The speed of an unladen European swallow in flight is assumed by many researchers to be greater than that of an unladen African swallow. However, when the swallows are

laden with coconuts, the African variant achieves greater speed. This has been demonstrated in field trials.

Tests conducted in the field during May and June of 1987 in Morocco confirm that the African swallow may have had both the power and the speed necessary to transport coconuts to England. Using 300 gram coconuts, paired trials were conducted using 11 different pairs of birds. Male and female species both were used, with males showing a 15 percent greater speed and 20 percent greater distance (Bloggs 1988, 23).

These results clearly support the argument that African rather than European swallows transported coconuts to England.

Notice the following in the above example:

- Quotation marks are not used. Instead, the text is single-spaced and indented on either side (0.75 cm to 1.25 cm is standard), and a font one size smaller than the rest of the text is used. This special formatting makes it clear to the reader that the text is a quotation.
- The block quotation is integrated into the paragraph. In this example, the sentence following the block quotation is not indented. This indicates to the reader that the text following the block quotation is considered part of the paragraph containing the block quotation.
- The citation – (Bloggs 1988, 23) – was incorporated into the quotation.

### Rules for Modifying Quotations

As a general principle, you may not change words or punctuation when you quote material. In other words, you cannot re-

write the text to improve clarity, to correct the spelling, or to modify the grammar and still use quotation marks. If the writing in the original source is so weak that you are tempted to rewrite the author's text, then you should paraphrase the material (see below).

The only exceptions to this general rule about modifying quotations relate to the following cases:

- If the quotation includes a spelling mistake or a grammatical error, then you may insert the term “[sic]” in the appropriate place. This signals to the reader that the mistake was in the original. Note the square brackets. If you find yourself inserting numerous [sic]’s in a quotation because it’s badly written, then consider paraphrasing the text.
- You may emphasize part of the quotation (using italics or underlining), as long as you indicate that you have done so. Use the format in the following example:

As has been noted by other scholars, “The possibility that coconuts were transported to England by swallows – the so called AT [Avian Transport] theory – is *patently ridiculous*” (McBloggs 1967, 56; emphasis added).

- If you wish to insert a few words or phrases to clarify something in a quotation, then you may do so only if you place all of your changes inside square brackets [ ]. This is a handy way to deal with acronyms that appear in quotations, as in the above example. Do not use this technique to add lengthy clarifications.
- Finally, you may leave out some of an author’s words in a quotation – *as long as the basic meaning of the author’s text is not changed*. Use ellipses (three periods . . .) to signal that you have left some text out of the *middle* or *end* of a quotation. An ellipsis is not used at the beginning of a quotation that you have truncated unless the text you are

quoting begins with a proper noun that is capitalized. This is illustrated in the following examples:

Smith and Brown (2009, 5) have observed that “On balance, Canadians no longer use the term ‘chesterfield’ to describe a sofa.”

*versus*

Smith and Brown (2009, 5) note that, on balance, “...Canadians no longer use the term ‘chesterfield’ to describe a sofa.”

### Paraphrasing an Author’s Words

Paraphrasing involves *restating* in your own words something that someone else has written or said. Normally we paraphrase text to improve clarity, or to distil lengthy passages into more concise prose.

Care is needed when paraphrasing material. For instance, it is not enough just to change a few words in someone else’s text and then present it as your own. You must restate the text in your own words. Anything else is considered plagiarism (see box on next page). Also, don’t forget that you still have to cite the source for the ideas that you are paraphrasing.

## What is Plagiarism?

The Gage Canadian Dictionary defines “plagiarism” as “an idea, expression, plot, etc. taken from another and used as one’s own”. Plagiarism is an extremely serious form of *academic* misconduct. It is equally unacceptable in business, professions, and the arts.

The following are common examples of plagiarism:

- Presenting another author’s exact words in your paper or report and not using quotation marks and a citation. The reader is led to believe that you wrote those words. Whether the words are copied from a text book or a web page, this is plagiarism in its most blatant form.
- Taking an idea written or spoken by someone else and presenting it as your original idea, in other words, not clearly attributing it to another author by using a citation. Even if this occurs accidentally, for example, you paraphrased and forgot the citation, it’s still plagiarism.
- Using another author’s exact words in your paper with citation but without the accompanying quotation marks. This is plagiarism even though you provided a source because the *words are not your own*. Changing a few words is not enough.

Universities have detailed and specific policies regarding plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. These may include failing the assignment, failing the course, or expulsion from the university.

If you have any concerns or questions about plagiarism, then contact your course instructor.

## 4. The Reference List



The reference list is the tool that other people will use to find the works that you cited in your document. Therefore, a complete and accurate reference list is essential. If readers cannot find the documents that you have cited, then how can they verify your arguments? Reference lists also are a handy way for people to identify important works in a field, and a quick way to determine whether or not the writer is familiar with the key sources in that field. Readers knowledgeable about the literature in a certain field can often tell whether or not you are knowledgeable simply by scanning your reference list.

Many different systems exist for organizing the sources that you cite in your essays and reports. The first thing that you need to know is that the rules for a *reference list* (discussed here) are not the same as the rules for a *bibliography* (which is used with footnotes and endnotes).

Over the course of your career as a student, and after, you may have to learn several different systems to satisfy various instructors, employers, or publishers. The system described here is based on the *Turabian 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Reference List)* style. It's a variant of the Chicago Style (16<sup>th</sup> edition) that has been simplified for students.

In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary you should organize your reference lists as shown here.

### 4.1. Formatting the Reference List

Reference lists should include only the documents that you cite in your paper. Do not include in your reference list documents that you read but did not cite.

Use a top-level heading style for your reference list, i.e., the same level as you would use for the introduction and conclusion of your paper. The caption should be "Reference List" or "References Cited". It's common practice to start the reference list on a new page.

The works listed in the reference list must appear in alphabetical order. Works by the same author(s) are sorted by date (earliest to latest). Each entry should have its first line aligned with the left margin, and all subsequent lines should be indented (0.75 cm to 1.25 cm is typical). This style, known as a hanging indent, is used in the examples throughout this section.

#### Automating Your Reference List

You can create your reference list manually by typing entries according to the rules presented in this section. Or you can simplify your life and let software take care of this task.

The rules presented here are finicky and tedious to learn and remember. It's *vastly* easier to generate reference lists automatically using tools such as *RefWorks*, *EndNote* or even *Microsoft Word's* built-in reference management tool.

If you make the effort to learn how to use reference management tools, then you won't have to worry about learning the rules outlined in this section (or any of the hundreds of other rules that exist for different styles). Instead, you'll have more time to focus on the quality of your writing.

As a bonus, all the major reference management tools allow you to import reference data from journal indexes and library catalogues – saving you the trouble of manually entering your sources.

## 4.2. Organizing Entries in the Reference List: Common Cases

Books and reports, journal articles, and chapters in books are the three most common types of documents that you'll include in your reference list. This subsection explains how to create a reference list entry for the most common cases involving these kinds of works. In Section 4.3, more complicated cases are presented, including books in a series, newspaper articles, theses, papers presented at conferences, web pages, and other cases.

### Types of Documents

Reference management software can't guess what kind of document you're using. Therefore, even if you're using reference management software, you should read this section quickly to learn about the different types of documents (e.g., refereed journal articles, books and reports, book chapters, etc.)

### Books and Reports

Books are written by authors and published by a company or organization such as "University of Toronto Press" or "Oxford Canada". Reports are usually written and published by agencies and organizations, e.g., "Pacific Institute" or "Environment Canada".

The entry for a book or report with one author looks like this:

Bloggs, B.B. 1978. *Trees of Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Books.

Notice that the title is italicized, and that page numbers are not listed. In the system used in this booklet, only the author's initials are used.

When there are two authors, they are listed as shown below. As in the case of a book with one author, each author's initials follows his or her surname.

Bloggs, B.B., and Jones Jr., P. 1978. *Trees of Ontario*. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Books.

An entry with three or more authors differs only slightly from the previous cases. In this example the document is a "report" written by researchers and published by a government agency.

Jones, J., Bloggs, B.B. and Smith, S. 1978. *Threats to North American Trees*. Toronto, Ontario: Ministry of Forests.

### Refereed Journal Articles

In addition to presenting their work at conferences and seminars, scientists and scholars also publish in *refereed* journals. These are typically published several times per year in "issues". The differences between a refereed and a non-refereed journal are explained in the box below.

### What is a Refereed Journal?

There are numerous ways to publish research findings, including presentations at conferences, books, and refereed journal articles.

Refereed journal articles are considered a high quality source in all kinds of scholarship because they have been subjected to a rigorous peer review process. Traditionally, the peer review process is anonymous, i.e., referees don't know who the authors are, and vice versa. However, some journals are making authors known to referees, or are being completely transparent.

Nowadays most journals have websites. The description of the journal should indicate whether or not it is refereed, and how the process works. You can also find this information in the printed copies of journals (although not all journals are available in printed, hard copy form).

The following is a typical example of a reference list entry for a journal article:

Bloggs, B. 1987. People of the world: the case of Canada. *Journal of People*, 17(2), 156-165.

This article has one author. Multiple authors would be listed in the same format as used for books and reports (above).

In reference list entries for journal articles, the title of the article has only the first word and proper nouns capitalized. It is neither italicized nor in quotation marks. For the title of the journal, all major words are capitalized, and the title is italicized.

In the example shown above, the “volume” is 17 and the “issue” is 2. In other words, this is the second issue published in the 17th volume of the journal. Volumes usually (but not always) correspond to years of publication. Some journals do not have distinct issues.

If there is no issue number, then simply follow the volume number with a comma and list the page numbers, as shown in the following example:

Bloggs, B. 1987. People of the world: the case of Canada. *Journal of People*, 17, 156-165.

Finally, notice that no publisher or place of publication is listed in reference list entries for journal articles.

### Chapter in Edited Books

In many fields, it is common for chapters written by different authors to be collected together in an edited book. These books usually have a common organizing theme. In an edited book, authors write chapters and the editor(s) ensure that the chapters have a consistent format, are well written, and address the theme of the book. Some chapters in books have been subject to peer review. Unfortunately, it can be difficult or impossible to tell whether or not that has been the case.

If you use a chapter from an edited book in your essay or report, then you have to cite (and list in the reference list) *the*

*chapter and its author*, not the book and its editor(s). It is important to refer to the individual chapters because the ideas that you are using come from the chapter’s authors, not the book’s editors. The only time that you would cite the book by citing its editors in your document is when you are referring to the book as a whole. An example is provided in Section 4.3.

The following example shows how to organize a basic reference list entry for a chapter in an edited book:

Bloggs, B. 1987. Flowers commonly found in Western Canada. In *Flowers of Canada*, ed. R.P. Rapskallion, 123-234. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Press.

Notice how the editor of the book (R.P. Rapskallion) is identified using the abbreviated word “ed.”. The editor’s initials precede his or her last name.

The word “In” is used to indicate that this is a chapter in a book. As in the case of a journal article, the title of the chapter is in lower case (except for the first word and for proper nouns), quotation marks are not used around the title, and the page numbers are listed after the editor. The title of the book is italicized, and all words in the title (except for “of”, “and”, “the”, etc.) begin with an upper case letter.

It is common for the editor of the book to have authored one or more of its chapters, for instance, the introduction and conclusion to the book. Use the format illustrated above even if the chapter that you are citing was written by the editor(s) of the book.

### 4.3. Organizing Entries in the Reference List: The Works

Commonplace examples of reference list entries were presented in Section 4.2. Other kinds of sources include the following:

1. Books and reports with editions, reports with numbers, and books in a series
2. Graduate student theses and dissertations
3. Presentations given at conferences

4. Articles in magazines and newspapers
5. Web pages

Additional types of documents beyond these are covered in Kate Turabian's book (see Section 6.3).

### Books and Reports with Editions or Report Numbers

Many books are published in *editions*. For example, the author of a popular textbook may update it every few years. The words that identify the book's edition are placed after the title.

Bloggs, B. 1988. *Trees of Canada*. Second Edition. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Books.

Books and studies published by research institutes and other organizations sometimes have a *report number*. The report number is placed after the title.

Bloggs, B. 1978. *Fiscal Uncertainty in Eastern Europe*. PR-78-876. London, U.K.: Economic Institute.

The report number is not part of the title. Therefore, it is not italicized.

### Books in a Series

Sometimes books are part of a series that contains other works with similar subjects. In such cases, you must include the name of the series. The series name follows the title.

Bloggs, B. 1988. *Flowers of Ontario*. Flowers in Canada Series. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Books.

Jones, J. 1995. *The Wonderful World of Intestinal Parasites*. Things in Your Innards Series, No. 5. San Antonio, Texas: Innards Institute.

The second example illustrates how to handle the case of a publication that has a series title and a series number.

Books in a series sometimes have a *series editor*. The series editor makes sure that the book fits with the rest of the books in the series. This is different from the case of an edited book where the book comprises chapters written by other people. The

name of the series editor (or editors) follows the name of the series.

Bloggs, B. 1989. *Flowers of Ontario*. Flowers in Canada Series, ed. T. Tulip. Toronto: Nature Books.

Notice how the editor's initials come before the last name.

### Entire Edited Books

Sometimes you may want to cite an entire book containing chapters by various authors because the book as a whole represents an important contribution. List it as follows:

Bloggs, B. (ed.). 1978. *Problems and Prospects in Guano Management*. New York: Institute of Guano Studies.

Placing "(ed.)" after the author's name indicates that this is an edited book, and that B. Bloggs is the book's editor. When you cite this book in the paper, you do not need to include the (ed.).

### Graduate Student Theses and Dissertations

Theses and dissertations are "books" prepared by graduate students. The term "thesis" is usually reserved for the document produced by a Master's student, while the term "dissertation" refers to the document produced by a Ph.D. (or doctoral) student.

Bloggs, B. 1965. *A Treatise on the Mating Cycle of the Ringworm*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Toronto, Ontario: University of North Toronto, Department of Intestinal Biology.

Jones, J. 1978. *Findings in Support of Pre-Columbian Bovine Aviation*. M.A. Thesis. Bloggsville, Kentucky: Schneider University, School of Archaeology.

In both of these examples the documents are published by the students' respective universities.

## Unpublished and Undated Works

Many documents are “unpublished”, meaning they do not bear a publisher’s “imprint” (the name under which a publisher issues books). These include working papers and reports meant for internal use. Be careful with these kinds of documents. Often they are not meant for public consumption.

The following is an example of an unpublished research paper:

Bloggs, B. 1990. *Ringworms Revisited*. Unpublished Research Paper.

The phrase “Unpublished Research Paper” in the above example signals to the reader the nature of this document.

Occasionally you’ll find it necessary to use a document that has no date of publication. This is handled as follows:

Bloggenberg, B. N.D. *A Review of the Ringworm Mating Cycle Project*. Unpublished report.

In this example, the document was undated (hence, the N.D. for “No Date”). The document would be cited as Bloggenberg (N.D.) in the paper.

Provide as much information as you can about documents such as these in your reference list entry. Even better, try to find a more suitable source. It might be awfully difficult for someone else to track down an unpublished document.

## Papers in Conference Proceedings

Academic and professional conferences are frequently the first place where new, previously unpublished information is presented. These kinds of documents are extremely important in some fields, notably mathematics.

In some instances, speakers prepare written papers, which are then collected and published as a “conference proceedings.” The proceedings are a record of the conference; thus, they can be very handy for future reference. If the proceedings have an editor, then the format is the same as for a chapter in a book with an editor.

Bloggs, B. 1989. Flowers of southern Alberta. In *Proceedings of the 21st International Conference on Flowers*, Toronto, Ontario, June 4-5, 1989, ed. W. Winker, 234-245. Kingston, Ontario: Association for the Study of Flowers.

If a conference proceedings does not have an identified editor, then the following format is used:

Bloggs, B. 1987. Flowers of the World. In *Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on Flowers*, Ottawa, Ontario, May 30-June 2, 1987, Association for the Study of Flowers, 23-34. Kingston, Ontario: Association for the Study of Flowers.

## Chapter in Author’s Own Work

Occasionally you may want to refer to one chapter in a book where all of the chapters are written by the same person. You should do this only if the book’s chapters represent distinct contributions (almost like free-standing articles). Most of the time, you’ll refer to the book as a whole.

Bloggs, B. 1987. Flowers of Canada. In *Flowers of the World*, 217-265. Toronto, Ontario: Nature Press.

You can tell that this is one chapter in the author’s book because there is no editor for the book.

If you are citing a chapter written by the editor(s) of an edited book, then list the chapter using the standard format for chapters in edited books. A special format is not needed.

## Articles in Magazines and Newspapers

The format for magazine and newspaper articles is similar to the format for articles in peer-reviewed (refereed) journals. Newspaper articles are listed as follows:

Bloggs, B. 1987. World in danger of being referenced to death. *Toronto Star*, October 25, A1 and A3.

Magazines are listed using a style similar to the one used for journal articles:

Bloggs, B. 1987. Too many ways to reference things.  
*Monday Night Magazine*, October 23, 34-35.

In the case of both newspapers and magazines, notice that the full date replaces the volume and issue number used in journals.

### Oral Presentations Given at Conferences

Not all conferences publish proceedings. Nevertheless, often people will want to cite a presentation or speech that they heard at a conference.

Sometimes you may want to refer to things people said in speeches that you heard, even if the speaker did not prepare a written paper. In these cases, use the following format:

Bloggs, B. 1987. "Who Cares About All These Citation Systems?" Presented at the Conference on Citation Systems, Toronto, Ontario, January 3-4, 1987.

Notice that there are quotation marks around the title of the paper.

### Websites

The web is an increasingly useful resource for researchers. Not only is it searchable, but also it often contains material that is not published anywhere else. However, you need to exercise caution and discretion when using material you find on the web. Anyone can publish anything, and web pages can change from day-to-day.

There is one important exception to this rule: complete documents can be "published" in electronic form (usually an Adobe Acrobat "PDF" file) and posted on a web page. For instance, almost every government agency or organization that publishes a new report will make it available online as a PDF.

The fact that you found a document published as a PDF on the web is irrelevant; it should be listed in your reference list using the same format that you would use to list any other reference of that type (i.e., report, journal article, etc.). You do not need to indicate that you found it on the web as a PDF any more than

you need to indicate that you found it in the library stacks as a paper book.

Web pages are a different matter. Material published on the web as a web page rather than a PDF is fluid and changeable. Therefore, it is extremely important that you signal to readers not only where you found the web page, but also *when* you accessed that page.

Websites created by organizations often post useful material, but do not list an author for the text on a particular page or pages. In such cases, cite the organization as the author, and provide the specific reference to the page in question.

Government of Canada. 1999. New horizons in avian research. Available at [www.gov.ca/dob/intro.html](http://www.gov.ca/dob/intro.html). Accessed on May 15, 2008.

In this case the web page has a title, "New horizons in avian research". The phrase "Available at" followed by the URL (the website address) allows readers to track down the page. It is not necessary to include "http://" in the URL. The text "Accessed on..." tells the reader when you viewed the page.

You may also make use of web pages where one or more people are identified as the authors of the page. Cite these as follows:

St. Bloggs, J. 1999. Bovine aviation in Scotland: results and conclusions. Available at [www.worldnet.org/~stbloggs/conclus.html](http://www.worldnet.org/~stbloggs/conclus.html). Accessed on January 5, 2009.

The author may have included a publication date on the web page, but you still should use the date on which *you* accessed the page.

## 5. Summary and Checklist



Writing well takes a lot of commitment. In the hands of a great writer, even an ordinary subject can become interesting and engaging. We can't all be great writers – but we all can become good writers through hard work and practice.

This booklet outlined some simple strategies that students can use to improve the quality of their essays and reports. Students who follow the advice in this booklet have reported improved results, better grades, and, more importantly, increased confidence in their ability to communicate effectively in writing.

Keep this booklet handy as you're working on your essays and reports. It covers a lot of ground and it can be hard to keep track of all the details. The following checklist is a useful tool for ensuring that you haven't missed anything important.

## Checklist

### Basic Structure

- Your introduction establishes the importance of the problem, explains the purpose of the paper, clarifies your central position, outlines your approach, and, if it's a long document, provides an overview of the structure of your document.
- The body of your essay, report or thesis is organized logically and accomplishes what you set out to do in the introduction. Paragraphs are well written and flow together easily.
- Your conclusion highlights the main messages and contributions of the essay or report. All concluding points are supported by evidence or arguments presented in the body.

### Presentation and Layout

- Headings and subheadings used to organize the document are informative and divide the essay or report into logical chunks. You've applied a logical heading system consistently.
- All pages are numbered appropriately.
- Fonts and line spacing for different types of paragraphs are appropriate (e.g., 12 point font for text; 1.5 or 2.0 line spacing for body text paragraphs; single spacing for block quotations).
- Figures, tables, boxes and equations are numbered appropriately and have informative captions. They are properly positioned in the body of the paper, and you've used them effectively to support your arguments.
- You've double-checked your text against the basic writing and style conventions in Section 2.4.

## Use of the Literature and Citations

- You've used the literature effectively to support your arguments. (See Section 6.1 for tips on finding literature.)
- The literature you've used is appropriate for your topic. Web pages are used rarely, if at all. Instead, you've made effective use of refereed journal articles, books and reports, high quality book chapters, etc.
- Sources are cited for the ideas, facts, statistics, equations, tables, maps and diagrams that you've used in your essay or report.
- You haven't over-sourced your work by providing citations for facts and information that are common knowledge.
- You haven't accidentally committed plagiarism by using someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution.
- Citations are built into the text properly, and page numbers are used only in cases where readers need to be able to track down specific facts or verify quotations.
- You've used the "a" and "b" system to distinguish citations to works by the same author(s) published in the same year.

## Quotation and Paraphrasing

- You've used quotations only where absolutely necessary.
- Quotations are integrated properly into sentences and paragraphs, and any deletions or modifications are clearly indicated (e.g., italics for emphasis, ellipses for deletions).
- Long quotations (three or more sentences) are presented in "block" style (single-spaced, indented, and without quotation marks).
- In paraphrasing text you've taken care to respect the author's original meaning.

## Reference List

- You've included a reference list at the end of your essay or report.
- Every work you have cited in your essay or report has a corresponding entry in the reference list, and only works cited have entries.
- The various types of documents you've used are formatted properly.

## A Final Check

- You've double-checked your essay or report for the common word usage and grammar problems discussed in Section 6.2.
- You've asked a friend or colleague to proofread your essay or report, and to highlight trouble-spots (weak arguments, garbled sentences, missing citations, etc.).

## 6. Appendix



Three additional subjects are covered in this appendix:

- Tips for finding literature to support your arguments.
- Common word usage and grammar problems that appear in student writing.
- Useful additional resources that you can consult to strengthen your understanding of the writing process.

### 6.1. Finding Literature to Support Your Arguments

Citing your sources is a fundamental building block of scholarship. This raises an important challenge: how do you find the literature that you need to cite? To help you get started, this section offers a few suggestions for finding pertinent literature.

#### Where to Begin?

Probably the most important step in the research process is sorting out what it is that you're trying to understand.

- What are you supposed to write about?
- What is the problem that you need to address?

If you've developed a clear idea regarding the focus of your research, then you can start identifying key terms and concepts to guide your literature search.

Your list of key terms and concepts will evolve as you begin to read. Frequently there are several different ways of expressing a

concept. For example, if you've been asked to explore a problem relating to "watershed management", then you'll quickly discover that some authors, especially from the United Kingdom and Australia, use the term "catchment" instead of "watershed". You'd need to search using both of these terms. It may be necessary to search using different spellings of common words (e.g., "colour" versus "color").

A good strategy for someone exploring a new problem is to find a recent source that surveys your topic. For instance, researchers occasionally publish books, review papers or chapters that summarize the evolution of a field and discuss the state-of-the-art. These can be excellent initial guides because their authors will make use of a lot of pertinent literature and may address differences in terminology.

If you can find a recent review piece, then you'll have an up-to-date reference list that you can use to track down other documents. However, you need to keep looking for material independently because authors of review pieces will bring their own biases and perspectives. You don't want to be channeled into one perspective.

#### Tools for Finding Literature

Tools available to researchers today make it easy to find enormous amounts of literature on most subjects. This is a mixed blessing because it can be hard to know where to begin. For example, specialized computerized indexes and free tools such as Google Scholar make sophisticated keyword searches easy. Unfortunately, most searches will generate an overwhelming quantity of "hits". Finding useful resources among all these potentially useful documents is challenging.

This section outlines generally useful search strategies. Potentially useful literature can be identified using three tools discussed here: library catalogues, journal indexes, and the Web. Of course, as noted above, another excellent source of references is the reference list of a good journal article, book chapter, or book. Consult a librarian for help using specific indexes and tools.

## Library Catalogues

Use library catalogues to find documents such as books, reports, conference proceedings, and maps. Keep in mind that in some fields, people rarely (if ever) publish their research findings in books.

- Books are considered important in the humanities.
- In mathematics, conference proceedings are a critical resource.
- In the natural sciences, engineering and many social sciences, refereed journals are considered the gold standard for publication.

Library catalogues usually only store basic information (e.g., author, title, date, publisher, subject key words and call number). Items typically are catalogued according to Library of Congress subject headings, which can be quite broad. Therefore, when you're searching library catalogues, you may want to try searching both subject headings and key words from the title.

## Journal Indexes

Dozens of specialized journal indexes have been developed, usually tailored to particular fields. Most of the entries in these indexes are for articles published in refereed journals. However, some of the indexes also catalogue other types of documents, including conference proceedings.

An important strength of most journal indexes is that they also provide the *abstract* of the article. Abstracts are short summaries of the article (usually a few hundred words). By reviewing the abstract it often is possible to decide whether or not it's worth reading the entire article. Abstracts are also important because they can be searched.

Thousands of journals are published every year. No journal index catalogues every journal. Instead, the extent to which articles are catalogued will be a function of their relevance to the index. In some indexes, every article in particular journals is

catalogued. Articles in other journals are occasionally catalogued if the indexers consider them relevant. If you are hoping to find articles from a particular journal that you think is likely to contain useful material, then you should make sure that the journal in question is catalogued in the index that you are using.

## Web of Science and Scopus

Specialized journal indexes exist for specific fields. However, the importance of the specialized indexes is declining for many researchers because the breadth and comprehensiveness of the two major general-purpose indexes (*Scopus* and *Web of Science*) is increasing.

- The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) publishes the *Web of Science*. This index has extensive coverage of English-language journals in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The *Web of Science* includes articles from as early as 1900. However, its coverage of smaller and local journals can be poor.
- *Scopus* is published by Elsevier. It includes more journals than the *Web of Science*. However, its catalogue extends only as far back as 1996.

Students, staff and faculty at most universities have free access to these tools through their libraries.

All journal indexes allow users to export bibliographic information to tools such as *RefWorks* and *EndNote*. Additionally, at many universities it is possible to open a PDF copy of a journal article identified through the index simply by clicking on a link.

*Scopus* and *Web of Science* also can be used to identify other articles whose authors cited an article that you think is important. This can be a useful way to find other authors working in a field. For example, if you find an excellent article by B. Bloggs, then you can use *Scopus* or *Web of Science* to find other authors who have cited B. Bloggs' paper.

## The Web

The Web is another potentially useful source for references. Several kinds of information are available:

- Web pages devoted to particular subjects exist. However, as noted in Section 4, these must be used cautiously. Not everything that is published – on the Web or elsewhere – is credible.
- Wikipedia is a specialized web-based resource that can be a useful starting point, e.g., to quickly survey an issue and to identify a few initial sources. However, as is true for all web-based resources, caution is needed when using information from Wikipedia because its pages can be edited by anyone.

Numerous search engines are available for searching the web, each one with its own rules for structuring searches. Google (www.google.com) is especially useful because it will search not only web pages, but also Adobe Acrobat documents published on the Internet. Google also provides a specialized research tool (Google Scholar) that can be used to identify journal articles, along with books, reports and other sources.

Use discretion in making use of material that you find on web pages. Some websites have more permanence and legitimacy than others. If the material is published by an established organization, then there is less likelihood that it will be changed without notification. For instance, if you cite a Government of Canada website on environmental impact assessment, then the material cited is more likely to be there in a year than if you cite “Steve and Doug’s Environmental Impact Assessment and Dog Racing Fun Page”.

Use material found on websites to *supplement* higher quality sources. Avoid using a website when a higher quality source exists.

Your instructor may have his or her own rules about using material from websites.

## Search Strategies

Similar strategies can be used to search library catalogues, journal indexes, and the Web. You’ll have the most success if you try multiple approaches.

Assuming that you have determined what the major terms are that you’ll need, begin with a specific search that combines key terms. For example, if you’re interested in finding journal articles dealing with the use of benefit-cost analysis in the context of electrical energy projects in Ontario, then the following are some key words that you could combine in a title search using Boolean operators:

(benefit-cost OR cost-benefit) AND Ontario  
AND electricity

A primer on Boolean logic is provided later in this section. Keep in mind that not all resources that you search use the Boolean terms (AND, OR, NOT) explicitly. For example, Google assumes “AND” when you provide two or more terms.

Typically you’ll find that the more keywords you join using Boolean AND operators, the fewer “hits” you’ll generate.

If the query generates too few references, then you can pursue several strategies:

- Add more keywords to each group. For example, you could use a Boolean OR operator to add “hydro”, “nuclear”, “fossil”, “coal”, “thermal” and “energy” to “electricity”.

(benefit-cost OR cost-benefit) AND Ontario  
AND (electricity OR energy OR hydro OR nuclear OR fossil OR coal OR thermal)

- Search again using the same Boolean expression, but this time indicate that the title, keywords and abstract fields should be searched.

- Make the query less restrictive by eliminating one of the sets of terms. For example, you could broaden the search to find articles relating to the use of benefit-cost analysis in the electricity field in any jurisdiction.

(benefit-cost OR cost-benefit) AND (electricity  
OR energy OR hydro OR nuclear OR fossil  
OR coal OR thermal)

If the query generates too many hits, then you'll want to make it more restrictive. Again, there are several approaches:

- Add a restriction on the type of document. For instance, you could add a restriction on the date of publication, so that only items published since 1990 are identified. Or, you could add a restriction on the type of item, so that only refereed journal articles are identified.
- Add additional search terms using AND. For instance, you could change the query to "(energy AND electricity)". That way only items that had the term energy and the term electricity would be identified.
- Use the Boolean expression NOT to eliminate certain types of documents that you know don't interest you. For example, if you are interested only in supply management approaches, then you could add the Boolean expression "NOT demand" to the query:

((benefit-cost OR cost-benefit) AND Ontario  
AND energy) NOT demand

## A Boolean Logic Primer

Boolean logic uses Boolean operators (most commonly AND, OR and NOT) to structure queries.

- **AND:** *Narrows* the search because it requires that all conditions are met. For example, when applied to the title field, the Boolean query "swallows AND coconuts" will identify only those documents that contain both words.
- **OR:** *Broadens* the search because it requires that only one condition is met. For instance, when applied to the title field, the Boolean query "(swallows OR birds) AND coconuts" will find documents that contain either "swallows" or "birds" – and the word "coconuts".
- **NOT:** *Narrows* the search because it eliminates documents that contain a particular term. For example, when applied to the title field the Boolean query "(swallows AND coconuts) NOT African" will not display documents that deal with African swallows.

Parentheses are used in Boolean logic to establish *precedence*. The following two queries are completely different because of the parentheses:

- "swallows OR birds AND coconuts"
- "(swallows OR birds) AND coconuts"

In the first example, items that mention swallows *or* items that mention *both* birds *and* coconuts will be identified. In the latter example, items that mention swallows *or* birds, and which *also* mention coconuts, will be identified.

Every search tool (e.g., Google, your library's catalogue system, a journal index) has different rules for implementing Boolean queries. Some permit you to type in queries using Boolean operators, while others require that you fill in forms to achieve the same result. Consult the help material associated with the search tool that you're using.

## The Importance of Serendipity

Many good sources can be found through serendipity, in other words, stumbling across useful material. Don't underestimate how important this can be.

- If the library catalogue sends you to a specific book, look at the books on either side on the shelf; normally, related works are shelved together, and you might find something useful that happens to have different subject keywords.
- It sometimes pays to examine other journal articles in the same volume. For instance, many journals publish special issues relating to a particular theme. The article that you found may be one of several useful ones in that issue.
- If you find one good item by a particular author, then look for more. Search indexes usually allow you to perform searches for more works by the same author simply by clicking on the author's name.
- As mentioned earlier, use the *Web of Science* or *Scopus* to search for authors who cite a good article that you've found.

## 6.2. Common Word Usage and Grammar Problems

Before you submit your written work, check to make sure that you haven't made any of these particularly annoying errors.

This list reflects my personal experiences (and pet peeves). A much longer list of commonly misspelled and confused words is available at [www.grammarbook.com](http://www.grammarbook.com).

1. "Alot" is not a word. A lot of students think that it is.
2. Do not confuse colons (:) and semicolons (;). *Colons* are usually used before lists. "Please buy the following items from the store: milk, jam, bread." Sometimes they are used to anticipate, as in this sentence: "He took the obvious way out: he turned and ran." In this particular example, a dash would have worked even better. *Semicolons* are used to join together two independent clauses; sometimes they are used in complicated lists. "Please buy the following items from the store: a loaf of bread, no older than one day; jam, preferably grape; and, two-percent milk, in the one litre carton."
3. The word "however" can't be used in place of the conjunction "but". Using "however" to join together independent clauses is a grammatical error. The following is a common example of this mistake: "I told him to go to the store first, however, he didn't follow my instructions." You can use the conjunction "but" to join these two clauses together. Or, you can create two sentences: "I told him to go to the store first. However, he didn't follow my instructions."
4. A *run-on sentence* occurs when two complete sentences are joined together inappropriately. A *comma-splice* is a run-on sentence formed by joining two complete sentences with a comma. In the example above, use of the word "however" instead of "but" creates a comma-splice.

5. The terms “i.e.” and “e.g.” are frequently confused. The former means “in other words”, while the latter means “for example”.
6. “Affect” means to cause an effect in something. “The heat affected the passengers.” An effect is produced by a cause. “The most serious effect of the heat in the bus was two cases of fainting.”
7. “It’s” is the contraction of “it is”. The possessive of “it” is “its.”
8. “Two”, “to”, and “too” do not mean the same thing. Likewise, “their” and “there” do not mean the same thing.
9. “Data” is plural; “datum” is singular.
10. “Principal” means “most important”, while “principle” refers to a rule or code of conduct.
11. Finally, “phenomenon” is singular. The plural form of this word is “phenomena.”

Your word processor’s spell check function will miss all of these problems, except for “alot”, which is a spelling mistake. Grammar checking software may help, especially in blatant cases. However, you still must learn the rules yourself. Practice and learning from constructive criticism are key.

Do the people who evaluate your written work often identify writing problems such as these? Do you find yourself explaining to instructors that what you *meant to say* was...?

These are signs that your writing needs work! If this is the signal that you’re receiving, then you need more help than this booklet can provide.

- Invest in a good writing and style guide (see appendix for a few examples).
- Consider getting help from the staff at a writing clinic (most universities have one).
- Take a basic grammar and composition course from your English department.

### 6.3. Additional Resources

This booklet is not a replacement for a writing course or for a good style and grammar manual. If you don't already have a good reference book on your shelf, then you should think about investing in one. Useful texts are listed below.

#### Dictionary and Thesaurus

You shouldn't limit yourself to the words and phrases contained in your word processor's dictionary and thesaurus.

Barber, K. (ed.) 2007. *Student's Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. 2nd Edition. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.

Chapman, R.L. (ed.). *Roget's International Thesaurus*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Harper Collins.

#### Grammar and Punctuation

This booklet touched on a few grammar and punctuation issues. However, it's not a substitute for a proper grammar and punctuation guide.

Straus, J., Kaufman, L., and Stern, T. 2014. *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation: An Easy-to-Use Guide with Clear Rules, Real-World Examples, and Reproducible Quizzes*. 11<sup>th</sup> Edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint.

- The Blue book is a short, straightforward guide to the rules of grammar and punctuation.
- The book's web site ([www.grammar.com](http://www.grammar.com)) is an excellent resource because it covers a lot of the material that is found in the book, and it's free!

Messenger, W.E., de Bruyn, J. Brown, J., and Montagnes, R. 2014. *The Canadian Writer's Handbook*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.

- *The Canadian Writer's Handbook* is a good, general purpose reference for university students. It addresses

the entire writing process, including basic grammar, sentence and paragraph construction, and organization.

#### Research and Writing Guides

Readers who wish to go beyond the basic instructions offered in this booklet should consult more detailed guides. The two listed here are an excellent starting point.

Northey, M. 2015. *Making Sense: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press.

- Margot Northey has written several "Making Sense" books. This one is a general purpose guide for students in the humanities. Other versions are available for the social sciences, engineering and natural sciences, and environmental science.

Turabian, K.L. 2007. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press.

- Kate Turabian's book is the source for the instructions on citation and reference lists presented in this booklet.

Turabian's book is also available as an 8<sup>th</sup> edition (revised and updated to use the Chicago Style instead of the style used in this guide).

In a future edition of the guide I'll update sections 3 and 4 to use the Chicago Style. In the meantime, the style used in this edition of my book is still acceptable (and is available in all the major reference management software tools).

## ***Notes***