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**Writing Your Thesis  
at the American Studies Center:**

**A Very Brief Guide  
to Academic Writing**

## INTRODUCTION

When you became a student of the American Studies Center, your English was good or excellent. We know this is true, because we do not accept students with poor language skills. Yet, you are not a native speaker, your education was in Polish, and it is likely that you have never written a text of more than a few pages in English. **At the ASC you are expected to produce serious academic papers, and it probably seems like a daunting task.** In order to help you accomplish it, the Center has provided you with a year of instruction in academic writing (if you are a BA student) and with a semester long pro-seminar (if you are an MA student). By the time you begin writing your BA or MA thesis, it is assumed that you KNOW HOW TO WRITE: your grammar and spelling should be fine, your style and vocabulary should be fairly sophisticated, you ought to know how to make footnotes, how to put together a bibliography, how to cite sources. In short, your supervisor assumes that you are capable of composing an BA or MA thesis. His or her guidance is not another stage of language instruction; he or she will talk to you about your topic, not your spelling and grammar. It is your job to make this possible. You must initiate the conversation by handing in writing of good quality, compete with footnotes and bibliography that do not require endless correction. Our aim is to offer you some help on the way to this goal.

This booklet is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to American Academic Writing; it will only *remind* you of some the key points you learned in your Academic Writing classes. It addresses some of the more common problems with grammar, style, and punctuation that we have seen in the work of our students. The best way to learn from this booklet is to read it BEFORE beginning to write and to consult it when in doubt about a particular aspect of your thesis: footnotes, proofreading, quoting, use of quotation marks, etc. Just to be clear: while this booklet is entitled “Writing Your Thesis,” the issues discussed in it should be applied to ALL writing that you do for a grade.

We hope our advice is helpful, but you are really in charge of your education as a writer. If you want to write well, you need to read a lot and **become what we call an observational reader**: pay attention to the patterns you see in what you are reading. If you come across a particularly elegant sentence of phrasing – copy it into a special file in your computer. Collect interesting words, ones you think you will find useful. Also, pay attention to what kind of publication you are reading. A novel, newspaper, magazine, or blog will follow different rules. **Look for the patterns you should use in your essays and thesis in academic essays published in American scholarly journals or in books published by American university presses.**

This is a guide to American academic writing. British journals and presses have a different set of rules from American ones; when publishing American authors or reprinting their articles and monographs, they will “correct” the text to match the publishers’ style. There are subtle differences of style, not just spelling. Furthermore, like fashion, grammatical style changes over time, though not as quickly as fashions shifts from a preference for stripes to plaids to solids (“Oxford commas are so last year”). The more current the book or article, the more likely the style will be following the most recent guidelines.

**The secret to good writing is TAKE YOUR TIME.** Believe us, no good academic article was written all at once. Copyediting/proofreading is a pain! And tedious! We know, we do it all the time. But please, please, do it before you send your supervisor a chapter or an essay. Your first draft is really a product of weeks of work, several layers of editing that your supervisor need to know about. **Be ruthless in looking at your own work and editing it for style** and clarity of meaning. It is hard because you tend to read your work in the way you think you wrote it, and not in the way the way it appears on the screen. People tend to read the meaning of their words in the way they intended them rather than in the way a reader might understand them. You need to be diligent in thinking about how a reader might understand your words and write in such a way that there's only one way a reader will understand your meaning.

**START EARLY AND EDIT YOUR WORK.** When you think you are done... give it some **MORE** time. It really helps. **Take a break – a day or two – and then look at it again,** do one last round of editing before you hand your chapter in. You will find many things to correct, we promise.

One place to start editing is to install an **American English spellchecker** and USE IT. Also, **use the clues your word processor gives even before you run the spellcheck.** If you use MS Word, then learn what it is telling you when it underlines a word in red and phrases and sentences in green and blue. **Set your proofing language to English (US).** A word underlined in red means Word thinks it is misspelled. That is not always the case; it might mean that the word is not in Word's dictionary. Weirdly, *postmillennialism* is in its dictionary but not *premillennialism*. Of course you can add a word to the dictionary. At the very least, double check a word underlined in red. A phrase or sentence underlined in green means Word thinks there is a grammatical error. Word may think your sentence is a fragment. It usually means you need to add a comma somewhere to clarify the relationship between the clauses. Blue underlining means Word is asking you "Are you sure?" Minimally, use these clues to correct your chapter or essay before you send it to us or turn in a hard copy. Below you will find rules and bits of advice on specific aspects of your writing.

## 1. Format

- Font: Times New Roman.
- Font size: 12 for text, 10 for footnotes.
- Double space not 1.5.
- Indent the first line of every paragraph.
- No extra space between paragraphs or after quotes.
- Begin each chapter on a new page (NOTE: this is a rule for MA theses; in BA theses sections are short and do not call for such breaks).
- Each chapter should have a title.
- The first page of the chapter should look like this:

### **Chapter One [font size 16]**

## **Chapter Title [font size 20]**

Begin text here.

Note: no punctuation, no colon after Chapter One, no period after the chapter title.

- **For page numbers use Arabic numerals.** Technically, page one should be the first page of your first chapter. Prior to that, you should use lower case roman numerals with no page number on the title page.
- **Use footnotes, not endnotes** (more on those later).
- **Ask your supervisor how he or she wants you to number the footnotes:** consecutively through your thesis or starting in each chapter of your thesis with number one (preferences vary among ASC faculty).
- **Format your notes according to the Chicago Manual of Style.** Your Academic Writing teacher has drilled you in these rules; we will refresh your memory in a later chapter. Also, use instructions available on internet.

This version is quite user-friendly:

**[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)**

- **Talk to your supervisor about the preferred structure for each chapter.** He or she may or may not recommend use of subchapters with titles. Some professors believe these subtitles are crutches to avoid the hard job of writing the connective sentences that guide the reader through your argument, of showing the reader why this paragraph follows the previous one. Others think sections are a good idea.

## 2. Quotations

**To quote or not to quote? Usually, the answer is not.** Only use quotations when the author has something particularly controversial to say or a colorful way of expressing his/her ideas. Do not quote simply to convey factual information. Comment on your quotes and introduce them properly.

- Do not italicize quotations.
- Quotations that go for more than 75 words (or four lines) should be blocked. Move the text to the right. Indent it from the left and skip the quotation marks. Do not decrease line spacing or font unless your supervisor requires this.
- Do not block quotations for effect.
- Block quotations should be single spaced and indented from both margins.
- Ellipses (parts of the quoted text that you skip) are rarely needed at the beginning or end of quotations.
- Do not put brackets [ ] or parentheses ( ) around ellipses – just dots with spaces between them (see example below).
- Always use double quotation marks, except for quotations within quotations.
- Punctuation marks (periods and commas) go inside quotation marks.
- Footnote numbers come after punctuation and quotation marks

### **Examples:**

**WRONG:** "...Block quotations should be (...) indented from both margins."

**RIGHT:** "Block quotations should be. . .indented from both margins."

**WRONG:** This thesis examines so called 'buddy cop films' of 1980s.

**RIGHT:** This thesis examines so called "buddy cop films" of 1980s.

**WRONG:** John said, "I heard him say, "Go home!" "

**RIGHT:** John said, "I heard him say, 'Go home!'"

**WRONG:** Jeanine Basinger argues that the first the purpose of the woman's film is "to place a woman at the center of the story universe"<sup>1</sup>.

**RIGHT:** Jeanine Basinger argues that the first the purpose of the woman's film is "to place a woman at the center of the story universe."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Italics and quotes

- ***Italicize* book titles, names of newspapers and magazines, and film titles.**
- **Use quotation marks for titles of essays, poems, and song titles.**

In principle, if something is a part of something else (e. g., a song that is part of an album, an essay that is part of a collection or in a journal, an article in a newspaper, or magazine) then the title goes in quotation marks and the thing of which it is a part is italicized. These rules apply to titles both in the main body of the text and in footnotes or bibliography.

- ***Italicize* foreign language words.** If you can find the word in a standard American dictionary (eg., Merriam-Webster), then do not italicize it.
- **Use *italics* to mark emphasis.** You may want to draw the reader's attention to certain words and phrases within a quotation. Italicizing the words or phrases is appropriate, but in the sentences that follow the quotation you need to explain why the italicized words/phrases are important. Do not italicize entire quotes as a way of indicating that they are quotations; that is what QUOTATION marks are for. They MARK quotations!

## 4. Punctuation

English punctuation is DIFFERENT from Polish punctuation, especially with regard to commas. Learn the rules! Here are a few selected rules we think may be useful to you:

- **Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses:**

**WRONG:** John rode his bike to the store, Mary met him there.

**RIGHT:** John rode his bike to the store; Mary met him there.

- **Use a comma when you have two independent clauses and a conjunction:**

**WRONG:** John rode his bike to the store and Mary met him there.

**WRONG:** John rode his bike to the store; and Mary met him there

**RIGHT:** John rode his bike to the store, and Mary met him there.

- **Do not use a comma when you the subject of the sentence is performing two actions:**

**WRONG:** John rode his bike to the store, and left it there.

**RIGHT:** John rode his bike to the store and left it there.

- **In a series of three or more items, put a comma before the conjunction.**

This construction is called the “Oxford comma” because the Oxford University Press requires it in its instructions to authors as to how to format their texts. It is also called a serial comma. Most newspapers and popular publications don’t use it; most scholarly journals and university presses require it. Its main purpose is to clarify the relationship between items in a series. Items here refer to nouns, adjectives, verbs, phrases, and clauses.

### **Consider:**

- The dog had a coat of brown, black, and white hair.
- The thief ran into the store, held up the clerk, and escaped through the back door.
- That government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish.
- Max invited to the party two hookers, Khrushchev and Stalin.

NOTE: In the first three sentences, if the Oxford comma was omitted, the meaning would still be clear. In the last sentence, without the comma, it is unclear if two or four people are coming to the party. Did Max invite two hookers named Khrushchev and Stalin? Or did Max invite Khrushchev and Stalin AND two hookers whose names we don't know?

With the Oxford comma:  
we invited the strippers, jfk, and stalin.



Without the Oxford comma:  
we invited the strippers, jfk and stalin.



- **Do not use colons when what follows is an object of what came before**

**WRONG:** The movie analyses significant surveillance concepts such as: control of private information, identity or organization of social space.

**RIGHT:** The movie analyses significant surveillance concepts such as control of private information, identity or organization of social space.

- **Do not put a comma between the subject and the verb, even if the subject has a series of long clauses.**

**WRONG:** Defending gender equality and women's right to decide about their own lives and be respected in society, connected the considerably new topic of abortion with a much broader issue of women's rights in general.

**RIGHT:** Defending gender equality and women's right to decide about their own lives and be respected in society connected the considerably new topic of abortion with a much broader issue of women's rights in general.

**WRONG:** The most important thing that Christianity provided them with, was the sense of hope for the future and meaning for their present suffering.

**RIGHT:** The most important thing that Christianity provided them was the sense of hope for the future and meaning for their present suffering. [don't need "with"]

**BUT:** Norma McCorvey, born on September 22, 1947, was half Indian and half Cajun.

- **Commas work differently with 2 types of relative clauses.**

Learn this rule:

- **USE commas to set off non-defining (nonrestrictive) relative clauses.**
- **DO NOT use commas for defining (restrictive, essential) clauses.**

What does this mean? Well, non-defining (nonrestrictive) relative clauses give extra information, not necessary to define what we are talking about. Defining clauses tell the reader which thing we are talking about. Briefly: if your reader **NEEDS** this information then he/she does not need a comma. Do not use a comma in sentences that tell us what someone said or thought – obviously, this counts as a defining clause. This is tricky because English does not require a comma in many cases that would call for one in Polish (before *który* and *że*).

Examples:

**WRONG:** The girl, who came to visit, was strangely beautiful.

**RIGHT:** The girl who came to visit was strangely beautiful. (Defining clause)

**RIGHT:** Barbara, who was strangely beautiful, came to visit me. (Non-defining clause).

In the first case, “who came in” is necessary information about the subject. Thanks to the clause, we now know which girl the speaker is talking about. In the second case, we already know who Barbara is (her beauty is just extra information and the sentence would still work without it).

NOTE: We recommend <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/607/> for a good set of examples illustrating this rule.

While we are discussing restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses, use “that” for restrictive clauses and “which” with commas with nonrestrictive clauses.

**Examples:**

Restrictive clause:

**WRONG:** The food, which my mother cooks, is the best in the world.

**RIGHT:** The food that my mother cooks is the best in the world.

Nonrestrictive clause:

**WRONG:** The book that was published in 1950 has been updated many times.

**RIGHT:** The book, which was published in 1950, has been updated many times.

- Use commas or dashes to set off explanatory phrases. Do not use hyphens, combinations of commas and dashes or just one comma or dash.

**Examples:**

**WRONG:** Judaism—the religion which existed on the American soil for generations was still not able to be nominated as an inside religion.

**RIGHT:** Judaism, the religion which existed on the American soil for generations, was still not able to be nominated as an inside religion.

**RIGHT:** Judaism—the religion which existed on the American soil for generations—was still not able to be nominated as an inside religion.

**WRONG:** It is worth mentioning that one of the two stars - Eddie Murphy had his successful film debut.

**RIGHT:** It is worth mentioning that one of the two stars, Eddie Murphy, had his successful film debut.

**RIGHT:** It is worth mentioning that one of the two stars—Eddie Murphy—had his successful film debut.

In both examples, commas are the better choice; in most instances like these, commas should be used in place of dashes.

- **TRICKY POSSESSIVES**

**To form the possessive of singular words ending in s, add 's:**

Dr. Glass's seminar;  
core concepts in Roland Barthes's theory.

**To form the possessive of plural words ending in s, add just the apostrophe:**  
trees' leaves.

- **SPACES, DASHES, HYPHENS, CAPITALS**

- No spaces after hyphens: multi-cultural, not multi- cultural

- No spaces around dashes: like—this, not like – this

- Use an m dash (like—this) not a hyphen for dashes. MS Word will automatically create m dashes if you type two hyphens between the words where the dash goes if you don't put any spaces between the words and the dash.

- Honorifics are capitalized: Mrs. Smith, President Obama, General Patton, Judge Ito.

- Nationalities and religions are capitalized in both noun and adjective: Pole, Polish, Buddhism, Muslim, Protestant.

- Use a colon to separate the title from subtitle. Capitalize all words in titles except for articles, prepositions, and conjunctions unless they are the first word in the title.

EXAMPLE of a GOOD TITLE: Before Roe v. Wade: Voices That Shaped the Abortion Debate before the Supreme Court's Ruling

## **5. NUMBERS AND DATES**

- Use periods, not commas for decimal places: e.g., 2.53.
- Use commas not spaces for numbers over 9999: e.g., 2857 and 1,443,785
- Numbers: one million (1,000,000); one billion (1,000,000,000); one trillion (1,000,000,000,000). Remember, it is better to have a billion zloties than a billion dollars!
- Use lower case Roman numerals in footnotes for page numbers in introductions and prefaces.
- Spell out centuries. Do not use Roman numerals (nineteenth century, not XIX c.)
- Spell out cardinal numbers one through ten, and use numerals for 11 through infinity.
- Similarly spell ordinals first through tenth, and use numbers for 11<sup>th</sup> through infinity.
- Spell out non-specific numbers: Hundreds died in the earthquake. Thousands of troops stormed across the border.
- Use cardinal numbers for dates, not ordinal: 22 January or January 22 not 22<sup>nd</sup> January or January 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- DATES: March 14, 1859 or 14 March 1859. Pick one format but be consistent: use the same format in the text and in your footnotes.

## **6. Sentence structure**

Academic English works best—the meaning is the clearest—when noun, verb, and object (if there is one) are next to each other, in that order, without a lot of modifying clauses and phrases. That does not mean all your sentences have to be simple, but neither should they be overly long and complex. You are not William Faulkner. Simple sentences do not mean that your writing should be boring.

Keeping your sentences simple means making sure the reader sees the relationship between the noun, verb, and object. Punctuation is a key to that.

Other ways to keep your writing interesting:

- **avoid the passive** voice
- **do not begin your sentences with “there” or the indefinite “it.”**

In both of these cases, you end up using some form of the verb to be, and being is boring.

Structure your sentences so that your verbs have some sense of action or activity. We understand that in learning English you spent hours learning the passive voice (the authors of this guidebook spent hours teaching it in language schools!), but the truth is that English does not like passive voice. Your academic writing will be more interesting if your subject is *doing* something and not having something done to it.

## **7. Danger: Wordiness.**

(NOTE: Examples in this section are from University of Toronto writing support, section: Wordiness: Danger Signals and ways to react written by Margaret Procter)

Edit your work for conciseness. Do your best to avoid Wordiness. Eliminate it while editing. If you allow your work some breathing time before your last round of editing, you will recognize many opportunities for this.

### **Doubling of Words** (*choose one*):

mutual agreement (*agreement*)  
consensus of opinion (*consensus*)  
future prospects (*prospects*)  
reconsider again (*reconsider*)  
inadvertent error (*error*)

### **Intensifiers, Qualifiers** (*omit or give specific details*):

Very  
Extremely  
Really  
Definitely  
to a certain extent

### **Formulaic Phrases** (*use a one-word form or omit*):

for the purpose of (*to*)  
at this point in time (*now*)  
with regard to (*about*)  
due to the fact that (*because*)  
in the near future (*soon*)  
in view of the fact that (*because*)  
Basically, . . . (—)

### **Catch-all Terms** (*can sometimes be omitted*):

Aspect	Field	Quality
Case	Kind	Situation
Fact	Matter	Sort
Factor	Nature	Thing
Feature	Problem	Type

**Padded Verbs** (*use a one-word form*):

to have an expectation, hope, wish, understanding, etc.  
(*to expect, hope, wish understand, etc.*)

to make an arrangement, plan, decision, inquiry, acquisition, etc.  
(*to arrange, plan, decide, inquire, acquire, etc.*)

**Unnecessary "to be" and "being"** (*omit*):

The program is considered **to be** effective.

Change to → The program is considered effective *OR* The program is effective

because of the terrain **being** rough

Change to → because of the rough terrain

**Overuse of Relative Structures ("Who," "Which," "That")** (*omit when possible*):

Example:

**There is a tendency** among many writers **who may be seen** to display **certain signs of lack of** confidence that their sentences **will be overloaded** with relative clauses and other words **which are** generally useless **in function**.

Change to →

Many hesitant writers overload their sentences with relative clauses and other useless words.

## 8. False friends and other confusing words

### Manifestation

In American English, manifestation (or manifest) is not generally used to mean a public protest; the word you want is demonstration (or demonstrate).

**WRONG:** The 1963 March on Washington was a massive manifestation in support of civil rights legislation.

**RIGHT:** The 1963 March on Washington was a massive demonstration in support of civil rights legislation.

### Cinematography

This word is not usually used to refer not to the science/discipline of film studies; it is primarily used to refer to the process of filming the movie. That's why the Oscar goes to a person who had the best achievement in cinematography.

**WRONG:** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can be perceived as a movie which started new era in American cinematography.

**RIGHT:** *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can be perceived as a movie which started new era in American cinema.

**RIGHT:** The remarkable cinematography of many Steven Spielberg's films is due to the talents of his cinematographer Janusz Kaminski.

### Fragment

This word conveys the sense of something broken off, a chip, and, while it may be used in a metaphorical way to refer to some sentences you have quoted for analysis or to a scene or film clip, it just feels awkward and out of place and is rarely used in that way in American English.

**WRONG:** This lengthy fragment from a monologue of Flipper's father shows how much the attitude of people does not change.

**RIGHT:** This passage (or these lines) from a monologue of Flipper's father shows how much the attitude of people does not change.

### Science/scientific

The authors of this manual do their research in the social sciences, and yet it really grates us when we hear our work described as "scientific." It is not; if it has to be labeled, call it "humanistic" or just simply "research." In the US academy, we tend to draw a pretty clear line between the arts (humanities) and the sciences, and the latter is generally reserved for the hard (or natural) sciences like biology, physics, and chemistry. Of course, some blur that distinction with what's called the social sciences (like political science,

psychology, and sociology). The essence of science is the scientific method, which entails experiments that can be replicated to verify results. So to describe historical research as scientific is to conjure the image of an historian jumping into her time machine, returning to the past, changing something (oh, say, killing a butterfly or assassinating Hitler).

The general term for which you may be looking is “academic” or “scholarly,” which distinguishes the research professors and students do from the kind of reporting done for a newspaper or the googling done to settle an argument in a bar. “Academic” or “scholarly” gives the sense of intense, prolonged research that has been peer reviewed.

**Conscience** – in Christianity, one’s sense of what’s right and what’s wrong (sumienie).

**Consciousness** - state or quality of awareness (przytomność, świadomość).  
(The pangs of his conscience were so horrific that he lost his consciousness)

**Historic** – momentous; historically significant.

**Historical** – of or relating to history.

(Every historic event is an historical event but not every historical event is historic.)

**Economic** – referring to the economy

**Economical** – something that saves you money

(The economic impact of the Great Depression encouraged many Americans to be economical.)

**Farther** – refers to physical distance.

**Further** – refers to logical distance.

(How much farther do we have to walk?” he keeps asking in despair.

If you press this argument any further, you will make a fool of yourself.)

**Effect** - usually the noun

**Affect** - the verb

(The effects of the oil spill are likely to affect the coast for several months.

BUT: The affect of love will effect strong emotions.)

## “Society” rarely takes an article.

**WRONG:** The American society is composed of many ethnic groups.

**WRONG:** In the society of consumers, private corporations are endeavoring to steer and direct individuals using surveillance.

**WRONG:** Its message is that the society is immersed in a media landscape of lifelike fantasies that serves the interests of those in power.

**RIGHT:** American society is composed of many ethnic groups.

**RIGHT:** In a society of consumers, private corporations are endeavoring to steer and direct individuals using surveillance.

**RIGHT:** Its message is that society is immersed in a media landscape of lifelike fantasies that serves the interests of those in power.

“The **society**” means a club, an organization of people, e.g., “the Society for American Music”.

## Words rarely made plural: advice, research, evidence

These words take non count adjectives: much research not many researches.

(My research includes studies of African American life under Jim Crow and the film director Spike Lee.)

Often you’ll need to add additional words, if you want to emphasize the plurality of the word/concept or use a closely related word:

She heard **many pieces of advice** as to how to deal with the situation.

**WRONG:** She heard many advices as to how to deal with the situation.

**RIGHT:** She heard **much advice** as to how to deal with the situation.

Scientists have conducted **many studies** [not researches] into the origins of life on earth.

## Words that have basically the same form in both singular and plural and take count adjectives: deer, fish, lice.

A deer ran across the road.

Deer ran across the road.

In the first, just one deer ran across the road; in the second, an unspecified number of deer were running. By the way, these sentences also suggest why those pesky articles are important. If you wrote the second sentence but intended the meaning of the first, a reader wouldn’t know that. Perhaps a way to clarify what was happening in the second sentence is to say “a group of deer” or “a herd of deer” or “a few deer.”

## 9. STYLE: What to avoid and how to avoid it.

- Do not use first person (I, we)
- Do not use second person (you)
- Do not use third person circumlocutions for first person like “the author of this thesis”

From time to time you may end up violating these precepts. Indirectly, they point to the question of audience. In most scholarly works, the first person should be avoided. You are writing a thesis not a letter, confession, or personal diary. Exceptions include the introduction or preface to your work, where you may wish to address your personal engagement with the topic. In more popular writing (as in this guide), first person is acceptable. Indeed, in some instances, it can be quite effective in engaging the reader with your argument.

You really do not need to say “in my opinion” (or “I think” or “I believe”).

You can say:

**Arguably,....**

**Clearly,....**

**It is clear that....**

Or you can just say whatever it is you want to say! If you are writing an evaluation of another author’s thesis, argument, use of evidence, you do not need to keep reminding your readers that you are giving your opinion. Of course you are. Your readers assume that you are giving your evaluation of evidence.

### **Consider:**

In my opinion, Kopecký’s book can be described as a somewhat shallow overview of the five Californian authors in connection with deep ecology.

“In my opinion” adds nothing to the meaning of this sentence. In fact, the simpler, more direct way is to write, “I can describe Kopecký’s book ...” but even here, I would edit the sentence to say “Kopecký’s book is a somewhat shallow ...” Seven words reduced to one. The writer is clearly expressing opinion and evaluation, and readers understand that, so “in my opinion” adds unnecessary words. Now the next sentences need to explain why the reviewer thinks the book is “a shallow overview” but the author doesn’t need to call attention to the fact that the statement is opinion/evaluation.

Students often find this difficult. There is a natural timidity to be so directly critical: “Oh, who am I, just a student, to dare criticize this learned scholar? I will add ‘in my opinion’ to emphasize that I’m merely expressing a preference and that I understand someone else (like the author!) may see things differently.” That you are student actually frees you to be

as critical as you need to be; your review will never be read by the author, your supervisor, on the other hand wants you to evaluate the book and express your opinion. You just better back up that opinion with evidence and a well-crafted argument.

- **Avoid words of empty praise: wonderful, amazing, great.** When you praise something, be specific: describe it as well-argued, sophisticated, subtle, to the point.
- **Do not use phrases like “the previously mentioned” or “the aforementioned” or “previously quoted.”** If you have written your essay, review, or thesis well, your reader will realize that you are circling back to a point you have already covered to come at it from a different direction.
- **Avoid starting sentences with “and” and “but”.**
- **Use “there” only to indicate place, not as a subject of a sentence.**
- **Use “this” only as an article not as a pronoun.**
- **Avoid “it” phrases like “it is obvious,” “it is doubtful.”**

This last trio is similar to comments about avoiding the passive voice and about keeping your verbs doing something. Usually what follows these words is some form of the verb to be.

- **Do not use contractions (e.g., won't, isn't, can't)**
- **Do not use slang.**

What is and is not slang will not always be obvious to non-native speakers, but the point here is keep your writing formal (and this is why contractions are a no-no). One word that's a little too informal for your thesis, essay, or book review is kids. Use children.

- **Use American spelling, not British** (labor, not labour; civilization not civilisation)
- **Avoid using “get” except in the strict sense of acquire** → use become (e.g.: She became sick, not she got sick)
- **Avoid overusing “what is more;”** → moreover, additionally, and also are acceptable substitutes.

## 10. What or which?

Consider these sentences:

### WRONG:

- Abortions became much safer, what was visible in the statistics published a few years later.
- Whole families came to New England, what provided stability of the community.
- Some of them identified themselves as a chosen nation, what resulted in a very literal understanding of the book of Exodus.

“Which” should be used in place of “what” in all of them, so they should read:

### RIGHT:

- Abortions became much safer, which was visible in the statistics published a few years later.
- Whole families came to New England, which is what provided stability of the community.
- Some of them identified themselves as a chosen nation, which resulted in a very literal understanding of the book of Exodus.

Or consider rewriting them:

- That abortions became much safer became visible in the statistics published a few years later.
- Whole families coming to New England provided stability to the community.
- Their identification as a chosen nation resulted in a very literal understanding of the book of Exodus.

The rewrites are preferable because they are simpler and more direct. The answer to the question which or what is often: neither.

RELATIVE CLAUSES	
RULE	EXAMPLE
<b>who / that</b> refer to people	They caught the man <b>who / that</b> spied for China.
<b>which / that</b> refer to objects	I lost the map <b>which / that</b> she gave me.
<b>whose</b> refers to possession	She complained to the man <b>whose</b> dog bit her.
<b>when</b> refers to a moment in time	Christmas Day is a day <b>when</b> people are happy.
<b>where</b> refers to a particular place	We visited the house <b>where</b> our father was born.
In non-defining sentences, the word <b>that</b> cannot replace <b>who</b> or <b>which</b> .	Mata Hari, <b>who</b> was a famous female spy, was born in Holland. Buckingham Palace, <b>which</b> is in London, is a favourite tourist site.

## 13. Verb tenses

**Maintaining the same verb tense** is important but tricky, particularly with the conditional tenses, but in general when you are writing about the past, use the past tense, or some variation thereof. The tricky part is when you are summarizing a source or the plot of a novel or film. There is a sense that the author **WROTE** the book in the past, but the book **CONTINUES** to say the same in the present as it did in the past.

Consider:

In spite of a strong sense of belonging to African culture, Equiano creates a multicultural identity, by combining his origin with Anglo-American manners and mentality. His attitude towards white man's culture changes from initial fear and resistance to some kind of admiration and to a will to imitate. He explains ...

All the verbs in the above sentences should be in the simple past tense because Equiano did all of those things **IN THE PAST!**

- **By contrast plot summaries of works of fiction require simple present, NOT simple past.**

Example:

Little Red Riding Hood lives at the edge of a wood. One day, Mum sends her to Grandma's with a cake, as Grandma isn't feeling well. Mum tells Little Red Riding Hood to be very careful in the wood-she mustn't leave the path or talk to strangers. Little Red Riding Hood puts on her red cloak, puts the cake in her basket, and promises to go straight to Grandma's...

(source: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>)

The example is silly – but note the tense. If you were telling the story to a child you would use past simple, but this is a plot summary not a story-telling event. Do the same for plots of complex movies, novels or stories.



## 15. Documentation: how and when to use footnotes

**Footnotes are essential. DO NOT TURN IN A THESIS CHAPTER DRAFT WITHOUT FOOTNOTES.** Footnotes are not a form of academic torture but a crucial part of the scholarly exchange of ideas. They give credit where credit is due for the information and ideas you use in your thesis. They enable other scholars to follow up on your research. And they are an important part of the evaluation of your thesis. Your supervisor needs to see what sources you are using, so he or she can evaluate if they are the most relevant and if you are using them effectively.

**Writing footnotes in the proper form needs to become a habit, something that is done as soon as you finish the sentence where a note is needed.** Yes, you're on a roll, the words flowing like lava from an erupting volcano, and stopping to write a note you fear will disrupt your train of thought and that magnificent sentence you were about to write will be lost. Maybe it will, but far more likely is that the place for the footnote will be lost and possibly the source that should go in the note as well. At the very least, put in the note number and brief reference so you'll know where the note goes and what should be included in it. Do not think you can write the chapter and then go back and add footnotes.

**Footnotes serve a variety of functions, the most important of which is, of course, acknowledging the sources you've used. Note that footnotes are necessary not just for direct quotations but also for places where you've paraphrased or summarized your sources.** Additionally, they are needed when you mention information that is not common knowledge. This last point is problematic in trying to determine what is "common knowledge." So if you say Abraham Lincoln was a tall man, that doesn't need a footnote; if you say Abraham Lincoln was 200 cm tall, that fact needs a footnote. This point may sound like a recipe for making your thesis so general that it's without significance. Rather you need to consider what value saying Lincoln was 200 cm tall adds to your argument. If you are just making a general comment about Lincoln's appearance, then all you need to say is that he was tall.

**You can use footnotes to provide additional information that is useful and interesting but not strictly relevant to the argument you are making.** In an essay about American preacher A. C. Dixon meeting Charles Spurgeon in the latter's London church, William Glass wrote this, "While there, he gave the 'long prayer' at a morning service in the Tabernacle, followed by short sermons at Monday evening prayer meetings." The footnote for that sentence was this, "Dixon, 104, 107-109. Spurgeon was so impressed with Dixon's work that he offered Dixon a position on the Tabernacle's staff. Dixon declined, citing a sense of obligation to his American congregation." Note, first the footnote cites the source for this information, then it adds the information about Spurgeon inviting Dixon to work for him. The author could have easily put those sentences in the main text, but he felt that it didn't add to the argument he was making at that point in the essay.

**Footnotes can be useful for showing a pattern. Use a footnote indicate that the information you are conveying is not based on an isolated, perhaps unrepresentative example.** In the same essay about Dixon and Spurgeon, Dr. Glass has this sentence: “When news of his [Spurgeon’s] remarks circulated in the United States, Southerners banned and burned his books, with one newspaper suggesting that ‘the works of this greasy cockney vociferator may receive the same treatment throughout the South; and if the Pharisaical author should ever show himself in these parts, we trust that a stout cord may speedily find its way around his eloquent throat.’” The footnote read, “Unidentified quote from a Southern newspaper in “The Slave Owners Burning Mr. Spurgeon’s Books,” *The Leeds Mercury*, 7 April 1860. See also “Mr. Spurgeon’s Sermons Burnt by American Slaveowners [sic]” *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 April 1860, n.p. and “Miscellaneous,” *Derby Mercury*, 25 April 1860, 3. The bonfires continued into the summer in Virginia according to “The Leeds Mercury,” *The Leeds Mercury*, 24 July 1860, 2.” Note, again, that the footnote starts with the source of the quotation, and the “see also” tells readers that here are other sources that show similar southern attacks on Spurgeon.

Finally, **a third use of footnotes beyond documenting sources is to guide readers to other research on the topic or to discuss how other scholars confirm or disagree with your conclusions.** In his essay about Spurgeon, Glass tells the story of Spurgeon’s engagement in a doctrinal controversy with fellow British Baptists and concludes that paragraph with this sentence: “One way of looking at this controversy is to see it as British Baptist’s ‘fundamentalist moment’ as Spurgeon’s rhetoric and separation were not that different from that of American fundamentalists in the denominational battles of the 1920s.” The footnote reads, “See Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 171-184. A basic outline of the controversy can be found in Dallimore, 206-211. Marsden’s conclusion is Spurgeon’s efforts to rally Baptists to battle liberalizing tendencies had little effect. “Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon,” 222.” This note tells the readers that Glass based his account mostly on George Marsden’s book supplemented by Arnold Dallimore’s biography of Spurgeon.

## 16. FOOTNOTES IN PRACTICE – HOW TO MAKE THEM:

When in doubt go to:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

or:

“Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition.” Online Writing Lab. Purdue University. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>

Here are the most basic and general rules:

- **The first time you cite a source, provide a full citation:**

<sup>1</sup>William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 184.

- **Use *ibid.*, if the source is same as in the previous note:**

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, 23-56.

Note that if the citation is to the exact same page(s) as the previous note, then *ibid* is all you need:

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

Do not spell *ibidem*, use the abbreviation *ibid.*

Use *ibid.* even if the citation is on the previous page.

- **When using the same source again later (with other sources cited in between) use a shortened form for the reference that includes the author’s last name and a shortened form of the title:**

<sup>15</sup>Glass, *Strangers*, 109.

Do not use *op. cit.* or *loc. cit.* to indicate a previously cited source.

- **Note numbers come at the end of sentences**

**WRONG:** Deleuze<sup>42</sup> claims that television does not use its aesthetic possibilities like films but has a purely social function.

**RIGHT:** Deleuze claims that television does not use its aesthetic possibilities like films but has a purely social function.<sup>42</sup>

**WRONG:** In their books, Marsden,<sup>14</sup> Carpenter,<sup>15</sup> and Trollinger<sup>16</sup> discuss the role of William Bell Riley in creating a fundamentalist movement.

**RIGHT:** In their books, Marsden, Carpenter, and Trollinger discuss the role of William Bell Riley in creating a fundamentalist movement.<sup>14</sup>

**WRONG:** That “William Jennings Bryan captured the fundamentalist crusade for his campaign against evolution”<sup>37</sup> is the conclusion of Ferenc Szasz.

**RIGHT:** That “William Jennings Bryan captured the fundamentalist crusade for his campaign against evolution” is the conclusion of Ferenc Szasz.<sup>37</sup>

- **A single note may contain more than one source; never put two (or three or four) note numbers at the end of a sentence.**

**WRONG:** This idea is well expressed in one of the films: “The more technology used, the easier it is for them to keep tabs on you. It's a brave new world out there.”<sup>11 12</sup>

**RIGHT:** This idea is well expressed in one of the films: “The more technology used, the easier it is for them to keep tabs on you. It's a brave new world out there.”<sup>11</sup>

In this case, the author used the first note to give the source of the quotation and used the second note to explain that “brave new world” was an allusion to Aldous Huxley’s novel. The explanation should come in the same note as the source. Even if you combine information from several different sources in one sentence, you just need one note where you include all the sources used for that sentence.

## 17. Bibliography

The bibliography needs to be included in your thesis, most supervisors will not require one with a chapter draft. It should include ONLY what you have cited in your notes. If a book, essay, or document is not in your notes, it does not go into the bibliography. The form it takes will depend on the sources you use. Bibliographies are typically divided into two sections: Primary Sources and Secondary Sources. Sometimes you'll see Secondary Sources subdivided into Books, Articles, Unpublished Sources, Internet Sources, and others. DO NOT SUBDIVIDE SECONDARY SOURCES. If your thesis is about films, then you will need a section called Filmography and include every film mentioned in your thesis. The filmography may be substituted for Primary Sources.

- **Do not number the list.**
- **Alphabetize according to author's last name.**
- **If the source has no author, alphabetize according to the title's first word excluding articles.**
- **Use hanging indent for entries.**
- **Single space each entry, double space between entries**
- **Use three em dashes for an entry whose author is the same as the previous entry.**
- **Your bibliography should look like this:**

### Bibliography [font size 20]

#### Primary Sources [font size 16]

*The Christian Index*. Macon, GA. 1920-1945.

Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers. Special Collections, Mosher and Turpin Library. Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX.

#### Secondary Sources [font size 16]

Glass, William R. *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001.

Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

———. “Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon: a Comparison with English Evangelicalism.” *Church History* 46, no. 2 (June, 1977): 215-232.

## **BEWARE OF PLAGIARISM**

According to ASC rules, if a student presents a thesis which is partly or entirely plagiarized, he or she must write a new thesis on a new topic. The new thesis cannot contain any element of the previous one.

You are guilty of plagiarism when you:

- turn someone else’s work as your own (whole or passages);
- copy words or ideas from someone without giving credit;
- fail to put a quotation in quotation marks;
- paraphrase or summarize without a reference;
- indicate a source but your paraphrase is very close to the original.

Plagiarism may be voluntary or involuntary. Make sure you do not forget any quotation marks, reference numbers, or sources. Always check your paraphrases against the original source to make sure you are expressing the idea of the original source with different words and different sentence structures.

# Resources

## Books

Barzun, Jacques and Henry F. Graff. *The Modern Researcher*. Sixth edition. Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2003.

(Old and stodgy, but still the indispensable guide to doing historical research.)

Fischer, David Hackett. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

(Recommended for those writing on US history. Devastating, as Fischer picks apart many of the big names in historical writing and demonstrates how they fail to follow the most basic elements of logical argument.)

Gordon, Karen Elizabeth. *The New Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Guide for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed*. Revised and expanded. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003.

(The most entertaining book ever written about punctuation.)

Strunk, William. *The Elements of Style*. Many, many editions.

(Ancient, but revised and updated, and still a good guide to the basics of writing.)

## Online resources

Brians, Paul. "Common Errors in English Usage." <http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html#r>

(Alphabetical listing, from a/an to zoology and many in between.)

Purdue Online Writing Lab. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/sitemap/>

(Provides clear answers to all your questions: writing process, style, typical assignments, grammar and much more)

"Chicago Manual of Style, 16<sup>th</sup> Edition." Online Writing Lab. Purdue University. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>

(Bookmark this page! You'll find here how to format properly sources for your footnotes and bibliography.)