

Common Mistakes

The Tutoring Center often sees students making similar mistakes in their papers. Here are some examples of these mistakes, in hopes that students can better understand how to correct these mistakes independently. Need more information - the Tutoring Center offers handouts in JH 106 and on the InfoRack on the web site.

MLA Format

The Tutoring Center can help students set up and write papers using the MLA format and citation rules. Tutors do not recommend using Microsoft Word MLA or other guides to write papers. These templates and suggestions are often outdated or only partially correct and do not follow the recommended guidelines for the latest version of the *MLA Handbook*.

Headings do not go in the header section. The header is for last name, a space, and page number: Smith 1, Smith 2, etc. A heading should only appear on the first page, in the upper left hand corner:

John Smith

Professor Johnson

EDUC 1300

1 January 2016

Note the order and the format of the date. Use the due date, not the date typed.

Spacing: Papers should be double spaced, a blank space between each line of text (like the heading above). Do not hit the space bar twice between each word or enter at the end of the line. The computer does it automatically. Microsoft Word will format a document with double-spacing, but add an extra space between paragraphs. To correct this, select "Remove Spacing After Paragraph" on the spacing menu.

Title of a paper should be centered on the line below the heading and above the first line of the first paragraph. Do not underline, italicize, bold, or put in quotation marks.

Works Cited: Every research paper must have a separate Works Cited page at the end of the paper on its own page. The title for this page is formatted like the title of the paper. It will become the last numbered page and lists every source used from research. These sources must be listed in alphabetical order. If the reference ends up being longer than one line, the next line(s) must be indented one "Tab."

Thesis/Topic Sentences

Students often forget the importance of thesis and topic sentences. These sentences identify the topic and help the reader follow the organizational structure of the paper.

Thesis Statement should appear once in the introductory paragraph as a statement of topic and purpose. The thesis should be reworded and appear again in the conclusion to summarize the topic.

Topic Sentences: Every body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that identifies the part of the thesis that is going to be explained.

Punctuation

Punctuating sentences improperly can lead to sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Check for improper or missing commas, semi-colons, and other punctuation.

Commas have definite uses in a sentence, such as separating two complete sentences joined with a conjunction, joining items in a series, and separating introductory phrases. Find a handout on the Tutoring Center website.

Semicolons: Many students mistakenly believe that a semicolon is the same thing as a comma. The only time a semicolon can replace a comma is when you are separating items in a long list. Otherwise, a semicolon is used to correct a run-on sentence by separating two complete thoughts contained in one sentence.

Point of View

Academic papers should be written in formal language and most often in 3rd person.

First Person pronouns are usually avoided. Some instructors allow “I” in certain circumstances.

Second Person pronouns “you,” “your,” “yours,” and “yourself” should never be used in academic papers.

Third person pronouns are the acceptable point of view for academic writing. Ex: “his,” “theirs,” “everyone.”

Rhetorical Questions: Asking a question in a paper is considered rhetorical because the writer is not expecting an answer. This has limited use in formal writing and will depend on the instructor.

Word Choice

Choosing the correct word is important when writing an academic paper, so eliminate “slang” or “jargon” from writing. Sometimes students focus on getting their thoughts down on paper and forget that some word spellings have been altered for texting and social media purposes, but their formal spellings have not changed. For example, the word “through” cannot be spelled as “thru.”

Additionally, word choice can affect meaning in academic papers, so choose words that best express the true meaning of the idea. Ex: a topic that is popular should not be describes as “cool.” Words such as “innovative” and “interesting” are more appropriate.

Contractions are formed when two words are shortened and joined with an apostrophe. Always spell out in academic papers. For example, “don’t” should be “do not” and “won’t” should be “will not.”

Imagery: Research papers are for facts and opinions. Visual imagery such as metaphors, similes, and overly descriptive terms can be used in literature analysis and are more appropriate to use in creative writing. Ex: an instructor assigns a paper about a memory from childhood, and imagery would increase the reader’s appreciation of the event. However, if that same professor assigns a research paper on crime rates in cities with strict gun-control laws, facts and statistics will support the thesis, and no descriptive imagery is necessary or relevant to the topic. Understanding the assignment is necessary to direct the paper.

Abbreviations used in social settings, such as postings and emails, no matter how common or how many people know what they mean, are never appropriate. Leave LOL, BRB, OK, and TTYL in your text messages. Any abbreviations that are initials for names, such as MOMA should be identified at the first use. Ex: The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York contains some of the finest examples of impressionist art available today.

This is just a partial listing of the errors found in student papers. The Tutoring Centers are ready to help and guide students in correcting and eventually eliminating errors found in their papers. Schedules are available online and in the Centers. Check often as tutors may be added during a semester or change their work schedules.