

## Common Mistakes

In the Tutoring Center, many students initially make similar mistakes in their papers. This handout provides a few examples of these mistakes in hopes that students can better understand and correct these mistakes independently. More information on any of these topics can be found in the Tutoring Center.

### MLA Format

The Tutoring Center does not recommend using any template (such as Microsoft Word MLA) to write papers. These templates are often outdated and do not allow for easy editing.

#### Headings:

The heading does *not* go in the header section. The only thing that should appear in the header is the writer's last name, a space, and the page number: Smith 1, Smith 2, etc.

The heading should appear *only* on the first page, in the upper left hand corner, and should look like this:

John Smith

Professor Johnson

EDUC 1300

1 January 2016

Note the order in which information is listed and the format of the date. Always use the due date.

#### Spacing:

The paper should be double spaced between paragraphs. Under the "Paragraph" section of Microsoft Word, there is an option to select line spacing. Writers should use only one space between words and sentences. Also, select "Remove Spacing After Paragraph" on the spacing menu to prevent extra spaces being added.

#### Title

The title of the paper should be centered on the line below the heading and above the first line of the paper's body. The title should be centered, but not be underlined, italicized, in bold print, or inside quotation marks.

#### Works Cited

Research papers must have a Works Cited page at the end of the paper which begins on a separate page with the title Works Cited centered on the page. The Works Cited page lists every source of information, called references, which are used in the paper. These sources must be listed in alphabetical order. If the reference is longer than one line, the next line(s) must be indented one tab.

### Thesis/Topic Sentences:

Students often forget the importance of a strong thesis statement and topic sentences. These sentences help guide the paper and focus on the topic, allowing readers to follow the organizational structure of the paper.

#### Thesis Statements:

The thesis statement should appear in the introductory paragraph, often as the last sentence to serve as a transition to the body paragraphs and as a preview of the topic. The statement should also be reworded and appear again in the concluding paragraph to restate the purpose of the paper and summarize the points.

#### Topic Sentences:

Every body paragraph of the paper should begin with a topic sentence. This sentence signals to the reader what this paragraph discusses. It also should tie in with the thesis statement and signal to the reader why this paragraph is important to understanding the topic.

## **Punctuation:**

Punctuating sentences improperly can lead to sentence fragments and run-on sentences.

### Commas:

Commas are used to separate parts of a sentence, items in a series, or set off certain words and phrases. For a complete list of comma rules, see the handout on commas on the InfoRack or in JH 108.

### Semicolons:

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

## **Addressing the Audience:**

Academic papers should not address the reader. There are a few ways students tend to do this:

### Second Person:

Second person pronouns you,” “your,” “yours,” and “yourself” should not be used in academic papers.

### First Person:

First person pronouns should also be avoided. In some cases, pronouns such as “I” can be included (always check with instructor for assignment rules). However, first person pronouns such as “we” and “us” are not used.

### Rhetorical Questions:

A rhetorical question can increase interest in the topic but should be used sparingly. Questions asked in a paper should be answered within the text. A quote can contain a question and should be punctuated properly.

## **Word Choice**

College-level papers do not use slang, figures of speech, and phrases that would be used in conversation. If any informal words are used for emphasis, they should be enclosed in quotes.

### Contractions:

A contraction is formed when two words are joined in a shortened form with an added apostrophe. These words should be spelled. 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 should be avoided. These are more appropriate to use in creative writing.

### Texting and Social Media Abbreviations:

Sometimes students are familiar with shortcuts and use word spellings that have been altered for texting, but their official spellings have not changed. For example, the word “through” cannot be spelled as “thru.” Academic paper should not describe a topic as “cool.” Words such as “innovative” and “interesting” are much more appropriate. Abbreviations such as LOL, BRB, OK, and TTYL are not appropriate in academic writing.