

Notes on Writing: An Abbreviated Guide to Style for Writing at the Graduate Level

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OVERVIEW

This guide is not intended as a comprehensive reference work for writing. It is intended as a quick guide for graduate student writing. The goal of this modest pamphlet is to convey a basic introduction to writing as a way of thinking in graduate writing and research projects. This pamphlet proposes that writing is a fundamental tool for advanced thinking—some would argue it is one of the fundamental tools for all thinking. Writing is the means by which you will work out ideas, further research, and convey results. Writing is part of every aspect of your educational experience and continues into any and all professional arenas. It is for these, and many other reasons, that developing the practice and art of writing is necessary. The goal of this guide is to offer a concise picture of the method by which good writing skills develop throughout the duration of your graduate education.

The guide is divided into four sections. In addition there is an introduction that covers some of the basic approaches to writing as a way of thinking. Subsequent sections deal with specific issues that you face as you develop a research topic and complete a thesis. The principles are not unique to writing a thesis and may also apply to any form of writing including course papers, reviews, position papers and simple statements of intent. Much of the material is not new, but covered in depth in a number of other sources listed in the bibliography.

The classic text on writing is Gerald Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*—simply stated, this is a text that every writer, that is everyone, should own. The section on grammar rules is essentially an abbreviated version of the original version of the *Elements of Style*. Additional sources were culled for the sections on format and style. All sources are cited and most of them are readily available in the library or to purchase. There are many books available that target specific problems that writers face from the psychological to the practice. My goal in writing this pamphlet is to give you a basic introduction and some specific criteria that are useful when approaching a typical graduate level writing assignment including, but not limited to, a thesis.

NB: ‘Notes on Writing’ is included in a set of materials prepared for the Graduate School of Design Writing Workshop, Fall 2007.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	03
II. Format Issues	04
Forms of Writing	04
Basic Outline of the Thesis	05
The Thesis: Research	05
The Thesis: Sources	06
The Thesis: Specifics about Form	07
III. Style Matters	07
How to Write for Your Discipline	08
<i>MLA Guide</i>	08
How to Quote other Sources	10
<i>Chicago Guide</i>	11
How to Include Images	12
How to Structure Narrative	12
How to Find Your Voice	12
IV. Grammar Rules Everyone Should Know	13
<i>Elements of Style</i>	14
V. Bibliography	20

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is thinking. This is not quite as obvious as it sounds. Most people approach writing with unrealistic expectations. The assumption goes a bit like this: I speak this language, I know this subject, therefore, writing will be a simple matter of committing my thoughts to paper, organizing a bit, running spell check and numbering pages. But writing is a process not a product. This means that instead of thinking of the writing as the final stage you should use the writing to work through the problem. Rules of style and form are not intended to inform content *per se*, but shape your thinking process into a more coherent presentation of an idea. The essay form is a good example. It is a proposition of an idea within a framework or outline that structures the argument: thesis statement, supporting evidence, restatement of the thesis with conclusions. In French, *essayeur* is to attempt—a good essay is not conclusive but discursive. The essayist is testing an idea, using language as the vehicle for exploration, ultimately to explain their point of view on the subject.

The following from William Zinsser serves as a good set of instructions to begin any writing project:

“My advice to...writers begins with one word: Think! Ask yourself, “What do I want to say?” Then try to say it. Then ask yourself, “Have I said it?” Put yourself in the reader’s mind. Is your sentence absolutely clear to someone who knows nothing about the subject? If not, think about how to make it clear. Then rewrite it. Then think: “what do I need to say next? Will it lead logically out of what I’ve just written? Will it also lead logically toward where I want to go?” If it will, write the sentence. Then ask yourself, “Did it do the job I wanted it to do, with no ambiguity?” If it did, think: “*Now* what does the reader need to know?” Keep thinking and writing and rewriting. If you force yourself to think clearly you will write clearly. It’s as simple as that. The hard part isn’t the writing; the hard part is the thinking.”¹

Notice how many times Zinsser emphasizes the idea of *rewriting*. This is the single most important idea to grasp—a well-written document is a work in progress at any given time until it is published. The analogy for architects is the drawing. Until the building is built anything can change. The drawings are fluid and flexible within their own set of conventions just as a writing project is fluid and flexible within the conventions of grammar, form, and style.

This document will try to cover the important issues of format, style and grammar relative to writing a thesis with special emphasis on issues relating to research. But, to be clear, writing is a general skill applied to any project in any discipline in any form. The essay, the thesis, the research report and the memo all share the same problem: how to explain to someone else what you are thinking.

II. FORMAT ISSUES

Forms of Writing

Form and matter are linked in writing just as they are in making. A brick house cannot exist without bricks—the form and the material are dependent in this case just as they are in writing. For example, you would not try to write a thesis like a memo, unless of course, you are writing a fictional account and intentionally distorting the form for didactic purposes. Fictional writing has a different set of expectations. The forms of fiction writing are a separate study, but do share a general principle with expository writing in that even fiction cannot ignore the basic form in which it assumes to present a story. That is, the expectations of the novel are unique and distinct from the short story.

You must be aware of the form of the writing that you are attempting. For example, the thesis and the memo tend to fall into the same formal category of writing; both are an example of expository writing. Expository writing explains or shares information. But the material of the thesis is more complex, longer and requires more structure on the part of the writer. The reader approaches the thesis with a different set of expectations. Expectations will vary between disciplines, but the general category of form remains the same. A quick review of the basic forms of writing then is:

- I. Exploratory: tells a story
- II. Expository/Explanatory: explains or shares information and includes almost all non-fiction writing not considered persuasive
- III. Persuasive: presents an opinion

For the most part the thesis and the dissertation are best described as expository writing. The thesis is an argument based on information you research NOT opinion. First, the thesis should try to prove something, make a claim, or present a particular way of seeing the subject. It is not a general discussion of a topic (The Weather in Spain) but a particular position in relation to a subject (How Weather Patterns in Spain are Changing and Why). If you do not make a claim or present an argument—you do not have a thesis. Second, the thesis needs to make a claim in relation to other work, that is, it needs to address the historiography of the topic. You cannot make claims in a vacuum: every claim has a context: historical, philosophical, or critical. Third, you must be clear about your sources. What material are you using to justify your argument: texts by others, primary documents produced at the time, or data that you have gathered from other sources or produced yourself. The clarity of your argument will depend in large part of the care you take with the historiography and the sources.

To repeat: the outline of a good thesis introduces the topic, offers a discussion of related work, then uses a variety of sources to support the argument of the thesis. The conclusion of the thesis is a synthesis of the argument and the body of the thesis. Often, this will also be true of the introduction. That is one of the reasons why it is very difficult to write a good introduction before you have wrestled with the body of the thesis.

Basic Outline of the Thesis

1. Introduce the topic
2. State a hypothesis or argument
3. Discuss related work
4. Support your argument (with at least three points)
5. Restate the argument and synthesize the material

Next we will look at the organization of the research. This is the first step in any large expository writing project. The organization of your research will mirror in many ways the organization of the thesis outline. This is not surprising if you remember that writing is a process not a product: that means that instead of thinking of the writing as the final stage you should use the writing to work through the problem. Don't forget: rules of style and form are not intended to inform content, but help shape your thinking process.

The Thesis: Research

An important part of the thesis and one that is missing in many less structured forms of writing is research. Any good thesis will necessitate research: you will have to study and organize the issues related to your hypothesis or argument. You will have to organize your data in such a way that it is visually or textually communicative to the reader. You will spend equal parts researching and writing until you understand what it is that you are trying to say to the world. Do not underestimate the need for good research habits, including knowing how to use a library, search online and locate and visit primary sources. To that end, the following are a few general guidelines for good research.

NB: You should also understand that the research process is an expansion of the second and third components, the historiography and sources, of the thesis itself. But as you will see, research ALWAYS informs the argument. Remember, writing is about thinking, so the more you understand about a subject, the more you will need to re-write as you work through your ideas.

First, good research begins with curiosity: about the subject, the world in which the subject exists, what others know about the subject, and the tools that are used to reveal the subject to you. That said, second: all research projects have the same basic parts:

1. Define the subject – identify the problem
2. Gather basic information from primary and secondary sources
3. Re-define the subject – state a hypothesis
4. Gather additional information as needed to test the hypothesis
5. Organize and analyze your material
6. State your conclusions, usually in a similar order to the process of discovery
7. Repeat as needed

The six essential steps can also be abbreviated to: identify the problem, hypothesize and experiment.

For modest writing projects, the emphasis is on the first, second and third steps. For the thesis, the procedure in full is expected. The difference between the research and the thesis or dissertation *per se* is this: in research, the assumption should always be that at any given point in the process you are able to share your materials without having drawn conclusions. In contrast, the thesis must draw conclusions. In research, conclusions do not have to be conclusive. That is to say, they can synthesize the material without giving you a clear answer to your hypothesis. The success of your research will depend in large part on the clarity of your question (step 1 and 3), the thoroughness of your research and consistency of your method of analysis.

It is important to remember that the outline can be fluid, but the basic components should all be present. You must research the context, organize and research your sources and support the argument in order for the material of your thoughts about a subject to have the necessary structure to be intelligible. One way to see how important and universal this process is would be to ask the same questions of all writing: what is the argument of this book? What is the context in which it is written? Who else is writing about these issues? What are the issues related to this subject? What kinds of sources are being used to support this argument? Are they convincing? All good writing will be able to answer these questions.

The Thesis: Sources

For good research, you need to use both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are documents, images, and objects produced in direct relation to the context or event of your subject. This includes: accounts of the event created at the time, or soon after the time of the event by firsthand observers or participants. For example, lab results, original documents, letters, newspapers of the time, drawings, photos and maps relevant to the context and so forth.

Secondary sources are texts and images produced as part of the analysis of a given event, object or idea. Secondary sources include: biographies, encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), books by historians or others that interpret or review research, and general reference books on your subject. A quick note here about encyclopedias as a secondary source: in general you should NOT cite them as a source. The information in the encyclopedia is too general. It is a weak secondary source. If you are unclear as to the robustness of a secondary source consult a librarian. They are trained to identify and classify sources.

As with all writing, when reading a source it is always useful to ask these three questions:

1. What is the argument of the author? (Argument)
2. What is the context of this book? (Historiography)
3. What sources is the author using? (Sources)

As you can see, these three questions can be applied to all reading and writing. It is a good idea to get into the habit of asking these questions not only when you are the writer but also when you are the reader. This will help you understand and organize the relevance of any given reading to the hypothesis you have formulated about your subject. In the case of statistics and scientific data, you will also have to determine the relative authenticity and authority of the material. For example, are these traffic statistics determined by the city planning authority or a private institution with a monetary stake in the outcome? Did the experimental method conform to accepted guidelines for this subject? Again, if you are unsure of the validity of a source, consult a librarian. If necessary, you may also need to consult a specialist in the field or a librarian of a specialized collection.

The Thesis: Specifics about Form – A List of Practical Matters

1. Overall length will depend on subject matter,
2. But, chapter length should be around 30 pages (any more and you exhaust the reader)
3. Applied research will depend heavily on data as a primary source. In general, the applied research thesis should follow the MLA guidelines. But you should always consult your advisor to verify format. [For more information, see “How to Write for your Discipline” in Section 3, Style Matters.
4. History/Theory Theses generally conform to the Chicago Manual of Style guidelines. Their length will also depend on the subject matter: in general, the more theoretical the thesis the shorter and more dense it will be.
5. Every thesis should go through multiple outlines and edits – be prepared to work and re-work your material as you work through your thoughts about the material.

III. **STYLE MATTERS**

Style matters. Not only is this a question of the voice and tone of the writing, but also pertains to the way in which you weave your thoughts and the thoughts of your sources together. This is much harder than it sounds. A thesis is built on research. By definition research includes historiography (other peoples thoughts on the subject) and sources (thoughts about the subject as it is occurring or thoughts that entail the subject). You must know when and how to include all of these thoughts along with your own in the body of the thesis. Incidentally, visual information should also be considered as a kind of thought. This is to make a distinction between images that illustrate the written text versus images that support the text but offer a different insight into the subject.

This section is divided into the most problematic issues related to style in writing a thesis: 1) how to write for your discipline, 2) how to quote other sources, 3) how to include images, 4) narrative and 5) how to find your own voice. The answer to each of the questions is both brief and complicated. The quick answers are: 1) read in your discipline,

2) use quotes as they pertain to your material and always credit others for their ideas, 3) don't think of the image as an illustration but a visual idea, 4) think about what you want to say in the order you want the reader to understand it, 5) after much practice. So there is the short version, for the elaborated version, see the following discussions.

How to Write for Your Discipline

Every discipline has a set of practices for writing. The only way to really understand what is expected in your field is to read in your field. That said, the main differences is between the humanities, the social sciences and engineering. The general principle of writing to think translates across disciplinary boundaries, but the format will change.

There are three primary sources of guidance for formatting:

MLA (Modern Language Association)

-used in the Humanities

APA (American Psychological Association)

-used in the Natural and Social Sciences

Chicago Manual of Style

-used in History [This is the most typical style used in Architecture History and Theory papers]

A good place to find guidelines for formatting manuscripts in all disciplines is the MLA Guide to Writing. For issues relating to citation in the humanities you should consult the Chicago Guide.

MLA Guide to Writing, Abbreviatedⁱⁱ

MLA style specifies guidelines for formatting manuscripts and using the English language in writing. MLA style also provides writers with a system for referencing their sources through parenthetical citation in their essays and Works Cited pages. Writers who properly use MLA also build their credibility by demonstrating accountability to their source material. Most importantly, the use of MLA style can protect writers from accusations of plagiarism, which is the purposeful or accidental uncredited use of source material by other writers.

If you are asked to use MLA format, be sure to consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (6th edition). Publishing scholars and graduate students should also consult the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing (2nd edition). The MLA Handbook is available in most writing labs and reference libraries; it is also widely available in bookstores, libraries, and at the MLA web site. See the Additional Resources section of this handout for a list of helpful books and sites about using MLA style.

General Guidelines

Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper,

Double-space the text of your paper, and use a legible font like Times New Roman or Courier.

Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.

Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides. Indent the first line of a paragraph one half-inch (five spaces or press tab once) from the left margin.

Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.

Use either italics or underlining throughout your essay for the titles of longer works and, only when absolutely necessary, providing emphasis.

If you have any endnotes, include them on a separate page before your Bibliography page.

Formatting the First Page of Your Paper

Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.

In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.

Double space again and center the title. Don't underline your title or put it in quotation marks; write the title in Title Case, not in all capital letters.

Use quotation marks and underlining or italics when referring to other works in your title, just as you would in your text, e.g.,

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas as Morality Play
Human Weariness in "After Apple Picking"

Double space between the title and the first line of the text.

Create a header in the upper right-hand corner that includes your last name, followed by a space with a page number; number all pages consecutively with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.

(Note: You may be asked to omit last name/page number header on your first page. Always follow their guidelines.)

Here are a few additional Internet sources you may find useful:

MLA Style Crib Sheet

<http://www.docstyles.com/mlacrib.htm>

MLA Organization

http://www.mla.org/style_faq

For other discipline-specific styles, check out these sitesⁱⁱⁱ:

Anthropology: University of South Dakota's Citations and Bibliographic Style for Anthropology Papers

Biology/CBE Style: Bedford St. Martin's Online!'s Using CBE Style to Cite and Document Sources

Chicago Style (used by many disciplines): Bedford St. Martin's Online!'s Using Chicago Style to Cite and Document Sources

Engineering and Sciences: Virginia Tech offers a guide for engineering and science students that covers formatting, citing sources, and other elements of style.

Government Publications: University of Memphis Libraries' Brief Guide to Citing Government Publications

History (see also Chicago style): Melvin E. Page's essay on A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities

Maurice Crouse's Citing Electronic Information in History Papers

Legal Writing: The State Bar of Michigan's Citation of Legal and Nonlegal Electronic Database Information Page.

Medicine: The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) guidelines include information about citing electronic sources.

Political Science: APSA Documentation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Writing Center

Sociology: The Cal State L.A. Libraries' ASA Style Guide contains electronic citation formats.

How to Quote other Sources

“Scholars cite sources for three important reasons: to give credit to other writers whose ideas they have drawn upon, to allow their readers to assess the reliability of sources used, and to help their readers find those sources, should they want more information on a topic. Within particular disciplines, there is some variation as to how sources, both print and electronic, should be cited.”

From *Writing with Internet Sources*, A Guide for Harvard Students available online at:

http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/writing_with_internet_sources.pdf

Citing sources and knowing how to incorporate them into your writing is a very important part of establishing credibility for your thesis. Sources are the foundation material of the thesis and should be used to support your argument. Do not use sources as a defense against poor writing.

Writing with Internet Sources provides guidelines for citing the most common kinds of electronic sources in the three major citation styles:

MLA (Modern Language Association),
APA (American Psychological Association), and
Chicago Manual of Style

Identify which style applies to your thesis and follow it! Typically a thesis written for a master's degree in architecture uses the Chicago Manual of Style, therefore; I am listing those guidelines, but if the audience for your work is going to be in the social sciences or engineering you MUST consult the MLA guide. Note, the following example is for an Internet source. All examples shown are from *Writing with Internet Sources*.

Chicago Style

The Chicago style of documentation, employed in some disciplines of the humanities and especially in history, uses footnotes or endnotes, their first line indented one-half inch (five spaces). Notes may be shortened to avoid repetition and supplemented by a bibliography: check with your instructor about which option is appropriate for your essay.

In text:

In his analysis of the inappropriate use of defamation laws against historians, argues that the "right to sue in defamation on behalf of deceased persons should be narrowly circumscribed." (footnote here)

First footnote or endnote:

29. Antoon de Baets, "Defamation Cases against Historians,"
History and Theory 41, no. 3 (2002): 350, <http://search.epnet.com>.

Subsequent note:

32. De Baets, "Defamation Cases," 347.

Consecutive note:

33. Ibid., 348.

Entry in bibliography:

De Baets, Antoon. "Defamation Cases against Historians." *History and Theory* 41, no.3 (2002): 346-366. <http://search.epnet.com>.

In consecutive references to the same source, you may substitute "Ibid." (the abbreviation for the Latin "ibidem," meaning "in the same place") for the identical information (author, title, etc.).

How to Include Images

Images are an important part of the thesis in the visual arts. Images are important to consider in all writing projects across disciplines, but in the visual arts they are especially pertinent as it is likely that a good part of the support for your argument will depend on visual evidence. Images are source material and as such need to be considered in the same way that you think about how to include all sources. Images should NOT be treated as mere illustration of a condition. A good example of this is when text describes exactly what you are seeing in the image without interpretation. Images should be part of the argument. If you use an image and can't explain why you used the image then you are only illustrating a point not elaborating a point.

Image and text convey different information. Images, just as text, should help you expand an argument, introduce a new idea or provide an understanding that text alone cannot provide. When writing about a building in an architecture thesis a plan is a good example of the kind of visual information that conveys information that it would be cumbersome to describe in text alone. Text and image in this case work together to explain a condition. All images should work the same way.

How to Structure Narrative

"Before considering the relationship of interaction to narrative, we need to be clear about our terminology regarding narrative. Gérard Genette begins his essay *Narrative Discourse* with the following distinctions: (1) the story is the signified or narrative content described, (2) the narrative is the signifier or form of the narrative discourse itself, and (3) the narrating is the "producing act." [1] Thus, narrative in a general sense is presented as a system where the act of storytelling, the narrating, produces a narrative through which the viewer constructs a story world, or diegesis."^{iv}

In order for the reader to understand what you want them to understand you must tell them what you want them to understand. Narrative is the overall structure of the writing that answers the question "What do I say next?" and "Is what I just said connected to what I am trying to say?"

It is also important to know your audience: To whom is this writing addressed? What will they know about the subject? Why would they read this text? You should be able to answer these questions before you structure your narrative. The relation between narrative and form and between narrative and content should not be underestimated.

Part of the editing process is to question the clarity of your statements in relation to the overall thesis, the chapter, the section and the paragraph. Writing is a bit like a maze that you must slowly unravel out so that the path to your goal is clear to the reader.

How to Find Your Own Voice

This is the most difficult aspect of writing. Often it is advisable to start by emulating writers you admire. This is not to copy, but to analyze how they organize an essay, chapter, or book. How and where is the main argument introduced? Does the writer explain what they are doing before they do it? How is a new idea introduced? What kinds of phrases do they use to connect ideas? Even the smallest detail can be useful. Once you have experience writing you can work on developing your own voice. It is probably more accurate to say that your voice develops as you refine your ability to write. Remember, writing is thinking. If it is confused, muddy, awkward or incomprehensible, that means you do not understand the subject and neither will the reader.

IV. GRAMMAR RULES EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Listed are the general rules of thumb for English usage that every writer should know. The information is primarily from *The Elements of Style* unless noted otherwise. The rules are easy; following them requires vigilance and patience. After you have completed a body of writing, that is you believe it is as close as possible to what you are trying to say about the subject, you begin the task of editing. First, go through the entire document several times paying special attention to the overall structure of your sentences, paragraphs and the links between ideas. Often a few connecting sentences will make an idea flow between paragraphs and from chapter to chapter. Second, look for grammatical and spelling errors. Note: word processing programs are useful, but not as thorough as your own brain. Finally, format you document so that it is easy to understand, follows the general rules for the discipline you are addressing, and is pleasing to the eye. The style rules vary accordingly by academic disciplines—see notes in Section 3 on style.

1. Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's.

Follow this rule whatever the final consonant. Thus write,

Charles's friend
Burns's poems
the witch's malice

Exceptions are the possessives of ancient proper names in -es and -is, the possessive Jesus', and such forms as for conscience' sake, for righteousness' sake. But such forms as Achilles' heel, Moses' laws, Isis' temple are commonly replaced by

the heel of Achilles
the laws of Moses
the temple of Isis

The pronominal possessives hers, its, theirs, yours, and oneself have no apostrophe.

2. In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last.

Thus write,

red, white, and blue
honest, energetic, but headstrong

He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.

In the names of business firms the last comma is omitted, as

Brown, Shipley and Company

The abbreviation etc., even if only a single term comes before it, is always preceded by a comma.

3. Enclose parenthetical expressions between commas.

The best way to see a country, unless you are pressed for time, is to travel on foot.

This rule is difficult to apply; it is frequently hard to decide whether a single word, such as however, or a brief phrase, is or is not parenthetical. If the interruption to the flow of the sentence is but slight, the writer may safely omit the commas. But whether the

interruption be slight or considerable, he must never omit one comma and leave the other. Such punctuation as

Marjorie's husband, Colonel Nelson paid us a visit yesterday,

or

My brother you will be pleased to hear, is now in perfect health, is indefensible.

Non-restrictive relative clauses are, in accordance with this rule, set off by commas.

The audience, which had at first been indifferent, became more and more interested.

Similar clauses introduced by where and when are similarly punctuated.

In 1769, when Napoleon was born, Corsica had but recently been acquired by France. Nether Stowey, where Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, is a few miles from Bridgewater.

In these sentences the clauses introduced by which, when, and where are non-restrictive; they do not limit the application of the words on which they depend, but add, parenthetically, statements supplementing those in the principal clauses. Each sentence is a combination of two statements which might have been made independently.

The audience was at first indifferent. Later it became more and more interested.

Napoleon was born in 1769. At that time Corsica had but recently been acquired by France.

Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* at Nether Stowey. Nether Stowey is only a few miles from Bridgewater.

Restrictive relative clauses are not set off by commas.

The candidate who best meets these requirements will obtain the place.

In this sentence the relative clause restricts the application of the word candidate to a single person. Unlike those above, the sentence cannot be split into two independent statements.

The abbreviations etc. and jr. are always preceded by a comma, and except at the end of a sentence, followed by one.

Similar in principle to the enclosing of parenthetical expressions between commas is the setting off by commas of phrases or dependent clauses preceding or following the main clause of a sentence.

If a parenthetical expression is preceded by a conjunction, place the first comma before the conjunction, not after it.

He saw us coming, and unaware that we had learned of his treachery, greeted us with a smile.

4. Place a comma before and or but introducing an independent clause.

The early records of the city have disappeared, and the story of its first years can no longer be reconstructed.

The situation is perilous, but there is still one chance of escape.

Sentences of this type, isolated from their context, may seem to be in need of rewriting. As they make complete sense when the comma is reached, the second clause has the appearance of an after-thought. Further, and, is the least specific of connectives. Used between independent clauses, it indicates only that a relation exists between them without defining that relation. In the example above, the relation is that of cause and result. The two sentences might be rewritten:

As the early records of the city have disappeared, the story of its first years can no longer be reconstructed.

Although the situation is perilous, there is still one chance of escape.

Or the subordinate clauses might be replaced by phrases:

Owing to the disappearance of the early records of the city, the story of its first years can no longer be reconstructed.

In this perilous situation, there is still one chance of escape.

But a writer may err by making his sentences too uniformly compact and periodic, and an occasional loose sentence prevents the style from becoming too formal and gives the reader a certain relief. Consequently, loose sentences of the type first quoted are common in easy, unstudied writing. But a writer should be careful not to construct too many of his sentences after this pattern (see Rule 14).

Two-part sentences of which the second member is introduced by as (in the sense of because), for, or, nor, and while (in the sense of and at the same time) likewise require a comma before the conjunction.

If a dependent clause, or an introductory phrase requiring to be set off by a comma, precedes the second independent clause, no comma is needed after the conjunction.

The situation is perilous, but if we are prepared to act promptly, there is still one chance of escape.

For two-part sentences connected by an adverb, see the next section.

5. Do not join independent clauses by a comma.

If two or more clauses, grammatically complete and not joined by a conjunction, are to form a single compound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semicolon.

Stevenson's romances are entertaining; they are full of exciting adventures.

It is nearly half past five; we cannot reach town before dark.

It is of course equally correct to write the above as two sentences each, replacing the semicolons by periods.

Stevenson's romances are entertaining. They are full of exciting adventures.

It is nearly half past five. We cannot reach town before dark.

If a conjunction is inserted, the proper mark is a comma (Rule 4).

Stevenson's romances are entertaining, for they are full of exciting adventures.

It is nearly half past five, and we cannot reach town before dark.

Note that if the second clause is preceded by an adverb, such as accordingly, besides, so, then, therefore, or thus, and not by a conjunction, the semicolon is still required.

I had never been in the place before; so I had difficulty in finding my way about.

In general, however, it is best, in writing, to avoid using so in this manner; there is danger that the writer who uses it at all may use it too often. A simple correction, usually serviceable, is to omit the word so, and begin the first clause with as:

As I had never been in the place before, I had difficulty in finding my way about.

If the clauses are very short, and are alike in form, a comma is usually permissible:

Man proposes, God disposes.

The gate swung apart, the bridge fell, the portcullis was drawn up.

6. Do not break sentences in two.

In other words, do not use periods for commas.

I met them on a Cunard liner several years ago. Coming home from Liverpool to New York.

He was an interesting talker. A man who had traveled all over the world, and lived in half a dozen countries.

In both these examples, the first period should be replaced by a comma, and the following word begun with a small letter.

It is permissible to make an emphatic word or expression serve the purpose of a sentence and to punctuate it accordingly:

Again and again he called out. No reply.

The writer must, however, be certain that the emphasis is warranted, and that he will not be suspected of a mere blunder in punctuation.

Rules 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover the most important principles in the punctuation of ordinary sentences; they should be so thoroughly mastered that their application becomes second nature.

Notes on Form from *The Elements of Style*

1. Headings. Leave a blank line, or its equivalent in space, after the title or heading of a manuscript. On succeeding pages, if using ruled paper, begin on the first line.

2. Numerals. Do not spell out dates or other serial numbers. Write them in figures or in Roman notation, as may be appropriate.

August 9, 1919	Chapter XII
Rule 3	352d Infantry

3. Parentheses. A sentence containing an expression in parenthesis is punctuated, outside of the marks of parenthesis, exactly as if the expression in parenthesis were absent. The expression within is punctuated as if it stood by itself, except that the final stop is omitted unless it is a question mark or an exclamation point.

I went to his house yesterday (my third attempt to see him), but he had left town.
He declares (and why should we doubt his good faith?) that he is now certain of success.

(When a wholly detached expression or sentence is parenthesized, the final stop comes before the last mark of parenthesis.)

4. Quotations. Formal quotations, cited as documentary evidence, are introduced by a colon and enclosed in quotation marks.

The provision of the Constitution is: "No tax or duty shall be laid on articles exported from any state."

Quotations grammatically in apposition or the direct objects of verbs are preceded by a comma and enclosed in quotation marks.

I recall the maxim of La Rochefoucauld, "Gratitude is a lively sense of benefits to come."
Aristotle says, "Art is an imitation of nature."

Quotations of an entire line, or more, of verse, are begun on a fresh line and centered, but not enclosed in quotation marks.

Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the Revolution was at first unbounded:
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven!

Quotations introduced by that are regarded as in indirect discourse and not enclosed in quotation marks.

Keats declares that beauty is truth, truth beauty.
Proverbial expressions and familiar phrases of literary origin require no quotation marks.
These are the times that try men's souls.
He lives far from the madding crowd.

The same is true of colloquialisms and slang.

5. References. In scholarly work requiring exact references, abbreviate titles that occur frequently, giving the full forms in an alphabetical list at the end. As a general practice, give the references in parenthesis or in footnotes, not in the body of the sentence. Omit the words act, scene, line, book, volume, page, except when referring by only one of them. Punctuate as indicated below.

Titles. For the titles of literary works, scholarly usage prefers italics with capitalized initials. The usage of editors and publishers varies, some using italics with capitalized initials, others using Roman with capitalized initials and with or without quotation marks. Use italics (indicated in manuscript by underscoring), except in writing for a periodical that follows a different practice.

Omit the initial *A* or *The* from titles when you place the possessive before them.

A Tale of Two Cities; Dicken's Tale of Two Cities.

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ⁱ Zinsser, W. *Writing to Learn*, pp. 56

ⁱⁱ from “The Owl at Purdue” online source: <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>>. This resource was written by Jennifer Liethen Kunka and Joe Barbato; additional revision by Dave Neyhart and Erin E. Karper.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_docelectric.html

^{iv} Genette, G. *Narrative Discourse*. Cornell University Press, 1980. p. 3, excerpt from <<http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~murtaugh/thesis/Introduction/Introduction.html>>