

WRITING CHECKLIST for scholarly writing

- _____ 1. I have avoided using informal, colloquial language (e.g., kids, stuff, sort of, really).
- _____ 2. I have avoided using contractions.
- _____ 3. I have severely limited my use of the word "that."
Hideous: Researchers found that children that experienced trauma reported that they were always vigilant
So much better: Children in the study who had experienced trauma reported being constantly vigilant.
- _____ 4. I have avoided using "that," "this" and "these" as pronouns, and have only used them as adjectives. Furthermore, I have used the words as adjectives only sparingly (e.g., once per page).
Bad: This means . . . (often the reader doesn't know what "this" is referring to)
Better: This finding indicates . . .
Best: The finding that age predicts attrition signifies . . .
- _____ 5. I know when to use "which" and when to use "that."
- _____ 6. My subjects and verbs match in number and in common sense.
Horrible: Measures used in the study includes . . .
Fine: Measures used in the study include . . .
Atrocious: Initial recruitment was the parents of 321 children (saying recruitment was parents)
Commendable: The researchers recruited the parents of 321 children.
- _____ 7. My writing reflects knowledge of this fact: The word "data" is plural and all verbs used with the word must be in plural form.
- _____ 8. My use of antecedents is correct.
Painful: As a child, my family did . . . ;
Pleasant: As a child, I experienced . . .
Mortifying: Rituals were important to my family. It helped us . . .
Admirable: Rituals were important to my family. They helped us . . .
- _____ 9. Almost all of my sentences have actors as subjects (the *authors* claimed, the *researchers* found), or other active subjects (the *literature* contains gaps . . .) instead of gerunds or other verb forms that make identification of the subject challenging, if not impossible (e.g., *Reviewing* the literature shows . . .).
When verb forms are used as subjects, writers may get themselves into embarrassing situations; for example, *Having* a narrow study population questions the validity of CBT for a broader population of individuals with OCD. OMG! Can "having" ask questions?)

- _____ 10. Related to #8, I have avoided passive voice as much as possible
Many unnecessary words: There are many researchers who write badly.
Better: Many researchers write badly.
- _____ 11. My sentences have identifiable subjects.
- _____ 12. I have made sure that phrases in related lists in my sentences have parallel structures.
Wrong: During the holidays, my family liked to engage in sports activities together, such as go skiing, take a hike, ice-skating, to ride bikes.
Right: During the holidays, my family liked to engage in sports activities together, such as skiing, hiking, ice-skating, and bike riding.
- _____ 13. As a rule, I have used commas after prepositional phrases, especially if they are long prepositional phrases.
Less clear: In accordance with the tradition of my family of origin my new family . . .
More clear: In accordance with the tradition of my family of origin, my new family . . .
- _____ 14. I have not divided compound predicates by commas, but I have used commas between two independent clauses separated by “but” or “and.”
- _____ 15. As instructed by the APA style manual, I use a comma between the penultimate and final element in a list.
Wrong: Doctoral students must excel at reading, writing and thinking.
Right: Doctoral students must excel at reading, writing, and thinking.
- _____ 16. I have used hyphens as elements of spelling (e.g., self-esteem) as described in the *APA Manual*. I have used dashes--and I know they have to be typed a certain way--to set off a part of a sentence. (Type as two hyphens with no space before, after, or between. *The APA Manual* goes into more detail about a second kind of dash, but I don’t know about that one.)
- _____ 17. As instructed by the *APA manual*, I have not used “as” or “since” in the place of “because.” Another word related to time, “while,” should not be used in place of “although” or “though.”
- _____ 18. Each paragraph has one major point. I could make an orderly and logical outline of my paper by listing in order the main points from the paragraphs.
- _____ 19. In each paragraph, each (non-thesis) sentence serves a purpose in relation to supporting the main thought or thesis sentence of the paragraph.
- _____ 20. My paragraphs do not end with virtually the same statements they began with, that is, the paragraph has further developed the thesis sentence.
- _____ 21. In relatively simple sentences with compound verbs, I have not used commas between the verbs.
Wrong: My cats thoroughly enjoy getting on counters, and sneaking into cupboards.
Right: My cats thoroughly enjoy getting on counters and sneaking into cupboards.

- _____ 22. In sentences that have more than one subject and verb, I have used commas (unless the sentence is short.
Correct: The researchers asked questions, and the participants provided responses.
Could also be: The researchers asked questions and the participants provided responses.
- _____ 23. I have examined each sentence to see if it could be made simpler and clearer by removing extraneous words.
Undesirable: In my paragraphs, each of my sentences serves a purpose in relation to the issue of supporting the main thought or thesis of the paragraph.
Better: In my paragraphs, each sentence supports the thesis statement.
- _____ 24. I have been consistent in my usage of spelling, formatting, punctuation, etc., throughout my paper. As a bonus, I have even made sure my spelling is correct and my usage conforms with APA style.
- _____ 25. I have consulted the *APA Manual* about how to punctuate the abbreviations for *et cetera*, *et alia*, *exempli gratia*, and *id est*. I also know where in sentences they can be used and when their spelled-out English versions must be used.
- _____ 26. I have proofread my "final" paper at least twice. If instructors often find typos in my work even after I have proofread them twice, I have proofread the paper one more time and/or asked someone else to proofread my paper. (Make sure your choice of other person complies with the honor code.)
- _____ 27. I have consulted one of my sources on APA format frequently while preparing my reference list and while formatting in-text citations. I know when NOT to include issue numbers in my reference list.
- _____ 28. I have consulted my APA sources frequently to be sure my in-paragraph and separate bulleted lists are formatted properly. The same goes for my headings and numbers.
- _____ 29. My ellipses are properly spaced.
Wrong: Mark Twain stated, "I have been through some terrible things in my life...some of which actually happened."
Right: (middle of same sentence is left out of the quotation) "I have been through some terrible things in my life . . . some of which actually happened."
Right: (beginning of next sentence is left out) "I have been through some terrible things in my life. . . . some of them actually happened." (The first dot is a period, the rest are ellipses.)
- _____ 30. My paper contains information, insights, critical thinking, and analysis that will differentiate it from all other papers received by my instructor. I have thought about and applied the relevant course material to the content of my paper. (Specifically, the paper is impressively different from what I would have written before starting the doctoral program.) My writing demonstrates mastery of research concepts and the precise scholarly language of research.