

## Writing Guide for your Research Paper

Preface: This is a guide to help with writing in one specific style, often referred to as ‘standard English’. The guide includes practical examples of how to use this style. Although this style is commonly found in academic writing, it also is criticized for privileging white epistemology and raciolinguistic ideologies (you can listen to a [Vijay Ramjattan discuss this topic in this podcast](#), or read check out [this article on linguistic racism](#)). To learn more about the connection between language, norms, and power, I highly recommend reading [this excerpt](#) from bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress* (1994, 167–175).

*This is the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you*

– Adrienne Rich (“[The Burning of Paper Instead of Children](#)”, poem in [The Will to Change](#))

### I. PAPER FORMATTING

Default paper formatting guide:

- Times New Roman, 12-point font
- Double Spaced
- 1-inch Margins all around

Your paper should include the following:

- A Title
- Page Numbers
- A Thesis Statement. See section III below.
- A Works Cited (including all references cited, but only the references cited—not all sources consulted during research). See section IV below.
- If figures are included, a figure caption and source should be provided
  - o Example: “Figure 1. Map of Italy and Sicily (Boatright et al. 2004, Map 1.1).”

### II. PAPER STYLE

When you are writing your paper, focus on creating a clear argument through the thesis, and developing a flowing defensive of that argument using supporting points / evidence / examples.

In writing / structuring your paper, focus on the following:

- Compose a clear introduction that succinctly outlines the topic and its importance, and presents the thesis statement
  - Avoid general facts / details that don’t really relate to the topic (e.g., if the paper is about the Roman gladiatorial games, don’t waste time and space with general statements about Rome being ‘the most powerful / important / significant / fascinating / enduring state’ from the ancient world → focus on the topic of the paper itself)
- Make arguments directly, rather than asking questions or outlining the topics that you will cover.

- E.g., “Can gladiatorial games tell us about the Roman people? What role did the games play in contemporary politics? This paper will examine these questions...” → “The popularity of gladiatorial games during the late republic and early empire reflect the militarism and violence endemic in Roman culture and provided a means through which ambitious politicians could court public support, particularly through the distribution of gifts and bread.”
- Be specific with the evidence being used
  - Don’t simply say that “the evidence shows that classical Athens wasn’t a true democracy by modern standards” → specify what the evidence is: “The exclusion of women, slaves, and non-citizens, as well as the requisite presence of the voter within the urban center of Athens, demonstrates that classical Athens wasn’t a true democracy by modern standards.”
- Create clear transitions between the arguments being made, versus just a structural notation that you are moving from point 1 to point 2
  - Avoid transitions like “Another point worth mentioning...” or “The next topic to talk about...” or “Another interesting aspect...” → link arguments together directly: “Just as the assembly membership restricted democratic participation to Athenian citizen men (point 1—the previous paragraph), the location of the *ekklesia* in the center of Athens and the necessity of voter presence meant that democratic participation was further limited to those who were urban dwellers, or those who had the financial freedom to miss work and travel to the city center (point 2—the current paragraph).”

Work to avoid the following:

- Colloquialisms (e.g., Mark Antony totally chickened out and fled the Battle of Actium)
- Clichés (e.g., don’t judge a book by its cover)
- Empty / vague phrases (e.g., some people may argue that Cleopatra wasn’t a powerful ruler) → powerful is vague—powerful in what way? Do people actually argue this, or is this a straw man argument as well?
- Straw Man arguments (e.g., some might say that gladiatorial games weren’t cruel) → do people say this? If so, provide citations!
- Absolutes (e.g., Alexander the Great was the best military leader in history) → this is vague and hard to prove
- Assumptions about the thoughts / feelings of past people (e.g., Constantine didn’t really believe in the Christian God) → argue what the best conclusions are given the evidence
- Unclear pronoun antecedents (e.g., “Trajan and Hadrian were military leaders and succeeded through adoption. He greatly expanded the empire through numerous campaigns.” → who does the “he” refer to??

### III. THESIS STATEMENTS

*Why Is a Thesis Statement So Important?*

Your thesis statement will clearly and directly assert the main point of your paper. This one sentence will then control and structure your essay, laying out the argument that will follow.

*How Do I Write a Good Thesis Statement?*

A good thesis statement will satisfy the following two main characteristics:

1. ***A good thesis statement must make a claim.*** Your paper must provide a position or a perspective on a topic. This position must include more than observations and must be demonstrated with specific examples. For example: “Game of Thrones is violent” is an observation. However, “Game of Thrones uses violence to reflect on the true costs of war and to depict the ways in which the powerful prey on the powerless” provides a clear and specific perspective on the use of violence in the *Song of Ice and Fire* series. It gives reasons for the violence, rather than just noting that the violence exists. These reasons must then be supported throughout the paper through the use of specific examples.
2. ***A good thesis will structure the entire paper.*** The thesis helps to lay out the arguments to be presented in the paper. Each subsequent paragraph then supports the thesis (and if it doesn’t, then either the thesis or the paragraph needs to be rewritten). Your thesis signals to the reader how you are going to develop and support your argument from the very start.

Strong thesis statements will also avoid the following pitfalls:

1. **Does not present a position / argument.** It should be very clear what side of an issue the paper will come down on (e.g., “Some people argue that Pepsi is superior to Coke” → but which is superior according to your paper?).
2. **Overly general / vague.** The thesis must be specific on the arguments your paper will make (e.g., “J.K. Rowling uses different literary techniques to comment on issues of inequality and prejudice” → be specific, *what* literary techniques does she use?).
3. **Simply summarizes the facts.** The thesis should present an argument, not simply a statement of fact (e.g., “Captain America and Iron Man fail to agree on legislation enforcing oversight on the activities of the Avengers, leading to civil war” → while this is true, this is not an analytical statement).
4. **Includes clichés.** Remember to keep your argument academic and reasoned (e.g., “The story of Romeo and Juliet is literally the most beautiful and tear-jerking story of love at first sight ever told”).

#### IV. RESEARCH AND CITATIONS

With research assignments, you are responsible for seeking out, consulting, and incorporating the work of other scholars in your writing. This requires the proper attribution of the ideas you incorporate through citations. You must include a Works Cited list with the sources that have been referenced in the paper. This does not include sources that you consulted in your research but did not end up using when writing the paper (and are therefore not referenced in the paper itself). Whatever citation style you choose (e.g., Chicago, Harvard, MLA, APA), be consistent!

The following sources are generally accepted for use in research papers:

- Primary sources (ancient texts)
- Books
- Book Reviews (published in Academic Journals)
- Journal Articles
- Academic Encyclopedias
- Project websites (e.g., the Athenian Agora Excavations website: <http://www.agathe.gr/>)

The following sources are generally not accepted for use in research papers:

- Course lecture slides
- Internet encyclopedias (Ancient.eu, Wikipedia)
- Non-academic websites (<http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/>)
  - o If you are unsure of whether a website is academically run, look at the “About” section on the website to see who produces the content.
  - o If you are still unsure, email me the link and ask!

When citing ancient sources, provide the reference information for the primary text rather than the translation. For example:

- To refer to a section of Polybius’ *Histories*, cite it as “Polybius, *The Histories* book.chapter.line–line” → e.g., Polybius, *The Histories* 1.1.1–2.

If you want to directly quote this passage, provide the translation source as well:

- Polybius correctly argues that “there is no more authentic way to prepare and train oneself for political life than by studying history” (Polybius, *The Histories* 1.1.2; trans. by Waterfield 2010, 3). The Waterfield 2010 source would appear in your works cited.

If incorporating quotes in a foreign language, italicize the text.

For WWU’s citation guide, see: [http://libguides.wvu.edu/citation\\_style](http://libguides.wvu.edu/citation_style). WWU supports the use of the open-source software Zotero for research management and citation building: <http://libguides.wvu.edu/zotero>

When incorporating information from your references, be sure to do the following:

1. **Whenever possible paraphrase—don’t quote directly.** Direct quotation should be limited to those statements that are impactful and important because of the wording of the author. They often reflect an argument being made by the author you are quoting. When it is simply information or details being presented, paraphrase this information in your own writing and provide a citation (this will also help you to avoid awkward integration problems for direct quotes).
  - Examples of proper quotes:
    - The Marian reforms created a population of veterans that “could be deployed in political struggles, thereby introducing a new and disturbing level of violence to Rome’s public affairs” (Boatright et al. 2004, 175).
    - Hatshepsut has become known to modern audiences as “the woman who would be king” (Cooney 2015).

- Example of a quote that should be paraphrased:
    - In the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE “Spartan hopes of achieving lasting power in these decades of turmoil after the Peloponnesian War were crushed in 371 BCE, when a resurgent Theban army commanded by the great general Epaminondas defeated the Spartan army at Leuctra in Boeotia” (Martin 2000, 225) → this is a wordy and awkward quote → Sparta’s attempt to consolidating and secure power in Greece through the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. was ended by Thebes at the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BCE (Martin 2000, 225)
  - Examples of common knowledge information that do not need citations:
    - Alexander the Great “died in 323 aged only 32 years old” (Van de Mieroop 2011, 336).
    - In the north “the Alps divide Italy from the Mediterranean Sea” (Boatright et al. 2004, 1).
    - In the study of Egypt “Egyptologists use the terms Old, Middle, and New Kingdom” (Van de Mieroop 2011, 42).
2. **Integrate the quote properly within your prose.** Quotes should grammatically and stylistically flow in your paper. Quotes should either be incorporated directly into the running text, “like this,” introduced by a colon, or should be set apart as a block quote on a separate line of text. If necessary, you can alter small aspects of the quote with added brackets around changed elements to make the quote fit into the syntax of the surrounding text (e.g., change the tense of a verb; replace a pronoun with a name).
- Example of quote alteration:
    - In the aftermath of civil war Augustus shifted his focus to civic works and urban regeneration, allowing him to “justly boast that he had found [Rome] built of brick and left it in marble” (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 28.3).
  - Examples of effective quote integration:
    - Greece has a particularly mountainous landscape, which made farming difficult in the ancient world. This variable terrain “ruled out the raising of cattle and horses on any large scale” (Martin 2000, 10).
    - Seneca the Younger argued that the poor treatment of slaves led to inevitable hostility between slave and owner, suggesting that “*quot servi, tot hostes*” (“as many slaves you have, you have enemies”; Seneca *Letter* 47).
    - Cato the Elder was reputed to end every senate speech with the same exclamation: “Carthage must be destroyed” (Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Elder* 27.1).
  - Examples of poor quote integration:
    - Greece has a particularly mountainous landscape, which made farming difficult in the ancient world. “The scarcity of level terrain ruled out the raising of cattle and horses on any large scale” (Martin 2000, 10).
    - “The scarcity of level terrain ruled out the raising of cattle and horses on any large scale” (Martin 2000, 10). This quote shows that the mountainous landscape made farming difficult in the ancient world.

*\*\*I encourage you to take advantage of the resources of the Hacherl Research and Writing Studio (<https://library.wvu.edu/rws>)! You can find them on the second floor of Haggard Hall\*\**

## V. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

Academic Integrity applies to all of the principles, values, and behaviors that contribute to good character, including, for example, honesty, fairness, respect, courage, and responsibility. We exhibit integrity within the classroom by taking credit only for work we have done and crediting the work of others. Similarly, we demonstrate integrity by treating one another with fairness and respect regardless of the setting. We, the faculty, students, administration, and staff of Western Washington University, are deeply committed to integrity as a fundamental principle of education. This can only be achieved when we commit to integrity throughout all of our activities at the University, including our work, academics, and campus life. To this end, each of us has a responsibility to be fair and honest. As a community of students, faculty, staff, and administrators, we recognize that our actions reflect on each of us as individuals, and on Western as a whole. As such, we honor integrity as vital to our community and the ideals of liberal education.

A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found at <http://www.wvu.edu/integrity/>.

### 1. Be sure you understand the university's definition of *plagiarism*:

Plagiarism is presenting as one's own in whole or in part the argument, language, creations, conclusions, or scientific data of another without explicit acknowledgement. If you submit or present as your own the written or oral work of someone else you are guilty of plagiarism. This also includes the resubmission of a student's own work in identical or similar form (a student may use the same or substantially the same work for assignments in two or more courses only with written permission from the instructors of all the classes involved). For more information, please see the WWU guide on plagiarism: <http://libguides.wvu.edu/plagiarism>.

### 2. Be sure that you understand the consequences of plagiarism:

- a) Plagiarism is the theft of intellectual property, just like shoplifting is theft of merchandise.
- b) Plagiarism diminishes the quality of the learning experience of yourself and your classmates.
- c) Plagiarism serves to undermine the value of a degree from WWU.
- d) When you plagiarize you will most likely be caught. Instructors are required by the university to report cases of suspected plagiarism. Academic misconduct can result in a failing grade and a notation of academic discipline on the student's record. Repeated acts of plagiarism can lead to dismissal from the University.

### 3. If at any point if you feel unable to complete an assignment, please:

- a) Visit the WWU Research and Writing Studio (360-650-3219; <http://library.wvu.edu/rws>). The Writing Studio can help with all stages of paper writing (topic selection and development, paper organization, grammar, etc.).

b) Make an appointment to discuss your situation with me during office hours. Your professors are invested in helping you successfully complete the course while maintaining academic integrity.