WRITING GUIDE

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This handout only discusses a few writing tips and reference formats. It is not an all-inclusive writing guide! Also see Strunk, W. (1999). The Elements of Style, 4th Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. (Also at: http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html)

Writing Techniques and Styles

1) Avoid using sexist exclusionary language.

For example: An extraverted person is sociable and outgoing. He enjoys parties and avoids solitary activities such as reading.

"He" excludes the female gender; instead, use "he or she", or alternate between "he" and "she" in different sentences. The best technique, however, is to employ plurals whenever possible.

For example: Extraverted people are sociable and outgoing. They enjoy parties and avoid solitary activities such as reading.

Note: The American Psychological Association and other social sciences (e.g., Sociology and Anthropology) mandate non-sexist language. Other courses in different disciplines (e.g., creative writing) may not require this language.

2) Use the active voice, but minimize linking to be verbs (i.e., is, are, was, were). Replace them with more dynamic language whenever possible. Sometimes this requires restructuring sentences.

For example: The Oedipus complex is resolved by the defense mechanisms of identification and repression. VS. The defense mechanisms of identification and repression help resolve the Oedipus complex.

3) Never employ the anonymous "you"!

Incorrect: According to Freud, you experience anxiety if you do not repress socially undesirable wishes.

Correct: According to Freud, anxiety occurs when one does not repress socially undesirable wishes.

Correct: According to Freud, anxiety results from failure to repress socially undesirable wishes.

4) Use a varied vocabulary. Avoid repeating key words.

Incorrect: The Basic Trust vs. Mistrust stage occurs during infancy. In this stage..[etc.].Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage occurs during the toddler years. In this stage..[etc.].

Correct: The Basic Trust vs. Mistrust stage occurs during infancy. This stage is characterized by.....The Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage corresponds to the toddler years. During this stage, .....[etc.]

5) Never use contractions (e.g., can't, don't); use full words (e.g., cannot, do not).

6) Do not use slang or colloquialisms! "A lot" is used commonly in ordinary conversation, but should never appear in papers.
7) Use clear, succinct language. For example, phrases such as "it appears that" and "that fact that" are seldom necessary. Verbose sentences confuse (or bore) the reader!

**Grammar**

1) Subjects and pronouns must agree. Mistakes often occur when trying to avoid exclusionary language as previously described.

**Incorrect**: If a person does not receive unconditional positive regard, they may not develop into fully-functioning individuals. (The subject, "a person", is singular; the pronoun, "they", is plural.)

**Correct**: If people do not receive unconditional positive regard, they may not develop into fully-functioning individuals. (The subject and pronoun are both plural.)

2) Do not end sentences in prepositions (e.g., on, for).

**Incorrect**: During the trust vs. mistrust stage, it is important for children to have someone to rely on.

**Correct**: During the trust vs. mistrust stage, it is important for children to have someone on whom to rely.

**Common Errors**

1) Note the different meanings of "e.g.", "i.e.", and "cf."

- e.g. = for example
- i.e. = that is
- cf. = compare to a contrasting (not a similar!) perspective

Both "e.g." and "i.e." require a comma, "cf." does not.

**For example**:
Some personality theorists emphasize anxiety (e.g., Freud, Horney).
Bandura believes that learning may occur by observation (cf. Skinner).

2) Apostrophes are used for the possessive form of a word, not the plural.

**Incorrect**: 1990's; r's (i.e., correlations), Breast-self examinations (BSE's)
**Correct**: 1990s; r's; BSEs

3) "While" refers to time periods, "whereas" is used for comparisons. Do not use "while" in place of whereas, although, or but.

**Incorrect**: Freud focused on the unconscious, while Adler emphasized the conscious.
**Correct**: Freud focused on the unconscious, whereas Adler emphasized the conscious. **Correct**: While working with Freud, Adler developed new ideas.

**Incorrect**: While these findings are unusual, they are not unique.
**Correct**: Although these findings are unusual, they are not unique.

--OR-- These findings are unusual, but not unique.
4) Use "since" in reference to time; do not use "since" in place of "because".

Correct: Several scoring techniques were developed since the test was first introduced.
Incorrect: Adler left the psychoanalytic group since he disagreed with Freud.
Correct: Adler left the psychoanalytic group because he disagreed with Freud.

5) Note the difference between "that" and "which" clauses.

Classic example:
He destroyed the evidence that was incriminating.
He destroyed the evidence, which was incriminating.

In the first sentence, the evidence was incriminating. In the second, the act of destroying the evidence was incriminating. "That" clauses are essential to the meaning of the sentence. (Therefore, they are called "defining clauses"). "Which" clauses (nondefining clauses) merely add further information, and always involve a comma.

6) Note the difference between "effect" and "affect".

In psychology, "effect" is usually used as a noun:
Several studies find an effect of socioeconomic status on health.

"Effect" can also be a verb:
In order to effect social justice, poverty and discrimination must be eradicated.

"Affect" is a verb denoting "influence" or "change" (usually referring to an independent variable):
Socioeconomic status affects health in several ways.

"Affect" can also be a noun denoting emotion:
Negative affect correlates with physical illness.
References

1) Be sure to cite others' work. Quoting and paraphrasing another writer's ideas require citations. Failure to cite the author constitutes plagiarism! Reference styles, however, vary across disciplines. Consult your textbook and readings for numerous examples of APA-style citations. Most often, the author's last name and publication year is enclosed in parentheses. Direct quotes require a citation to the exact page number in which quoted text appears.

**Example:** Crisis theory addresses the adjustment issues posed by adverse circumstances (Moos & Tsu, 1977). Therefore, it provides an excellent framework for studying adaptation to chronic illness.

**Example with direct quote:** Crisis theory helps explain “how people can cope with major life crises and transitions” (Moos & Tsu, 1977, p. 6). Therefore, it provides an excellent framework for studying adaptation to chronic illness.

2) Every paper must end with a reference page (i.e., bibliography) written in APA style. A few examples follow. Refer to your textbook and course readings for additional examples.

a) **Journal article:**


-->Last name, first initial (year). Title of article. *name of journal*, volume #, pages

b) **Book written by one author:**


-->Last name, first initial (year). *Book title*. City of publisher: name of publisher.

c) **Chapter from a book with many authors:**


-->Last name, first initial (year). Title of chapter. In [first initial and last name of editor] (Ed.), *Title of book*, (chapter pages). City of publisher: name of publisher.