

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

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The major purpose of this brief manuscript is to recommend a set of guidelines for the preparation of written assignments. There is no universally accepted method for preparing manuscripts for submission to instructors, and students often find this to be a major source of frustration. The following are the guidelines I prefer for students to use in my classes. Nothing is magical about these guidelines, and students should not use these guidelines in another class without first consulting their instructor.

A minor, but perhaps more important, purpose is to acquaint students with a methodology for professionally preparing reports. Many recruiters point to the lack of communication skills as a major shortcoming of many students. Perhaps this manuscript can help students to enhance their capabilities in this important area.

The narrative will be developed around the following general structure. First, general mechanical issues are addressed. Second, issues surrounding the presentation of the narrative are discussed. Third, common style and grammatical errors are listed. Fourth, the proper method to use in referencing sources is presented.

Mechanical Issues

This section discusses the general structural format written assignments should follow. The following topics are addressed: spacing, margins, print, and pagination.

Spacing

Except when otherwise noted, manuscripts should be double-spaced. This allows space for the reader to make insightful comments. All headings or titles containing more than one line should be single spaced. A triple space should precede and proceed a visual support (table, graph, chart, etc.) placed within the text. Any quote requiring more than four lines of text should be indented and single spaced. A triple space should precede any centered heading or major subheading. All paragraphs should be indented five spaces.

Margins

Manuscripts should be prepared with one inch borders surrounding the text, i.e. one inch at the top, bottom, and sides. Paper should be 8 1/2" x 11" except for large visual aids that are

folded to the proper size. The page number is part of the text and should be inside the 1" margin. Do not use right justified margins.

Print

Manuscripts should be word processed using a ten or twelve point print, using Times New Roman or Arial font.

Pagination

With only a few exceptions, all pages in the manuscript should be numbered. Any page with a centered heading at the top, which includes any page only containing a table or other visual support, should be numbered at the bottom center of the page. All other pages are numbered in the upper right hand corner. The cover page is not numbered. The Executive Summary is given page "i" (Roman numeral 1). Each following page prior to the first page of the text is given the next sequence Roman numeral. An Arabic number 1 is placed on the bottom center of the first page of text and all following pages are given the next Arabic number in the sequence, generally in the upper right hand corner. Generally all the following pages should be numbered. The sequence of the presentation is addressed below.

At least two lines of text must remain together when going to the following page. That is, do not leave one line of text at the top or bottom of a page. The only exception is a situation that is unavoidable (e.g., a paragraph containing three lines).

Presentation of the Narrative

Structure

One of the most common weaknesses in student presentation of the narrative is the lack of structure. The narrative should be presented in a fashion such that an individual looking for a specific item of information can locate it rapidly. In addition, the writer must presume that the reader approaches the narrative with less interest than the reader of, say, a Hemingway novel. Furthermore, structure greatly enhances the clarity and comprehension of the text.

The introduction of the narrative should explain to the reader exactly what is to be presented, why it is being presented, and in what sequence is it to be presented. During the presentation of the narrative, the writer should remind the reader where the narrative is in the sequence. The conclusion should remind the reader what the purpose was, how it was presented, and how the narrative has accomplished its objectives. The narrative should be developed in a logical, systematic fashion as a person would develop a persuasive argument.

The presentation of the narrative should use liberally (but not overuse) headings and subheadings. The following is the generally accepted levels of structure in descending order:

1. centered heading, underlined.
2. centered heading, not underlined.
3. side heading (flush with left margin), underlined.
4. side heading, not underlined

5. paragraph heading (beginning of paragraph, followed by a period), underlined.

Generally, it is not necessary to use all five types of headings; however, the order must be followed. For example, you may choose to use 1, 3, and 5 (which is common). All topics having the same level should be of similar importance in the narrative. If this is not the case, more heading levels are needed.

The Cover Page

Every written assignment should contain a cover page. It should present the title of the document, the author(s), the course number and section, the course title, the instructor's name, the date, and the name of the institution.

All the information should be centered on the line. The title should be placed approximately one inch from the top of the page, and the name of the institution should be placed one inch from the bottom of the page. The course information should be grouped together and double spaced. The author(s), course information, date, and instructor should be evenly spaced on the page. The cover page is not numbered.

The Executive Summary

"Out there in the real world" managers will seldom read an entire lengthy document or report. Most business managers only want very specific information. Executive summaries are included so that a busy executive can, in a short time, determine the essence of the document. If the summary triggers an interest, then the executive can continue to read and determine where in the document to look for the information desired. The executive summary should succinctly address the purpose of the report, topic(s) addressed, data collected, person(s) involved, methods used, and conclusions.

The executive summary is normally less than one page in length. Where there are page constraints placed on the report, the executive summary does not count as a page. Generally, the executive summary is page i.

Tables, Charts, and Graphs

If appropriate, tables, charts, and graphs should be used to summarize or clarify the text. Often visual representations can greatly clarify many pages of text. Many business executives strongly recommend students become familiar with the process of developing these visual support mechanisms. Once again, it is more efficient for a busy business executive to examine a visual support for understanding than to read several pages of text. The writer's purpose is to communicate understanding and information in the most thorough and yet efficient way possible. If the executive understands what s/he needs to understand from the visual support, then that is sufficient; however, if a clearer, deeper understanding is needed, the executive can read the text.

Tables, charts, and graphs should be clearly labeled with a centered title containing the number of the exhibit in a sequence and its subject. For example, the second table might be labeled, "Table 2: A Summary of Significant Aspects to the Central Problem." If possible, the visual supports should be presented in the same physical direction as regular text, so that the

reader does not have to shift the text. Place visual supports as close as possible to their logical place in the text. Reference visual supports in the text by their title (e.g., Table 2.) If the visual support takes more than one-half of a page, it should be placed on a separate page and should be centered on the page from top to bottom. This page is numbered on the bottom center in the proper sequence.

The Reference Section

It is most unusual when a manuscript is prepared without utilizing any outside sources. Only those sources referenced in the text should be listed. The reference should be presented in the proper format (see the discussion below) beginning on a separate page entitled "References." This section follows the text and is not counted in page constraints. The page number is placed at the bottom center of the first reference page, and the remaining pages are numbered in the upper right hand corner. The page number follows in the sequence from the text. The body of a reference is generally single spaced. A double space is used between references.

Prior to using any source of information, the student needs to assess the credibility of that source. Milner Library has done an excellent job of providing readers with the means to assess the credibility of the source. **“Evaluating Information Resources: Criteria to Consider”** can be found on the Milner Library web page at: <http://www.library.ilstu.edu/assets/pdf/handouts/evalinfo.pdf> In case you were wondering, sources from wikipedia.com (or any other similar web site) are not credible, and information gleaned from the sources should not be used in any of your reports/papers.

The librarians at Milner Library have also provided a number of wonderful resources for you to help with your search for secondary sources. In order to find wonderful information about various sources for Business and Marketing, go to the Milner Library web page at: <http://www.library.ilstu.edu/assets/pdf/handouts/evalinfo.pdf> , scroll down to the Business section.

Appendices

Sometimes items referenced are either too lengthy or not of sufficient importance to warrant placing them in the body of the text. This can include items such as copies of important documents, technical notes, and lengthy visual supports. Such items are placed in the Appendix. All appendices should be titled in a sequence beginning with Appendix A. Each page of the Appendix is numbered in the sequence continuing from the text. The page number for any page of the Appendix containing a title must have a page number placed at the bottom center of the page. Only appendices that are referenced in the text should be included.

Style and Grammatical Errors

Errors made in style and grammar can greatly damage the credibility of the writer and entire research project. No substitute exists for careful and thoughtful proofing of any document before submission. This requires that the document be prepared far enough in advance that corrections can be made in time to meet deadlines. The lack of adequate proofreading has been found to be the most common source of student's writing problems (i.e., the writer hurriedly

prepares the document and does a sloppy job.) When appropriate, other individuals should be asked to proof the document as they may see errors not detected by the writer.

Students are urged to obtain a copy of The Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, 4th edition, (approximate cost \$10.00) for consultation about grammar, punctuation and style. The following is a list of the most common inexcusable errors committed by students in their writing:

1. Use of colloquial expressions, e.g., "Being that", "Reason being"
2. Misspelled words (in this day of word processors hard to understand).
3. Normally, possessive nouns should contain an apostrophe.
4. The term "a lot" is two words and is very ambiguous.
5. Verb and subject do not match, e.g., the data is analyzed.
6. Absence or misuse of commas.
7. No use of semicolons.
8. Use of the indefinite "you," e.g., "When you hire folks like him, you run the chance of getting burned."
9. Use of they, them, this, and other pronouns that could reference more than one noun. Beginning sentences with such pronouns is generally hard to support, because the pronoun must modify the entire preceding sentence.
10. Lack of specificity and use of ambiguous terms and expressions, e.g., the foreseeable future.
11. Failure to be specific or "say what you mean and mean what you say."
12. Constructing two very short sentences that could easily be combined into one sentence.
13. Beginning several sentences in a row with the same word.
14. Starting almost every sentence with "there."
15. Using double negatives, e.g., "We didn't do nothing to deserve this."
16. Writing in passive rather than active voice.
17. Use of the past tense exclusively; avoidance of the present tense.
18. Paragraphs that contain only one or two sentences.

19. Paragraphs that develop several non-related thoughts.
20. Using a conversation tone, e.g., "Oh, you know what I mean."
21. Sentences that contain a string of several pronouns, e.g., "They did it to them so they would know that he could do business with them."
22. Splitting an infinitive, e.g., to vigorously investigate.
23. Using the words "firstly," "secondly," "thirdly," etc.
24. Writing in the first person, singular and plural.
25. Using colloquial two-word verbs, e.g., talk over (discuss), look into (investigate), and throw out (remove).
26. Ending sentences with prepositions, e.g., ". . . seeing where he is at."
27. Using "which" instead of "that."
28. Ending sentences with abbreviations.
29. Illogical expressions, e.g., the quota system's nonexistence.
30. Incorrectly beginning sentences with "however" instead of "nevertheless."
31. Using profanity is never appropriate.

Referencing Sources

Footnotes and Endnotes

Generally, footnotes and endnotes should be avoided. Only when a clarification of information in the text is explicitly needed should a footnote be used. In business publications, endnotes are generally preferred to footnotes. A raised number should be placed in the text at the point where the endnote is referenced. A separate page entitled "Endnotes" follows the last page of text with the notes appropriately numbered. The page is numbered on the bottom center of the page in the sequence following the text.

Reference Citations Within The Text

Citation in the text should be by the author's last name and year of publication, enclosed in parentheses without punctuation: "(Kinsey 1960)." If practical, the citation should stand by a punctuation mark. Otherwise, insert it in a logical sentence break. If you use the author's name

within the sentence, there is no need to repeat the name in the citation; just use the year of publication in parentheses, as in "...The Howard Harris Program (1966)."

If a particular page, section, or equation is cited, it should be placed within the parentheses: "(Kinsey 1960, p. 112)." For multiple authors, use the full citation for up to three authors; for four or more, use the first author's name followed by "et al." (no italics). A series of citations should be listed in alphabetical order and separated by semicolons: (Donnelly 1961; Kinsey 1960; Wensley 1981).

Reference List Style

References are to be listed alphabetically, last name first, followed by publication date in parentheses. Use full first name, not just initials. The reference list should be double spaced on a separate page. Use two hard returns between each reference.

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of their references. Check them carefully. There must be a reference for every citation, and a citation for every reference. Do not include uncited works in the reference list, and be sure that you have included a complete reference for every citation.

“1. Single- and multiple-author references for books:

Donnelly, James H. and William R. George (1981), *Marketing of Services*. Chicago: American Marketing Association.

2. Single- and multiple-author reference for periodicals (include author's name, publication date, article title, complete name of periodical, volume number, month of publication, and page numbers):

Wensley, Robin (1981), "Strategic Marketing: Betas, Boxes, or Basics," *Journal of Marketing*, 45 (Summer), 173-82.

3. Single- and multiple-author reference for an article in a book edited by another author(s):

Nevin, John R. and Ruth A. Smith (1981), "The Predictive Accuracy of a Retail Gravitation Model: An Empirical Evaluation," in *The Changing Marketing Environment*, Kenneth Bernhardt et al., eds. Chicago: American Marketing Association, 150-73.

4. If an author appears more than once, substitute four hyphens (this will appear as a 1-inch line when typeset) for each author's name (do not use underlines):

Fornell, Claes and David F. Larcher (1981a), "Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error," *Journal of Marketing Research*, (February), 39-50.

----and---- (1981b), "Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error: Algebra and Statistics," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18 (August).

6. If two or more works by the same author have the same publication date, they should be differentiated by letters after the date. The letter also should appear with the citation in the text:

Day, George (1981a), "Analytical Approaches to Strategic Market Planning," in *Review of Marketing 1981*, Ben Enis and Kenneth J. Roering, eds. Chicago: American Marketing Association.

----(1981b), "The Product Life Cycle: Analysis and Applications Issues," *Journal of Marketing*, 45 (Fall), 60-67.

7. References to unpublished works, such as doctoral dissertations and working papers, should be included in the references list as follows:

Coughlin, Maureen (1980), "Fear of Success: Reaction to Advertising Stimuli and Intention to Purchase," doctoral dissertation, City University of New York.

8. Websites and URLs should be included in the references list as follows:

Doe, John R. and Mary Smith (2000), "Learning from the Web," (accessed June 2, 2000), [available at [insert URL here](#)]."

American Marketing Association (2007), "Manuscript Style Specifications for the Journal of Marketing," (accessed January 2, 2007), [available at http://www.marketingjournals.org/jm/ms_stylespecs.php#general].

Final Notes

Students generally have the abilities necessary to write well but fail to use them. No substitute can be made for careful diligence, thoughtfulness, and adequate time allotment. I strongly urge my students to acquire, develop, and polish their written and verbal communication skills before entering their professional careers. I sincerely hope that this brief document will aid in the process.

Acknowledgement

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