

Writing Tips Revised 2022

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) program faculty believe that aspiring educational leaders must be able to communicate clearly and accurately to lead 21st century schools. For this reason, five or more writing errors may result in a deduction of at least .25 (on a 4.0 scale) in the final score of an assignment. The following tips were compiled to assist students in writing clearly and accurately so that writing errors do not detract from the content of their writing.

1. Formatting and Style

- a. Always have an introduction and conclusion.
- b. Include transitions between paragraphs to clearly connect your ideas.
- c. Use *American Psychological Association Manual 7th Edition* (APA) formatting.
- d. A good guidance resource for APA formatting is <https://apastyle.apa.org/>.
- e. Write out all numbers less than 10 or if the first word of a sentence is a number. However, be sure to express numbers in numerals in the following circumstances (*APA Manual 7th Ed.* 6.32):
 - i. Numbers that immediately precede a unit of measurement, i.e., 3 cm.
 - ii. Numbers that express statistical or mathematical functions, fractions or decimal quantities, percentages, ratios, percentiles, and quartiles.
 - iii. Numbers that represent time, dates, ages, scores and points on a scale, and exact sums of money. For example, 2-year-olds.
 - iv. Numbers that denote a specific place in a numbered series, i.e., Items 1 and 5. (The preceding noun is always capitalized.)
- f. Refer to all published works and completed studies in the past tense. "The researchers reported their findings."

2. Abbreviations

- a. Do not use abbreviations. Thus, "cont." should be written out as "continued."
- b. Do not use contractions in scholarly writing. "Do not" would be correct, but "don't" is incorrect.
- c. Write out the words in an acronym the first time you refer to it, putting the acronym in parenthesis after the words. For example, you must write out No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and then you can use NCLB throughout the rest of the paper. However, be careful not to overuse acronyms; save them only for phrases that you need to use frequently in a document.

3. Fragments

- a. Be sure that all sentences contain a complete thought. For example, "I plan on becoming a principal" is a complete sentence. "In the next few years, anyway" is a fragment and not a complete sentence.
- b. Check to make sure that there is a subject (noun) and a verb to ensure that a sentence is not a fragment.

4. Commas

- a. When listing three or more items, always include a comma after each item. For example, "My three favorite sports to watch on TV are basketball, football, and hockey." (Note the comma after football.) This is sometimes referred to as the Oxford comma. Omission of a comma can change the meaning of a sentence significantly as in the following example:

“The panda eats shoots and leaves.” (A phrase from a nature show.)

“The panda eats, shoots, and leaves.” (Call CSI immediately.)

- b. Always include a comma before the conjunction if the part of the sentence after the conjunction can stand alone. For example, “I am going to have dinner, and then we are going to watch a movie.” This rule also applies to “which,” “that,” and “while.”
- c. Always include a comma after an introductory clause. If you want an example, here it is. (If you can move the phrase to the end of the sentence and it makes sense, you need a comma after the clause at the beginning of the sentence.
- d. Do not use a comma in place of a conjunction. When this happens, it is a comma splice (a type of **run-on sentence**). “Greg works at the university, he is my friend” is incorrect, but “Greg works at the university, and he is my friend” is correct.

5. Colons

- a. Before a list or long (block) quote, be sure to use an introductory phrase followed by a colon. For example, “The researchers identified the following three themes in their data: (1) relationship development, (2) good communication skills, and (3) trustworthiness.”

6. Semi-colons

- a. If you are not certain when to use a semi-colon, then don't use them.
- b. A semi-colon can be used to link two independent thoughts (or clauses) in one sentence. Use these questions as guidance: Do you have two independent thoughts or clauses in the sentence that are able to stand alone and are not fragment sentences? If so, why not just create two sentences?
- c. A semi-colon is also used to separate items in a list when one of the items includes commas, as in the following example: “Three separate focus groups were held for district and school administrators; teachers, counselors, and school psychologists; and classified staff.
- d. If you use a semi-colon, it should be infrequently.

7. Quotation Marks

- a. “A quote without a citation will always have the period inside the quotation marks.”
- b. “A quote with a citation will always have the citation after the quote” (Raven, 2020, p.3).
- c. “A quote in the middle of a sentence will always have the comma inside the quotation marks,” “then another quote,” and “the final quote.” If each quotation has a citation, put the citation after the quotation mark but before the comma or period.

8. Parentheses

- a. Parenthesis must always be used in pairs.
- b. This is also true when putting parentheses around numbers in a list, such as (1).

9. Pronouns

- a. In APA 7, it is officially good practice in scholarly writing to use the singular “they.” Use “they” in place of “he” or “she” if the pronoun preference of an individual is not known or if “they” is the individual's preferred pronoun. (See <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/singular-they> .)
- b. Use “they” to write about a generic person such as, “Each student submitted their internship portfolio for review.”
- c. Write in the plural to avoid having to assign gender and mitigate agreement issues. For example, “The principal should always do what he or she thinks is best for students” is more cumbersome than “Principals should always do what they think is best for students.”

10. Proofreading

- a. Be sure to make any corrections underlined in blue or red or otherwise marked by your software program.
- b. In Word, be sure to turn on the Editor feature and correct when appropriate (some suggestions are not contextually correct).
- c. The free version of Grammarly can be downloaded to assist in catching writing errors.
- d. Read your paper aloud with these guiding questions:
 - i. Can I say what I mean with fewer words?
 - ii. Is the content clear?
 - iii. Are the ideas clearly linked to each other to convey my message?
- e. It is also good to have someone else read your writing before you submit an assignment.
- f. Always proofread and revise. If you are turning in a first draft, then it is likely to have errors.
- g. Particularly for doctoral students, [reciteworks.com](https://www.reciteworks.com) is also a valuable resource for checking references.