Polishing Your Paper

You've heard me tell you over and over that this class is as much about *process* as it is about end result, as much about learning the components of writing and structuring a research paper as it is creating a well-written, interesting narrative.

Because the paper's structure is so important, **proofreading and formatting**—which are always important in any academic paper—take on an even more important role for your research project.

The following is a suggested process for proofing and editing your paper. Start at the top and work your way through to the end, and your paper is likely to be nice and tidy by the time you're done. Double-check visually by checking the paper and bibliography against the sample MLA paper in your text.

An important aspect of good proofreading/editing is allowing enough time to do to job well. For the final draft, **allow at least two or three days for proofreading and editing**. I've given you two sets of check boxes, to allow for checking a couple of drafts.

Formatting Guidelines

☐ ☐ Review the research paper assignment sheet to ensure that you have included all requested components.

☐ ☐ Print your paper on *one side* of standard twenty-pound white paper. Use a high print setting for sharp, crisp printing.

☐ ☐ Print your entire paper in black ink. Laser printing is preferable—if using an inkjet printer, use the highest resolution setting. Make sure that your URLs in your References or Works Cited pages are also in black font.

☐ ☐ The final draft should be "clean," with no handwritten corrections.

☐ ☐ Check your margins—they should be 1" on all four sides—and reset if needed. Be sure to check this, as Microsoft defaults to 1.25" margins on the sides. Use your computer's menu controls to set the margins. Check the final result with a ruler.

☐ ☐ The left margin should be justified, the right margin ragged.

☐ ☐ **For MLA**: Set up an upper left corner header according to MLA citation style. MLA papers do not have a cover sheet or an abstract.

☐ ☐ **For MLA**: Set page numbers according to MLA citation style, i.e., including your last name and a page number. Use your computer's "Header-Footer" controls to create the header, setting headers and footers at 1⁄2 inch.

☐ ☐ **For APA**: Set up a title page according to APA citation style.

☐ ☐ **For APA**: Include an abstract after the title page. See http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/ for details and an example.

☐ ☐ **For APA**: Set page numbers according to APA citation style, i.e., including a running (usually shortened) title and a page number. Use your computer's "Header-Footer" controls to create the header, setting headers and footers at 1⁄2 inch.

☐ ☐ Headings are generally not used or required in **MLA** format, but you may use them if you choose to. Headings should be placed one regular double-space atop each section and may be **bolded** and in a sans serif font—such as Geneva or Helvetica—if desired. If using headings, do not leave additional white space between heading and text. Headings are commonly used in **APA**. You may use them if you desire.

☐ ☐ Set font size at 12-pitch throughout. Titles, headings, etc., should also be in 12-pitch. In fact, the entire paper and References/Works Cited page should be in 12-pitch. If used, tables and figure legends may be in 10-pitch font.

☐ ☐ There should be no bolding anywhere in your paper, except in headings (if used; headings are optional).

☐ ☐ Italicized font should only appear in your paper in one of three ways: (1) to indicate titles of books, journals, magazines, newspaper, film, etc. within your paper, as required by your citation format; (2) where indicated within the Works Cited page; or (3) to indicate the use of non-English words and phrases in your paper. Do not use italics or underlining to emphasize words in your text.

☐ ☐ Double-space the entire paper throughout. Set double-spacing using computer commands—<u>do not</u> use the return key, space bar, or tab key.

☐ ☐ Indent each paragraph ½" or one tab space throughout your paper. Set indents using computer commands—<u>do not</u> enter manual tabs (with the tab key) at the start of each new paragraph.

☐ ☐ Craft a title that is interesting but also descriptive of your paper's contents. For **MLA**, enter the title one double-space below your heading (on page 1) and start your paper one DS below the title. If you have a long or hyphenated title, you may break the title into two lines, if it works to do so. Capitalize the title according to "title case." For **APA**, the title appears on the title page and the shortened title appears atop page 1.

☐ ☐ Do not leave empty space "white space" between heading and title, title and paper, paragraphs, or References/Works Cited entries. There shouldn't be any extra white space anywhere in the paper, The only exception would be if white space is inadvertently created around images, tables, etc.—and even this should be limited as much as possible.

☐ ☐ Verify length. Your final paper should be at least 12 pages, excluding the References/Works Cited pages, the cover and abstract pages (**APA** only), and any endnotes or appendices. You may write a longer paper if desired.

☐ ☐ Format in-text citations according to citation guidelines. Be precise! When citing in-text quotations, remember that end punctuation goes <u>after</u> the parenthetical citation.

☐ ☐ Format your References/Works Cited pages according to citation guidelines. Be precise!

☐ ☐ Your References/Works Cited pages must set up as double-spaced, "hanging" paragraphs. Use your computer menu commands to set up the "hanging" —<u>do not</u> use the return key, space bar, or tab key to create these.

☐ ☐ Bind your final paper and cover memo using spiral or coil binding at Kinko's, or a similar office service location. See the specific instructions in the "Final Paper" assignment elsewhere on this Blackboard site.

Structural and Content Guidelines

☐ ☐ Use an objective point of view. Unless we have discussed otherwise, stay in third person, and avoid the words I, we, you, your, etc., in your paper.

☐ ☐ Avoid all uses of "I will…", "This paper will…", "The reader should…" and the like. Use simple declarative sentences.

☐ ☐ Leave one space between each sentence (not two). If you've already typed two spaces throughout your paper, don't worry about changing them. If you wish to, though, use Word's "replace" command to change them all at once.

☐ ☐ Check that all paragraphs begin with a topic sentence and include 3-8 sentences, all expanding on the topic sentence. And remember: <u>One topic per paragraph</u>!

☐ ☐ Check that no paragraphs are too long—as a general rule, keep them under ¾ of a page. Break up too-long paragraphs.

☐ ☐ Smooth out paragraph transitions as needed. One paragraph should lead smoothly on to the next one.

☐ ☐ When incorporating source material, remember to introduce your "speakers." In other words, don't just drop in a quote: let your reader know who is speaking, and why she may be considered an authority.

☐ ☐ Handle "block quotes" according to your citation style. In **MLA**, if a quote is longer than four lines after it's added to your paper, it should be blocked. In **APA**, quotes longer than 40 words are blocked, regardless of actual length. See your text for explanations.

☐ ☐ Check for correct use of tense—be sure you're not switching back and forth between past, present, and/or conditional tenses within the same paragraph. (The best way to find this is by reading aloud.) Remember that in **MLA** style, we speak predominantly in present or present perfect tense, i.e., "Smith says…" (<u>not</u> "Smith said…"). In **APA** style, a mixture of tenses is used. See the Week 8 lecture for details.

☐ ☐ Use active verbs. Search for the "weak" am, is, are, was, were, be, been, and being in your paper and strengthen up the verb voice if you can.

☐ ☐ Eliminate sentence fragments—they don't belong in an academic paper. Every sentence *must* have a subject and a predicate and must make sense by itself.

☐ ☐ Likewise, eliminate comma splices and run-on sentences. Remember: you can <u>never</u> end a sentence with a comma! See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Run-on_sentence and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comma_splice for more help.

☐ ☐ Check for subject-verb agreement. If your subject is singular, the rest of the sentence must also be in singular structure; if the subject is plural, everything must be plural. For example:
INCORRECT: Verbs has to agree with their subject.
CORRECT: Verb**s** **hav**e to agree with their subject**s**.

Or, for a singular form:

INCORRECT: A verb must agree with their subjects.
CORRECT: A verb must agree with **its** subject.

See http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslsubverb.html for more help.

☐ ☐ Verify that all pronouns are used clearly, i.e., that they have clear antecedents. In other words, if you use a pronoun, make sure the reader can tell what subject it is referring to. The simplest way to avoid this problem is to avoid using pronouns when you can. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pronouns for more details.

☐ ☐ Eliminate as many adverbs as possible. Hint: search for anything ending in –ly. Read your sentences aloud with and without the adverbs, and decide whether or not to keep them. Adverbs tend to be redundant, pushy, or weakening. Ninety-five percent of the time, they should be killed.

☐ ☐ Non-English words should be italicized within the text. For example, "It was a *fait accompli*."

☐ ☐ Check that you've always included the serial comma, i.e., the final comma that comes before "and" or "or" in a series.
INCORRECT: I bought bread, apples and oranges.

CORRECT: I bought bread, **<u>apples,</u>** and oranges.

☐ ☐ Eliminate weasel words: very, some, many, much, kind of, sort of, really, pretty much, a little, a lot, etc.

☐ ☐ Handle numbers correctly, and never begin a sentence with a numeral. See the forum post on this under "Helpful Hints."

☐ ☐ Handle acronyms correctly. Spell them out at first use and abbreviate thereafter. Don't use periods between each letter. For example, United States is abbreviated US, not U.S.. Never begin a sentence with an acronym. See the forum post on this under "Helpful Hints."

☐ ☐ Check that you haven't used and abused exclamation marks. There shouldn't be any in the paper, unless you've used one to two for extraordinary emphasis. Otherwise, your language should carry the emphasis.

☐ ☐ In-text images (et al.) should only be used if they actually add to the text, explaining something better visually than it could be explained in words. If using images, charts, tables, etc., integrate them smoothly into the text, with text flowing around objects that are less than ¾ of the page width (Use the Format/Object command). Items wider than ¾ of the page should be centered. Non-essential images should be placed in an appendix.

☐ ☐ Images, tables, etc. should either be fully explained in the text or should have an accompanying legend.

☐ ☐ Use the Word command Insert/Footnote to insert footnotes. Remember that the purpose of footnotes is to insert explanatory text that adds to the understanding, but which would be cumbersome if included in the general text. (See the Week 8 lecture for details.)

☐ ☐ If used, collect endnotes at the end of your paper. Endnotes add additional *brief* content about a subject, and are used if the content isn't necessary to immediate understanding, if including it in the text would interrupt the paper's flow, and/or if the information is not important enough to be placed within footnotes. Place the endnotes at the end of the paper, just before your Works Cited pages. Within the endnote list, indicate each entry with an Arabic number. (See the Week 8 lecture for details.)

☐ ☐ The purpose of appendices is to provide material that isn't essential to the text, but which further informs or adds to its understanding. If using one or more appendices, list them as Appendix A, Appendix B, and so on, in order of in-text appearance. Place the appendices at the end of the paper, just before your Works Cited pages. (See the Week 8 lecture for details.)

☐ ☐ If you can talk a friend, family member, or classmate into it (bribe them!), have them read your paper. Give them a colored pen and invite them to circle errors, underline things they don't understand, make a note if something seems to be missing, etc.

☐ ☐ When doing a final check of your paper, include a check of your source material.

   1. Every time you encounter a source in your paper, circle the citation. Then flip back to your References/Works Cited list and put a check mark by the source in the list.

   2. If you find that a source is *not* entered in your Refs/WC list, stop right then and enter it.

   3. After you have finished this work-through, go back and look at your Refs/WC list. If any items are not checked, go back again and see if you can find those sources in your text. If you can't, remove them from your Refs/WC list.

☐ ☐ Last but not least… **READ THE PAPER OUT LOUD**, from start to finish. This is a critical final step in proofreading.