

## Guidelines for Preparing a Course Paper

### *Introduction*

This section should be several paragraphs in length, citing references as appropriate and needed. You have two purposes of this section: (a) grab the attention of your reader and (b) enlighten your readers about the thrust of the topic and the importance of the topic.

Course papers are frequently a requirement of a graduate class and provide for a valuable learning experience. The course paper provides the student an opportunity to practice synthesis of course material or to develop an in-depth discussion of topics related to course content. In addition, a course paper can further develop writing skills as it is imperative that school administrators be good writers.

Every working day of their careers, administrators are called upon to write. And through their writing they show others not only how they perform but also how they think. When administrators put their ideas into writing, they produce a public record that continues to exist well past the time of its creation. Because of this durability, and administrator's paper trail should compliment rather than haunt its creator. (Lehr, 2001, p. 764)

The introduction should also include a brief discussion or listing of the main sections of the paper. This paper will include a discussion of the appropriate format for a course paper. Additional topics to be reviewed are mechanics, citations, references, and editing.

## *Format*

At a college or university, most colleges and departments use a nationally recognized style manual or set of formal guidelines. In the College of Education at Southeast Missouri State University, the style manual that is used is *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition*. This manual is available at most bookstores and libraries. Course papers, graduate papers, and theses should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) fifth edition style manual. Instructors have the option to modify the format if they choose for course papers. However, students will be expected to follow this formatting style for graduate papers and theses. The use of the APA style is recommended to assist students in becoming familiar with the style and for clarity of writing.

For those students who have taken GR691 Methods of Research since the fall semester of 2001, the APA fifth edition is the style manual that has been in use. For students who have taken the Methods of Research course prior to fall semester of 2001, the fourth edition of the APA publication manual was used.

There were two major changes from the fourth to the fifth edition. The first change was the use of italics where underlining was previously used in headings and titles of books or journals. Secondly, when developing the list of references, the hanging indent is now used “meaning that the first line of each reference is set flush left and subsequent lines are indented” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001, p. 299).

The fifth edition of the style manual also has added an extensive section on electronic citations. Electronic citations will be discussed further in another part of this paper.

### *Mechanics*

There are several areas with respect to the mechanics of a paper that are important. These areas include: (a) writing style, (b) margins, (c) line spacing, (d) headings, (e) page numbers, and (f) fonts.

### *Writing Style*

The writing style for any type of graduate paper should be very easily understood with the use of simple and direct language and sentence structure. Assume the reader knows nothing about your topic. The sentence structure should be appropriate with the use of complete sentences. The use of run-on or extremely complex sentences makes it difficult for the reader to understand the content.

There are several writing practices that should be avoided when writing any kind of graduate paper. Contractions, such as can't in place of cannot, should not be used. Acronyms and abbreviations should first be written out completely followed by the acronym or abbreviation in parentheses. Eliminate or refrain from the use of value words such as great, profound, good, and extremely. Also, when using vague terms such as several, many, or some, be sure to cite supporting examples that will clarify these terms. Be specific about time, dates, and intervals rather than using the terms such as current, recent, and the present.

In graduate papers, references are used to cite other individual's writings that support the topic of the study or research. Be careful to eliminate all trace of plagiarism

and give credit where credit is due. Paraphrase rather than use a direct quote unless you will lose the essence of the meaning without the quote. How to cite quotations will be discussed further in the section of this paper on references.

When developing the various ideas and concepts within a paper, carefully review the organization of the paper. Single sentences seldom are of sufficient strength to stand on their own as a paragraph. Be sure that your thoughts flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, and section to section. Transitional sentences and paragraphs are essential for smooth flow of your material and good writing.

### *Margins*

Another aspect of mechanics in any type of graduate paper is the margins that are established in the formatting of the paper. The standard for the left margin is 1½ - inches. The top, bottom, and right margins should be 1 inch. The left margin is set at the 1½ - inches to accommodate any type of binding on the left hand side of the paper.

The exception to the depth of the margin at the bottom of the page is when “widows” and “orphans” occur. These are when a single line occurs at the beginning or ending of a paragraph that carries over to the next page. Rewriting the copy or making the bottom margin deeper by moving the line to the next page should avoid these single lines.

A heading that occurs at the bottom of the page so that there is not room for the first line of the paragraph to follow is another instance of a “widow” or “orphan.” This is another example of when the bottom margin can be larger than 1 inch. However, this change of copy should not be used just to lengthen a paper.

### *Line Spacing*

Another part of mechanics to remember when writing a course paper is the line spacing that is used. All of the text should be double-spaced. The double-spacing includes any lengthy quotations. An example of using double spacing for a quotation occurs in the introduction of this paper.

Double-spacing is also used between sections of the paper. Any spacing other than double-spacing can give the impression that the writer is attempting to lengthen a paper by using more than double-spacing.

There are two parts of a course paper when single-spacing is used. When creating a list of references, references are usually single-spaced with double-spacing used between references. Several examples are in the reference section of this paper. The second place where single spacing is used is on the cover page of the paper. The cover page of this paper is an example of appropriate use of single-spacing when composing a cover page.

### *Headings*

As mentioned previously, double spacing is used between sections of a paper. Also, sections of a paper are introduced by headings that help the reader to understand the organization of the paper. Headings function as an outline for a paper. The same principles that are used for outlining are used for headings. “Avoid having only one subsection heading and subsection within a section, just as you would in an outline” (APA, 2001, p. 111).

The APA style manual shows five levels of headings. Few course papers will use all five levels of headings. Three levels of headings are used to organize this paper.

Appendix A provides examples of the style of headings that would be used based on the complexity of the structure of a paper. Students should discuss with their instructor the preferred choice of headings when developing a course paper.

The format used for headings, as mentioned earlier, is one of the changes between the fourth and fifth editions of the APA manual. Italics are used instead of underlining the different levels of headings.

### *Page Numbers*

One of the simplest of the various items to remember when writing a paper is the numbering of the pages. Yet this seems to be one of the things that is most frequently skipped or avoided when writing a course paper. With the use of word-processing software, page numbering is easily and quickly accomplished. The default setting in the software is acceptable. The most frequently used location for page numbers is the top right corner or centered at the bottom of the page.

### *Fonts*

The font chosen should be a font that is simple in style and easily read. The Times New Roman style of font is used in this paper. In addition to the readability of the font, the size of font that is appropriate is extremely important. The 10 or 12 size font should be chosen. Larger font gives the appearance of trying to lengthen a paper to meet any page requirement. A smaller font becomes too difficult to read.

All of these various aspects of mechanics are important for the writing of a course paper at the graduate level. Content is the primary consideration; however, the mechanics are needed for clarity and ease of understanding.

## *Citations*

When writing any paper, whether the paper is a course paper, theses, or dissertation, the writings of other authors are usually cited. The citation of other works is important as credit should be given where credit is due and to avoid any sense of plagiarism. Citations are needed whenever the content is the result of putting the thoughts of others in your own words or when making a direct quote. When a direct quote is not being used, only the author(s) name and the date of publication are used in the citation (APA, 2001). When a direct quote is being used, the author, date, and page number where the quotation can be located is included. Examples of the author, date, and page number citation are with the direct quotations used earlier in this paper.

The first direct quotation was in the introduction. This quotation was over 40 words and was placed in a block format followed by the citation. Note that the citation, (Lehr, 2001, p. 754), comes after the period at the end of the quotation and no quotation marks are used around the quotation.

A second direct quotation that is much shorter is used in the discussion of formatting. Here the citation is enclosed in parentheses directly after the quotation marks and before the period at the end of the sentence.

With the many journal articles and other information available on the Internet, a citation may be a reference to a form of electronic media. These citations use the same author and date format. However, the reference has additional components from the traditional reference. Electronic references will be reviewed as part of the discussion on references.

## *References*

The references should be a list that contains all the sources that have been cited in the course paper. The references need to be carefully checked as part of the editing procedure. It is very easy to include a reference that is not in the final draft of a paper or to leave out a reference that has been cited.

The format for the list of references is one of the changes from the fourth to the fifth editions of the APA manual that was mentioned earlier. The hanging indent is the style that is now used. This form is shown in examples of references in the references for the paper and in Appendix B. Another change is to use italics for the titles of books and names of journals instead of the use of underlining.

Quotation marks are not used in a reference. This is not a change. However, many individuals still seem to use this format. Again, there are a number of examples in Appendix B of the correct way to do a reference.

Electronic references offer a different challenge. This type of reference has recently come into use with the availability of so much material on the Internet. The APA has a website where many examples of correct electronic references are given. The URL for this website is <http://www.apastyle.org/electgeneral.html>

## *Editing*

The final topic to be discussed is that of editing of the course paper. Students need to write, revise, and edit. The revision and editing are easily slighted and this becomes evident when reading a course paper. All of the topics reviewed in this paper need to be followed during the editing process.

Several additional items also need to be remembered. Word processing has helped students to improve their writing. However, spell-checkers do not always find all of the spelling errors. As we edit, we do not see errors because we know what should be on the page. Have another individual who does not know about your topic read your paper.

The continuity or flow of the writing is also important. “Be sure your thoughts flow from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, section to section. . .” (Theobald, n.d.). The smoothness of the writing only comes with reviewing and editing. Transitional sentences and paragraphs are essential for smooth flow of the material and good writing. Editing, rewriting, and revising are the final steps to a quality graduate paper.

#### *Summary*

This paper has been an abbreviated review of the basic components and concepts that should be used in writing a course paper for a graduate class. The aspiring administrator needs to be a good writer. A good writer is able to present ideas in an organized manner. To do this, a person must be able to write clearly and correctly. In any type of written communication, the basic ideas presented in these guidelines for a course paper are applicable. The topics covered included the format of a paper, mechanics, references, and editing. While the format of other types of communication may differ from a course paper and citations and references may not always be used, mechanics and editing of any writing are always important. Good writing takes time and practice. However, good writing is an essential skill for every professional.

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Lehr, A. E. (2001, June). Why school administrators should be model writers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(10), 762-764.
- Theobald, M. (n.d.). *Writing for methods of research*. (Available from the Department of Educational Administration and Counseling, MS 5550, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO, 63701)

Appendix A

LEVELS OF HEADINGS

Five levels of headings:

CENTERED UPPERCASE HEADING

Centered Uppercase and Lowercase Heading

*Centered, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading*

*Flush Left, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Side Heading*

*Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.*

Two levels of headings:

Method

*Procedure*

Three levels of headings:

Method

*Apparatus and Procedure*

*Pretraining period.*

Four levels of headings:

Centered Uppercase and Lower Case

*Centered, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading*

*Flush Left, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Side Heading*

*Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.* The paragraph continues after the heading.

Examples from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (2000).

## Appendix B

### Addition Reference Examples

- Algozzine, B. & Ysseldyke, J. E. ((1986). The future of the learning disabilities field: field: Screening and diagnosis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 19*, 394-398.
- American Psychiatric Association. (1980). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author
- Ayllon, T. A., Layman, D., & Kandell, H. J. (1975). A behavioral educational alternative to control of hyperactive children. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, 8*, 137-146.
- Berne, P. H. & Savary, L. M. (1985). *Building Self-esteem in children*. New York: Continuum.
- Borden, K.A., Brown, R. T., Jenkins, P., & Clingerman, S. R. (1987). Achievement attributions and depressive symptoms in attention deficit disorder and normal children. *Journal of School Psychology, 25*, 399-404.
- Brooks, D. M. & Woolfolk, A. E. (1987). The effects of students nonverbal behavior on teachers. *The Elementary School Journal, 88*, 51-59.
- Brophy, J. & Good, T. (1974). *Teacher-student relations: Causes and Consequences*. New York: Holt Reinhart & Winston.
- Collins, M. & Tamarkin, C. (1982). *Marva Collins' way*. Los Angeles: Jeremy Ptarcher, Inc.
- Conners, C. K. (1969). A teacher rating scale for use in drug studies with children. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 126*, 885-888.
- Cooper, D. H. & Speece, L. (1990). Maintaining at risk children in regular educational settings: Initial effects of individual differences and classroom environments. *Exceptional Children, 57*(2), 117-127.
- Epps, S., Yesseldyke, J. E., & Algozzine, B. (1983). Impact of different devinitions of learning disabilities on the number of students identified. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 1*, 394-398.

## References

- Bem, S. L. (1981). *Bem sex-role inventory: Sampler set*. Redwood City, CA: Consulting Psychologist Press.
- Bennis, W. (1984). Transformative power and leadership. In T. J. Serviovanni & J.E. Corgally (Eds.). *Leadership and organizational culture*. (pp. 64-71). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Brookover, W. B., & Lezotte, L. W. (1979). *Changes in school characteristics coincident with changes in school achievement*. East Lansing, MI: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University.
- Brunner, C. C. (1994). *Emancipatory research: Support for women's access to power*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 373 440)
- Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 223-257.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Some schools work and more can. *Social Policy*, 9(2), 28-32.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1978). Educational leadership: Toward the third era. *Educational Leadership*, 35(4), 319-323.
- Kochan, F.K., Spencer, W.A., & Mathews, J. (1999). *The changing face of the principalship in Alabama: Role, perception, and gender*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED 431 232)
- Kruger, M. L. (1996). Gender issues in school headship: Quality versus power? *European Journal of Education*, 31(4), 447-462.
- Lee, V. E., Smith, J. B., & Cioci, M. (1993, Summer). Teachers and principals: Gender-related perceptions of leadership and power in secondary schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2), 153-180.
- Loden, M. (1985). *Feminine leadership or how to succeed in business without being one of the boys*. New York: Times Books.
- Mant, A. (1997). *Intelligent leadership*. St. Leonard, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Mertz, N. T., & McNeely, S. R. (1998) Women on the job: A study of female high school principals. *Educational Leadership Quarterly*, 34(2), 196-222.
- Noddings, S. N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Powell, G. N. (1993). *Women and men in management*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Regan, H.B. (1990). Not for women only: School administration as a feminist activity. *Teachers College Record*, 91, 565-577.

Rosener, J. B. (1990, November-December). Ways women lead. *Harvard Business Review*. p. 119-25.

Shakeshaft, C. (1987). *Women in educational administration*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Skrla, L. (1999). *Femininity/masculinity: Hegemonic normalizations in the public school superintendency*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service ED 438 602).

U. S. Department of Education, (1998). *1998-1999 Blue Ribbon Schools program: Middle school and secondary school nomination requirements*. (OMB Control Number: 1850-0745). Washington, DC: Author.

Zaleznick, A. (1977). Managers and leaders: Are they different? *Harvard Business Review*, 55(3).

For examples of electron citations see the APA website:

<http://www.apastyle.org/electgeneral.html>