

GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Prospective employers in the business community *demand* high quality oral and written communication skills. In order to equip students with the skills to meet this demand, instructors will expect students to submit a number of written assignments in virtually every course in the curriculum. This document summarizes the pertinent rules, guidelines, and suggestions that will enable students to submit high quality written assignments. Note, however, that these rules, guidelines, and suggestions only apply to the *form* of the written document. The *content* will naturally be of paramount importance, and, for obvious reasons, it is impossible to provide guidelines or suggestions for this aspect of the written document. [Please be sure to obtain precise details of the content requirements for each written assignment from your instructor(s).]

Instructors in the College of Business and Economics will generally expect students to write papers in *business report format*. Business report format simply requires that the various topics addressed in the paper be clearly identified with appropriate headings and sub-headings. In this regard, the convention usually followed is to use **CAPITALS** (upper case) for the main section or topic headings, and upper and lower case for the sub-headings. This convention will be used in this document.

Two other communication formats frequently used are letters and memos. These are much shorter than business reports, and usually address one specific topic or issue. Examples of each are included in the appendix to this document.

General

ALL written communications must conform to generally accepted standards of English grammar and style. This document highlights some of the most important rules, but it is not exhaustive. For a more complete coverage of this topic, consult publications such as Strunk and White's "*The Elements of Style*."

Fonts and Typefaces

Use a *minimum* of 12 point font size. Use only common typefaces such as Times New Roman (which is known as a 'serif' typeface), or Arial (which is known as a 'sans-serif' typeface).

Bold and Italics

When specific emphasis is required, or the writer simply wants to draw something to the attention of the reader, it is permissible to use **bold** or *italics*. Sometimes, the word or phrase to be emphasized is so important that it is both **bolded** and *italicized*. Be careful

not to use these writing tools excessively in a document, since this will tend to have the opposite effect.

Line Spacing

The general rule for academic papers is double spacing, while the minimum is 1½ spacing.

Justification

Academic papers will generally be left justified (as in this document).

Page Margins

The general page margin default setting in the two most commonly used word processing programs, WordPerfect® and Word®, is one inch all round. This is also the standard margin required in academic papers.

Page Numbering

All pages in an academic paper must be sequentially numbered. The numbering style is a personal preference, but it must be consistent throughout the paper. If there is a table of contents, the page numbers used for it are lower case Roman numerals, that is, i, ii, iii, iv, v, and so on. [The regular numbering starts on the first page of the paper which is page 1.]

Tables and Figures

If tables and figures are used in a paper, they must be clearly numbered sequentially as “Table 1,” “Table 2,” and so on, and must have an appropriate title immediately below the table or figure number. It is acceptable to use the abbreviation ‘Fig.’ for figure. Both the table or figure number and the title must be centered on the page, immediately above the table or figure. If the table or figure contains data or material obtained from a published source, details of the source must be given below the table or figure. A table must be complete on one page. In other words, a table must not be ‘split’ over two pages.

Spelling

It is essential that *all* written communications be free of spelling errors. When in doubt about the correct spelling of a word, consult a dictionary! If the spell checking feature is used in a word processing program, remember that it only picks up spelling errors, not *context* errors! It is therefore essential to proofread your paper very carefully after you have completed it. (Tips for proofreading are given in a separate document.)

Grammar

Many grammatical errors can be avoided by using the grammar checkers in word processing programs. But, just like spell-check applications, they are not foolproof. The English language contains numerous rules for proper grammar, punctuation, and style. These rules are further complicated by context and writing style.

Abbreviations and Contractions

Generally speaking, abbreviations should only be used for those words where common usage is normal. For example, it is proper to use “Mr.” as an abbreviation for “Mister.”

But if another word or phrase is to be used frequently in the paper, it is acceptable to use an appropriate abbreviation. However, the first time the word or phrase is used in the paper, it is customary to write it out in full, with the abbreviation to be used thereafter shown in brackets immediately following. Example: “At California State University, Northridge (CSUN), it was found that ...” Contractions, that is the shortening of a word or phrase by the omission of one or more sounds or letters, should be avoided wherever possible. However, if they are used, care must be taken to ensure the precise spelling and punctuation of contractions. A common example is “etc.” used in place of “et cetera,” which means “and others; and the like; and the rest; and so forth.” Another common example is “aren’t” in place of “are not.”

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