

TRU Open Learning Writer's Style Guide

Thompson Rivers University

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A Note about TRU Open Learning Style Guides

Thompson Rivers University Open Learning (TRU Open Learning) has designed a set of three academic style guides to suit the preferences in different subject areas. The style guides are:

- *TRU Open Learning Essay Writing for University Courses Style Guide*
- *TRU Open Learning Writer's Style Guide*
- *TRU Open Learning Social Sciences Style Guide*

The *TRU Open Learning Writer's Style Guide* draws on *current* Modern Languages Association style (MLA style). It uses in-text citations instead of endnotes or footnotes; it also uses either a list of works cited or a list of works consulted instead of a bibliography. MLA style is used in many North American colleges and universities. For a full version of MLA style, refer to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th Edition, 2003.

The *TRU Open Learning Essay Writing for University Courses Style Guide* draws on an older version of MLA style that the Modern Languages Association (MLA) published in 1977 and still accepts for an alternative kind of documentation. It uses notes — footnotes or endnotes — to cite sources. It also calls the list of works consulted a “bibliography.” Some departments of history and other disciplines still require those features. The style is sometimes called “Old MLA style.”

The *TRU Open Learning Social Sciences Style Guide* draws on American Psychological Association style (APA style), which uses in-text citations (like MLA citations but not quite the same), as well as a list of cited works that it calls “References.” It is an alternative that many colleges and universities require for courses in social sciences and health sciences. For a full version of APA style, refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th edition, 2001.

Although each of the TRU Open Learning style guides relies heavily on a version of MLA or APA style, each also modifies and extends that style in some ways.

Regardless of which style guide is prescribed for your course, using the style will help you to do your formatting and documentation with a systematic, disciplined approach. Especially if you are new to academic styles, the experience will enable you not only to apply the particular style but also to learn and apply other styles when the need arises.

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Using the *TRU Open Learning Writer's Style Guide*

The *TRU Open Learning Writer's Style Guide* will help you to format your writing, follow some style rules (“conventions”), and document any sources that you should acknowledge. For a start, quickly read the entire guide. After that, refer to it when you have a question. With the help of this guide, you will be able to focus on what really matters—the content of your writing.

Planning Your Writing

Your course will provide directions about your writing task, but the steps of choosing a thesis and preparing an outline are basic for many kinds of writing.

Choosing a Thesis

The thesis is the point that you want to examine or defend. It is something that you then set out to prove. It is important for you to be clear in your own mind about what you are trying to prove—before you begin writing.

Suppose you have been given the essay topic “Compare and contrast madness in *Hamlet* and *Death of a Salesman*.” There are famous mad scenes in *Hamlet*, and Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* has delusions and eventually takes his own life. As a first step toward composing that essay, you would read the two plays, paying close attention to the scenes that are relevant to the topic. You might then decide, for example, that Hamlet was pretending to have lost his sanity but that Willy Loman really was not sane. This would be your thesis.

Once you have a thesis, you can begin gathering evidence. A major mistake that some students make is to decide on a thesis before reading the work in depth: they pick a topic on which they have strong opinions, and they set out to prove what they have already decided. They then fail to find and recognize important evidence. The result is a mediocre piece of writing.

Preparing an Outline

There are several ways to go about the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, but many students find that developing an outline is a useful step. To begin developing an outline, list all the points you can think of in favour of your thesis. Then pick out the ones that seem strongest. Arrange these points in a meaningful order. You might save your best argument until the end or proceed from general to specific or use another logical sequence. When you have done this, you have made an outline.

Formatting Your Writing

Type or word process on “letter-size” white sheets of paper, which are 8.5 by 11 inches (approximately 21 by 28 cm). If you are expressly permitted to use handwriting, write legibly in pen on standard-size lined sheets. Whether you are typing or writing, use only one side of each sheet if you will be submitting your writing on paper.

Page Identification

Number the pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner—about half an inch from the top of the page and one inch from the right edge.

On the same line as the page number, add your name and any other information that the assignment directions require. If you are using a word-processing program, all of this information belongs in the *header*.

Margins

Use margins of at least 1 inch (at least 2.5 cm).

Spacing and Indenting

Indent the first word of each paragraph at least half an inch (just over 1 cm) or 5 spaces.

If you are writing by hand, skip every second line. If you are typing your work, double-space it unless directed otherwise. (Some instructors prefer that word processing files be single-spaced for ease of marking.)

Title Page?

Do not use a separate title page. Instead, type the following information in the top left-hand corner of page 1, as shown on the “Sample First Page”:

- ◆ Your name
- ◆ Your instructor’s name
- ◆ Course number (and assignment number if required)
- ◆ Date

Then type the paper’s title—centred, not aligned left.

Sample First Page

Fifer 1

Terry Fifer

Dr. H. J. Lee

English 212, Assignment 4

June 11, 2003

The Use of Dramatic Irony in

Hamlet and *Death of a Salesman*

William Shakespeare in *Hamlet* and Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman* both use dramatic irony. There are a number of similarities and at least one significant difference. [The rest of the paper continues from here.]

Following Style Conventions

Quotations

When quoting, use the exact wording, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of the original. Use ellipsis points (three spaced periods) like this . . . to indicate words that you have omitted within a quotation. Precede the ellipsis points with a period when the omitted words are at the end of a sentence—like this. . . .

Do not correct errors that you have copied from content you are quoting. If it is necessary to indicate an error, insert *[sic]*—Latin for “thus”—in square brackets after it. If you need to add an explanatory remark in a quotation, put it in square brackets, [].

Generally put quoted material within double quotation marks (“ ”). Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) only when you need to use quotation marks *within* other content in quotation marks.

Use *block quotation* style for poetry of at least two lines and other quotations of more than four lines. Do not enclose the block quotation in quotation marks, but do indent it at least an extra inch (2.5 cm). Within block quotations, use single-spacing instead of the usual double-spacing. The statement introducing a block quotation often ends with a colon. Here is an example of block quotation style:

The society aims to use terminology for persons with disabilities that is preferred by the principal advocacy groups, but the usage is in constant evolution. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect to satisfy all of the concerns all of the time. A descriptive word that was preferred last year may be considered problematic today. (Singh 2001)

When you are quoting two lines of poetry within a paragraph, show the break between the lines with a slash (/). Retain the original capitalization at the beginning of the second line, as in these lines from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: “Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit/ Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste. . . .”

When you are using “block quotation” style for poetry, keep the original indentation and line breaks intact, as in this “shape poem” by George Herbert:

Man
My God, I heard this day,
That none doth build a stately habitation,
But that he means to dwell therein.

Avoid using long quotations to “pad” your writing—to increase the length. Also be sure that sentences with quotations are grammatically correct and easy to read: be as careful as you would be if there were no quotation marks.

Abbreviations

Keep abbreviations to a minimum. Do not abbreviate *Prime Minister, Governor General, President, Vice President, the Reverend, Professor*, military titles, days of the week, and months of the year. Use *Dr., Jr., Sr., Mr., and Mrs.* Also use *Ms.*, which looks like an abbreviation even though it is not the short form of any word. The trend is toward less use of periods in abbreviations, as in *PhD, BC, CD, and mph.*

Italics or Underlining

Use *italics* or underlining for emphasis and for:

- Foreign language words (if not yet brought into English) in English text
- Titles of longer works (as described under “Titles of Works”)
- Names of newspapers, with the city italicized only if it is part of the paper’s name (*The Globe and Mail* of Toronto, but the *Victoria Daily Times*)

Although *italics* are increasingly preferred, use underlining if you are writing by hand or do not have *italic* type available—or if your instructor requires it.

Titles of Works

Always copy the title of a book from the title page, not the book cover, which may sometimes have an abbreviated form of the title.

Capitalize the main words of a title, which include the first and last words along with all the other words except articles (*a, an, the*), coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or*, etc.), prepositions (*with* in a phrase like *with cream*), and *to* in infinitives (like *to begin*).

Italicize titles of books, periodicals, plays, book-length poems, films, TV programs, CDs, CD-ROMs, Web sites, and works of art.

Put quotation marks around the titles of articles, essays, short stories, interviews, and short poems. Generally use “double quotation marks”; use ‘single quotation marks’ only if the title is within other content in quotation marks.

Numbers

In general, use words for numbers that can be expressed in one or two words, but use numerals for statistical and scientific numbers (*19 times out of 20*), years (*1984, 2010*) and parts of a book (*pages 9–11*). Also use words:

- For approximate numbers, as in *over two hundred people*
- For a number that begins a sentence
- For readability, as in *a budget of \$2.5 billion and ten 5-point scales*

Punctuation

Always place periods and commas inside (before) the closing quotation marks. Place all other punctuation marks outside (after) the closing quotation marks unless the other punctuation mark is part of the quoted material, as in “*Is this a metaphor of life?*” he asked.

Do not use commas before or after dashes. If you are using a typewriter, you may use hyphens for a dash; use two hyphens--not one--with no extra spacing.

Avoid contractions (*doesn't, you're*) in formal writing. Also, do not use *it's*, the contraction for *it is*, when you mean *its* (no apostrophe), the possessive form of *it*.

When referring to decades, write (for example) *1880s*, rather than *1880's*.

Hyphenation

Hyphenate prefixed compounds with a capitalized base word (*neo-Marxist*), a number (*post-1996*), or an abbreviation or acronym (*anti-NATO forces*). Hyphenate all *self-* compounds (*self-assurance*). Hyphenate prefixed words that could be misunderstood (*un-ionized*, meaning *not ionized*) or misread (*anti-intellectual*). Generally hyphenate compound adjectives that precede what they modify (as in *middle-class attitude*) unless the meaning is clear without the hyphen.

Avoid using unnecessary hyphens. If in doubt, consult a dictionary.

Preferably do not break words at the ends of lines. Therefore preferably do not use automatic hyphenation when word-processing.

Spelling

For spelling and usage, use a Canadian dictionary. Where more than one spelling is given, use the first spelling listed. Be consistent in your spelling.

Identifying People

The first time you refer to someone, use the person's full name and title (*Dr. Martha Fiedler*). After that, the surname is sufficient (*Fiedler*) if there is no possibility of confusion.

Citing Sources

Plagiarism — passing off other people's ideas as your own — is a major academic offence.

You do not need to cite sources for matters of common knowledge. It is hard for some students to know what is “common knowledge,” but it becomes easier with experience. Assigned readings are not “common knowledge”; cite these sources even though your instructor will know where you obtained your information.

You must document your sources in two ways:

- ◆ In parenthetical documentation — citations within the body of your writing¹
- ◆ In your “Works Cited” list at the end

Parenthetical Documentation

If you use someone's words or ideas, cite the source—normally including the page number—in parentheses. (For electronic sources such as Web pages or online journals, cite the paragraph number.)

Steinbeck's female characters are often strong people who “guide their husbands through their moments of instability” (Falkenberg 17).

Steinbeck often created strong female characters who were able to guide their husbands through moments of instability (Falkenberg 17).

If you mention the author's name in your text, cite only the page number:

Falkenberg notes that Steinbeck created strong female characters who were able to guide their husbands through moments of instability (17).

If you are acknowledging an entire work, you can simply include the name of the work and its author in your text. Here is an example: “Ray Carver earned his reputation as a ‘dirty realist’ with *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*, a collection of tales of woe from the dark side of the American dream.”

If you are citing a play, include the act, scene, and line numbers—not the page.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we are told that “The play's the thing” (2.2.633).

¹ Current MLA style does not prefer the use of footnotes (at the bottom of a page) or endnotes (at the end of an essay) to document sources. On occasion, however, you may need to use a footnote or endnote for a content-related comment that would distract the reader from the main point. This example illustrates how to use a footnote for that kind of comment.

List of Works Cited

At the end of your piece of writing, list all the source materials that you have cited. Do this in a “Works Cited” list in alphabetical order. Use the following guidelines when making the list:

- ◆ Centre the heading “Works Cited” near the top of your page. Leave a double space after the heading before beginning the first entry.
- ◆ Begin your entry flush with the left-hand margin. If the entry runs to a second line, indent that line by at least one centimetre or five spaces.
- ◆ Use the punctuation shown in the “Examples of Works Cited (MLA Style)” part of this style guide.
- ◆ Where an author’s name would be repeated in the list of works cited, replace the name with three hyphens and a period.
- ◆ If no place of publication or publisher is given, write *n.p.* For no date, write *n.d.* For no page, write *n. pag.*
- ◆ For printed works, use this general order of information in your citation:
 - Author’s name
 - Title of a part of the work
 - Title of the work
 - Name of editor, compiler, or translator
 - Edition used
 - Volume number(s) and name of series
 - Place of publication and name of publisher
 - Date of publication
 - Page, section, or paragraph numbers

Sometimes your assignment directions may require you to include a bibliography. MLA style generally avoids the term *bibliography* because it literally means a “description of *books*” and therefore appears to exclude non-print materials. In practice, however, the expectation is likely to be what MLA style calls a list of works *consulted*, which is an alternative to a list of works *cited*. In a list of works *consulted*, include not only the works that you cited in your paper but also other relevant works that you consulted.

Examples of Works Cited (MLA Style)

Books

Book by a single author—and another book by the same author

Jones, Ray. *Talking about Statistics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983.

— — —. *America's Funniest Statistics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Book with two or more authors

Dal, Michael, and Louise Lui. *Galileo*. New York: Harper Collins, 1999.

If there are more than three authors, one can use “et al.” as shown here:

Francis, Daniel, et al. *Canadian Issues: A Contemporary Perspective*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Book under the direction of an editor

Brown, Mary, ed. *The History of Canada*. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2000.

Other Printed Works

Play

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Washington Square-Pocket, 1992.

Article, essay, poem, etc., in an anthology

Brown, A. Y. “The Loon in Canadian Literature.” *Symbols in Fiction*.

Ed. A. D. Singh. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971. 27–41.

Article or entry in a reference book

“Sparta.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 15th ed., 1987.

Review in a scholarly journal

McNeal, Robert H. Rev. of *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940*, by Isaac Deutcher.

Canadian Historical Review 46 (Mar. 1965): 79–81.

Article in a magazine or newspaper (translated, in this example)

Raymond, Jean-Gilles. “Victims of Crime Have Rights Too.” Trans. Marie Ng. *Guardian*

Weekly 24 Jan. 1999: 13.

Anonymous article

“Importing Full Employment.” *Financial Post* 17 July 1965: 6–7.

Letter to the editor or editorial

Chan, Jie. Letter. “Best Bets.” *National Post* 4 Dec. 1998: A28.

“Court Case Avoided.” Editorial. *Burnaby Now* 30 May 1999: 6.

Online Sources

World Wide Web page

Crane, Gregory, ed. *The Perseus Project*. 21 May 1999. Tufts University, Medford MA. 3 June 1999 <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>>. ¹

Web site

Victorian Women Writers Project. Ed. Perry Willett. 24 April 2003. Indiana U. 8 May 2003. <<http://www.indian.edu/~letrs/vwwp/>>. ²

Web-accessible electronic journal article

DeKoven, Marianne. "Conrad's Unrest." *Journal of Modern Literature* 1.2 (Winter 1997–98): 33 pars. 2 June 1999 <<http://www.indiana.edu/%7Eiupress/journals/mod21-2.html>>.

Newspaper article accessed online

Beutel, Trudy. "Students' Privacy at Stake." *Richmond News* 8 May 2003. 9 May 2003. <<http://www.richmond-news.com/051203/news/051203nn4.html>>.

Article from an online subscription service (article database)

"Cooling Trend in Antarctica." *Futurist* May-June 2002: 15. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. City U of New York, Graduate Center Lib. 7 May 2003 <<http://www.epnet.com/>>.

It is often necessary—and generally acceptable in student papers—to include just the URL of the subscription service, as shown. (It is sometimes possible to provide a more precise location, but there can be complications even then.)

Part of a document

Kipling, Rudyard. "The White Seal." *The Jungle Book*. Project Gutenberg. 1 June 1999 <<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/People/rgs/jngl-table.html>>.

¹ Notice the two dates. The Web page was updated on May 21, 1999, and the writer used the page as a source on June 3, 1999.

² Although MLA style calls for <angle brackets> around URLs, the "Frequently Asked Questions about MLA Style" at the MLA site also acknowledge that it is helpful to use hyperlinks like <http://www.mla.org> (or <http://www.mla.org>) when a paper will be read on-screen. Since all TRU Open Learning assignments may be submitted as files that can be read on-screen, those alternative ways to write URLs are acceptable. In any case, always be sure that each URL is precisely correct and functioning.

Other Media

Interview that you conducted

Tanaka, Stacey. Personal interview. 28 Nov. 1999.

Sound recording

Dylan, Bob. *Nashville Skyline*. Columbia, 1969.

Television or radio program

“Death by Moonlight.” *The Valour and the Horror*. Dir. Brian McKenna. Writs. Brian McKenna, Terrence McKenna, and Roman Jarymowicz. CBC, 1992.

Film or video

Under the Willow Tree: Pioneer Chinese Women in Canada. Dir. Dora Nipp. National Film Board, 1997.

CD-ROM

The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. CD-ROM. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Questions about MLA Style

For more information about MLA style, go to the MLA site, www.mla.org. In the “MLA Style” section, you will find a set of frequently asked questions that you may wish to consult.