TRU Open Learning
Essay Writing for University Courses Style Guide
Thompson Rivers University

Using This Style Guide................................................................. 1

Planning Your Writing.................................................................. 1
  Choosing a Thesis...................................................................... 1
  Preparing an Outline................................................................ 1

Formatting Your Writing ............................................................... 2
  Page Identification................................................................... 2
  Margins.................................................................................... 2
  Spacing and Indenting.............................................................. 2
  Title Page ................................................................................ 2

Following Style Conventions ....................................................... 4
  Quotations ............................................................................. 4
  Abbreviations........................................................................ 5
  Italics or Underlining............................................................. 5
  Titles of Works...................................................................... 5
  Numbers................................................................................ 5
  Punctuation .......................................................................... 6
  Hyphenation .......................................................................... 6
  Spelling................................................................................ 6
  Identifying People ................................................................. 6

Using Notes to Cite Sources.......................................................... 7
  Purposes of Notes................................................................. 7
  Presentation of Notes............................................................. 7
  Examples of Notes for Print Sources........................................ 8
  Examples of Notes for Electronic Sources............................... 12
  Example of Notes Providing Content..................................... 13

Creating a Bibliography .............................................................. 14
  Presentation of Bibliographic Entries ........................................ 14
  Sample Bibliography............................................................... 14
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 This Style Guide

The TRU Open Learning Essay Writing for University Courses 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, which is 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. Before you begin writing, it is important for you to be clear in your own mind about what you are trying to prove.

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. Place the number 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, write on 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

Use a separate title page. Include the following information, as shown on the “Sample Title Page”:

♦ Title of paper
♦ Assignment number
♦ Course code, such as HIST 121
♦ Your name
♦ Date

Reminder: Sometimes TRU Open Learning usage in this style guide departs from MLA style. The use of a separate title page is one example of that.
Sample Title Page

The Definition of a Canadian, 1867–1914

Assignment 2
HIST 121
Malek Armadi
June 12, 2003
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.¹²
[There would be a related footnote indicating the source, 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.
Using Notes to Cite Sources

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

If you use someone’s words or ideas, cite the source.

You do not need to cite sources for matters of common knowledge. It is hard for some students to know what “common knowledge” means, 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 notes within the body, which may be either footnotes at the bottom of the page or endnotes (also called simply “notes”) before the bibliography
- In a bibliography at the end, which should also include works that you consulted but did not cite

Purposes of Notes

- Notes indicate the exact source.
- They acknowledge indebtedness to others for opinions or ideas.
- They give the authority for a fact that the reader might be inclined to doubt.
- In addition, notes can be used for material that would interrupt the flow of the content (“text”) if it were not placed separately.

Presentation of Notes

- Each note has a reference number that appears both as a superscript like this\(^{37}\) at the end of the other person’s ideas and at the beginning of the footnote or endnote. The reference numbers are consecutive throughout the essay.
- Notes are single-spaced, with a double space between them.
- Notes for sources typically indicate the author, the title of the work, the place and date of publication, and the page reference.
- If the author and title of the work are fully included in the body, include only the place and date of publication and page reference in the note.
- If a work is cited again without an intervening citation, use the Latin abbreviation “Ibid.,” which means “in the same place.” If the citation refers to a different page, add the new page number.
- If a work is cited more than once but there is an intervening citation, cite the author’s surname, the title in abbreviated form, and the page reference.
- Use commas, not periods, within the note. Use a period at the end.
- Refer to a single page as “p.” and to two or more pages as “pp.”
- For a work with no publication date, write “n.d.” For works with no publisher or place of publication, write “n.p.” For works without pagination, write “n. pag.”
Examples of Notes for Print Sources

The following examples generally relate to the entries in the “Sample Bibliography” to illustrate how note references correspond to bibliographic entries. Since these notes are just examples, the reference numbers do not refer to anything in this text.

**Book in One Volume**

For the first citation, supply complete information:


For subsequent references use a shortened version:

3. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, p. 35.

**Book in More than One Volume**


**Books under the Direction of an Editor**


**More Than Two Authors or Editors**


**Book Forming Part of a Series**

Later Editions, Republications, Reprinting, etc.


Translation


Citation at Second Hand


Essay, Chapter, etc., in a More Extensive Work


Article in an Encyclopedia, Dictionary, Gazetteer, Atlas, etc.


Periodical Articles, Abstracts, Reviews, etc.


32 Wendie Nelson, “‘Rage against the Dying of the Light’: Interpreting the Guerre des Éteignoirs,” Canadian Historical Review, 81 (December 2000), 552.


Newspaper Article, Unsigned and Signed


Published Correspondence

Play or Poem

The name of the author of a play or poem is provided in the bibliography. Note the act number, scene number, and lines:

37 *The Threepenny Opera*, II. i. 13–14.

A reference to *The Second Part of Henry VI*, also noting act, scene number, and lines, would be:

38 *2 Henry VI*, I. i. 32–35.

Titles are in quotation marks for short poems but in italics for book-length poems:


Pamphlet


Government Document (Bulletin, Debate, Professional Paper, etc.)


Statute


Archival Document


Plate in a Book


Examples of Notes for Electronic Sources

Videotape or Audiotape


53 Ramsay Cook interviewed by Desmond Glynn in A History of the Canadian People II: Post-Confederation, Program 1, an audiotape prepared by CJRT-FM Open College, Toronto, n.d.

54 Cook, A History of the Canadian People, Program 1.


World Wide Web Page

If you are submitting your paper as an electronic document, ensure that each Web address (URL) is a functioning hyperlink, either underlined or not underlined.


MLA style uses angle brackets, as in <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/> for URLs but accepts that active hyperlinks, as shown in these examples, can be best for papers that will be read on-screen. Since TRU Open Learning papers are frequently read on-screen, this style guide prefers the use of hyperlinks. For clarity, this style guide also goes beyond MLA style by using “retrieved . . . from” as shown in these examples.

Web Site


Web-Accessible Electronic Journal Article

Newspaper Article Accessed Online


Article from an Online Subscription Service (Article Database)

It is often necessary and generally acceptable to include just the URL of an online subscription service, rather than the precise location of the document.


Part of a Document


Interview That You Conducted


Sound Recording


Television or Radio Program


CD–ROM


Example of Notes Providing Content

A content note provides the reader with an explanation or other information that would divert the reader’s attention if it were included in the text of the paper, rather than placed separately in the note. Keep content notes to a minimum.

66 Martin Allerdale Grainger (1874–1941) used his own experiences as a West Coast logger to write Woodsmen of the West, one of British Columbia’s earliest novels.
Creating a Bibliography

Presentation of Bibliographic Entries

- All sources cited in the notes and (with reference numbers) in the text are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.
- Other material used but not specifically cited may also be included.
- Periods, not commas, are used in the bibliography to separate the author’s name from the title and the title from the place and date of publication.
- When an author’s name appears more than once in the bibliography, the “ditto sign” for his or her name appears as a line of 10 hyphens or three em-dashes ———. followed by a period.

Sample Bibliography


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