



# *Writing Center*

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# WRITING GUIDE

## Sample MLA Formats

Prepared for  
the students, faculty, and staff  
of Scottsdale Community College  
by the  
Writing Center,  
Language & Communication Division

## **FORMAT FOR RESEARCH PAPERS**

While the content of a paper is important, the format gives it a professional appearance. The appearance of a paper and conformity to standard practices should be taken into consideration by a writer. College papers should be typewritten as most instructors will not accept a handwritten paper. The student should be aware that research shows typewritten papers generally receive a higher grade.

### **PAPER**

- White Paper 8 1/2" by 11" is standard.
- Use one side of the paper only.

### **SPACING, MARGINS, TYPE SIZE AND INDENTING OF TEXT**

- Double space the entire paper. (No single or triple spaces anywhere.)
- Margins are 1 inch all around. (Margins are usually preset for 1.25" on most computers which is usually acceptable – check with your instructor.)
- Use standard type or font, 10 or 12 characters per inch.
- Indent 5 spaces to indicate a new paragraph. Tabs are usually preset for 5 spaces; therefore, hit the tab key once. Indent 10 spaces for set-off quotations.
- On a computer do not use "right justification" which causes the right edge of each line of the text to line up exactly and causes the words to be oddly spaced.

### **NUMBERING THE PAGES**

#### **Body**

Number the pages in the upper-right-hand corner 1/2" from the top of the page, lined up with the right margin. The number is preceded by the author's last name. Do not write "page." Do not number the cover page (also called title page); start numbering with the first page of the narrative as page 1.

#### **Outline**

Number the pages in the same manner as the body of the paper. However, use small Roman numerals (i, ii).

#### **Works Cited**

The numbering from the body pages continues on into the Works Cited page.

## COVER OR TITLE PAGE

The cover or title page is a separate piece of paper for your title and other information.

On the top half of the cover page, center your title.

In the middle, place your name.

On the bottom half of the cover page, center your class, instructor and date.

Cover Page  
Research Paper

Title

By  
Name

Class  
Instructor  
Date

First Page  
Research Paper

Name 1

Title

1" 1/2"

Title Page  
Short Paper

Name 1

Name  
Instructor  
Class  
Date

Title

1" 1/2"

Last Page

Name 9

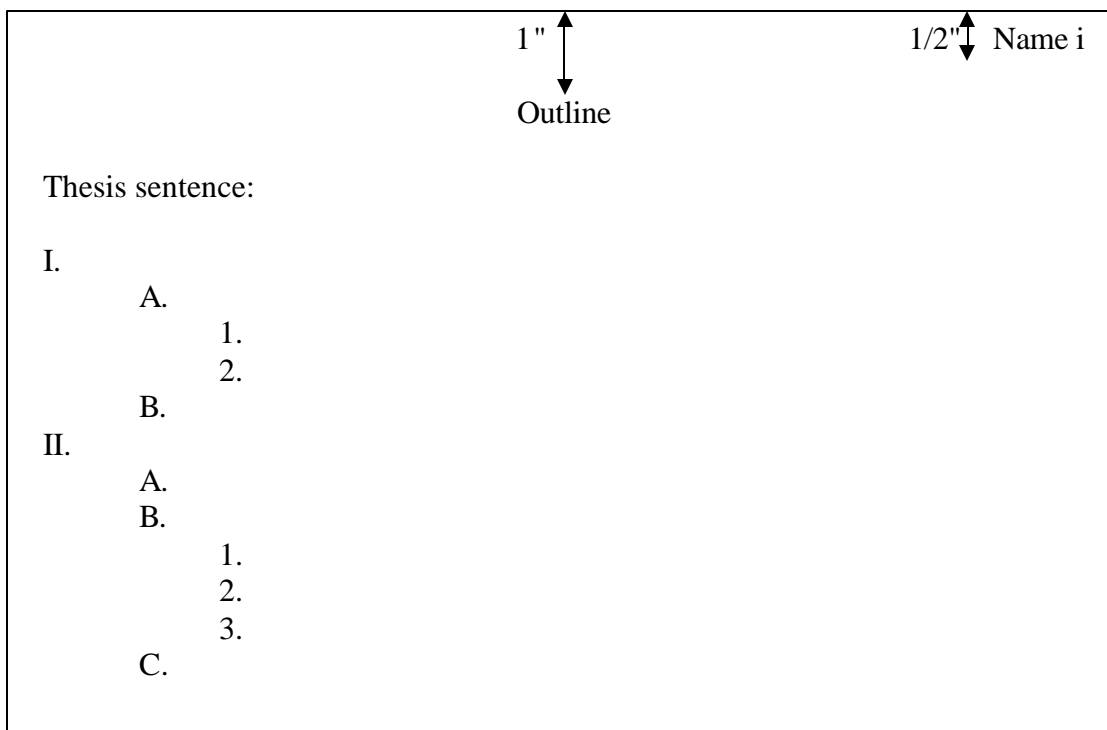
Works Cited

1" 1/2"

## OUTLINES

Some instructors require an outline. The outline functions like a table of contents and accurately reflects the organization of the paper and the major ideas in the paper. It is headed *Outline* in plain text (not boldface), centered on the page, and down 1 inch from the top. The student's last name and page number (in lowercase Roman Numerals) are right justified in the header about 1/2" from the top.

State your thesis sentence first; then follow the recognized conventions of outlining. Use the standard outline symbols. Indentation indicates the importance of the material, progressing from major ideas to minor ones. Roman numerals are used for the major headings and the subheadings are arranged as below. You never have just one heading; that is, if you have an A you must have a B, and so on.



## PUTTING THE PAPER TOGETHER

- Staple the paper in the upper left-hand corner.
- Do not fold the paper.
- Do not put the paper in a folder unless your instructor asks you to do so..

# Writing the Paper

## **BEGINNING**

The beginning, also called an introduction, obviously introduces the subject. It is a full paragraph of several sentences including information on who, what, where, when, and why (background material). The first sentence of the beginning paragraph is a relatively broad statement. Although this statement is broad, it is relevant to the paper as a whole. The last sentence of the paragraph will clearly state what the paper is specifically going to be about and usually includes your thesis. In an attempt to start broadly, do not use overworked phrases: "Nowadays . . .," "According to Webster . . .," "The subject I am going to write about is . . .," and other similar phrases. Try to capture your reader's attention but do not resort to obvious gimmicks. A beginning story, or a "hook," can also be used to draw in the interest of your reader.

## **THESIS STATEMENT**

A thesis statement is a complete sentence, and it is usually the last sentence of the beginning paragraph. The thesis statement is a clear declaration of the subject of your paper plus the attitude of the writer. Notice the difference:

SUBJECT: Smoking is now allowed in some public places.

SUBJECT AND ATTITUDE: Smoking should be banned in all public places.

Thus, a good thesis statement indicates to the reader the tack the paper will take. It often has what is called an argumentative edge. This thesis statement controls the rest of the paper. Although your stand or position should be clear, you do not need to say, "In my opinion . . ." or "I believe . . ."

## **MIDDLE**

The middle of the paper develops and supports the idea stated in the thesis statement. Many things can be used in the middle to support it: facts, reasons, examples, details, incidents. Organize the middle logically. The reader should not be expected to fill in the gaps in your writing. That is, the middle should be complete. Nothing should be left out and nothing redundant should be included. Be clear and straightforward. The number of paragraphs in the middle depends on the number of points the writer needs to support the thesis statement.

## **TOPIC SENTENCES / DISCUSSION POINTS**

Each paragraph of the middle usually begins with a topic sentence or discussion point. This sentence clearly indicates what the paragraph will be about. The topic sentence is then supported by the rest of the paragraph. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EACH PARAGRAPH IS UNIFIED, OR COVERS ONE MAIN IDEA.**

## **END or CONCLUSION**

Although the middle actually covers all the points in support of the thesis statement, the paper must have an end which will be a full paragraph. This will clearly indicate to the reader that the paper has come to an end. That is, the reader is not looking for what seems to be a missing last page. **INTRODUCE NO NEW IDEAS HERE; SUMMARIZE WHAT IS IN YOUR PAPER.** Think of the

end as the culmination of the paper where you neatly tie together the ideas. Do not end the paper with an unanswered question, an apology, a statement that negates the paper, or with a trite phrase such as "In summary . . . , In conclusion . . . ," or "As you can see. . ."

## **LENGTH**

Instructors often give a suggested length for a paper. Sometimes the number of words is given or the number of pages. A good paper will be close to the length assigned, and the subject will be developed thoroughly without unnecessary padding. Do not use large print to have more pages. Ten characters per inch is the standard. Think in terms of thoroughness, and length will seldom be a problem.

On the other hand, some student papers are too long. Sometimes students include unnecessary information. Use only the information that clearly supports your thesis statement. At other times student papers are too long because of redundancy or wordiness. *Redundancy* is a needless repetition using different words. For example: Contemporary music is music of the present time.

*Wordiness* is the use of many words to express an idea when a few would be better. Therefore, write clearly and concisely, choosing the accurate word for the context. When you are tempted to use more words than you really need, remember this little poem.

### **WORDINESS**

The written word  
Should be clean as bone,  
Clear as light,  
Firm as stone.  
Two words are not  
as good as one.

— *Anonymous*

## **TITLES**

Give your paper an appropriate and interesting title that truly reflects the content. It is best to title the paper after you have written the paper. A good title starts your paper off well. Titles should be capitalized and punctuated correctly.

### **Capitalizing a title:**

Here is a mnemonic to help you capitalize correctly.

**Capitalize** the first letter of each word of a title, except for **CAP**:

**C** - conjunctions (and, but, or, for, etc.)

**A** - articles (the, a, an)

**P** - prepositions (in, on, at, to, etc.)

### **Exceptions:**

- The first word of the title

**Punctuating a title:**

- Do not put quotation marks around the title of your paper or underline it.
- If the title of your paper contains the title of another work, that title is put within quotation marks or underlined as the case may be.
- Do not use a period after your title.
- Do not use a question mark or exclamation point unless the title is clearly a question or an exclamation.

**PROOFREADING AND EDITING THE PAPER**

A poorly typed paper cannot be excused whether the lack of typing ability is yours or your typist's. You are ultimately responsible for all aspects of your paper. Proofread your draft and correct all errors. Be aware that spell checkers will not catch all spelling errors. Then prepare a final copy. Recheck the format before submitting it. Even with careful proofreading, a few errors will slip by; without proofreading, many errors slip by.

**SUBMITTING THE PAPER**

Timeliness is important. Papers are to be submitted on or before the date due. If for some reason it is impossible to submit the paper on time, the instructor should be consulted. A penalty for a late paper is at the discretion of the instructor. Some instructors will not accept a paper after the due date.

**CITATION OF REFERENCES**

In writing research papers, you will be expected to give credit to your resources. The methods of citing your sources or references vary according to the subject matter of the course. Your instructor may specify which method must be followed. Handbooks for writing research papers are valuable for the proper method to use. Be consistent in using only one method in a single paper.

**PARENTHETICAL DOCUMENTATION**

Parenthetical in-text documentation of sources is required. That is, right after your quotation or paraphrase of information, the author is cited. The Works Cited page or Bibliography at the end of the paper will have all the usual information.

Styles for in-text documentation differ. For example two different styles are the Modern Languages Association (MLA) and American Psychological Association (APA); there are others as well. Therefore, you should follow the instructor's guidelines. The following example is MLA style and can be used in the absence of specific guidelines.

When the source or author is not mentioned in the text, give the author's name and page number.

**Example:** The invention of the monochord is attributed to Pythagoras (Marcuse 197).

When the source or author is mentioned in the text, the page number is sufficient.

**Example:** Ernst Rose writes, "The highly spiritual view of the world presented in Siddhartha exercised its appeal on West and East alike" (74).

## **WORKS CITED OR BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Works Cited (also called Bibliography) is the last page of your paper and contains complete information about your sources. It is in alphabetical order by the author's last name, and the format is different from an endnote. Again a good handbook will have examples of all the various sources you would use. The following are MLA examples of a book and a magazine.

McConnell, Frank. Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature. New York: Oxford UP, 1929.

Motulsky, Arno G. "Impact of Genetic Manipulation on Society and Medicine." Science 14 Jan. 1983: 135-40.

For the exact format of parenthetical in-text documentation, and works cited or bibliography, consult a good handbook and carefully study the examples given. Handbooks give examples of proper citations for books and magazines as well as other sources, such as interviews, newspaper reports, professional journals, pamphlets, films, electronic sources, articles compiled in a book, and many others.

## **GRADING CRITERIA**

Students often think a paper has an absolute value regardless of the class or the instructor, but college papers are usually evaluated with respect to the specific assignment. A college paper is usually graded as a whole. The following will give you an idea of the different aspects of a paper that could be taken into consideration when grading a paper and, thus, contribute to its grade.

- Assignment followed
- Proper format
- Structure
  - The basic elements of organization
    - Beginning
    - Middle or body
    - End
    - Thesis statement (usually at the end of first paragraph)
    - Topic sentences (usually at the beginning of each paragraph of the middle or body)
  - Paragraphs (full - many sentences)
  - Sentences (complete sentences - no sentence fragments)
- Mechanics
  - Spelling
  - Punctuation
  - Grammar
  - Usage and Idiom
- Interest, logic, and solidity of content (VERY IMPORTANT!)

Some instructors have their own grading criteria, designating points for each aspect. The grading criteria help them assess the quality of your paper and help you to understand your grade.