

Common writing mistakes that I hate

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The point of writing is to communicate. Following conventions is usually an aid to this because the reader expects things to be done a certain way, or because the conventions have codified rules of good writing that are nearly always true. Where convention fails, drop it. But the following rules nearly always hold. One must have good reason, an unusual situation, or an understanding reader to not follow these conventions.

When I have understood and agree with a paragraph or point, I'll often put a checkmark (✓) by it.

Date your papers. Author your papers.

This is non-negotiable. It applies to scraps of paper to university memos and regulations. Put on contact details in case you do well and it's sharable.

Use Latin abbreviations correctly. When writing be sure to use Latin abbreviations, that is, *i.e.* and *e.g.*, correctly. Big examples, for example, this reference, get set off by commas, and I suggest using *for example*. Smaller examples, for example, the list here (*i.e.*, “*e.g.*”), can be put in parenthesis.

Be careful with which and that. Clauses that define an object must use *that*. Clauses that don't define an object, which may merely tell the reader a tasty tidbit about it, may use *which*. If you use too many *which*'s your writing is not telling a direct story, or you are using *which* incorrectly. Go on a which hunt.

Put page numbers on each page. This helps discussions about improvements.

Since is time-based; Because is causal. You can make your writing more clear by using since only for time-based and because for causality. Since I have used this rule, because I use this rule, would then have two meanings instead of one having two and one having one.

Provide adequate margins. If you don't leave room it makes it harder to read (particularly with small fonts), and there is no room for comments.

Its and It's. *Its* refers to the possessive of a gender neutral pronoun. *It's* is a contraction for *it is*. Contractions are discouraged in formal writing, so you should probably only use *its*.

Use a spelling program. There are programs on most platforms for checking spelling. On the Mac, Word has it under Tools. On Unix, "spell file-

name", in Emacs, ispell is often installed. Overleaf has a similar tool.

Feel free to use headings. This can be done by centering, changing fonts (be careful), changing font sizes, and underlining. Color can also be used, but for work to be graded avoid the color red. Note that items here can be found through the underlined, APA Level 5 headings.

Check words and word limits. Include a word count and check the spelling of every word. If this drives you to a word processor, good. This also means that I expect you to stick to the limit.

In order to write vs. To write. It is often useful to use the phrase “in order to X”, where X is some verb. It helps you get the prose going and helps avoid writer's block. But, it has two extra words. Leaving it in is sloppy. Upon revision, go back and strike it out to make the prose clearer, shorter, and clearer. Actually, literally the same for all filler and redundant phrases, and so on.

Use references appropriately. If you reference an important point or one that is not your own, the referenced paper should be in your references. If you didn't actually read the paper, note this somehow, either in the text or in the reference section (such as, cited in X). Some references I can follow, but others I need help with. Are you willing to assume you know what I'll know and what I won't?

Further suggestions on writing 'good'

American Psychological Association (1983).

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (3rd edition). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Tells you how to label a figure, itemize, and so on. Not the only set of conventions, but a common one even outside of America. There is also a workbook version of this in library. Before embarking on a large project I would read this if I were you.

van Leunen, M.-C. (1978). *A handbook for Scholars*. NY, NY: Knopf. A good book if you are going off to graduate school and can afford it.

Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (1979, and various later versions). *The elements of style*. NY, NY: Macmillan. Short and sweet 90 pages of pithy comments. I've read it 4 times.

On computers there are numerous programs to check spelling and a few that will check grammar. The spelling programs are always worth it, the grammar ones are sometimes a useful adjunct.

Commands to mark up a document

9	Delete
0	Close up (close up)
2	Delete and close up (delete and close up)
^	Insert something (His name ^{is} Bill)
#	Insert a space (the cat)
b	Insert a space
/ Stet -- let original stand
l	Transpose (transposes or change order the)
l	Set farther to the left
—	Set farther to the right —
¶	Insert a new paragraph (pilcrow mark)
o	Set ⑤ as "five"; set & as "and"
c	Set in caps
c	Set in small caps
ø	Set in lowercase
<u>cat</u>	Set in italic type
cat	Delete italic; set in roman
—	Insert hyphen (self=concept)
<u>I</u> N	En dash (1965 <u>I</u> 1972)
<u>I</u> M	Em dash (em <u>I</u> or long <u>I</u> dash) (option-shift-dash)
^	Superscript (r ²)
^	Subscript (H _A O)
^	Insert comma
^	Insert apostrophe
0	Insert period
—	Note correction in body of text