

Academic writing: A style guide for students

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Access for students: [Academic Skills and Learning resources](#)

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Writing at the University of Luxembourg

Academic writing is understood as the process of expressing in written form information and ideas according to the objective(s) and characteristics of your academic work.

This style guide is intended as a reference for your academic writing at the University of Luxembourg. It offers guidance on essential aspects of academic writing, including formatting, mechanics of style, citing and referencing. The style guide has been designed to apply across study programmes and disciplines.

You should follow the instructions in this style guide for all written assignments unless your course instructor or study programme has given you specific instructions or a specific citation style for a particular assignment.

The aim of this style guide is to enable you to:

- Compile written work in accordance with the standards for academic writing of your discipline(s).
- Identify and apply the appropriate rules for formatting, citation, referencing, and other essential aspects of academic writing in accordance with your discipline, type/genre of work (e.g. essay, research paper, literature report, etc.), and language (English, French, German).
- Acknowledge your sources by citing correctly and by compiling complete and consistent reference lists.
- Avoid plagiarism in written work.
- Format and submit your written work in a way that is accessible to a broad audience, including readers with special needs.

The instructions provided in this style guide are partly based on one of the most commonly used style guides in higher education, the [American Psychological Association \(APA\) Style, 7th edition](#) (APA, 2020). APA Style is equally applied to the examples provided, which are adapted from Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 1623). Many other citation styles exist and you should always follow specific instructions received from your course instructor or study programme. A list of common citation and reference styles and the respective publication manuals for different disciplines is provided in the section 'Choosing a citation style' below.

This style guide applies to texts written in English, German, and French, with some exceptions. In such cases, the language(s) to which the instructions refer will be specified.

This style guide can be downloaded from the [webpages for academic skills resources of the Learning Centre](#).

Formatting

The principal aim of formatting guidelines is to ensure **consistency** in the structure and presentation of academic texts. Consistency helps the reader to navigate the text and focus on its content and message rather than its appearance.

Consistent formatting is also key to making texts **accessible**. A well-structured and formatted text makes it easier for any reader to follow the argument and find elements within the text. It also helps readers using assistive technology (e.g., screen readers) to apply this technology to the text or convert the text to a different format if needed. Some word processing applications offer an accessibility check function that gives you recommendations on how to make your text more accessible.

Please be aware that the number of words per A4 page depends on formatting. Make sure that the page layout of your academic work, considering page margins, font size and line spacing, results in pages that contain between 250 and 500 words per page (for pages with text only, without figures or tables).

File and work format

Texts must be submitted in common, machine-readable formats such as docx, pdf or as required by the course instructor.

Documents should use a portrait, A4 page layout with normal margins, e.g., 2.5 cm on every side of the page.

Structure of the document

Written work that you submit for assessment must include an official cover page and declaration of authorship. You can download the respective templates in English, French or German from the [webpages for academic skills resources of the Learning Centre](#).

The generic structure described below should be followed regardless of the text genre or type of assignment. Your course instructor may have additional requirements, in particular for the main body of the work. Please make sure that you follow them.

Cover page

- Title of the academic work
- First name(s) and surname(s) of all students figuring as author(s) of the submitted work
- Student ID number(s)
- Title of the course
- Name of the study programme
- Name of the instructor(s) to whom the task is submitted
- Date of submission
- Number of pages, number of words, number of characters
- Checklist

Declaration of authorship

- Signed by all author(s) of the submitted work

Table of contents

- List of figures, if applicable
- List of tables, if applicable
- List of abbreviations, if applicable. Abbreviations need to be spelled out in the text when first mentioned

Abstract

- If required

Main body of the work

- Introduction
- Body, further divided in different sections depending on the type/genre of the text
- Conclusion

Reference list

- Alphabetical or numbered, depending on the citation system used

Appendix (optional)

Formatting styles

For any given text element such as headings, normal paragraphs, or footnotes, the same formatting style should be applied consistently throughout the text.

The use of pre-defined styles of a word-processor (modified if needed) can significantly improve consistency. It also makes it easier for readers to re-format a text in order to make it more accessible if needed, e.g., by increasing the font size for a given style.

Font (accessible typography)

Many fonts are permitted for academic works. In order to ensure the readability of the document, a common font should be used that is easily recognisable from any computer and standard software application.

Some of the most common sans-serif fonts are:

- Calibri (11-point): **The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog**
- Arial (11-point): **The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog**

Some of the most common serif fonts are:

- Times New Roman (11-point): **The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog**
- Georgia (11-point): **The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog**

You should use the same font and font size for the body of the text throughout the entire document. A different font or font size may be adequate for figures, formulas and equations (e.g. **Cambria Math**), or computer code (monospace fonts such as **Lucida Console** or **Courier New**). For footnotes, the footnotes function of the word-processing programme should be used, applying a slightly smaller font size and line spacing than for the main text.

To improve accessibility, choose an appropriate colour contrast in figures and diagrams so that visually impaired users can read your work.

Line spacing

Use multiple line spacing (e.g., 1.5 or double-spacing) throughout all parts of the paper, with (possibly) the exception of tables, figures, and footnotes.

Paragraph spacing, alignment, and indentation

Applying paragraph spacing, alignment, and indentation consistently to the body of a text will make it easier to read.

Spacing—Add space before each paragraph, e.g., 6 points. Using the paragraph spacing function of your word processor for changing paragraph spacing is preferable over adding manual line or paragraph breaks.

Alignment—Headings and footnotes should be aligned to the left margin. Full justification may be used for the main body of the text.

Indentation—Indent the first line of each paragraph of text, e.g., 0.5-1 cm from the left margin, using the paragraph indentation function of your word processor. Do not use the space bar to create indentation.

Other spacing, alignment, and indentation may be appropriate for headings, abstract, block quotations, tables and figures, reference lists, and appendices.

Headings and captions

Format the headings in your document using your word processor's pre-defined heading styles (you can adapt these styles, if needed). This function will let you create an automatic table of contents.

Use up to two to three levels of headings to distinguish different sections in your work.

For tables or figures, insert captions using the respective function of your word processor.

Unless explicitly instructed, avoid labelling your headings with number or letters, and do not use different colours for titles or headings.

Page numbers

Use the page-numbering function of your word processor to insert page numbers into your document.

The cover page is not included in the page numbering.

Place the page number in the footer of the document.

Footnotes and endnotes

Use footnotes and endnotes when you need to cite a particular source, or to make a brief explanatory comment. Keep their use to a minimum and follow the conventions of your field of study.

Footnotes—Placed at the bottom of a page.

Endnotes—Placed at the end of the work.

Tables, graphs, and figures

All tables, graphs, and figures must be appropriately labelled and integrated in the document. Using your word processing software's function for inserting captions for this purpose will allow you to automatically create lists of tables or figures, if needed.

Tables, graphs, and figures should be placed at the end of the paragraph in which they are first mentioned. The same applies for equations and formulas.

The font size in tables, graphs, and in text appearing in figures should reasonably match the size of the main body of text.

Consider splitting wider tables and distributing them across two pages, rather than switching to a landscape orientation. Larger amounts of (original) data in table format can also be provided as a data annex in the appendix to the paper.

Mechanics of style

In this section, you can find information about the use of punctuation, quotation marks, numbers and equations in your academic work.

Punctuation

The most commonly used punctuation marks in English are:

- Comma [,]
- Period or full stop [.]
- Colon [:]
- Semicolon [;]

With some exceptions, punctuation marks in French and German are the same as in English. For more information on the differences between French and English, and German and English, please refer to the following resources:

- [French-English](#) punctuation comparison
- [German-English](#) punctuation comparison

Using the proofing tool of your word processor for the respective language should normally activate automatic use of the correct punctuation and quotation marks for the given language, and can therefore significantly improve consistency.

Some guidance and examples:

Use commas [,] for lists of three or more things, including before the last item (Oxford or serial comma):

Friends, Romans, and countrymen.

If one or more items in the series already contain a comma, use semicolons between the items:

Friends, Romans, and countrymen; Caesar, Brutus, and Mark Antony.

The semicolon [;] can also be used to separate clauses in a list:

It is wrong to claim that Caesar was ambitious: he has brought many captives home to Rome; he has wept when the poor have cried; and he thrice refused the kingly crown.

In bullet lists, if bulleted items are complete sentences, start each sentence with capital letter and finish it with a period or other appropriate punctuation:

- I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
- I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke.
- My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar.

In bullet lists, if bulleted items are words or phrases, you have two options:

Without punctuation:

We can see Caesar's lack of ambition in that he:

- wept
- brought captives home
- refused the crown
- was Mark Antony's friend

With punctuation:

We can see Caesar's lack of ambition in that he:

- wept;
- brought captives home;
- refused the crown;
- was Mark Antony's friend.

Quotation marks

To enclose a quotation, please remember the following rules:

In British English, use single quotation marks:

‘And men have lost their reason.’

In American English, use double quotation marks:

“And men have lost their reason.”

In French, use chevrons:

« Et les hommes ont perdu leur raison. »

In German, use German-style double quotation marks:

„Der Mensch ward unvernünftig.“

In quotations, periods [.] or commas [,] are placed as follows:

In British English, outside:

And Brutus is an ‘honourable man’.

In American English, inside:

And Brutus is an “honourable man.”

In French, outside:

Et Brutus est un « homme honorable ».

In German, outside:

Und Brutus ist ein „ehrenwerter Mann“.

Numbers and equations

Use words to express numbers *zero* through *nine*, and use numerals to express numbers 10 and above.

All equations appearing in a scientific document need to be typeset. Most word processing software has an equation editor, which can be used for that purpose.

Variables are usually typeset in italics.

For more information about how to typeset equations (specific to physics), you can consult the following guide provided by [Southwestern University](#).

Citing and referencing

Whenever you borrow ideas, arguments, text, data, graphs, or other elements from other authors and you use them in your own work, you need to acknowledge the original source by citing it in your text. Citations make it clear to the reader that you are engaging with or using somebody else's ideas or arguments. At the same time, and in combination with a reference list (see the section 'Creating a reference list' below), they allow the reader to identify and look up the source.

A citation consists of two elements:

- a short reference to the source inside the text – the in-text citation; and
- a complete entry in the reference list.

Each work you cite in your text must appear in the reference list, and each work in the reference list must be cited in your work. More information on how to cite, and on how to create your reference list, is provided in the sections 'In-text citations' and 'Creating a reference list' below.

In-text citations

There are two ways of referring to the work of others in your own text: paraphrasing and quoting.

Paraphrasing—When paraphrasing, you summarize, synthesize or critically engage with ideas, arguments or information from one or more sources in your own words. Through paraphrasing you adapt or engage with the ideas or materials from other authors according to your own needs and in your writing style. Paraphrasing is essential for explaining to the reader what you make of somebody else's work and how that work relates to your own argument. Unless you need your reader to know the exact wording of a source, paraphrasing is usually the preferable way of referring to a source, as it allows you to embed it in your own line of reasoning and explain the reader what you make of it. As it requires a thorough understanding of the source, it also provides evidence of your comprehension and your interpretation of the source.

Quoting—Sometimes it may nevertheless be important to include a direct quote in your text, i.e., to reproduce words verbatim from another work, in exactly the same way as in the source. This may be the case, e.g., if you are conducting a textual analysis of a source and need your readers to have direct access to the original. You should always make it clear to the reader, however, how the quote relates to your argument. Quotes must always be clearly identified by using quotation marks:

- Short quotations (1-2 lines) can usually be integrated in the text using quotation marks and an in-text citation.
- Longer quotations (2-3 lines or more) should be indented and set off from the main text in a separate paragraph, with the in-text citation placed at the end of the paragraph.

Direct quotations should never exceed 10 per cent of your text. If you quote more than that you should consider obtaining formal permission from the author(s).

In-text citations are short references to the paraphrased or quoted work(s), that provide sufficient information to locate the complete source in the reference list. They must be placed in the text in a way that allows the reader to identify that paraphrased or quoted passages, usually by placing them immediately following, and occasionally just preceding, the respective passage. In-text citations must follow one of the citations systems described in the following section.

Citation systems

Regardless of whether you paraphrase or quote, you must always cite your sources.

If your course instructor or programme asks you to use a particular citation system, please make sure you follow the respective instructions. Otherwise, we recommend you use a parenthetical (author-date) system.

There are three systems for including citations in a text:

- Parenthetical citations (author-date system)
- Numeric citations
- Note citations

Parenthetical (author-date) citations refer to the source by inserting a brief reference to the source in parentheses directly in the text, usually at the end of the passage in which you paraphrase, or directly following a quote. This short reference is usually composed of the last name(s) of the author(s) and the publication year, followed by the number(s) of the page(s) on which the paraphrased or quoted passage can be found in the original, as in the following example:

Early research has suggested that Caesar was genuinely concerned with the well-being of the poor (Antony, 1979; Lepidus et al., 1981).

If you cite several works by the same author, it is not necessary to repeat the name:

These initial findings have been contested in later studies, which claim that Caesar was largely indifferent towards the poor (Metella, 1992, 1994).

In the parenthetical system, citations can also be attributed to particular authors as part of the sentence (so-called 'narrative citations'), as in the example below:

In an early study, Antony (1979) argued that Caesar was genuinely concerned with the well-being of the poor (pp. 16-18).

Numeric citations are similar to parenthetical citations in that they provide a short reference to the cited work directly in the text. But rather than identifying the source by its author(s) and publication year, they use a number which refers to an entry in the (numbered) reference list.

In-text citation:

According to calculations presented in early research [5], ransoms paid for captives brought home by Caesar did not fill the general coffers.

Reference list:

4. ...
5. Lucullus, L. (1981). The Gallic Wars in numbers. *Review of Roman Studies*, 41(2), 89-103.
6. ...

Note citations put the reference in a footnote or endnote, rather than directly in the text. The note can contain a short reference that links to an entry in a reference list, as in the parenthetical or numeric systems:

Recent archaeological findings from the presumed site of the Lupercal suggest that a kingly crown was once left behind in the ancient cave.¹

¹ Bibulus, 2008

Alternatively, the complete reference can be included in the note:

Recent archaeological findings from the presumed site of the Lupercal suggest that a kingly crown was once left behind in the ancient cave.¹

¹ Bibulus, M. (2008). Notes from the cave: Findings from excavations at the Domus Livia site. *Archaeological Review*, 63(4), 21-29.

Creating a reference list

You must list all sources cited in your text in a reference list at the end of the document. References provide the full information that is necessary for readers to identify the source, in accordance with a given citation style.

Works that you have consulted but not cited in your work (i.e., works that had no impact on your text) must not be included in the reference list.

Instructions to use a specific style for referencing may exist for your programme or course. Please be sure to follow these instructions, if this is the case. Whatever style you use, you should apply it consistently throughout the document.

- In a parenthetical, author-date citation system, references are listed alphabetically by author's last name.
- In numeric systems, sources receive a sequential number and are listed in ascending order in the reference list.

Generally, each entry in the reference list has at least four elements: author(s), date, title, and information on the publisher.

Depending on the type of publication, the information to be provided may change. The examples provided in Table 1 below is for a selection of common reference types: journal article, book, edited book, chapter in edited book, webpage, video, and conference paper, using APA Style (APA, 2020). For information on other referencing styles, please refer to the section 'Choosing a citation style' below.

Independently of the reference type and unless the reference style you use prescribes otherwise, include all authors in the reference. The last author is usually preceded by an 'and' or an ampersand (&).

Table 1 Examples for common reference types using APA Style

Reference types	Reference list
Journal article	Antony, M., Lepidus, M., & Octavius, G. (1979). If Caesar was ambitious, why did he thrice refuse the crown? <i>Journal of Modern Rhetoric</i> , 38(2), 145-163.
Book	Antony, M. (1979). <i>Empathy and ambition in Julius Caesar. A restoration of judgement</i> (2nd ed.). Palatine University Press.
Edited book	Antony, M., & Lepidus, M. (Eds.). (1979). <i>Public speaking: Oration and rhetoric</i> . Esquiline Books.
Chapter in an edited book	Antony, M. (1979). Why Marcus Iunius Brutus is an honourable man. In Lepidus, M. (Ed.), <i>An anthology of honourable men</i> (pp. 214–229). Gaius Plinius & Sons.
Webpage	Quirinal Association of Public Finance. (1979, March). <i>The five largest ransoms secured by Caesar</i> . https://quirinal.org/fact-sheets/caesar/ransoms If the contents of a page are likely or designed to change and the cited content is not archived, indicate 'n.d.' instead of a publication date and include a retrieval/access date in the reference: Quirinal Association of Public Finance. (n.d.). <i>What's new in public finance</i> . Retrieved October 7, 2020, from https://quirinal.org/news .
YouTube video or other streaming video	Honourable Man. (1979, March 17). <i>Mark Antony wants you to lend him your ears</i> . [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...
Conference paper	Antony, M. (1979, March 13–15). <i>Ransoms and the public dept</i> [Conference presentation]. Quirinal Association of Public Finance Annual Conference, Rome, Italy. https://annual.quirinal.org/1979
Data Set	Antony, M. (1979). <i>Ransoms at a glance</i> (QAPF-OI 328; Version 1) [Data set]. QAPF Online Indicators. https://indicators.quirinal.org/ransoms

Notes: All examples are based on APA Style (APA, 2020). Additional guidance on individual reference types in APA Style is available from the [APA style webpages](#).

Choosing a citation style

A citation style is a set of rules that define how to create in-text citations and reference lists. Preferences for particular citation styles vary across disciplines and the text genres prevalent in these disciplines.

The choice of citation style should be based on your field or discipline and according to the characteristics of your academic work.

Please verify whether there are style guides available for your study programme or course. Alternatively, use the style guide that best suits your needs. Table 2 lists a selection of common citation styles.

Whichever citation style you choose, make sure you apply it consistently throughout your text.

There are applications that help you manage your citations and automatically create reference lists based on pre-defined styles. Especially for longer texts with a large number of citations (e.g., a bachelor or master thesis), such applications can be useful for managing sources. For a quick overview of some of the referencing software available, please refer to the [following information provided by the University of Manchester](#).

Table 2 Common citation styles

Citation style	Disciplines	System
American Chemical Society (ACS) Guide to scholarly communication (ACS, 2020)	Chemistry	Numeric
American Medical Association (AMA) Manual of style (Christiansen, Iverson, Flanagan, et al., 2020)	Medicine and biology	Numeric
American Political Science Association (APSA) Style manual for political science (APSA, 2018)	Political Science	Parenthetical
American Psychological Association (APA) Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020)	Psychology, education, social sciences	Parenthetical
The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) ASME Journals digital submission tool guidelines and information. References (ASME, 2021)	Engineering	Numeric
Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Citation style and reference formats (ACM, 2020)	Computer science, information technology	Numeric
The Bluebook (The Columbia Law Review et al., 2021)	Law	Notes
The Chicago manual of style (The University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, 2017) Kate Turabian's Manual for writers (2018) is a style manual for students based on the Chicago manual of style (Chicago A).	Chicago A: Humanities and history Chicago B: Humanities, social sciences and sciences	Notes Parenthetical
Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers Editorial style manual (IEEE, 2020)	Engineering and computer science	Numeric
Modern Language Association (MLA) Style (MLA, 2021)	Literature and humanities	
Oxford University Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA) (Faculty of Law, University of Oxford, 2012)	Law	Notes

Plagiarism

When you copy, use or reproduce another person's work without acknowledging the source you are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a case of academic dishonesty and a legal infraction that can entail disciplinary consequences, as outlined in the [University's Disciplinary procedure in cases of fraud and plagiarism](#).

Note on the use of chatbots and Artificial Intelligence (AI): While the use of chatbots or any other type of artificial intelligence to generate texts is not, strictly, a form of plagiarism, the Disciplinary Procedure in cases of fraud and plagiarism (version updated on 15.02.2023) of the University nevertheless considers an inappropriate use of such resources as fraud. It may, therefore, result in the same sanctions established by the University for cases of fraud and plagiarism. Students are advised to refer to Section 2 of the [Disciplinary Procedure](#) and Section 43 of the [Law, 2018](#), for further information.

In order to avoid plagiarism, it is important to understand that whenever you present and develop an idea or argument without including a citation, readers must assume that you are claiming it as your own. If it is not, you are guilty of plagiarism, even if you did not deliberately pass it off as your own (e.g., you forgot to include a citation or you did not cite the original author) and even if you mistakenly assumed that the idea was common knowledge and therefore did not need a citation. Failure to appropriately acknowledge other people's work or ideas in your own work always constitutes plagiarism. Please note that these rules equally apply to the citation of compiled notes shared between students in preparation for exams, and the citation of an instructor's study materials. You must state clearly what your sources are.

It is therefore imperative that you always search the literature for the arguments you use in your writing and that you make it clear to your reader when they are, and when they are not, your own. This includes correctly citing all the sources used in your work, as described in the section 'Citing and referencing' of this document. It also includes clearly marking your own arguments (e.g., by using phrases such as 'I believe/suggest/argue/conclude that') and explaining how you conducted your research in case it involved the creation of original data.

For more information on how to avoid plagiarism, please refer to the University's handout *Understanding and avoiding plagiarism*, which you can access on the [webpages for academic skills resources of the Learning Centre](#).

References

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