

STYLE SHEET FOR ESSAY WRITING

Review O'Neill Library's copies of the *MLA Handbook (MLA)*, 6th Edition (particularly chapters 1 through 4) or *The Little English Handbook (LEH)*, 8th Edition ("Format of Manuscript" and pages 174 through 188) for detailed descriptions of essay formats and other information important for good essay writing. This sheet is intended to be an easy reference guide. If the information here contradicts that offered in either of the above mentioned guides, please defer to the information on this style sheet.

Format

Font and Font Size: Any plain text font (i.e., no bolding, italicizing, or underlining) is appropriate for the text of your formal essay. As for font size, 12 point is always appropriate.

Margins: Your essay must have one-inch margins, top and bottom, left and right.

Page Numbering: Include page numbers and your last name on each page of your essay.

Spacing: Double space the text of your essay; also use two spaces before and after a block quotation; single-space the text of block quotations as well as epigraphs (see **Quotations** below).

Staple Pages: Staple, rather than paper clip, your essay before turning it in. Please, no bent or torn corners.

Tense: ALWAYS use the present tense in formal essays. Simple past tense may be appropriate when using historical material or when discussing events that occur in the past in the context of the fiction about which you write. The simple present verb form (Prospero **usurps** Sycorax's authority in "The Tempest") is not the same as the past verb form (Prospero **usurped** Sycorax's ...), the progressive verb form (Prospero **is usurping** Sycorax's . . .), or the past participle form (Prospero **has usurped** Sycorax's . . .).

Titles: Underline or *italicize* the titles of books, magazines, newspapers, and television programs; that is, underline or *italicize* any text that can hold within it shorter selections (chapters, episodes, etc.). Titles of those shorter selections should be presented in quotation marks, namely the titles of "short stories," "poems," "articles," "chapters," and "specific TV episodes."

Citation Style

Bibliography (if applicable): Do not forget to review the bibliographic format documented in the *MLA* or *LEH*. The following is an example of the bibliographic format for a book:

- Roumain, Jacques. *Masters of the Dew*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1978.

NOTE: Articles, interviews, books, etc. use different formats.

Footnotes/Endnotes (if applicable): Again, refer to the format documented in the *MLA* or *LEH*. Here is an example of the footnote/endnote format for a book:

- Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1978): 23.

NOTE: bibliographic and footnote/endnote citation styles **are different**; two differences are the order of the author's first and last names and the inclusion of a page number with footnotes/endnotes.

Articles, interviews, books, etc. have different formats.

Quotations

In-text: There are several ways to cite an in-text quotation. Refer to the *MLA* or *LEH* for different styles and choose one that suits you; consistently use that style throughout your essay. When using short quotations (3 transcribed lines or fewer) within the text of your essay, it is best to blend your prose and that of the quotation as seamlessly as possible. For example:

Fiona Apple says that "what [she] needs is a good defense/cause [she's] feelin' like a criminal," but she does not define her "crime" as popular usage dictates.

Remember to introduce or set-up your quotation (the "Fiona Apple says that . . ." part of the preceding example). Consider another example from Jacques Roumain's novel, *Masters of the Dew*:

Roumain describes the effect of the drought on the village of Fonds Rouge as a pervasive dust. He states that "the dust slipped through [Délira's] fingers, the same dust that the dry wind scattered over the high hedge of cactus eaten by verdigris, over the blighted thorn acacias and the devastated fields of millet" (Roumain 23).

Please note: after finishing the quotation, immediately add your citation reference in parentheses **AND THEN** add your punctuation mark.

Block: Use block quotations only for direct quotations of 4 lines or more (**NOTE:** not four sentences, but four lines of transcribed text). You should follow this procedure when using block quotations:

- Introduce this quotation with an appropriate phrase or sentence
- End this phrase/sentence with a colon (:)
- Double space
- Indent ten spaces from the left margin (each line of the block quotation should be indented ten spaces on the left side only)
- Begin your quotation
- Block quotations must be single spaced (this differs from MLA format)
- End the block quotation with a punctuation mark **AND THEN** include citation information [punctuation mark, space, then (Roumain 23) – see example below]
- Double space
- Revert to double-spaced text
- Interpret the quotation (it is considered “bad form” to begin a new paragraph after a block quotation)

Here is an example of the proper format for a block quotation:

Roumain describes the effect of the drought on the village of Fonds Rouge as a pervasive dust:

the dust slipped through [Délira’s] fingers, the same dust that the dry wind scattered over the high hedge of cactus eaten by verdigris, over the blighted thorn acacias and the devastated fields of millet. (Roumain 23)

In this quotation, Roumain simultaneously identifies Délira as a representative peasant and notes the prevalence of her/their suffering.

Essay

Editing/Proofreading: Carefully proofread and edit your essay for mistakes in spelling, grammar, organization, and content. Also proofread to test the strength of your argument (make sure each paragraph advances your thesis in some way). This process is difficult, particularly for those new to the genre of the formal essay; therefore, you might want to engage the help of a well-trained tutor, professor, or diligent friend. See “Paper Guidelines” on this point.

Spelling: There is no excuse for misspelled words. Engage the spell-check option for your word processing program **AND** proofread your essay before you hand it in (**SPELL CHECK ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH!**).

Thesis Statement/Paragraph: An essay’s **topic** is different from its **thesis**. A topic is a broad area of inquiry. For example, a topic for an essay might be: Masculinity in William Shakespeare’s “Othello.” If, for your thesis, you write “this paper will discuss the role of masculinity in ‘Othello,’” you **ARE NOT WRITING A THESIS**. Although such a statement introduces your topic, it does not yet propose an **ARGUMENT** about that topic. A **thesis** limits and focuses the topic of your paper. It is **one sentence** that tells your reader what your essay will be arguing. A **thesis statement** is specific, not general, although you may make general statements to lead up to it (thesis paragraph). An example of a thesis, from the above-mentioned topic, is: “Shakespeare questions traditional forms of masculinity in ‘Othello’ because they can undermine the domestic unit, and thus threaten society itself.”

Use of Quotations:

“Quotations are effective in research papers when used selectively. Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting, vivid, unusual, or apt, and keep all quotations as brief as possible. Overquotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skillful writer.

The accuracy of quotations in research writing is extremely important. They must reproduce the original sources exactly. Unless indicated in brackets ([]) ..., changes must not be made in the spelling, capitalization, or interior punctuation of the source” (MLA 72).

Conclusion: Your conclusion should reflect what you learn in writing your essay. You can restate or summarize your introduction, but this is not the most effective strategy. Generally speaking, in the body of your essay, you discover or elaborate on issues that you do not raise (or raise briefly) in your introduction. Your conclusion, then, should demonstrate such learning. If, for example, you particularly like a portion of the body of your essay, you might refer to it and link it to your thesis in your conclusion.