Chapter 2 - Area A (Essential Skills)

This area is composed of courses that promote key foundational aptitudes that make advanced study possible. Although every engineer does not need to write like Tolstoy, he or she does need to communicate effectively in writing. Similarly, every poet does not need to understand calculus like Stephen Hawking, but he or she does need basic calculation skills. Area A serves to nurture basic skills in writing and mathematics so that the student can go on to tackle weightier matters.

2.1 The English composition sequence

The importance of writing can be attested to by the fact that English composition is the only class in the USG core curriculum that most students have to take twice. Indeed, when we speak of composition studies at Gordon State College, we usually speak of it in terms of a sequence: English 1101 and English 1102. Successful completion of both English 1101 and English 1102 (or their equivalents) is required for graduation or transfer. Usually taken in the fall of semester of the freshman year, English 1101 marks Gordon State College students' first experience with the rigors, challenges of college-level writing. In English 1101, Gordon State College Students will develop the writing skills necessary to take on the second course in the sequence, English 1102.

2.2 English 1101

Sometimes, when students think of college writing, they tend to think of students burning the midnight oil writing long, heavily foot-noted research papers on some arcane subject, or maybe crafting an impassioned persuasive paper on some current issue. English 1101, however, has little of that sort of thing. Most of the papers are short and many require little or no research. All of them ask the student writer to focus on the process of writing as well as the result or finished text

2.2.1 English 1101 and process-based writing

Briefly, process-based writing means that the student should focus on the steps of writing, not just the finished product. Of course, there are a number of ways to get to a strong finished product, but the typical writing process might contain the following steps

Reading ► Pre-Writing ► Drafting ► Revision ► Editing ► Submission

2.2.2 Types of essays and activities in English 1101

Students in English 1101 at Gordon State College will probably write around five or six essays over the course of the semester. Most will be written outside of the classroom, but some will be written wholly or in part in the classroom during class time. Some of
the types (or modes) of writing students might find themselves doing in English 1101 include:

2.2.2.1 Personal narrative

This writing assignment usually asks the student to tell a story of a key event in his or her life, relating that story with strong and specific sensory detail. Many assignments of this nature ask the writer to highlight the significance of the event and illustrate that significance in such a way that it speaks to the reader. Often, a personal narrative assignment will ask the student writer to show rather than just tell his or her feelings and/or experiences.

2.2.2.2 Compare and contrast

This assignment asks the student to examine two items, ideas, texts, products, services, etc. and explain both how they are alike and how they are dissimilar. Often, the professor will ask students to contextualize their findings in a compare and contrast essay and to make a recommendation in its conclusion.

2.2.2.3 Summary

A summary assignment asks the student writer to actively read and often annotate a text by another writer and then, using the conventions of paraphrase, quotation, and proper documentation write an essay that accurately, briefly, and thoroughly illustrates all of the original document’s major points without getting bogged down into the source text’s minutiae. Strong summary writers are good at seeing the “big picture.”

2.2.2.4 Synthesis

When composing a synthesis essay, the student takes two or more texts, ideas, theories, etc. and combines them to form a hybrid of the two (or more) texts, ideas, or theories. A good synthesis essay connects ideas that are sometimes very different to form a coherent whole. Similar to the summary essay, the synthesis essay is a good way to develop the skill of seeing the difference between “the forest” and “the trees.”

2.2.2.5 Process analysis

This assignment asks the student writer to look at a multiple-step procedure and carefully explicate each particular step giving particular attention to the details involved. A good process analysis essay is “idiot proof,” that is, by following the directions carefully, any reader—regardless of the reader’s prior familiarity with the process—should reach the desired result. The process analysis essay places particular value on specificity.

2.2.2.6 Description
The descriptive essay writer attempts to “paint a picture with words” and describe a particular locale so that the reader can actually “see” the place in question. Like the process analysis essay, the descriptive essay is a great way to develop the ability to write with specificity.

2.2.2.7 Problem and solution

A precursor to the argumentative or persuasive essays students write in English 1102, problem and solution essay asks the student to see a community issue, describe the issue in detail, and offer a potential solution. The process analysis essay develops a student’s ability to look beyond his or her own needs and see the values of the community at large. It also develops the ability to think in terms of possible consequences.

2.2.2.8 Classification

The goal of the classification essay is to divide a bunch of disparate items by using a principle of classification so that every item in a given group falls into one and only one category. Classification is a great way to build the skills students will use as they do work in sciences.

2.2.2.9 Definition

The definition essay asks the student writer to go beyond the dictionary definition of a term and come up with an extended and nuanced definition of a word often using examples. Often this assignment asks the student to write a definition of tricky, abstract terms such as honesty, education, or honor.

2.2.2.10 Persuasion/argument

Although some instructors might think of terms like “persuasion” and “argument” as very similar, others might differentiate between these two terms. Although both persuasion and argument both ask the student to create an essay that will change the opinion of one who feels diametrically opposed to the student writer on a topic, argument often relies solely on reasons and evidence. Persuasive writing tends to also incorporate emotional or value-driven reasoning.

2.2.2.11 Expository

This type of essay asks the student writer to uncover all he or she can about a given topic, package that information, and make it readable to a given audience.

2.2.2.12 Research
This mode of writing, actually more of a technique or tool, can be paired with any of the other modes of writing above. It encourages the student writer to ferret out the most trustworthy information about a subject—often using Gordon State College's Hightower Library and its holdings.

2.2.2.13 Other activities

Other activities in English 1101 include taking quizzes and tests, and writing in timed situations such as in-class essay examinations. English 1101 is also the class in which most GSC students get their first taste of college level research through the mandatory Hightower Library Orientation.

2.2.3 Types of writing, English 1101, and The Karate Kid

As is clear from the extensive list above, students do many different types of writing in English 1101. Sometimes the connection between assignments and what is traditionally thought of as “academic” writing is apparent—as in the case of the Problem/Solution Essay (argument) or the Classification Essay (classification work in the life sciences).

Other times, the academic connection is harder to see. A student in English 1101 might find his or herself writing an in-depth description of a dormitory room or painstakingly recalling the minute details of a family holiday celebration, or even meticulously elucidating his or her reader on the exact steps necessary to produce a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Such a student might ask, “What in the heck does this have to do with real college writing?”

Actually, it has a lot to do with college writing. To see the connection, just think about The Karate Kid. In the film The Karate Kid (1984 dir.: John G. Avildsen; remade in 2010 dir.: Harald Zwart) the protagonist visits the home of an old man who is well known as an excellent karate teacher. The young protagonist asks the old man to teach him karate and the old man agrees. However, instead of immediately learning holds, throws and kicks, the old man assigns the young man a number of mind-numbing household tasks. Moreover, the old man is very particular about the way the protagonist performs these tasks. Just as the young man has had enough of being used as inexpensive household labor, the old man makes it clear that what the protagonist has really been learning are the basics of several key karate moves. Those English 1101 writing assignments—even the ones that seem frivolous—are building core skills necessary for strong academic writing.

2.2.4 The skills developed in English 1101
There are many differences between what college writing instructors look for in English 1102 and the type of writing assignments most students received while attending high school. Although individual instructors may vary, it is probably fair to say that most college instructors are looking for increased depth and detail, more specificity, audience awareness, appropriate citation and a level of mechanical correctness in line with college audience’s expectations.

2.2.4.1 Depth and detail

“Go deeper!” is an English professor’s common plea. One good way to develop more depth and detail in writing is for the student writer to add the following caveat to his or her sentences: “For example….” So if a student writes, “My friend James is always making me laugh,” he or she could leave it at that, or he or she could finish the thought by adding “for example” and write: “My friend James is always making me laugh. For example, one day he picked up a trash can, put it on his head, and insisted I refer to him as "R2D3" for the whole day.”

2.2.4.2 Specificity

In high school, a student might get away with writing a sentence such as, “It was a nice day.” In college, however, the instructor will want to know “what was nice about it?” Was it free from rain? Pleasantly cool in summer time? Warm in December? Was the day spent with friends? Alone? Or was it just a day free from hassles? Do not be surprised if the instructor scribbles something like “what do you mean by that?” in a paper’s margin. Specificity is one of the key elements of college writing.

2.2.4.3 Audience awareness

Sometimes high school writers are told to write for a "general audience." However, college professors often want students to be more specific and begin to ask themselves, "who am I writing this for?" Questions like the implied reader's age, gender, ethnicity and familiarity with the topic will arise.

2.2.4.4 Citation

There are a number of citation systems; in English generally uses MLA form. Basically, MLA form ask the writer to demonstrate where he or she got every fact in a paper that is neither his or her own work or common knowledge. Then, MLA gives the student writer a tightly prescribed format for demonstrating those sources. For more information on citation, see the section in this work on “Citation basics.”

2.2.4.5 Mechanical correctness

One aspect of composition that everyone knows is the struggle to get essays mechanically correct. Students in college writing, however, can be surprised to learn
that there are other, arguably more important, aspects to student writing. Still, if readers cannot follow what student writers are trying to convey, communication breaks down and the writer’s ethos suffers. Although completely mistake-free papers can be elusive, savvy writers strive for mechanical correctness in all their work.

2.2.5 English 1102

When considering English 1102, it is important to remember that for many students, English 1102 is the last chance that they will have to take a class that focuses exclusively on academic writing. Skill development cannot be delayed any further; students enrolled in English 1102 will have to demonstrate their proficiency at college-level writing.

2.2.6 English 1102 and process-based writing

Just like as is English 1101, Gordon State College faculty teaching English 1102 are interested in the finished product, but also in seeing the steps—or process—a student writer has taken to create that piece of work. Interestingly, the same steps that serve the student writer in English 1101—reading, pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing, and submission—will be needed for successful completion of English 1102. However, the activities and approaches of each step is apt to be different as the student moves to English 1102.

2.2.6.1 Types of essays and activities in English 1102

Students in English 1102 should expect to write a variety of papers including annotated bibliographies, expository research papers, arguments, persuasive papers, proposals, literary papers, evaluations, and rhetorical analysis. Students in English 1102 will also do at least one oral presentation.

2.2.6.2 Annotated bibliography

It can be easy to get an “annotated bibliography” assignment mixed up with a “works cited.” The two do share some attributes—they both contain a list of MLA style resources used in a longer work—but there the similarities end. An annotated bibliography goes further and includes a summary of the work and sometimes an evaluation of the secondary source as well.

2.2.6.3 Research paper

Virtually all Gordon State College composition faculty members require a research paper or some variation on that assignment. The research paper assignment requires that the student writer gather, examine, analyze and synthesize a significant amount of
data and repackage that data in his or her own words according to accepted
documentation policies.

**2.2.6.4 Argument (also known as “position paper”)**

Convincing a potential date to go out with you, applying for a job, getting a parent to extend curfew for one special occasion—the process by which these goals were reached often involves argument. Rather than involving raised voices and name calling, real argument—in its rhetorical sense—can be defined as “a course of reasoning aimed at determining the truth or falsehood of a given claim or proposition” (“Argument”). Argument is a fundamental building block of college level writing—students should expect to create arguments throughout their academic careers—and it should come as no surprise that argument is one of the key assignments taught in English 1102.

**2.2.6.5 Persuasion**

It is easy to get “persuasion” assignments confused with “argument” assignments. In fact, some faculty members even confuse or conflate the two assignments. Although the two styles of assignments share key attributes—they both try to change the minds of an audience who disagrees with the student writer—to many who study writing there is a key difference between persuasion and argument. To many, the key difference between the two is that “persuasion” essays utilize facts, statistics, and emotional reasoning, while “argument” essays stick to rational, fact-based arguments alone.

**2.2.6.7 Oral Presentation**

A University System of Georgia requirement, the oral presentation is a bit of an odd-ball assignment in that it asks the student to present information orally, not in writing. The oral presentation can be persuasive or expository and is often, but not always, linked to another English 1102 assignment such as the research paper or the argument.

**2.2.6.8 Proposal (also known as “prospectus”)**

Usually linked to another, longer work a proposal assignment (aka “prospectus) is the instructor’s way of making sure that the student gets off on the right foot and has chosen a topic that is likely to lead to a successful project. Although the proposal is often a short assignment, it should not be taken lightly and the student should think carefully about it before submission.

**2.2.6.9 Literary essay (also known as “scholarly interpretation,” “literary analysis,” “poetry paper,” “drama paper,” or “fiction paper”)**
It can go by a lot of names, but one thing students in English 1102 might find themselves doing is writing about literature. It is worth mentioning that college literature assignments often ask the student writer to go far beyond mere summary and into analysis, looking at how a given piece of literature “works” as well as simply “what happens.”

2.2.6.10 Evaluation

Evaluation essays usually seek to judge something’s value or worth. Writers can (and do) evaluate anything: works of literature, methods of completing tasks, television shows, and restaurants are some of the categories that lend themselves to evaluation essays. Writers of evaluation essays will set criteria, collect evidence, and render judgment.

2.2.6.11 Rhetorical analysis (also known as “argument analysis”)

A rhetorical analysis essay should never be confused with mere summary. Whereas summary is concerned with “what happened,” rhetorical analysis essays examine the ways that a given text seeks to influence its readers—not so much “what is said,” but rather how it was said. A rhetorical analysis paper examines things like tone, voice, and word choice.

2.2.6.12 Other activities

Of course, instructors vary and an individual instructor might have one or more other assignments for his or her English 1102 students during the course of a semester. Common activities in English 1102 include tests, examinations, group work, or in-class writings.

2.2.7 Types of Writing, English 1102, and The Karate Kid

If we thought of the assignments in English 1101 as the beginning of the movie The Karate Kid (1984 dir.: John G. Avildsen; remade in 2010 dir.: Harald Zwart), then the essays assigned in English 1102 are not unlike the end of the movie when the protagonist takes his skills and uses them in the final karate bout. So too will the Gordon State student use the skills he or she learned in English 1101 to “do battle” with the writing challenges of English 1102.

2.2.8 The English 1101 Skills Further Developed in English 1102

English 1101 sought to develop skills such as writing with depth and detail, specificity, audience awareness, proper citation and mechanical correctness. Those skills will be further augmented and enriched as the student moves through English 1102. For this reason, among others, it is strongly recommended that students take English 1102
during the semester immediately following their successful completion of English 1101 with a grade of “C” or better.

2.2.9 New skills developed in English 1102

In addition to honing the skills developed in English 1101, participation in English 1102 will develop new skills in the student writer such as critical thinking, writing for audience, writing with a sense of purpose, analysis, and synthesis.

2.2.9.1 Critical thinking

Critical thinking is one of those concepts that gets bandied about so often (and so casually) that it can be useful to stop for a moment and define exactly what is meant by the phrase. To most of the GSC faculty, critical thinking is the process of objective analysis and evaluation of data to form a rational judgment (“Critical thinking”). In this way, “critical thinking” differs from hunches, instinct, and one’s “gut” reaction. In fact, and hunches can be looked at as opposites to critical thinking. For example, imagine being asked who was going to win an upcoming football game. A native Atlantan might answer, “the Falcons, of course.” But did the answerer respond in that matter because he or she really thought the Falcons would score more points than their opponent? Or did the answerer merely “hope” that the Falcons would win? If it was hope, then the respondent wasn’t practicing critical thinking. If the prediction was based on observations and data—for example, the other team’s starting By the way, if someone tells you that he “knows” the Falcons are going to win before the game begins, he’s definitely not practicing critical thinking—sports are nothing if not unpredictable. For more information on critical thinking, see Section 3 of this work.

2.2.9.2 Audience awareness

English 1102 papers are fascinated by the concept of audience—or, the person or persons to whom the student writer’s paper is addressed. Now, of course the professor is the student writer’s audience, but usually there is another audience involved as well. In the case of an argument paper, the audience is usually composed of those who disagree with the student writer’s position. In the case of an expository research paper, the audience might be composed of those who wish to learn more about the subject. Audience becomes a very important aspect of writing in English 1102.

2.2.9.3 Rhetorical purpose

Also known as exigence, a sense of rhetorical purpose is a natural outgrowth of thinking about audience. If a writer has an audience, he or she could do a number of different things with (or to) that audience. The writer could educate that audience, convince that audience, inspire that audience, motivate that audience or a number of
other options. Be aware that rhetorical purpose or exigence is not the same thing as topic. One topic could yield many different types of papers depending on what rhetorical purpose is chosen. For example, the topic could be “the 2016 Presidential election” but papers just explaining the election (expository), attempting to convince the reader to vote for one particular candidate (argument), or to demonstrate the importance of voting (motivational), would be very different works.

2.2.9.4 Textual analysis

When a television sports commentator shows highlights of a sporting match, or when a friend says something like, “I should have known it was going to be a terrible day when I walked out of the house without my cell phone this morning,” or when a financial reporter blames stock market woes on the number of housing starts in the preceding month, they’re doing analysis. Analysis involves taking something big apart and looking at its components carefully. Textual analysis involves pulling apart and looking for key moments (in a longer work, like a novel) or key lines (in a shorter work or poem). For example, a textual analysis of Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations might pull apart the rest of the long novel focus on (or “analyze”) the death scene of the Pip’s benefactor, the convict Magwitch. Textual analysis of T.S. Eliot’s modernist poem “The Waste Land” might focus on (again, “analyze”) the Sanskrit mantra, “Shantih, shantih, shantih” that appears at the poem’s end.

2.2.9.5 Synthesis

If “analysis” represents a “pulling apart,” then “synthesis” represents its opposite—a putting together. For example, if a hungry Gordon State student asked six classmates for their recommendations about the best fast food options in Barnesville and four colleagues recommended the chicken restaurant while two recommended the barbeque restaurant and all of them suggested staying away from the burger joint, the student could put all those opinions together (“synthesize”) and expect that the chicken restaurant might be the best one to try first.

2.2.10 Works cited


2.3 Mathematics

(See "Mathematical Communication" in Section 5.6.)

2.4 Top 8 Errors at Gordon State College

This section lists the most common errors your professors identify as the most commonly made at Gordon. The purpose is to explain what these errors are, how to identify them, and how to avoid them. The explanations are succinct, so look in the Appendix to this book for further explanations and examples of each term that you find in bold.

2.4.1 Comma splices, fragments, run-ons

These errors occur very commonly, and in many ways they often originate as punctuation errors as much as anything else.

2.4.1.1 Comma splices

A comma splice is a sentence structure error where a writer places a comma alone to join together two independent clauses.

Comma splices often occur only because the writer sensed that some punctuation mark was required in the space where the comma was put, but it should have been a period, semicolon, or colon.

Take the following examples to illustrate the point. The subjects and main verbs have been underlined for the sake of convenience:

I decided to run for Secretary, it’s the job I’m most suited for.  
She thought she’d just pour water on it, she forgot to turn off the power.

Both cases feature a comma placed where a conjunction should have been placed, at least, or where a period or semicolon would have worked as well. Consider first how the sentences would look with periods where the commas were:

I decided to run for Secretary. It’s the job I’m most suited for.  
She thought she’d just pour water on it, she forgot to turn off the power.

The four clauses could easily have been individual sentences. Consider also how the clauses would look with coordinating and subordinating conjunctions between them:

I decided to run for Secretary, and it’s the job I’m most suited for.  
She thought she’d just pour water on it, but she forgot to turn off the power.
I decided to run for Secretary because it's the job I'm most suited for. She thought she’d just pour water on it, though she forgot to turn off the power.

These changes do affect the meaning of the sentences, but that is also what conjunctions are for – they indicate how a reader should relate one idea to another.

**NOTE:** Do not confuse the comma splice with other comma errors. Though it does involve a comma, it is more on the order of a sentence fragment or run-on sentence because it is a sentence-level error. (See level error in the Appendix.)

2.4.1.2 Fragments

A sentence fragment is a sentence structure error where a writer joins together a group of words, concludes them with an end-sentence punctuation mark, but the sentence is incomplete. The fragment can occur for any number of reasons:

A. it is missing a necessary part of its subject or predicate,  
B. it begins with a subordinating conjunction and contains no independent clause, or  
C. it is actually only a lengthy relative clause.

2.4.1.3 Run-ons

A run-on is a sentence structure error where a writer joins together two clauses into a sentence without any mark of punctuation at all. They are very similar to the comma splice, but they involve the absence of punctuation altogether.

2.4.2 Improper thesis statements

An argumentative thesis statement should be a statement of opinion on some debatable point or issue. Generally it appears at or near the end of the introductory paragraph, and ideally it should include a statement of reason.

**NOTE:** It is best to get a general idea from your teacher before you write your essay what his or her stipulations are about the form and placement of a thesis statement. Some teachers have more particular requirements than others.

2.4.3 Misplaced punctuation
This is a very large topic, and it is addressed in various parts of this handbook, but the idea behind misplaced punctuation as an error is that a writer understands that a mark of punctuation is required, but places the wrong one in that place.

### 2.4.4 Subject-verb agreement

**Subject-verb agreement** errors usually occur when a writer fails to connect an action (the *verb*) with the performer of the action. The result is that there is a **plural** subject and a **singular** verb-form or a singular subject with a plural verb-form.

The *guys* who helped my dad *gets* too much credit.

That *tree* behind the azalea bushes *were planted* ten years ago.

There are many reasons why this may occur, but most often it is because the writer put so much distance (several *words* or even *phrases*) between the subject and its verb, as in the examples above. A writer might make the verb agree with a noun that stands between it and the subject of the verb. In the first case the writer forgets that “guys” is the subject of the sentence and is trying to make the verb (“to get”) agree with “dad.” Likewise, in the second example, the writer is trying to make “to plant” agree with “bushes” instead of the true subject (“tree”).

### 2.4.5 Pronoun-antecedent agreement

**Pronoun-antecedent** errors occur when a writer fails to make a pronoun’s *number* or *person* agree with the number or person of its antecedent. Often this is because the writer loses track of what pronouns are referring to what antecedents. Since any noun in a given sentence can be an antecedent, this is easy to do. During the **editing** and **proofreading** phases of the writing process, an effective writer should take special note of his or her pronouns, wherever they occur, and make certain that no other nouns in the vicinity of each pronoun could be construed as the antecedent except the intended antecedent.

### 2.4.6 Improper indication of the possessive

There are many ways to indicate the **possessive**, depending on the word itself – on the type of word it is and sometimes on the sound the word makes.

With **pronouns**, each *person* has its own **singular** and **plural** forms. This form of possessive is probably the easiest to understand. The following Table illustrates common examples of the possessive pronouns in each form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Nouns will have a possessive inflection, usually, taking the form most often of an -’s, and this is the part of possessives that can get complicated. If it is a noun or a proper noun, it will likely take the -’s inflection. The name “Arnold,” for example, would be changed to “Arnold’s,” and the word “dog” would be changed to “dog’s.”

Further complicating things is the possessive plural noun, especially if the original word already ends in an -s. Suppose, for example, there is a family of people with the last name “James,” and as a group, they own something. Is the possessive “James’,” “Jameses’,” or “James’s”? 

2.4.7 Quote integration mechanics

(See Section 2.7.2 for further information on this topic.)

2.4.8 Their, there, and they’re

These errors are common, obviously, because they are words that sound alike to the ear, but their meanings are almost entirely different.

Their is a possessive, plural, third-person determiner. Writers use it to indicate that something belongs to a group of people.

There is a demonstrative adverb. Writers use it to indicate that the position of something in relation to themselves is somewhat distant.

They’re is a contraction of they and are.

2.5 Top Questions Students Ask (FAQ’s)

This section lists the questions teachers at Gordon find students asking most often. The purpose is to give a succinct answer to each of them, so students are encouraged to look in the Appendix to this book for further explanations and examples of each term that you find in bold.

2.5.1 “Can I ask questions in my essay?”

Well, of course you can ask questions, but generally speaking, no, you may not ask questions in your essay. There are several factors at play here, the first of which is voice. Asking questions in an essay is more a matter of appropriateness than
correctness. It depends on whether or not your teacher will allow it, but as a general rule, it is best to avoid asking questions.

The second factor is that asking questions influences the structure or organization of the essay, and often in a negative way.

2.5.2 “Why can’t I use second person (‘you’)?”

In many ways, the answer to this question is an extension of the first. When a writer uses second person in his or her essay, the reader is being addressed directly, which is not usually appropriate in an academic writing context.

More often than not, however, when a writer uses second person pronoun in an essay, the antecedent of the pronoun is not made clear or is interchangeable with another pronoun nearby (often a first- or third-person pronoun).

2.5.3 “I know I need a conclusion paragraph, but what goes in it?”

After writing a full essay, it can be difficult to decide what to put into the conclusion to it. Many writers ask at that point, “what new information could I add?” It might be helpful to ask yourself two questions – “So what?” and “Who cares?”

2.5.4 “What’s the difference between a semicolon and a colon?”

Before thinking of the differences between semicolons and colons, it is helpful to note their similarities. Both punctuation marks really should only occur at the end of a clause.

2.5.5 “When I am writing my essay and reporting other people’s words or ideas, how do I know when to use present tense and when to use past tense?”

This can be a very difficult question to answer without practice. The best way to begin understanding the difference between using present tense and past tense is to think about the difference between spoken and written language. Spoken language is ethereal and impermanent, while written language is more or less static and fixed. If a person writes a story, publishes it, dies, and the story is written about one hundred years later, the story goes on after the writer dies saying the same thing forever. If that same person has a conversation with someone, then dies, then it is correct to refer to that conversation in the past tense (what that person said) because there is no written account of it one can refer to. (And even if there were, it would be most accurate to say that the written account says something about what the people in it said to one another.)

This being the case, it is most accurate to refer to anything that occurs in writing in the present tense and anything that does not in the past tense.
The main problem with this is usually not that a writer misunderstands so much as that he or she is not accustomed to writing in present tense for something he or she read, resulting usually in inconsistency, as the person carelessly switches from one tense to the next.

2.5.6 “In punctuation, how do I know when to use a dash and when to use parentheses? What’s the difference between them?”

This is a case where tone becomes important because there are many cases where a dash and parentheses are both correct to use, but one or the other is more appropriate to what message you want to send.

2.5.7 “How do I write better transitions?”

The best way to improve transitions is to remember what it is that transitions really are and what they can be. Once a writer understands their function in an essay, then the possibilities open up. Writers use transitions to help readers understand how information that follows them should be understood in relation to information that comes before them. In truth, transitions are just as simple and as complex as that. [...]

2.5.8 “How do I get started with this essay?”

(See Section 3.2, “Invention,” for further information on this topic.)

2.5.9 “What’s the difference between quotation marks and italics?”

There are many areas where the use of quotation marks and the use of italics overlap. In many instances the differences are most apparent in documentation mechanics. (See Section 2.6.2.4 for explanations on the proper usage of italics and quotation marks in documentation.) But this section focuses more on the non-documentation-related differences between quotation marks and italics.

2.5.9.1 Italic

Apart from the documentation uses, italics should be used to indicate

- the names of aircraft, ships, spacecraft, and trains
  
  Hughes H-4 Hercules
  
  RMS Lusitania
  
  Voyager
  
  Crescent

- words and phrases of foreign origin that have not become a part of the English language
  
  Festina lente
  
  habeus corpus

- scientific names of plants and animals
  
  Cladrastus kentuckia
  
  Enteroptopus dofleini

- words used as words or letters used as letters
• emphasis
  No you are not telling me this again!
Note also when italics should not be used, but often are:

• words and phrases of foreign origin that have become a part of the English language
clichés
• a writer’s own essay title

2.5.9.2 Quotation marks

Apart from the documentation uses, quotation marks should be used to indicate

• informal titles
• an unstable term (a term with a meaning or applicability that has not been established)
• words spoken by someone, as in dialogue.

NOTE: One useful (though not universal) rule to follow with quotation marks is to use them as some people do in speech, when they describe something while making quotation marks with their fingers. This is a tendency people have in speech that generally carries over to writing as well.

Note also when quotation marks should not be used, but often are:

• a writer’s own essay title

NOTE: A good illustration of the difference between using italics and using quotation marks can be found in one of the italics examples above: the *Hughes H-4 Hercules*. This was an aircraft designed by inventor Howard Hughes. Hughes had been so ambitious in his plans for it and materials used to build it that members of the press took to calling his plane by a disparaging nickname, “The Spruce Goose.” Note that the official name of the aircraft is given in italics and the nickname is given in quotation marks.

• Book titles
• Movie titles

2.5.10 “What’s the difference between *lay* and *lie*?”
Many people who try to understand this one find it difficult, and it is hard to find a concise answer that is easily understood. Perhaps the easiest answer is this: *to lay* is a **verb** in need of an **object**, and *to lie* is a verb that does not take an object. Here are two examples to illustrate the point:

Please **lie** down for a while.
Now I **lay** me down to sleep.

Both sentences have similar constructions – *lay or lie* for the verb, followed by *down* to indicate manner. The difference is with the inclusion of *me* in the second sentence: in the first sentence the thing (or in this case the person) being set down is not mentioned, and in the second the person (“me”) being set down is specifically mentioned in the form of a **direct object**.

To complicate matters, however, *lay* actually is the past **tense** form of the verb *lie*. That being the case, the following sentence would also be correct:

Usually, we would **lay** down for a while.

### 2.6 Tips to improve your writing style

The following is a list of suggestions for improving your writing **style**. Bear in mind that style differs from grammar in that it has less to do with “correctness” than it has to do with “appropriateness” and to some extent “effectiveness.”

**2.6.1 Close up the distance between subject and verb.**

After writing a sentence initially, take a moment to consider what is the **subject** of the sentence and what is the beginning of the sentence’s **predicate**. The relationship of subject to predicate is important for understanding the sentence’s meaning because the subject indicates what the sentence is about, and the predicate indicates what the subject does or is. More often than perhaps any other issue, writers tend to insert language between the subject and predicate that obscures this connection.

A common stylistic issue writers have is that they insert a **prepositional phrase** between the subject and the predicate, when that phrase could have been converted into a **modifier** that came before the subject. Consider the following example:

*The King of Spain from Castile*

Note that the two underlined phrases are both prepositional phrases, modifying “King,” by giving a reader more information about who the King is. Remember that prepositional phrases are modifiers of something, and the more that are tacked on after the word they are modifying, the more redundant they can be. Also note that modifiers can go **before**
the words they modify, as well as after. The above example can be reduced and enlivened in this way:

The Castilian King of Spain

OR

Spain’s Castilian King

OR even

Spain’s King is a Castilian

In the third case, more than merely converting a prepositional phrase into an adjective, a **linking verb** has been added, making the term “Castilian” the **subject complement**.

(Also see **Section 2.6.4** for more information on converting prepositional phrases into modifiers)

### 2.6.2 Close up verb phrases.

**Verbs** occur in **phrase** form more often than on their own. They can be accompanied by **auxiliaries** to indicate additional information about a verb’s **tense** and **mood**. Writers often insert words between the individual parts of **verb phrases**, to the detriment of the meaning in their sentences.

The first and easiest way to deal with this issue is to be mindful of verb phrases to begin with.

### 2.6.3 Close up the distance between modifiers and the words they modify.

It can be confusing for a reader when it is unclear what word in a sentence an **adjective** is **modifying**, and it can be confusing for the writer, too. This is especially true of **adverbs** because they are so moveable.

### 2.6.4 Convert prepositional phrases into modifiers where possible.

**Prepositional phrases** are modifiers in their own right – they give further information about the **nouns**, **verbs**, or **adjectives** they are connected to. That being the case, the **object** of each prepositional phrase is the most essential information contained in it and can usually be converted into an **adjective** or **adverb**. (See **Section 2.3.4** for further information on prepositional phrases.)

Consider this sentence as an instructive example:

The man **from Castile in my garden** loves geography.
The underlined sections “from Castile” and “in my garden” are prepositional phrases. The sentence itself is correct, but the prepositional phrases make it unwieldy. One easy approach the writer of this sentence could have taken would be to convert one of those phrases into a modifier of some kind. Here is an example:

The Castilian man in my garden loves geography.

In this case the object of the preposition from the first sentence (“Castile”) has been converted into a modifier for the word “man,” and the meaning of the sentence is made more clear.

2.6.5 Reduce the usage of empty constructions.

Many writers have a tendency to begin sentences with subject-and-verb constructions that have very little inherent meaning. Sentences that begin with “It is…” or “There are…” are good examples of this. In the case of “It is…,” a construction is created of a pronoun (“it”) with no clear antecedent and the linking verb to be without a complement. Those details will be made apparent later in the sentence, but even so, the readers have already read the subject and the verb of the sentence without knowing who or what the sentence is about or why they are reading it to begin with.

2.6.6 Reduce over-reliance on linking verbs.

As the Appendix notes, a linking verb is a verb used to “link” the subject of a sentence with its subject complement. There is very little difference between the complement and an adjective, however.

2.6.7 Be mindful of word order in restrictive and non-restrictive elements.

Often also called “essential” and “non-essential” elements, restrictive and non-restrictive elements follow nouns and give more information about them. They most often occur in the form of a phrase. They occur often, but not much attention is often paid to the word order within them, which can be cause for some grammatical awkwardness.

Simply put, a restrictive element narrows the reader’s understanding of the noun it modifies, and a non-restrictive element adds information to the noun without narrowing the reader’s understanding. (See comma in the Appendix, usage rule #4, for examples of sentence with restrictive and non-restrictive elements.)

The most common word-order error in a restrictive element is placing the preposition at the end of a prepositional phrase.

2.6.8 Be mindful of voice.
This is a large topic, so be sure to look for the bold-faced terms in the answer for much fuller explanations. A writer’s voice is the features of his or her writing that indicate his or her attitude or relationship with the subject matter, and these features can range from the sentence level to essay level.

Often, when a student hears the word “voice,” their mind goes to the term “passive voice.” This is one of those sentence-level elements of voice. A sentence is written in the passive voice when the subject of the sentence is not performing the main action of the sentence.

One important factor in voice is to remain consistent with it. A writer can easily slip from one voice to another.

**2.6.9 Be mindful of diction.**

This is an area where a thesaurus might be effective if used responsibly, though thesauruses are more often used ineffectively and inappropriately. Diction is the word selection a writer uses—his or her vocabulary—and since it is a topic of style, it is a question of whether the word choices made are appropriate to the situation or not.

**2.7 Citation Basics**

Citation is the part of writing that involves giving credit where it most properly belongs. When a person speaks using his or her fingers as quotation marks (“air quotes”), that person is actually acting on the same impulse he or she should be following when correctly citing someone: quotation marks are what we use in language to establish some kind of distance between our own ideas and opinions and others’ ideas and opinions.

For example, when a person uses his or her fingers as quotation marks to say

> Stacy said she was “too sleepy” to do any work

that person is communicating to a listener that the words enclosed in quotation marks are Stacy’s words and not necessarily the words the speaker him or herself would use to describe Stacy’s true frame of mind. Consider how that sentence would look without the quotation marks:

> Stacy said she was too sleepy to do any work

In this case the words “too sleepy” may or may not be Stacy’s, but the speaker’s frame of mind doesn’t seem to be any different from Stacy’s: the speaker isn’t skeptical about whether or not Stacy really was as sleepy as she said she was, or about whether or not “sleepiness” is a legitimate reason for not doing her work.
This is one of the many ways quotation marks can be used. (See Section 2.6.2.4 and Appendix for further information on punctuating with quotation marks.) It is important when it comes to citation because quotation marks differentiate one person’s words from another person’s words. The speaker in the first example doesn’t want the listener thinking that he or she actually believes Stacy’s excuse.

These examples illustrate the basic point, but it does get more complicated than just putting quotation marks around other people’s words. In most writing contexts, people are thought to have more or less a trademark on their ideas and on the clauses and phrases they use to express those ideas. (See the Appendix for further information on clauses and phrases.) Writers who borrow from other people’s ideas are expected to keep an appropriate and respectful distance from other people’s ideas so that it is clear what thought or expression of a thought belongs to whom.

Unlike the example above with Stacy, a writer could actually share another person’s frame of mind and still need to quote them word for word:

I agree with Stacy that “being too sleepy is reason enough to get out of performing open-heart surgery.”

In this case the quotation marks enclose words containing Stacy’s point of view and the words Stacy used to describe it. This is an expectation both Stacy and the listener have every right to expect from the speaker or writer because it clarifies who said what.

**NOTE:** This section should be understood as a guide to MLA citations basics and not an exhaustive resource. There are plenty of resources available that give more examples of how to cite some less-than-standard sources using MLA.

### 2.7.1 A Case for Academic Honesty

It isn’t just for clarity that writers should do this, though. It is an issue of academic honesty that they should. (See Section 8 for a fuller discussion of academic honesty.) If Stacy is not present to defend herself in a conversation about her work ethics, for example, then she has reason enough to expect that the person using her words to describe her frame of mind will do so as accurately and as faithfully to her original intent for them as he or she possibly can.

The best way to think of academic honesty might be to say that when a writer uses someone else’s ideas or words in an essay, it is something like borrowing that person’s personal property. This is why we use the term “intellectual property” to describe someone else’s intellectual work. (And we put the term “intellectual property” in quotation marks because it is not a term that we coined.) When a person allows us to
use their property outside of his or her presence, they expect us to use it responsibly and for the purposes for which it was intended. It is illegal to do otherwise, and part of the reason for that is that since the owner is not present to protect his or her property, abuse of that property is an abuse of that person’s trust that we will use it correctly. The owner put a good deal of work into acquiring that property (or into producing it in the case of intellectual property), and that is important to respect.

A person does have limitations to the use of his or her intellectual property, however, so long as the person using it is not making money off of it.

In academic writing and in some other forms or purposes of writing, the expectation is that a person will use other writers’ words or ideas responsibly and respectfully through the use of citation. Depending on the field of study a person is writing for, there are several different formats for citing, but this chapter will focus specifically on MLA format in its examples. (See Section 2.6.4 for further information on other citation formats.) In any citation format, crediting other sources occurs in two places in the essay: in the in-text citations and in the list of works cited. The in-text citations occur in the body of the essay and may appear something like this:

I disagree with one critic who says that “a floor lamp’s design should always be a function of its utility” (Jenkins 37).

As above, this is a quote from someone. We know this because of the quotation marks and because of what is called the parenthetical citation following it. What goes in the parentheses is a name and a number. Format enables a reader to understand the significance of that name and that number. Knowing that this essay is written in MLA format, a person knows that “Jenkins” is the last name of the author who wrote this statement, and “37” is the page number on which that statement can be found in Jenkins’s source.

Suppose a reader wants to know more about Jenkins’s comment on the design of floor lamps? Suppose a reader wants to see it in the larger context in which it was stated? (After all, another part of the reason citation is important is because it literally means you are taking someone else’s ideas out of context and putting them into your own, somewhat different context.) In that case, a person who knows this is written in MLA format knows how to find out more by going to the list of works cited at the end of the essay. There the interested person will find a list of all the sources cited in the essay. In that list the reader will find something that might look like this:

All of the details in this list entry are important to a reader in finding the information he or she wants to see. A reader is able to identify this as the entry he or she is looking for because it has “Jenkins” as the first word, and that reader will remember that “Jenkins” was the word given in the in-text citation. (The in-text citation should always be the first word of the entry in the list of works cited.) From this entry a reader knows also the title of Jenkins’s book and the publisher and year of publication. All a person would need to do now to find the quote from the in-text citation is find Jenkins’s book and turn to page 37 (the number in the in-text citation).

2.7.2 Integrating quotes (In-text citations)

The important thing to remember about in-text citations is that they must be grammatically integrated into your own essay. This is a part of MLA documentation that many readers find very frustrating, but it is a necessity nonetheless. Grammatical integration means that, when quoting and citing other people’s material, a writer must incorporate not only a person’s ideas, but his or her language as well. Integrating quotes grammatically is another level of involvement with another person’s material, and it is in additional way of putting another’s ideas into a new context with the writer’s. (See Section 2.7.2.1 on paraphrasing and summarizing for an additional perspective on this.) Take this quote on page 186 from a book called The Ashley Book of Knots as an example:

“As the line or rope that provided the knot is no longer in use, the Bowline Knot is nowadays very apt to be termed merely the 'Bowline,' the word knot being dropped” (Ashley 186).

The quote itself is a complete sentence from that book, but if a writer were incorporating the quote into an essay of his or her own, it would be inappropriate to drop it into the essay as it appears above. This is because it is inappropriate to include a quote from someone without establishing a context for it. While the above example provides a reader with all of the information he or she might need to find the quote (i.e. the author’s name and the page number), it does not indicate the relevance of the quote to the point being made in the essay writer’s argument.

Often, the solution to the problem can be as simple as writing

One writer argues that, “As the line or rope that provided the knot is no longer in use, the Bowline Knot is nowadays very apt to be termed merely the 'Bowline,' the word knot being dropped” (Ashley 186).

There are many more descriptive and imaginative ways to integrate quotes than this, however. For example, one might say
One expert argues that the material used to tie a knot can affect the way that we think of the knot itself: “As the line or rope that provided the knot is no longer in use, the Bowline Knot is nowadays very apt to be termed merely the ‘Bowline,’ the word knot being dropped” (Ashley 186).

In this case, the quote is the same, but the essay writer’s material is separated from the quoted material by a colon. This allows the writer to expand his or her commentary to the level of an independent clause. (See the Appendix for further information on independent clauses.) As discussed elsewhere in this guide, there are some limitations to the use of a colon to introduce a quote, though. (See the Appendix for further information on colons and Section 2.7.2.3 for further specific information on citations using colons.)

There are many rules of MLA documentation, but they leave a great deal of latitude for a writer, still. For example, a writer could incorporate the same quote by moving the author’s name out of the citation:

**Clifford W. Ashley**, an expert on the art and science of knot-tying, says that “As the line or rope that provided the knot is no longer in use, the Bowline Knot is nowadays very apt to be termed merely the ‘Bowline,’ the word knot being dropped” (186).

Notice in this case that the two critical bits of information for a reader who wants to find out more about this quote are there for him or her to see. The name of the author has been made the subject of the sentence, and the page number has remained in the citation. The most important thing is that a reader will understand that the source can be found in the essay’s works cited page by the surname “Ashley,” and the quote itself can be found on page 186 of that source.

Below is a chart, with guidelines on how certain texts of certain descriptions can be cited in-text.

**2.7.2.1 Verb Choice and Tense**

A careful reader will already know a great deal about the source used in the example above without even reading its entry on the works cited page. The author’s full name is given, as is the title of the book, the page number the quote is from, and a little bit of what the book is about. A works cited entry for this book would appear this way on the works cited page:

**Ashley, Clifford W. The Ashley Book of Knots. New York: Doubleday, 1944. Print.**

One important detail a reader might notice about this book is that it was published in 1944. The author himself (Clifford W. Ashley) died only three years afterwards. These
things being the case, it seems odd to some readers and writers that the examples above use the verb “says” or “argues” to describe quotes from Ashley’s book. “He wrote the book decades ago,” they will say, “and he’s no longer alive to say or believe these things.” So, they will wonder, “why would you say that he says these things, rather than said them?”

The rules about verb tense can be tricky when it comes to documentation. (See the Appendix for more information on verb tense in general.) Take this quote from the same book as an example:

Ashley says that “A knot is never ‘nearly right’; it is either exactly right or it is hopelessly wrong, one or the other; there is nothing in between” (18).

The verbs in this quote are all set apart to emphasize an important point about verb tense. Both the essay writer’s and Ashley’s verbs are in present tense for the same reasons. Ashley put his comments in the present tense because he believed his statements about knots and correctness would be true whether he was alive or not. Likewise, the essay writer uses the present tense (“says”) to describe Ashley’s comments about knots because the book in which the comments can be found has continued to “say” the same thing long after Ashley passed away. The idea to remember is that, so long as a quote can still be found, a writer should always think of it in the present, even when the author of the quote wrote it down long before.

The only circumstance in which a quote should be referred to in past tense (“said,” for example), would be if the essay writer is referring to a source that no longer exists. For example, if a quote comes from a book that is no longer available to anyone because it has been destroyed or permanently lost, then details from the book only exist in memory or lore. This does not happen very often, though. It is more common for a person to quote from a web site that has been taken down or altered from a past form. It also happens even more often that an essay writer cites a comment or statement (in a speech, for example) that has been unrecorded. In each of these cases an essay writer will refer to those comments in the past tense (as being “said”).

This being the case, is it most appropriate to state that an author says something when it is more accurate to say that it is written down? This is a very good point, but in academic writing “to say” is an accepted term to describe something in writing, and that is mostly because other, perhaps more accurate, terms (writes, declares, etc.) can seem archaic and draw unnecessary attention to themselves. For the sake of accuracy, it is acceptable to use terms like argues, states, claims, posits, or a host of others, but a writer should have good reason for doing so when a more straightforward choice like says will suffice.
When making verb choices to integrate a quote grammatically, it is also important to select a verb that accurately describes the action you are describing. For example, writers often use the term *discusses* to introduce a quote, though it is a poor choice since “discuss” implies an ongoing debate that is larger than a single quote.

**Rule of Thumb:** In making word choices, it is worse to be inaccurate than to be redundant.

### 2.7.2.2 Paraphrasing and summarizing

There are other circumstances where the handling of other people’s intellectual property may involve the use of the *paraphrase* or *summary*. (See Section 8 for further information.) It may be best to think of the use of other people’s information in terms of length and exactness:

- While a *quote*, as described above in this section, involves the incorporation of someone else’s *words, exactly as they are written*, with the use of *quotation marks*,
- a *paraphrase* involves the incorporation of someone else’s *ideas, without omissions*, but converted into language suited to a different context, and
- a *summary* involves the incorporation of someone else’s *ideas*, but including only the most *relevant or important* ones.

The system is based on the idea that a person’s *intellectual property* rights extend not only to his or her ideas, but also to the words used to express those ideas.

### 2.7.2.3 Citation mechanics

A few basics of citation mechanics are covered throughout Section 2.7.2, but some more specific aspects of citation are necessary.

An in-text citation should provide the first word of its entry on the works cited page.

A parenthetical citation hardly ever has a comma in it. The only circumstance where this is acceptable is if there is more than one source cited by the same author.

There should be punctuation of some kind following each parenthetical citation. This may be a period, but it also may be a comma.

There is no rule that citation should occur only at the end of a sentence. If a writer finds a circumstance where the first half of the sentence is a quote, but the second half is information that is original to writer, then he or she should put the citation before the original ideas begin. (See the *Appendix* for further information on basic sentence structures.)
For example, if this sentence were to appear in an essay –

I disagree with one critic who says that “a floor lamp’s design should always be a function of its utility” (Jenkins 37).

– and the essay writer wanted to explain a little more about why he or she disagreed with Jenkins’s position on floor lamp design than just that he or she disagreed, then the writer might revise it this way:

One critic says that “a floor lamp’s design should always be a function of its utility” (Jenkins 37), but this point of view does not take into account reductions to form and color done in interior design by the school of neoplasticism in early twentieth-century Holland.

This example illustrates how the placement of documentation is important to communicating the difference between a writer’s original ideas and a cited critic’s. If the writer were to have put the documentation at the end of the sentence, it would have looked like this:

One critic says that “a floor lamp's design should always be a function of its utility,” but this point of view does not take into account reductions to form and color done in interior design by the school of neoplasticism in early twentieth-century Holland (Jenkins 37).

And in that case, a reader might think that he or she was looking at a sentence that first provides a direct quote from the source written by Jenkins, followed by a summary or paraphrase that is also by Jenkins, all of which could be found on page 37 of that source. In that case, not only would the writer not be taking credit for his or her own original ideas, but also the writer would seem to be implying that Jenkins wrote or thought something very different from what Jenkins thought or believed.

Quotes can also be integrated with the use of colons, particularly if a writer wants to incorporate a quote in clause form. It enables the writer to attach more commentary to the quote, and it is less invasive to the quote itself. Consider the following example:

One critic considers lamps from an ultra-pragmatic standpoint: “a floor lamp’s design should always be a function of its utility” (Jenkins 37).

2.7.2.4 Italics and quotation marks

MLA handbooks don’t say much about when to use italics and when to underline, but MLA does treat underlining and italicization interchangeably. A writer should therefore understand that, in circumstances where it is clear that underlining or italicization is called for, he or she should do one or the other each and every time: either italicize
every time, or underline every time. It is usually best to italicize if the technology is available to do so.

**Rule of Thumb:** If the source being cited was published in standalone form, it should be cited in italics; if it was published as a part of a larger publication, it should be cited in quotation marks.

2.7.2.5 Authors’ last names instead of first

Sources should be cited in-text by their last names only. It is a mark of professionalism to do so. It is inappropriate to refer to authors by their first names or by their titles (Dr., Prof., Mr., Mrs., etc.)

2.7.2.6 Reference markers

It can happen that a writer refers to the specific details of a source, but instead of given in print, those details occur in some other, non-linguistic medium. In cases like that, spatial or temporal reference markers are acceptable.

In other cases, the source might be a print source, but there are more specific reference markers available than page numbers. This is especially true in the case of a poem or some plays. In cases like that, where a line number or act, scene, and line number are available, those numbers ought to be given instead of the page number because they are more specific reference points.

Likewise, in the case of more formalized poetic forms, like the Sonnet for example, a writer may refer to its individual parts. “In the second quatrain,…" for example, or “In the sestet, …”

2.7.3 A guide for the works cited page

Most of the material above is relevant to the material here. As suggested above, the MLA documented essay has two dimensions to it – the in-text citations and the works cited page.

2.7.3.1 The basic works cited entry

The basic format of any type of works cited entry is this:

**Author’s Name.** **Title.** **Publication information.** **Medium.**

Any works cited entry – regardless of its type – will follow this basic pattern. Note the punctuation of this example and the background colors of each section. A period is used
to signify the end of each section. A works cited entry should not have this colors included, but the colors are provided here to assist in the examples in the following pages.

The author’s name, if it is given, should be included first, with the last name first, first name last, with a comma separating the two (See Section 2.6.2.5 for further information), followed by a period. Sometimes things are written by more than one author, and sometimes no author is listed at all. If there is more than one author, and no more than three, it would appear this way in the author’s name section of a works cited entry:

Jenkins, Al, Reggie Davis, and Amy Anthony.

Notice that the names are not alphabetized. This would be because Al Jenkins was listed as the primary author of the book being cited, and that can be determined by carefully reading the first page of the source. Generally speaking, publishing follows the same rule as movie studios follow for billing a film: the biggest star gets his or her name featured most prominently or listed nearer the top of the movie poster. The same for academic writing – the primary author is listed before the others on the first page.

The format for title and publication information varies greatly depending on the type of source, so see the following subsections of 2.7.3 for further information on how to cite those. The medium, however, is easier to determine: it is the method by which the content of the source is delivered.

2.7.3.2 Books

The basic works cited entry for a book will be very similar to the example in the previous section, but the title will be given in italics. Here is a basic example of a works cited entry for a book:


Other information may be added, depending on the type of book. This might include the edition number, additional authors, graphic novels, etc. Most of all of this information can be found on the book’s title page, while some of it can be found on the book’s copyright page.

The title of the book should be given in italics. (See Section 2.7.2.4 for further information on the rationale for this.) As this example shows, the subtitle should be given in italics, also, with a colon between it and the main title.

The publication information generally will list an abbreviated version of the publisher’s name, followed by a colon, followed by the city of publication, followed by a comma,
followed by the year of publication, concluding with a period. The city of publication will be the first city listed on the title page, and the year of publication will be the most recent year listed on the publication page. It is acceptable and expected that the publisher’s name will be abbreviated.

Generally, the medium will be listed as “Print” unless it was accessed electronically, in which case the medium will be listed as “Web” or “Kindle file” or whatever the case may be.

2.7.3.3 Articles

The basic works cited entry for an article will be a bit different, mainly because there are two titles involved: the title of the article and the title of the journal it was published in. The basic principles are the same, though. Here is a basic example of a works cited entry for an article in an academic journal:


The title of an article should be given in quotation marks, and the title of the journal should be given in italics. (See Section 2.7.2.4 for further information on the rationale for this.)

Also, the example includes the journal title in the blue highlighted area, rather than in the green highlighted area, where the title goes. This is because the article itself was published in this particular journal, making it a part of the publication information.

2.7.4 Other Documentation Formats

Documentation formats are reflections of the academic disciplines that produce them, and what is most valued or important will be reflected through its emphasis in the documentation format.