

Writing Professionally and with Integrity

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“Poor Writing Skills Top M.B.A. Recruiter Gripes”

This headline was taken from a *Wall Street Journal* article (1/16/06), in which the following was reported:

As part of his interviews with M.B.A. students, Darren Whissen, a financial-services recruiter in California, provides an executive summary of a fictitious company and asks them to write about 500 words recommending whether to invest in the business. At worst, he receives "sub-seventh-grade-level" responses with spelling and grammar errors. "More often than not," he says, "I find M.B.A. writing samples have a casual tone lacking the professionalism necessary to communicate with sophisticated investors. I have found that many seemingly qualified candidates are unable to write even the simplest of arguments. No matter how strong one's financial model is, if one cannot write a logical, compelling story, then investors are going to look elsewhere. And in my business, that means death."

Professional Writing

- Writing to meet professional expectations
- Writing to enhance your credibility
- Writing with integrity
- Writing clearly and concisely

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

Understand WHY you are writing.

- Every document has a purpose or mission.
- Purpose dictates both tone and content.

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

Understand common document formats.

- Resumes and cover letters
- Emails
- Research papers
- Technical reports

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

The Importance of Correctness

Surface-level

ex. No typographical errors on your resume or cover letter

Tone

appropriate for the context

in general: courteous, cordial, respectful, and **not pushy**

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

- Place yourself in your reader's position
- Be mindful of cultural contexts different from your own
- Ask for advice and feedback from others

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

Email is professional correspondence.

- Remember basic courtesy.
- Handle email confidentially, but realize that not everyone does.
- Write in complete sentences, including correct punctuation and capitalization.
- Refrain from using emoticons and IM abbreviations.
- Err on the side of formality.
- Simpler is better for font, signature blocks, and wallpaper.

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

Cover letters make a lasting impression.

- Writing clearly and correctly conveys not only competence but also respect.
- When re-establishing a brief or tenuous personal connection, help your reader remember you.
(ex. My name is Joe Miner, and you may remember that Moe Techie introduced us at halftime during Missouri S&T's homecoming football game last October.)

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

- Ultimately, it is your **personal responsibility** to make sure your writing meets professional expectations.
- You run the risk of closing many doors for yourself if you cannot make a positive impression with your writing.
- Always presume your reader has a low tolerance for error, and write accordingly.

Writing to Enhance your Credibility

- At this point, you are not recognized as authorities in your profession.
- Your writing benefits tremendously if you engage with the published work of established leaders in your field(s).
- It is critical for you to (1) integrate reliable published sources into your own documents, and (2) credit those sources appropriately.

Writing to Enhance your Credibility

Your writing demonstrates your ability to:

- Gather, read, and understand published materials relevant to your project;
- Synthesize and analyze this often complex material;
- Draw intelligent and well-reasoned conclusions based on work already conducted and published.

Writing With Integrity

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the copying, whether deliberate or unintentional, of ideas or portions of text without properly citing the source(s) of this information. It is also using other people's ideas without giving proper credit to those people. Although plagiarism is often unintentional, it still demonstrates incompetence. If you fail to record your sources and then later forget that you used that source, you are still liable and open to the charge of theft of intellectual property.

Writing With Integrity

It can be very tempting to "cut and paste" paragraphs from other people's research projects (found in journals, books, or on the web) into your work. Realize that this is NEVER APPROPRIATE.

Your job is to research your topic, learn about what has been done in the past, synthesize this material, and generate your own conclusions using your own language.

Regardless of your past experiences, cultural background, or personal opinion, you are obliged to understand the professional expectations of your current academic environment.

NEVER compromise your personal integrity and professional reputation by plagiarizing.

Writing With Integrity

Q: How can you avoid plagiarism?

A: Cite your sources appropriately.

If you use the language of your source, quote the wording exactly. This is called a **direct quotation**. A direct quotation is either enclosed in quotation marks or indented on the page. If you omit part of the original wording, use an ellipsis (three periods for an omission within a sentence, four periods if the omission goes beyond a single sentence). In any case, several words in succession taken from another source constitute direct quotation and must be acknowledged. Indeed, a single word may constitute a direct quotation if that word is closely identified with a particular author.

Writing With Integrity

Q: What else can you do to avoid plagiarism?

A: Learn to paraphrase appropriately.

A paraphrase employs source material by restating an idea in an entirely new form that is original in both sentence structure and word choice. Taking the basic structure from a source and substituting a few words is an unacceptable paraphrase and may be construed as plagiarism. Creating a new sentence by merging the wording of two or more sources is also an act of plagiarism.

Writing With Integrity

Source Quotation:

A grand unified theory has long been the holy grail of physicists. Since ancient times, physicists have sought minimalist explanations of nature. Theories with four basic particles are considered better than theories of ten.

--Alan Lightman, *Ancient Light: Our Changing View of the Universe*

Paraphrase:

A grand unified theory has long been the central goal of scientists. Since the dawn of time, men of science have looked for minimalist explanations of natural phenomena. A theory with four elementary particles is considered better than a theory of ten.

Writing With Integrity

Source Quotation:

A grand unified theory has long been the holy grail of physicists. Since ancient times, physicists have sought minimalist explanations of nature. Theories with four basic particles are considered better than theories of ten.

--Alan Lightman, *Ancient Light: Our Changing View of the Universe*

Paraphrase:

Physicists have long had the grand unified theory as their holy grail. Science always tries to give minimalist explanations for natural phenomena. The best theory is the one with the fewest elements.

Writing With Integrity

Q: How else can you maintain integrity in your writing?

A: Learn to use the APA citation style

The APA citation style is set forth in *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). This citation style guide has been adopted by many science and social science disciplines, including **business**.

Writing With Integrity

Q: How else can you maintain integrity in your writing?

A: Always include your references in any document you generate.

If you are engaging with the work and the language of others, you must cite your sources **in all cases**. Not only research papers but technical reports, PowerPoint presentations, and even professional emails should include citations when you are using the language and ideas of others.

Writing With Integrity

APA citation style has two main components:

- In-text citations
- References page

Writing With Integrity

APA in-text citations link a source mentioned in the text to the corresponding entry in the reference list. Citations must include the author's name and the year of publication. For direct quotations, the page number is required; for paraphrases, the page number is recommended.

Examples of citing quotations:

- According to Jones (1998), "Students often had difficulty using APA style, especially when it was their first time" (p. 199).
- Jones (1998) found "students often had difficulty using APA style" (p. 199); what implications does this have for teachers?

If the author is not named in a signal phrase, place the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number in parentheses after the quotation.

- She stated, "Students often had difficulty using APA style" (Jones, 1998, p. 199), but she did not offer an explanation as to why.

Writing With Integrity

Examples of citing paraphrases:

- According to Jones (1998), APA style is a difficult citation format for first-time learners.
- APA style is a difficult citation format for first-time learners (Jones, 1998, p. 199).
- Research has shown that the modelling of the effects of a job-security mandate is not going to be fundamentally different from many other corporate rules (Maitland, 2001; Dunfee, 2000; Vogel, 2005).
- Mitchell (1995, p. 231) argues that mandating such rules is important, as they can help in achieving distributive justice.

Writing With Integrity

- Include a References page at the end of your document.
- Appropriately format all entries according to APA style.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

Good writing style is a CHOICE, not an accident.

Sentence-level style: Choosing the right words and crafting sentences that are easy to read and understand.

Paragraph-level style: Weaving sentences together smoothly to emphasize your main points and satisfy your readers' expectations.

Document-level style: Setting an appropriate overall tone and appealing to your readers' values.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

- **Style** is what makes the content of your paper easy (or hard) to read and understand.
- **Style** is NOT merely embellishment or ornamentation. It is not a matter of sprinkling adjectives or metaphors *or anything unnecessary* throughout your writing. Style is not "fluff."
- **Developing a good writing style** is fundamental if you want to communicate your ideas effectively.
- **A clear, solid, appropriate writing style** illustrates your clear thinking, your emphasis on quality, your attention to detail, your respect for the readers' needs, and your willingness to work within the parameters of the assignment.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

Consider these three variations of the same sentence:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Predicate</u>
The Institute	provides	the government with accurate crime statistics.
The government	is provided	with accurate crime statistics by the Institute.
Crime statistics	were provided	to the government by the Institute.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

The Given/New Method

Readers will always try to fit new information into what they already know.

Every sentence (or nearly every sentence) should contain something the readers already know (the given) and something the readers don't yet know (the new).

Writing Clearly and Concisely

Consider these sentences:

- a. Santa Fe is a beautiful place with surprises around every corner. Some artists choose to strike off into the mountains to paint, while others enjoy working in local studios.
- b. Santa Fe offers many beautiful places for artists to work, with surprises around every corner. Some artists choose to strike off into the mountains to paint, while others enjoy working in local studios.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

Sometimes, the previous sentence does not offer a suitable subject for the sentence that follows it. In these cases, transitional phrases can help the writer to provide some given information at the beginning of a sentence.

This public relations effort will strengthen Gentec's relationship with the leaders of the community. With this new relationship in place, the details of the project can be negotiated with terms that are fair to both parties.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

1. Know your audience.
2. Avoid the first person in formal academic writing, especially to qualify assertions (*I believe...*, *We suggest that...* etc.) and to narrate the steps of a research paper (*First, I selected...*, *We then calculated...*, etc.). Avoid the royal *we*.

Incorrect: Because we need to consider weight, we give a higher probability for elements weighing 15 grams or less.

Better: Because weight is a significant factor, a higher probability was assigned to elements weighing 15 grams or less.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

3. Consider carefully your use of verb tense.

Use the **past tense** to describe methodology and results (one's own or those of other researchers).

Use the **present tense** to express general truths or conditions and to discuss conclusions.

- *Much research **has focused** on this problem. Smith et. al. **surveyed** the data and **concluded** that the original study was invalid.*
- *The array **was designed** to detect weak signals. Its performance **indicates** that interference remains a problem.*
- *This approach **was** applied in a second case study. Figure 2.17 **illustrates** the process.*

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

4. Avoid relying on indirect language.

Awkward: It is observed that the processing time decreases with higher values of x .

Better: Processing time decreases with higher values of x .

Awkward: It is suggested that the WAPK approach can overcome these limitations.

Better: Mason et al. suggest that the WAPK approach can overcome these limitations.

Awkward: In this paper, a new method of measuring production is proposed.

Better: This paper proposes a new method of measuring production.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

5. Avoid unnecessary use of the passive voice.

Awkward: The performance of the model is discussed.

Better: This work discusses the performance of the model.

Awkward: In their research, the first approach was shown to be invalid.

Better: Their research showed the first approach to be invalid.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

6. Never start a sentence with a numeral, abbreviation, or variable. Either write out the words or rearrange your sentence.
7. Although abbreviations are written in capital letters, unabbreviated expressions should be in lower case except for proper nouns (i.e., the coefficient of variation, but CV; link failure frequency, but LFF; Markov decision process, but MPD).
8. Abbreviations should be introduced in parentheses immediately after the first use of a term and used consistently thereafter.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

9. Avoid using the words **this**, **that**, **these**, **those**, or **it** as the primary subjects of your sentences.

Instead of: The tool is at a default, guarded position both before and after the milling process. **This** allows the cutting to be done only at the time the operator chooses.

Try: The tool is at a default, guarded position both before and after the milling process. **This default position** allows the cutting to be done only at the time the operator chooses.

Editing for Clear and Professional Language: Ten Hints

10. Trim down phrases to make your prose more readable and concise. Don't use more words than you absolutely need.

In order to = to
Serves to illustrate = illustrates
For the purpose of = to
In the event that = if
At this point in time = now
Because of the fact that = because
Is in compliance with = complies with
Prior to = before
Has responsibility for testing = tests
Subsequent to = after
At a temperature of 298K = at 298K
Utilize = use

Writing to Meet Professional Expectations

Find at least one person—ideally, more than one person—to read your document before you submit it.

Check and re-check your spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Realize the limits of spell-checker and grammar-checker software.

While you're still a student, make good use of the Missouri S&T Writing Center, 113 Campus Support Facility, 341-4436.

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