**Communication Studies: Guidelines for Essays**

Writing is an act of communication, and the impression you make on paper is central to your overall credibility. The ideal essay is an interesting, original exploration of some topic or text that demonstrates a clear understanding of the theory or critical method employed. Like any high quality message, the body of an essay should follow the principle of N.E.S.C.: *Name* your thesis and main points in support of it, *explain* them, *support* them, and *conclude*. A good introduction establishes the need or relevance of your thesis and then provides a preview of your direction in the essay. The body of the essay possesses well-developed arguments supported by timely and original research that is CLEARLY referenced within the text of the essay (see below). All *paraphrased and quoted materials are clearly cited*. Emphasize insights, not description. The conclusion offers a brief summary of your findings, perspective, and parting thought(s). Although you will have developed your voice throughout the piece as you comment on and clarify material, your voice should come through strongest in the advocacy and conclusion section of the paper. Your *voice* in the essay is your uniqueness; your presence. A college-level essay should never seem like a high-schoolish regurgitation of other people’s ideas. Rather, the *writer’s* understanding of theories employed or explored is expressed in a creative and individual way.

As you write, strive for word economy. For example, “being that” should be “because” or “since;” “titled” will usually suffice for “entitled,” “effect” is better as a verb than “impact;” and “use” can usually replace “utilize.” Eliminate unnecessary words; be as clear as possible. Similarly, avoid clichés and abbreviations. Phrases such as “we, the people” or “in today’s society” are vague. Use gender-neutral language. Where “he or she” is awkward, convert the subject to the plural “they.” **PROOFREAD** your work! You will be penalized for tortured syntax, misspellings, and errors in punctuation. Carelessness can ruin even the most imaginative work, and there really is no excuse for misspellings in an age of automated spell-checks.

**Basic format requirements:** All papers must be typed (12 point font, preferably Times New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, to equal approximately 300 words a page). Staple your work, but please omit report covers, folders, and plastic binders. Attach a separate title page which includes (in this order on the page): Title, your name, course and instructor’s name, and date. The bulk of your research should consist of scholarly sources; only cite and reference reliable sources.

**Referencing:** Most of the social sciences use either the *American Psychological Association* (APA) 5th or *Modern Language Association* (MLA) style guides. The following are examples of the kinds of endnotes you should use in your essay. These adhere to APA (5th Ed.) guidelines and appear on a separate “references” or “Works Cited” page(s). If you append references, there is no need for a separate bibliography.
**Internal (in-text) citations:** In general, information that is paraphrased should be noted by the author’s last name and date of publication (Chung, 2002). Note that the period always comes after the closed parentheses. Phrases that are approximately seven words or longer must be referenced with quotes: “Ignoring the names of theorists would prove to be a false economy in the long run” (Griffin, 2002, p. 5). When no author is given, as in the case of some newspaper articles, give the periodical title and date (New York Times, May 3, 1995). Note that periodical titles are always underlined or italicized.

**Listing References:** Arrange all entries in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author. The following list addresses some of the most common mistakes made by student writers using APA style:

- If you are using several works with the same first author, arrange subsequent entries by alphabetizing names of second authors, then third authors, etc.

- References with the same author(s) are arranged by year of publication; the earliest is the first.

- All entries on the first reference page are indented five spaces on the second line.

- The author’s first name is never listed. Please use initials.

- Articles and books cited do not have full caps. Only periodicals have caps.

- Use italics to underline book and periodical titles (the latter usually includes volume number and issue).

**Samples of references:**

**Books**


Articles in a scholarly journal

Articles in a newspaper, trade magazine, or popular magazine

Internet citations: For a website, be sure that the organization and/or author are credible. The Net is filled with special interests, biased and prejudiced information that charades as “research” and/or “fact.” As a rule, materials that are sponsored by established organizations (universities, government organizations, legitimate institutes) are more credible as sources.