RULES AND GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

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Writing is a key feature of graduate work because it is an important vehicle for learning, exploring and elucidating ideas and skills, for developing interpretations and arguments, and for representing ideas in communication with others.

The following is both a reference regarding rules that all papers submitted in this course must comply with, and some guidelines intended to delineate the most important features of good writing in graduate studies. Adherence to the rules is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for obtaining a passing grade in this course. Please pay especial attention to sections 2 and 3. Violation of any of the rules in these sections – on any assignment – will result in a failing grade for this course. Additionally, the instructor retains the right to petition that the offending student be dismissed from their academic program, with the reason for the dismissal to be recorded on the student’s permanent academic record. The Academic Standards recorded in the University at Albany Graduate Bulletin, further explain and exemplify these rules.

The guidelines are provided to answer a number of frequently asked questions regarding the characteristics of good graduate writing. Developing the ability to produce writing with these characteristics will enhance your probability of success in this course.

Additionally, a list of excellent books is provided for those who are interested in getting the best possible guidance regarding quality graduate writing.

RULES

1. Rules about the use of sources:

   1.1. You must use sources parsimoniously – this means that if you use the work of others, you must summarize their arguments, ideas, evidence or findings much more often than you quote them directly. No more than 15% of your paper should be composed of direct quotations. Through the writing assignments in this course I want to gauge your mastery over the content and skills you have had the opportunity to learn by seeing how well you use them and how thoroughly and
critically you analyze them. Of equal importance is how well you analyze and present evidence and compose arguments. I am not interested in how well you can transcribe the thoughts of others.

1.2. You must have good reason to use the work of others – this means that whenever you use the ideas of others you must make clear how these relate to the argument you are putting forward in your paper. You must tell the reader exactly what should be noticed or focused on in the work of others that you cite, and how this work is related to the idea that you are intending to convey.

2. Rules about the acknowledgement of sources:

2.1. You must always distinguish the work of others from your own – this means that whenever you quote a source verbatim; whenever you are summarizing or paraphrasing the work of another person; whenever you use data or information you found in the work of others, whenever you use an organizational scheme or method developed by another person; and whenever you mention in passing key ideas or insights from another person’s work – you must recognize your use of their work by clearly citing the sources you have employed.

2.2. Your citations must be clear and provide sufficient information to locate your source – this means that you must use the author-date citation system in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style (15th Edition). You may follow any of the in-text or sequential note (footnote or endnote) systems in the Chicago Manual of Style – but you must follow it consistently and correctly. You must also adhere to the appropriate reference-list or bibliography style. Students may find the presentation of this style as put forward in Turabian, Kate L. 1996. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. 4 ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press – a more user-friendly way of becoming familiar with this official style manual of the Department.

3. Rules regarding originality:

3.1. You must write your own paper – it is plagiarism to turn in the work of another as if it were your own and thus a transgression of ethical standards.

3.2. You must write your paper alone – you are encouraged to engage in collegial dialogue with classmates, professors, and others – but do not do the actual writing of the paper with another person.
3.3. **Your paper must be original** – you cannot submit in this class a paper – or even sections of a paper – that you have submitted or will submit in another class. It is a violation of university rules to submit the same work for two different assignments. You are encouraged to build upon previous work when appropriate – extending and elaborating ideas and insights gained in them, but the work you submit in this course must be original.

**GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCING QUALITY GRADUATE WRITING**

1. **Good graduate writing is purposeful** – this means that quality writing is the result of good planning. Determine what you want to convey in your paper before you write it, outline your plan to accomplish this purpose, and then begin drafting. Start writing your assignments early, make clear outlines, and give yourself time to draft, redraft and edit.

2. **Good graduate writing is focused** – this means that quality writing results from following a good plan closely.

3. **Good graduate writing is coherent** – this means that quality writing uses clear procedures in the structuring and presenting of claims and evidence and presents logically structured arguments.

4. **Good graduate writing supports claims with evidence** – this means that quality writing offers reasons or evidence in support of all of the ideas it attempts to convey.

5. **Good graduate writing is concerned with the accuracy, validity, and reliability of the evidence and arguments that support its claims** – this means that quality writing shows the writer has attempted to ensure that the evidence and arguments offered to support claims is of the highest quality.

6. **Good graduate writing details how the evidence is related to the claim** – this means that quality writing spells out the reasons why the evidence is considered relevant to the claim.

7. **Good graduate writing is written in a concise, clear and direct style** – quality graduate writing results from a genuine concern that the reader is able to understand the claims and follow the argumentation. Prolonged, pedantry, and abstruseness are the mark of the academic poseur – not the good graduate writer.
8. Good graduate writing attends to spelling, grammar, syntax and rules of composition – this means that respect for the reader demands attention to details. All quality writing requires careful editing.

EXEMPLARY WORKS FOR GRADUATE WRITERS


Turabian, Kate L. 1996. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. 4 ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
