Introduction
This brief academic English writing guide has been assembled by observing common challenges in history writing over the years. Needless to say, this guide does not pretend to comprehension. It omits lengthy exposition on formulating introductions, paragraphs, and structuring academic work, because these issues are dealt with in detail in other places. If you seek more information on such areas, contact the EUI English Unit. In addition, you can consult these sites:

http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/
http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides/

Likewise, further information on grammar can be obtained online, for instance at:

http://www.grammarbook.com/
http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/

This guide has seven parts. The first part addresses plagiarism, the second one common technical problems, then come language issues followed by punctuation and matters of style. Finally, the guide highlights the US and UK differences in spelling and punctuation, and the various ways of setting out the apparatus (footnotes and bibliography). Some readers may disagree with aspects of the proffered advice. As always in the humanities, judgment needs to be exercised; matters of style are not an exact science. Comments and feedback can be sent to Professor Ann Thomson.

1. Plagiarism

- Note the EUI policies on good practice in academic research:

- As everyone knows, quotations from and paraphrasings of primary and secondary sources (= summaries) require a footnote. In addition, quotations require the quoted passage to be placed within quotation marks, ‘like this’, and referenced with a footnote. One footnote per paragraph (say, three per page) is a good indicator of the general norm.

- There is helpful discussion of the issues for historians here:
  http://www.historians.org/governance/pd/curriculum/plagiarism_intro.htm

2. Quoting

- Quotations of sixty words or more (block quotations) should be indented as extracts and separated from the main text by a space above and below. Such block quotations can be in smaller font than the main body of the text, but 10 point font is too small. Within the quotation, further paragraph indentations should be made as needed to indicate the paragraphing of the original source. Such text extracts should not be set within quotation marks, thus:

  It was not normal for either servant or factory girls to receive a fixed and adequate yearly income. Since average wages only rarely exceeded the minimum necessary for existence ... ill health or unemployment meant drastic cuts in wages and a dramatic deterioration in women’s living standards.
2. Technicalities

- To help your readers, place your name, title and date on the first page of your paper so they know whose work they are reading. Likewise, include your surname and date in the file name if you send a chapter via email so it is easy to file, locate, and distinguish from other versions.
- Use 12 point font Times Roman or equivalent.
- Use 1 inch/2.5cm margins.
- Place page numbers on each page.
- Ensure each page has two or three paragraph breaks: no full-page paragraphs or one-sentence paragraphs. See the essay guides mentioned in the introduction for advice on paragraphs.
- Do not use contractions in scholarly prose: don’t, it’s. Do not use abbreviations.
- ‘It’s’ is short for ‘it is’. ‘Its’ is the possessive of it: the dog wagged its tail.
- Place footnote numbers after punctuation.
- Headings are in bold, and subheadings in italics.
- ‘Cf.’/‘See’: There is a widespread misapprehension that ‘cf.’ can be used more or less interchangeably with ‘see’. This is not the case; ‘cf.’ is the abbreviation for the Latin ‘confer’ or ‘compare’.
- Ellipses in sentences: indicate omitted material within a quoted sentence with an ellipsis consisting of three spaced dots between square brackets: ‘thus […] it was thought that he was correct’.
- Ellipses between sentences: To indicate omitted material between sentences place three spaced dots after the final period—altogether four dots, thus: ‘it was thought he was correct. […] However, others disagreed’.
- Spell out numbers under 10, except if it is part of a measurement: 6 percent, 5 centimeters, 4 kilometers (or centimetres/kilometres in UK spelling; this issue is covered below).
- Spell out century numbers: ‘the fourteenth century’ (not 14th century) and hyphenate the adjectival form: fourteenth-century wars.
- Compound modifiers (or compound adjectives, phrasal adjectives, or adjectival phrases) that modify a noun: two or more words that together express a single idea are hyphenated if they precede a noun: man-eating shark has a different meaning to man eating shark: the former, the shark eats the man; in the latter the man eats the shark.
- If you begin each paragraph by indenting the first sentence with the tab key, you do not need to leave a space between paragraphs. Do leave such a space if you do not indent the first sentence. Either method is appropriate, but don’t mix them.
- In general, maintain as much as possible in lower case. Government and state bodies are usually in lower case. The following should be capitalized:
  a) Official political parties, as in the British Labour Party; but place socialist/communist/fascist in lower case when used as an adjective.
  b) Personal titles and posts when immediately preceding an individual, thus: President Obama. But he is the president of the United States.
  c) Proper nouns, e.g., French Revolution, University of London, Declaration of Independence.
3. Punctuation

- Avoid overusing dashes. Learn to use colons, semi-colons, and parentheses (see below). If you use dashes, note that the two common forms are the ‘em dash’ and the ‘en dash’. The em dash is longer than the en dash, and it refers to parenthetical dash use: ‘He spoke in a whisper—the room was quiet’. If you do not know how to insert em dashes, you can substitute two hyphens: ‘He spoke in a whisper—the room was quiet’. The en dash is used in ranges: 129–73, Monday–Thursday, vi–xii, Iran–Iraq. A hyphen is not a dash. Use dashes to combine words, as in ‘mid-fourteenth century manners’.

- Semicolons: Use the semicolon (;) when enumerating a list of items when commas would be confusing. Also use a semicolon between two complete sentences that are closely related in meaning: ‘I went to the basketball court; I was told it was closed for cleaning’.

- Colons: Use a colon (:) before block quotations and after ‘as follows’ and ‘the following’. For guidance on commas, colons, and semi-colons, see here: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/607/04/

- Italic: use italics, not bold or underline to emphasize words. The latter two never feature in modern journals or books.

- Understand the use of apostrophes and inverted commas for apostrophes. The student’s views were dogmatic (singular). The students’ views were dogmatic (plural). The students were dogmatic (no possessive here). Similarly: 1930s, not 1930’s.

- Adverbials such as however, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, in contrast, etc. should be preceded and followed by a comma: ‘However, Marie-Antoinette remained intransigent’. And: ‘Louis XVI, however, was more perceptive than his wife’.

- Note that ‘however’ can also have a different meaning, in which case the comma must not be used: ‘However well the Italian team played, it could not defeat Australia’.

- Be careful with comma use; they should always serve a purpose and can change meaning. Do not place commas after ‘and’, ‘but’, etc. An example of a misuse of the comma: ‘Pandas. Large black-and-white bear-like mammals, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.’ With the comma after ‘eats’, the sentence means that the panda shoots (a weapon) and leaves the scene, whereas ‘Eats shoots and leaves’ means that it eats shoots (baby plants) and leaves (from a tree). See Lynne Truss, Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation (2003).

A contrary example of the need for a comma is the following:

Let's eat grandma!

Let's eat, grandma!

PUNCTUATION SAVES LIVES!
Never use a feminine article to refer to ships, countries, and so on; use ‘it’ rather than ‘she/her’. If possible, avoid gender-specific language in contexts in which it is not necessary. Use neutral pronouns wherever feasible: ‘humankind’ instead of ‘mankind’, ‘spokesperson’ instead of ‘spokesman’, etc. Likewise, use gender-neutral language wherever possible.

An introductory participial phrase should be set off by a comma unless it immediately precedes the verb:
- ‘Having forgotten to notify his generals, the king arrived on the battlefield alone’.
- ‘Exhausted by the morning’s work, the archaeologists napped in the shade of the ancient wall’.
- In doing so, ensure that the subject of the phrase is the noun that immediately follows it.

‘Hanging or dangling participles’ are a frequent mistake; for example:
- ‘Exhausted by the morning’s work, the workers found the archeologist napping in the shade of the ancient wall’. Here the phrase, which is meant to apply to the archeologist, in fact applies to the workers.
- ‘Though a Spanish possession on paper, these privileges had secured Lombardy’s pseudo-independence...’. Here this first part of sentence does not match the second half.

Avoid ‘etc.’, ‘e.g.’, and ‘i.e’. Do not abbreviate ‘for example’ or professional titles like ‘professor’.

Articles and organizations: use ‘the’ when we pronounce the individual letters: the EU, the UN, the IMF, the OECD. There is no ‘the’ when we pronounce it as a word: NATO, UNESCO, OPEC. Note the changes if the organisation is used adjectivally: an EU directive, the EU Commission, EU regulations.

Abbreviations: All acronyms of agencies and organizations must be spelled out on first use. For example: European Union (EU).

4. Language Issues

- Do not use colloquialisms: that is, not ‘He did not get it’ if you mean ‘he did not understand’.
- Beware of words that appear similar but have distinct meanings: critic/critique, rise/raise, process/procession, affect/effect, expanse/expansion, advise/advice, descent/descend, faith/fate, fraud/fraught.
- Often a single word can replace two or three: ensure/make sure; relinquish/let go; transcend/go beyond; advance/put forward; how/the manner in which; much/a lot; uninterested/not interested; unwilling/not willing; unlike/contrary to or in contrast to; concluded/came to the conclusion; insufficient/not enough; establish or found/set up; like/similar to; seeking/looking for; omitted/left out.
- Enormity means horror and does not refer to size (enormous).
- Quotation is the noun, quote is the verb.
- Uncountable nouns. There are a number of nouns in frequent use in English that cannot be made singular or plural, for example, information: I need some information (not ‘an information’ or ‘some informations’). Others include: equipment, legislation, progress, knowledge, advice, feedback: there are no such words as equipments, progresses, advices, or feedbacks.
- Be sure to place the correct preposition after a verb: It depends on [not ‘of’] the situation / they discussed [not ‘about’] the problem / this relates to [not ‘with’] the issue of …
• Comprising is not accompanied by ‘of’: to consist of = to comprise, e.g., ‘The seminar comprises ten researchers’.
• If you use a ‘not only’ construction, the second part of the sentence should have ‘but also’.
• If you use ‘on the other hand’, the preceding ‘on the one hand’ should be clear.
• A common problem involves putting a word between verb and object, or where to place the adverb:
  Incorrect: He describes very well the situation.
  Correct: He described the situation very well.
  Incorrect: The government abandoned immediately the plan.
  Correct: The government abandoned the plan immediately.
• That/which usage: there a US and UK distinction. The US usage uses ‘that’ in the restrictive sense, while ‘which’ is used when the meaning is nonrestrictive/non-defining. In the latter case, a comma precedes the word ‘which’: ‘Chocolate cake, which I love dearly, gives me hives’ (nonrestrictive/non-defining use). ‘The piece of cake that I ate last month made me ill for a week’ (restrictive/defining use). UK writers often use ‘which’ in this sense: ‘The piece of cake which I ate last month made me ill for a week’. The main thing is consistency: choose one mode of usage and stick to it.
• Rather than using verbs such as ‘look at’, as in ‘This article will look at X’, use other more precise expressions like examine/discuss/investigate/lay bare/reveal/analyse—though be aware that their meanings differ slightly.
• Vary your use of ‘such as’ and ‘like’ to avoid repetition.
• Increase your repertoire of adjectives. Don’t overuse ‘strong’, for example.
• Ambiguity should be avoided, e.g. ‘Since’ or ‘for’ should be changed to ‘because’ when its sense is ambiguous.
• ‘However’ and ‘nevertheless’ are not prepositions and cannot be used to join two sentences together.
• Avoid the ‘floating this’. Do not begin a sentence with ‘This was important’. Tell the reader what ‘This’ refers to e.g. ‘This aspect of the problem was important’. (this + summary word). Sometimes ‘this’ does not float when it is absolutely clear what this refers back to here, as in ‘This led to ….’.
• Avoid beginning sentences with ‘As such’.
• Passive constructions. It is common in some non-English languages to write academic prose in the passive voice: e.g.: ‘Robespierre was thrown out of the chamber’. The active voice can be preferred in academic English when the aim is to highlight the agency of historical actors. The sentence would then be ‘A group of deputies threw Robespierre out of the chamber’. There is a good guide to this issue here: [http://www.dailywritingtips.com/7-examples-of-passive-voice/](http://www.dailywritingtips.com/7-examples-of-passive-voice/)
• Beware of confusing the following: adherence/adhesion; exert/assert; devise/device; dubious/doubtful; limits/limitations.
• Beware of the nuances: ‘I broke off the relationship—I broke up with him—and broke his heart’.
• Be sure to couple verbs and nouns correctly: ‘She asserted her freedom’; ‘She exerted authority’ (not: ‘She exerted freedom’).

5. Style

Paragraphs

In English academic prose, the ideal is for the author to exert firm control over the material. It is unacceptable for large amounts of undigested information to be conveyed and then analyzed in a final section. The analysis should be laced throughout the presentation. The author’s presence in the prose is achieved by the use of topic sentences at the beginning and/or end of paragraphs. A topic sentence is a synthetic statement or generalization that the paragraph fleshes out empirically in the following sentences of the paragraph. If you commence too many paragraphs with factual statements, rather than with topic sentences, you risk writing a descriptive rather than analytical piece of work. So begin paragraphs with a topic sentence! However, paragraphs with cumulative evidence leading to a significant conclusion can finish with the topic sentence. ‘As we can see from the evidence above, B is true and not A’. In this case, the topic sentence comes at the end as form of summary or general conclusion. It is also good practice to end a paragraph with such a statement rather than a quotation. Examples can be found here: http://www.writingcentre.uottawa.ca/hypergrammar/partopic.html

Sentence openers

• Use as wide a range of conjunctions and linking adverbs as possible. You can begin sentences with these words as transitional devices to inject your own voice into the text: nonetheless, moreover, furthermore, indeed, however, and yet. It is important to vary them. Avoid excessive use of ‘but’ as a sentence opener.

• Note below the elegant use of the ‘while’ to introduce a concessive contrast structure: the initial statement is qualified in the second half of this long sentence, thereby adding nuance and subtlety to the argument: ‘While it would be foolish to efface the differences in the circumstances of, say, a forced ‘eastern worker’, a Jewish concentration camp worker […] and, say, a Turkish construction worker or Italian pizza baker 40 years later, the deep structure of popular prejudice and disregard linking the consequences of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft to more recent hostilities against “guest workers” and “foreigners” is also impossible to ignore’.

- Nothing better demonstrates the fact that, at this crucial junction, the policy was less an outcome of design than of accident.
- Far from being essential to its functioning, A and B were handicaps to C’s development.
- Even more striking was the fact that …
- Even the most favoured states found themselves challenged in the current economic climate.
- Much favoured, too, were …
- There could be no question that X would become a minister.
- Party members could not help but notice that …
- Much though he resisted, X was subdued by the guards.
- Still worse were the options presented by the government.
- Never before had X been confronted by so many challenges.
- It was plain for all to see that the party leadership was out of touch with the base.
- It went without saying that the miners would not accept this offer.
- Rarely has a political leader benefitted so much from luck.

- Note the use of the introductory phrases below: here the verb is deferred to the second half of the sentence, preceded by an introductory phrase that communicates the author’s view of the discussed issue(s). Their use enables a firm authorial presence and replaces ‘yet’ and ‘however’ as ways of changing direction your narrative or argument:
  - In a profession notorious for microscopic preoccupations, few historians have ever commanded such a wide field in such detail or with such authority. To the last, Hobsbawm considered himself to be essentially a nineteenth-century historian, but his sense of that and other centuries was both unprecedentedly broad and unusually cosmopolitan. [From the Guardian obituary].
  - Regardless of the odds, he decided to press on.
  - For all that, it was not such a bad day.
  - For one thing, there was not sufficient food for everyone.
  - Even so, we decided to stay.
  - All in all, we had a good time.
  - By and large/On the whole, they were satisfied
  - In the event, we decided to stay after all.
  - For the most part, they were satisfied with proceedings.
  - If anything, he supported the opposition.
  - That said, he was also quite angry.
  - At the same time, many had to admit the strength of the argument.
  - What is more, it was also quite cold.
  - Just as bad, he also maligned my cat.
  - All told, there were 100 delegates present.
  - Still not satisfied, she pressed him for more.
  - More/most revealingly, he conceded that he had been economic with the truth yet again.
  - At the very least, one might have expected some honesty.
  - On the whole, the delegates were satisfied.
  - Sure enough, the policy was revealed as flawed.
  - As might be expected, they were unimpressed with the food.
  - Needless to say, the boiled fish was delicious.
  - By any measure, it was a paltry offer.
  - Taken together, the elements of the bargain were impressively large.
  - Properly studied, its history was actually interesting.
- Popular impressions aside, there was substance to the argument.
- More to the point, it was time for action.
- For her part, she would not sign the document.
- Looked at another way, the offer did not seem so bad.
- Of all the features of $X$, the most notable was $Y$.
- What the players possessed in enthusiasm, they lacked in experience.
- There is almost no $X$ that could not be helped by $Y$
- While attractive, its disadvantages are sufficiently significant to warrant skepticism
- Whatever the virtues of $X$, they did no compare to those of $Y$.
- Not to be outdone by $Y$, $X$ made a great effort to …
- Marginal as they were politically, the German companies in $Y$ made impressive gains against the local competition.
- Not content with attacking me, $X$ also systematically misrepresents my book, falsely alleging many omissions.
- To complicate matters further, he was not $X$.
- To make matters worse, he was $Y$.
- For one thing, the state was unable to provide sufficient support.
- Of all the images in the complex reception history of the Enlightenment, none is so striking as the portrait of $Y$.

6. US/UK spelling and punctuation differences

Spelling:
Besides the differences you’ll note below, US style guides generally prefer ‘$z$’ to be used in words like civilize, realize, etc., while UK style guides prefer civilise, realise, and so on. Both are correct depending on your audience/publisher. The main thing is to be consistent.

Note that UK spelling includes the ‘u’ in words like color/colour, honor/honour, favor/favour. Note, too, for the UK the doubling of the ‘l’, as in travellers (UK); travelers (US).
And the er/re differences: centre (UK); center (US).

Dates
In British/Commonwealth English, dates are written as 5 February 2005 or 5th February 2005. In the US, it is February 5, 2005.
Avoid: the 5th of February and February 5th 2005.

Punctuation
Generally, the US style requires a comma after each item in a list (it is called a serial comma, sometimes the Oxford or Harvard comma), while the UK style often omits the comma in the last couplet:
- US: He liked the colors red, blue, and white
- UK: He like the colours red, blue and white.

The former is to be preferred because it avoids ambiguity, as in this sentence:
‘We invited the strippers, JFK, and Stalin’ / ‘We invited the strippers, JFK and Stalin’
The second example can imply that JFK and Stalin were the strippers.
**Titles and (sub)headings**

In the UK, the lowercase is sometimes used after capitalizing the first word of book titles and headings (for example, *The Historical Journal*). In the US, all nouns and verbs are capitalized.

Note, too, the distinction in the abbreviation of editor: (ed.), vs. ed.,
- UK: John A. Hazel (ed.), *The growth of the cotton trade*.

**7. Apparatus: Footnotes and Bibliography**

**Short-title system**

Modern style guides in virtually all English-language journals have dropped the Latin abbreviation method (ibid., op. cit.) for the short-title method. The most usual form is to give a full reference for the first mention of a particular work. Subsequent mentions use only the author’s last name, a shortened version of the title, and the page number, all separated by commas. Examples are given below. Historians generally *do not* use the so-called Harvard method of author/title citations in parenthesis, e.g. (Smith, 1990: 231). We use footnotes, which requires the insertion of a superscript number in the text *after* the punctuation, thus.\(^2\) Footnotes can be single spaced and should not have extra lines between them. They can in a small font, too, if you wish. See example below.\(^3\)

As with spelling and other matters of style, there are distinct US and UK modes of setting out the scholarly apparatus.

**US: Chicago Manual of Style**

Note the use of *double quotation marks after* the punctuation

**Books**


Subsequent reference: Hazel, *Cotton Trade*, vol. 4, 102 or 4:102. (* repeating “ed.” is unnecessary.)

**Journal articles**


Subsequent references: Carr, “Uncertainty and Monetary Theory,” 82.

**Book chapters**


Subsequent reference: Chomsky, “Explanatory Models,” 60 (if the entry is listed in the bibliography under Chomsky) or Chomsky in Fodor and Katz, *The Structure of Language*,

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\(^2\) A link to the Chicago Manual of Style is here: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

\(^3\) You will note that these two notes are single spaced, 10 point font, and not separated by an extra line.
60 (if the entry is listed in the bibliography under Fodor and Katz).

[remember that the first name goes first, unlike in the bibliography]

Thesis

Some UK Styles (adapted from Contemporary European History)
* Note the use of single quotation marks inside the punctuation.
* If you are going to use p. for page numbers, remember that p. is for a single page, and pp. for multiple pages. Never use pg.

Books

Articles in journals and newspapers

Official documents

Unpublished material

Websites
These should be presented as shown in the following examples:

For Minority at Risk data, see www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/ (retrieved 3 August 2007).
See www.watsoninstitute.org/borderlands/region.cfm (retrieved 3 August 2007).

Bibliography
Set out your bibliography in alphabetical order according to the surname. Do not number the books/articles or use bullet points. Note that you do not need a space between the items, because you indent the second and subsequent lines. It should be set out like this (below is the Chicago Manual of Style but there is also a MLA style: http://www.aresearchguide.com/12biblio.html).


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