

Here is a list of errors of grammar and style which I have found to be fairly common in theses and dissertations. Now that you know they are errors, don't make them. I have provided references to sections of the 6th and/or 5th edition of the APA Publication Manual (PM5) where appropriate.

"Affect" and "Effect"

Get out your dictionary. Used as a noun "affect" means "emotion." Used as a verb "affect" means "to act upon." Used as a noun "effect" means "a result or consequence." Used as a verb "effect" means "to bring about or cause to happen." Examples: "What is the effect of this drug? Does it affect cognition? Does it alter affect? Could we use it to effect a change in one's personality?"

Alphabetical Order of Citations Within Parentheses

When listing several citations within parentheses, do so alphabetically, not chronologically. For example: "Cannibalism has been studied by several psychologists (Carr, 1981; Maslow, 1936; Wuensch, 1990)." (PM 6.16)

Amount, Quantity, Number -- [see this guide](#).

Ampersands

Use the ampersand to stand for "and" within parentheses, but not outside parentheses. For example, say "Wuensch and Urwalt (1996) reported that estrogen's effects in tropical climates differed from its effects in temperate climates," but say "Several others have reported similar interactions (Mueller, 1995; Wuensch & Urwalt, 1996; Xenos, 1982)." (PM 6.12)

ANOVA Independent Variables ("Factors")

Don't refer to them as "factors," reserve that term for the weighted linear combinations of variables resulting from a factor analysis (PM 4.20). Do not capitalize the names of variables unless they are connected by "x" -- for example, say "the main effects of sex and dose fell short of statistical significance, but the Sex x Dose interaction was significant."

Anthropomorphism

Do not attribute human characteristics to <nonhuman> animals or to inanimate sources. (PM 3.09). This was one of Kathleen Row's pet peeves. She wrote "Beware of attributing human-like attributes to theories, hypotheses, or psychological concepts. For examples, theories do not think, feel, or have relationships." As another example, "The current investigation will gather and analyze information" No, the investigator will gather and analyze the information. Another example: "These simulated data looked at mean pulse increases in four different groups ..." [Also read this](#) and [this](#).

Blank Spaces

Students frequently insert blank spaces where they do not belong. The best way to prevent this to is [turn the Show/Hide formatting marks ON](#). Blank spaces will then appear as dots, and you can see the ones that should not be there. One of the places that students most often put such blank spaces is at the end of the last sentence in a paragraph. Usually this has no ill effect, but it can have an adverse effect on formatting if you switch from one computer to another or one printer to another. On a related topic, be consistent with respect to [how many blank spaces](#) you will put between each sentence and the next. The APA Publication Manual clearly states (section 4.01) that [there should be TWO blank spaces between sentences](#).

Bold Font

In a thesis at ECU, set all headings in bold font (and some of them in bold italic font), unless you have five levels of headings, in which the Level 5 headings should not be in bold font. See my Thesis Tips page for more details (to which you can link at the bottom of this document). Also see this document: [APA Style Headings](#)

Case

Read the APA Publication Manual carefully regarding appropriate use of upper case. Students tend to capitalize things they shouldn't, such as the names of variables (but see the comments above about ANOVA independent variables). (PM 4.14 through 4.20)

The word "factor" should be capitalized when it is followed by a number -- for example, "The first factor captured 46% of As shown in Table 3, Factor 1 loaded well on" You should also capitalize the names that you give to derived factors -- for example, "The Chinese participants scored much higher on Temporal Farsightedness (Factor 5) than did"

[Last names which start with a lowercase letter.](#)

Citations, Repeated Within Same Paragraph

Within a paragraph, if the author's name appears in narrative (not within parentheses), you do not give the year in any subsequent narrative citations. The year is always given for parenthetical citations. (PM, 6.11)

Conjunctions as the First Word in a Sentence

Do not start a sentence with a conjunction. And don't end one with a preposition. See [Rules for Writers](#). Then see [another opinion](#).

Commas and Quotation Marks

Put the closing comma (or period or any punctuation mark that was part of the quoted material) within the quotation marks. (PM 4.08)

"Data"

Treat this word as a plural noun. The singular is "datum." (PM 3.20)

DF* for *F

Put a blank space after the comma which separates the numerator *df* from the denominator *df*. (PM 4.44.)

Equality and Inequality Signs

Put a blank space on each side of them. (PM 4.44)

Equivalence Testing

It is perfectly acceptable for a research hypothesis to be a range null hypothesis -- that is, that the correlation between two things or sets of things is very close to zero. This should not be stated in terms of whether or not the tested correlation will be statistically significant in the obtained sample (which is largely a matter of how large the sample will be). For example, Mike wrote "Openness to Experience will not be significantly correlated with cyberloafing." Statistical/research hypotheses are statements about the value of a population parameter, usually that the rho between two things has a value other than zero. "Significant" refers to the value of p , that is, whether or not the data are highly unlikely given the hypothesis. Accordingly, the word

“significant” has no place in a research hypothesis. If you want to predict that the correlation between two things is very small or zero, do so, specifying what very small or zero means – for example, $-.1 < \rho < +.1$. Then conduct [an equivalence test](#). For Mike, an appropriate research hypothesis would be "The association between Openness to Experience and cyberloafing is very small, $|\rho| < .1$."

Et Al.

There is no period after "et" (which is not an abbreviation), there is one after "al." Do not use "et al." the first time you cite an article, unless there are 6 or more authors. If two references with the same year would shorten to the same form using et al., then list as many of the authors as necessary to remove such ambiguity -- for example, if there were in your reference list two or more articles which could reduce to "Wuensch et al., 1996" you might have to say "Wuensch, Poteat, et al., 1996". Note that there is NOT a comma before "et al." unless more than one author's name is given. (PM 6.12)

Figures and Tables

- Refer to every figure and table that you present -- don't just throw in figures or tables without referring to them. (PM 5.10)
- In a final manuscript, place them in the body of the manuscript, usually on the first page after that on which the figure or table is first mentioned (unless you can squeeze it in on the page itself, which is likely only to work with a small figure or table), rather than at the end of the manuscript.
- Put the figure captions on the figures rather than on a captions page. Here is a properly formatted example of a figure caption: "*Figure 1. Attractiveness x Type of Crime interaction for American defendants.*" Pay attention to the proper use of font type, punctuation, and case.
- Use the table border lines features of your word processor rather than underlining to produce spanners in your tables. See my Thesis Tips file for more details (link at bottom of this document).

Final Manuscript vs Copy Manuscript

The thesis is a final manuscript, not a copy manuscript. Copy manuscripts are those that are submitted to editors for review and, with luck, publication. The staff of the journal turns them into nice looking, easy to read, final manuscripts. The thesis should already be a final manuscript when it goes to the thesis committee. (Chapter 6 of the PM5)

Font Face

Use 12 point Times New Roman, if available, and it is almost certainly available. If it were not, another 12 point [serif font](#) would do. [Sans-serif fonts](#), like Arial, Cambria, Helvetica, and Verdana, are to be avoided, except in figures, where they are permitted. (PM 8.03)

Headings

Please see this document: [APA Style Headings](#)

However

When used as a conjunction, it should be preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma. For example, "I was upset about running over that possum; however, the possum stew was very tasty." [More details](#).

Hypotheses

In some disciplines it is common practice to state hypotheses formally. Personally, I prefer statements that express simply, and less formally, the expectations of the researcher. When hypotheses are stated, it is almost always the research hypotheses that are stated, not the null hypotheses. The word "significant" should NEVER be used in a hypothesis. The usual sort of hypothesis is a statement about the value of some parameter, usually a correlation coefficient. "Significance" refers to whether or not the fit between the data and the null hypothesis was sufficiently poor to assert, with great confidence, the research hypothesis.

Indentation

The first line in every paragraph should be indented. Failure to do so has become a surprisingly common error among my recent graduate students. (PM 8.03)

"Independent Variable"

This term should be used only for experimentally manipulated variables. Categorical variables not manipulated should be referred to as "predictor variables," "classification variables," "grouping variables," or another appropriate term that does not imply experimental manipulation. [Read this document](#).

Impact

As a noun "impact" means "a striking together," "the force of a collision," or "the power to produce changes." Given that last meaning, it is appropriate to say "Sometimes early experience has a profound impact upon later species identity." As a verb "impact" means "to strike together." It does NOT mean to affect. If you say "he impacted my thinking" you are saying he hit your thinking. Think of an impacted wisdom tooth -- it is striking up against your other teeth. See also [Impact This, Buddy!](#)

Italics, not Underlining

The only acceptable reason to use underlining rather than italics is that you are using a typewriter rather than a word processor.

Its vs. It's

I have a hard time with this one. "Its" is the possessive, as in "the rat licked its fur." "It's" is a contraction of "it" and "is," as in "it's not a rat, it's a chinchilla." It was not always so -- see the [Word Detective](#).

Likert scales

Best to reserve this phrase for scales whose item response options reflect degree of agreement with a statement. See [Likert](#).

Line Spacing

The usual advice is to "set your word processor to double space and then forget it." If you are using Microsoft Word, see "Double Spacing" in my document [Word Tips for the Thesis Typist](#). Do not put a blank line between one paragraph and the next paragraph. Do single space the abstract.

Margins

The Graduate School prescribes one inch margins all around. Microsoft Word, however, will allow tables to extend into the margin and does not have the courtesy to tell you when that happens. You must be vigilant, keeping an eye out for intrusions of tables into margins. Every graduate school has its own stories about the administrative assistant whose job is to check the margins on incoming theses and dissertations, rejecting those that have allowed any text or image into the sacred margins. There is such an

administrative assistant in the graduate school here at East Carolina University: be vigilant.

"N" or "n"

Upper case *N* should be used when referring to total sample size. Lower case *n* should be used when referring to the sample size for a subgroup.

Numbers

Numbers nine or less that don't represent precise measurements should be spelled out, unless they are grouped for comparison with numbers greater than nine. Spell them out at the beginning of a sentence. See the APA Publication Manual for details, exceptions, and examples. (PM 4.31 through 4.38)

P Values

Why just say " $p < .05$ " or " $p > .05$ " when you can give an exact value such as " $p = .032$?" On the other hand, if the p is less than .001, just say " $p < .001$." It is not very useful to say something like " $p = .000000283$." Although p is an abbreviation, do not follow it with a period. See section 4.35 in the APA Publication Manual where it reads: "When reporting p values, report exact p values (e.g., $p = .031$) to two or three decimal points. However, report p values less than .001 as $p < .001$. The tradition of reporting p values in the form $p < .10$, $p < .05$, $p < .01$, and so forth, was appropriate in a time when only limited tables of critical values were available. However, in tables the ' $p <$ ' notation may be necessary for clarity." My advice: If $p \geq .06$, report it to two decimal points. If $.001 \leq p < .06$, report it to three decimal points. If $p < .001$, report " $p < .001$."

Page Breaks

To force a page break, in Word, just hold hold down the Ctrl key while you hit the Enter key. Do not insert multiple carriage returns (Enter) to force a new page.

Pagination

Page numbers should not appear on the first page of each chapter. Prefatory pagination is really strange: Consult my Thesis Tips page.

Passive/Active Voice and the First Person

Use of the active voice with the first person is strongly encouraged. (PM 3.18.) Also, see [Use of First Person in APA Style](#) .

Plethora

I just don't like the sound of this word, but even worse is that it is almost always misused. It does not mean "a lot." I means "[too much](#)."

Pronouns for Nonhuman Animals

Use neuter pronouns unless the animals have been named. (PM 3.20.) I guess that I would use "he/she" for my pet earthworm, Squiggly. Squiggly is a hermaphrodite. APA probably considers "hermaphrodite" an insensitive term, but it describes earthworms accurately. I would still use a neuter pronoun when referring to a named animal from a species that does not reproduce sexually.

Prepositions at the End of a Sentence

Avoid them. "A preposition is a poor word to end a sentence with" can be changed to "A preposition is a poor word with which to end a sentence."

Reference List

- **Abbreviations:** Do not abbreviate the titles of journals.
- **Body-List Correspondence:** Every citation in the body of the manuscript must match up with an entry in the reference list and vice versa. (PM 4.01)
- **Digital Object Identifier.** If available, this should be included in the reference. (PM 6.31 and 7.01, 2) Here is an example:
Thompson, L. F., Braddy, P. W., & Wuensch, K. L. (2008). E-recruitment and the benefits of organizational web appeal. *Computers in Human Behavior, 24*, 2384-2398. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2008.02.014
Notice that there is no period after the doi.
- **Electronic Sources:** If the cited article is available in hard copy, reference it exactly as you would had you not obtained it through an electronic database. The APA says "it is not necessary to include database information." Furthermore, the URL you used to access the

database is not likely to work for others. Example: Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? the spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 24, 452-471. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyhref&AN=AMR.BD.DEB.ANDERSSON.TTSEIW&site=ehost-live> . The URL here will not work for others. It should not be provided in the reference list.

- **Issue Numbers:** Most journals are paginated by volume -- Suppose the first issue runs from 1-126. The first page in the second issue will then start with page 127. You do not need the issue number to be able to find the article. A few journals are paginated by issue. Suppose the first issue runs from 1-126. The first page in the second issue will be page 1. You do need to know the issue number to be able to find the article. In reference lists, issue numbers are given only when the journal is paginated by issue rather than by volume. When I see something like "*Psychosociological Science*, 13(4), 384-391" I know you goofed -- it is a rare journal which would have over 300 pages in a single issue! (PM 6.30 and 7.01) Personally I wish the APA would allow issue numbers even when the journal is paginated by volume. Having the issue number can make it a lot easier to find the article electronically.
 - Consult [this list](#) to determine whether a journal is paginated by volume or by issue. (Thanks, Cat)
- **Hanging indentation** (rather than traditional indentation) should be used. With hanging indentation every line except the first line is indented, as in this example below. See the examples from the library at [Ithaca College](#). To see how this should be done with MS Word, [see my document](#). (PM 2.11)
Pastafarian, I. M. (2005). Personality dynamics among those who worship the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Paris, France: Temple of Squack Press.
- **Italics:** Use italics rather than underlining. (PM 4.21) Titles of journals and books and journal volume numbers are set in italic font. A comma and a space separate the volume number from the page numbers. Issue numbers are not to be set in italic font.
- **Case:** In the reference list, do not capitalize every word in a book title or the title of an article in a journal (in the body of your manuscript you would capitalize the major words in titles). (PM 4.15)
- **Order:** Single entries precede all multiple-author entries beginning with the same surname. References with the same first author and different additional authors are arranged alphabetically by the surname(s) or the

additional authors. References with the same authors in the same order are arranged by year of publication, with the earlier items preceding the later. If the authors and dates are identical, use the (1996a), (1996b) convention, arranging the articles alphabetically by the title (excluding "A" the "The"). (PM 6.25)

- **Et Al.:** This has changed. If there are eight or more authors, list the first six, then three ellipses, and then the last author's name. For example, suppose that Wuensch published an article with ten coauthors. You would list the names like this: Wuensch, K. L., Carey, A. I., Carroll, L. S., Wundt, W. M., Fechner, G. T., Weber, E. H., ... von Helmholtz, H. L. F. (2027)." (PM, 6.27 and 7.01, 2)

Redneck Plural

The redneck plural is using the singular possessive when the plural nominative or objective should have been used. An apostrophe should not be used when forming the plural of a noun unless it is possessive. For example, you should write "these possums make great stew," not "these possum's make great stew." The plural possessive would be "possums'," as in "this garbage dump is the possums' favorite place to forage."

Royal We

When referring to the author of the thesis, use "I" or "my," not "we" or "our." See the PM, 3.09, "Editorial we."

Secondary Sources

Avoid them, if possible. Don't tell me that Row and Boat (2004) reported that Stream (1996) found a quadratic relationship between misanthropy and family income, do go to the original source (Stream), read it, and then cite the original source. If you absolutely must use a secondary source (you have tried to get the original but could not), do it with proper APA style -- for example: "Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (1985, as cited in Striegel-Moore, Tucker, & Hsu, 1990) reported that"

Sexist or Dehumanizing Language

Avoid sexist or dehumanizing language. Don't use "male" and "female" as nouns when referring to humans, acknowledge their humanity by referring to them as "men" and "women," or "boys" and "girls." Don't, however, use "man" and "woman" as adjectives. It is OK to use "male" and "female" as

adjectives. (Item 3 in Table 2.1 in the PM: "Use *male* and *female* as adjectives where appropriate and relevant (*female experimenter, male participant*). *Males* and *females* may be appropriate when the age range is quite broad or ambiguous. Avoid unparallel usage such as 10 *men* and 16 *females*." Since "10 men and 16 females" dehumanizes women but not men, it is also sexist. See the [APA Guidelines for Unbiased Language](#), especially Item 3 under gender and the following comment. See these [examples of dehumanizing language](#).

APA used to discourage authors from using the term "subjects" to describe the research units when they were humans. They encouraged the use of words like "participants," "respondents," or some other terms less dehumanizing than "subjects." With the 6th edition of the publication manual, [use of the word "subjects" has been designated as appropriate](#) even when the subjects are humans. (PM6: 3.11, Guideline 3). [What are "subjects?"](#)

Shifts of Tense

Shifting tenses back and forth annoys readers. Avoid it. (PM 3.06)

Singular "They"

While it is appropriate to avoid sexist language by using the plural, do not use the "singular they." For example, "Each subject was instructed to hit the red key on their keyboard...." is agrammatic -- the pronoun "their" is plural but its antecedent ("Each participant") is singular. You could instead say "Subjects were instructed to hit the red key on their keyboards....." (PM 3.12, 3.19, 3.20)

Spacing After Punctuation Marks

Insert one space after commas, colons, and semicolons and periods that separate parts of a reference citation and periods in initials (for example, K. L. Wuensch). Do not insert a space after internal periods in abbreviations or around colons in a ratio. **Space twice after punctuation marks at the end of a sentence.** (PM 4.01) To make it easier to see blank spaces, [turn the Show/Hide formatting marks ON](#). Blank spaces will then appear as dots.

Split Infinitives

Call me old fashioned, but, unless needed to avoid ambiguity, I think one should avoid placing an adverb between "to" and the verbal. More than once I have been sent the following quotation as proof that I am a traditionalist:

"The dislike of split infinitives is long-standing but is not well founded, being based on an analogy with Latin. In Latin, infinitives consist only one word (e.g. *crescere* 'to grow'; *amare* 'to love'), which makes them impossible to split; therefore, so the argument goes, they should not be split in English either. But English is not the same as Latin. In particular, the placing of an adverb in English is extremely important in giving the appropriate emphasis ... In the modern context, some traditionalists may continue to hold up the split infinitive as an error in English. However, in standard English the principle of allowing split infinitives is broadly accepted as both normal and useful." (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998)

Split Numbers

Do not permit the negative sign (hyphen) to be split (at the end of a line) from the rest of the number. You can avoid this by using Word's nonbreaking hyphen -- see [NonbreakingHyphen.jpg](#).

Statistical Symbols

Set in italic font (or underline if you are using a typewriter rather than a word processor) statistical symbols such as *t*, *F*, and *p*. The PM (3.19) says not to set Greek letters in italics, even when used as statistical symbols, but I happen to think they look better when set in italics, so I do so in my handouts (I do follow the APA prescription in my manuscripts for journals that use APA style).

In Microsoft Word 2003, you can get Greek symbols, such as χ , by clicking Insert, Symbol, selecting the font (use the Symbol font, it usually looks better than the others for Greek letters), selecting the symbol, and then clicking on insert, as illustrated [here](#).

Tense

Use the past tense to describe things that have already happened, such as the procedure you used to gather the data, the results you obtained when analyzing the data, and the writings of others. "Correct: "Sanchez (2000) presented similar results." Incorrect: "Sanchez (2000) presents similar results." " (PM 3.18)

"Tracking Changes"

Microsoft Word's [tracking changes](#) feature is a great tool to use when collaborating on a manuscript, including theses and dissertations. You must, however, be sure that you have accepted or discarded all tracked changes and deleted all comments from your manuscript before to convert it to pdf and deliver it to the graduate school. For example, you may have Word set to flag changed lines with a vertical line in the margin. If so, and there are still tracked changes in your Word document, that line will appear in the margin of the pdf document too, and the Graduate School will not like that. See [Tracking Changes in Word](#) .

Ideally, the members of your committee will use Track Changes to show what edits they recommend and to comment on your document. In the best scenario, the chair will work with the document you send and then send it on to the next member to add additional edits/comments, and so on, with the last member sending the document back to you and the chair. In this way, you need work with one document having all of the recommended edits and comments.

Be sure to preserve a record of the recommended edits and comments. If you make the recommended edits and then clear all comments and recommended changes and then send the document back, the members are likely to exclaim (WTF, how am I to know if she made the changes I recommended?" It you accept a recommend edit, leave a comment noting that you have done so (and identifying who requested that edit). If you decide not to accept a recommended change, leave a comment explaining why. Leave all comments by members remain in the document. Respond to them. The commenting member will clear the comment when e is satisfied that you have addressed it adequately.

All those using track changes should be sure that Office knows who they are. On university computers, by default, the author is "ITCS." That does not help one know from whom a particular comment came. See [User Identity](#) .

"Try And"

No, no, no. "Try to." See [Try2.htm](#).

Voice

"Prefer the active voice. *Preferred:* "We conducted the survey in a controlled setting." *Nonpreferred:* "The survey was conducted in a controlled setting." The passive voice is acceptable in expository writing and when you want to focus on the object or recipient of the action rather than on the actor. For example, "The speakers were attached to either side of the chair" emphasizes the placement of speakers, not who placed them" (PM 3.18)