

**Top 10 Writing Style Errors**  
**for papers submitted in Dr. Doverspike's graduate classes**  
**Academic Year 2022-2023**  
**(Revised 01-01-2025)**

Listed by the numbers as they appear on the [APA Style Checklist](#), these errors are the most common style errors made on graduate students' papers. Based on the Top 10 errors on graduate school papers for each of three semesters, these errors account for more than 95% of text edits and style errors. None of the errors are unique to APA style, but all of them are addressed in most American English style guides, such as Plain English handbook (Walsh & Walsh, 1959), *English Grammar and Composition* (Warriner et al., 1977), *Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), and *Elements of Style* (Strunk & White, 2009).

14. A term to be abbreviated must, on its first appearance, be written out completely and followed immediately by its abbreviation in parentheses (or, if already in parentheses, in brackets). Thereafter, use the abbreviation (APA, 2010, p. 107; APA, 2020, p. 173). For additional information, see [Doverspike \(2020\)](#).
15. Use a period to end a complete sentence (APA, 2010, p. 88; APA, 2020, p. 154).
17. Use a comma, which is known as the Oxford comma or serial comma, between elements (including a comma before the conjunction “and” and “or”) in a series of three or more items (APA, 2010, p. 89; APA, 2020, p. 155).
19. Use a comma following an introductory adverbial or introductory prepositional phrase. If the phrase is short (e.g., “In this section we discuss...”), the comma after it is optional (APA, 2010, p. 88; APA, 2020, p. 155).
20. Use a comma to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction (APA, 2010, p. 89; APA, 2020, p. 155).
21. Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction (p. APA, 2010, p. 89; APA, 2020, p. 156), and to separate elements in a series that already contain commas (APA, 2010, p. 90; APA, 2020, p. 156).
22. Place periods and commas inside double quotation marks, with a few exceptions (APA, 2010, p. 92; APA, 2020, p. 157).
27. Each pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent and should agree with the antecedent in number and gender (APA, 2010, p. 79; APA, 2020, p. 120).
28. Verify noun-pronoun agreement so that nouns and pronouns agree in number. For example, use a singular pronoun when referring to an antecedent singular noun (APA, 2010, p. 79). As of October 1, 2019, APA (2020, pp. 120–121) endorses the singular use of “they” in some circumstances. See [APA Style](#) website for details.
28. Use of the singular “they” is part of APA Style because it “is inclusive of all people and helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender” (p. 121). Although usage of the singular “they” was once discouraged in academic writing, many advocacy groups and publishers have accepted and endorsed it. For more details, see [APA Style](#) website.
32. Write the word for any number below 10, and use numerals for any number 10 or above. If beginning a sentence with a number, always spell out the number with a word (APA, 2010, pp. 111–112; APA, 2020, pp. 178–179).
34. Avoid using terms such as “research has shown.” Instead, cite the specific author(s) and publication date (APA, 2010, p. 174; APA, 2020, pp. 261–262).
38. In parenthetical citations in text, use an ampersand (&) between the names of two authors or before the last author when all names must be included to avoid ambiguity. In narrative (nonparenthetical) citations, spell out the word “and” (APA, 2010, p. 175; APA, 2020, p. 266).
40. In text citations, use ampersand (&) inside parentheses and use conjunction (i.e., and) outside of parentheses (APA, 2010, p. 175; APA, 2020, p. 266).
43. Direct quotations must be accurate (APA, 2010, p. 172; APA, 2020, p. 274), or square brackets (not parentheses) must be used to enclose material such as an addition or explanation inserted in a quotation (APA, 2010, p. 94; APA, 2020, p. 275).
46. All quotes require that the page number (or paragraph number if there is no pagination) of the quote be specified (APA, 2010, pp. 92, 171; APA, 2020, p. 270).
51. All text citations in the text should also be included as reference entries, and vice versa (APA, 2010, p. 174; APA, 2020, p. 257).
55. Titles of books and periodicals are *italicized*. Within the body of a paper, use non-italicized sentence case for titles of books and journals (APA, 2010, p. 101; APA, 2020, p. 294). In references, use italicized sentence case for titles of books and use italicized title case for titles of journals (APA, 2010, p. 185; APA, 2020, p. 270). Use non-italicized sentence case for titles of articles. See the examples below:

This sentence is written in non-italicized sentence case.

*This sentence is written in italicized sentence case.*

This Sentence is Written in Non-Italicized Title Case.

*This Sentence is Written in Italicized Title Case.*

## References

References for the above citations are contained in the [APA Style Checklist](#).

Doverspike, W. F. (2018). Top 10 writing style errors. <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>

Doverspike, W. F. (2025). Top 10 writing style errors. <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>