

### **Dr. Lyn's Help for Self-editing**

The following self-editing tips are not in anyway meant as a guarantee that a proposal or a dissertation will pass review. These tips are only meant as an aid to help doctoral learners and candidates and other graduate students become more aware of the quality of work they submit. The general rule regarding whether you need an editor follows: If your chair tells you to get an editor, you need to hire an editor. If your chair does not mention an editor, these tips could certainly help you produce a paper that will pass review without an editor.

#### **Top 10 APA Mistakes**

The APA Style blog (2013) listed the top 10 APA mistakes. Throughout my 30+ years of editing dissertations and theses, these are the top mistakes I have seen. Please know, university editors usually flag these as well. Other mistakes I would add, although not technically considered APA mistakes, are missing references and non-matching references (e.g., Janes, 2012 in the reference list and Jones, 2012 in the text).

- Incorrect use of numbers
- Incorrect use of hyphenation
- Incorrect use of et al.
- Incorrect capitalization and punctuation in headings
- Use of since instead of because
- Improperly prepared tables and figures
- Failure to use the serial comma
- Failure to spell out abbreviations and acronyms as needed

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- Inconsistent use of double-spacing between lines
- Incorrect use of and versus the ampersand

The biggest problems I see with proposals and dissertations are missing or incomplete references and submitting less than absolutely the best work humanly possible. I strongly recommend students buy a year of Grammarly or WritePoint (more on this later) and check their work. Usually, you can get a free month if that is all you need. In addition, find someone in your circle of friends who is qualified to proofread your paper. (You may have read Acknowledgements in my last dissertation. BrendaLynn Love proofread every draft I submitted.)

Read your paper backwards; do not laugh, this is quite an effective strategy for finding your own mistakes. Whatever you do, even if it includes hiring an editor, only submit as close to perfection as is humanly possible with every post and every submission of your thesis, prospectus, proposal, or dissertation. This will save you time and money.

### **Self-Editing Tips**

First, never work on your paper unless you have clicked the paragraph symbol (¶) in the Paragraph box on Word's Home tab. This function will allow you to see all formatting issues (e.g., every page and section break, every paragraph indentation, and every space).

### **Software Aids**

Even after working for many years as high school teacher and adjunct professor, with two masters' degrees and a specialist and doctoral degree under my belt, I never turned in one post or paper in my second doctoral program unless I had first run that post

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or paper through WritePoint (similar to Grammarly). I now keep Grammarly on my laptop and use it for every email, note, and letter. A PhD must set a certain standard in writing. If with my background I felt the need and still feel the need to use software to check my writing, it might be prudent if you did as well.

Most universities supply either WritePoint or Grammarly at no charge. If not, I strongly recommend you buy a subscription. By turning in a paper with no grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors, you better your chances of your chair actually reading the content in your paper. This will save you much time overall.

**<https://www.writepoint.com/>**

**<https://app.grammarly.com>**

### **Begin the Correct Way Each Time**

When I edit a dissertation or proposal, after I cross check references, I read the client's dissertation manual. It is crucial to align each paper according to the specifics of the manual because even a different major can mean different requirements. In addition, if your university also supplies a rubric or checklist, be certain to follow this. Do not look at someone else's dissertation and think this is how to write your dissertation. Read your manual and use your checklist.

Set the margins before you begin and make certain the page numbers are properly set. In addition, hold your cursor over the first few pages and check for the proper settings for spacing by right clicking and selecting "Paragraph." If not, use "Select All" and highlight all text in the body of each chapter and set the correct spacing: Left—zero, Right—zero, Before—zero, after—zero, and line spacing—double. Then in "Paragraph," click the "Line and Page Break" tab at the top and click "Widow/Orphan Control."

**Tabs**

Make certain all your bullets, numbers, and indents are 0.5 and no more. This is a hot button with reviewers. Click on your ruler; it is just under the taskbar, far right, hover your cursor in the edge and you will get the “ruler” prompt to click. To get your numbers or bullets at 0.5, including the symbol, right click, “Paragraph,” “Special By,” Hanging 0.5.

For bullets or numbers, highlight your text and click on “Bullets” or “Numbering” in the “Paragraph” box in Word’s “Home” taskbar. You must use the same bullets throughout, and only use numbers for items in an ordered sequence. If you are not at 0.5, line everything up with your ruler by clicking on the first letter of the first item in your list. You will see the tab marks above in the ruler, just move them. Items in a list inside your text are listed by letters, not numbers: “Within a paragraph or sentence, identify elements in a series by lower case letters in parentheses” (APA, 2010, p. 64). Finally, if your tabs are giving you problems, clear them: Right click, “Paragraph,” bottom left- “Tabs,” Clear All.

**Line Spacing**

APA does address spacing (one space or two between sentences) but only in reference to journal articles, not for dissertations. For this reason, spacing varies by universities and even by chairs. Ask your chair but be consistent throughout your paper. For references in the Reference List, use only one space even if you used two spaces in your paper. Following are a few other issues you should check:

- **Odd page breaks and blank pages.** Do not leave a blank page or a half-filled page of text in the middle of a chapter; do not leave a short table/figure without text on the page. Do list a reference (Reference List) on two separate pages.
- **A dangling line.** At least two lines of a paragraph must be at the bottom or top of a page. If not, highlight text, right click, “Paragraph,” “Line” and “Page Break” (up at the top), then check widow/orphan control. I recommend you set this for your entire paper.
- **A dangling heading.** Use a page break to keep a heading from dangling at the bottom of a page. A heading must be followed by at least two lines of text before the page break. Make certain the entire table or figure is not on separate pages unless this is a necessity and then refer to the APA manual for guidance. The table titles and figure captions must appear on the same page as the table or figure.
- **Inconsistency of spacing above headings.** Make sure the space above headings is uniform; if you wish, add an extra space above headings to set off new topics on the page.
- **Inconsistency of spacing above and below figures and tables.** Use a soft break (Ctr. +Shift) between Table # and the title of a table and between the title and the table. Below a table or figure, set it off from paragraphs or other tables/figures on the same page with an extra space; make certain the spacing around tables/figures is uniform from chapter to chapter.
- **Tables and figures in the margins.** No text or graphics may be in the margin areas of the page.

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## **Make Word Work for You**

In Word, put your cursor where you want to start checking, then go to “Review” and select “ABC Spelling and Grammar” in the far-left corner. In Word365, click on the “Review” taskbar, then “Check Document” (top, far left). If you have Word set up correctly (I explain further down), Word will do a fair job of checking your work. This method does not replace Grammarly or WritePoint; this is just another method to help you ensure your work is at the level of the degree you are pursuing.

**Another method:** Select the text you wish to check, right-click, and then convert your paper to an audio file; this will allow you to open your paper in iTunes.

**To set up Word for optimum efficiency** go to “File,” then to “Options,” and then “Proofing.” Once in “Proofing,” at the bottom (“When correcting spelling and grammar in Word”), make certain all five boxes are checked and then select “Grammar and Style,” or it may be called “Grammar and More,” and click “Settings.” Once inside the Settings box, make certain all boxes are checked. Also check your spacing preference and parentheses inside quotations (for APA). Now, check that you want to recheck your document.

## **Use the Correct Words**

When editing a paper, I begin by checking for common errors. I use the “Find” and “Replace” feature in Word to change certain words typically flagged by the formal editors:

“Additionally” is replaced with “In addition.”

“Due to” is replaced with “because” (due only refers to time).

“Lastly” is replaced with “finally.”

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“Firstly” is replaced with “first.”

“Since” is usually replaced with “because.” Since only refers to time.

[Following is a cut and paste from one of the formal editors at Walden] ““Very” is removed, and ““which”” versus ““that”” is checked. Remove subjective terms like, ‘key, important, critical, very, etc.’ because they are opinion-based, which does not belong in academic papers. Explain why it is important vs. that it is important. Using the word ‘which’ in a sentence is called a relative clause, which must be separated from the rest of the sentence with comma/s.”

Next, use the “Find” feature and look for all instances of “in order to do” and delete “in order,” which is a superfluous term (e.g., In order to do this, I must... vs To do this I must...). Look for all forms of the verb “say,” which is an error if used when writing about what an author wrote. Unless you hear the author give a speech, do not use any form of the verb say.

Check for accuracy with the Latin abbreviations i.e. and e.g.: i.e. stands for id est and means roughly "that is," e.g. stands for exempli gratia, which means “for example.” Use the “Find” feature to look for instances where the word data has the wrong verb (i.e., data—plural; datum—singular [also check for other terms such as media, which is plural; medium is singular]).

### **Agreement of Subject and Verb**

In almost every proposal or dissertation that I have edited, the learner or candidate had a few issues with subject/verb agreement. “A verb must agree in number (i.e., singular or plural) with its subject, regardless of intervening phrases that begin with such words as together with, including, plus, and as well as (APA, 2010, p. 70).

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**Incorrect:** The student in the band class together with their friends ....

**Correct:** The student in the band class together with his or her friends.....

**Incorrect:** The car in the car lot as well as the other cars are in my way.

**Correct:** The car in the car lot as well as the other cars is in my way.

### **Numbers and Percent Sign**

Make certain numerals have a percent symbol (9%), and numbers that are spelled out use the word percent (nine percent). Do not write 9 percent or nine %. (Do not spell out any numbers 10 and above unless the number starts a sentence.) The APA manual lists when numbers below 10 are not to be spelled out. APA has specific rules for numbers (pp. 111-114). Do not guess.

### **Direct Quotes and Plagiarism**

Some chairs and even some universities do not allow any direct quotes. Check on this early in your dissertation journey. (Also check to see if you can use books or dissertations.) When using a direct quote, use page or paragraph numbers with each one: (p. 24) or (para. 24). Count the words in each quote. If it is 40 words or more (use the “Review” tab, which has a word count) make certain block quotes are used. According to the APA Publication Manual (p. 171), “If the quotation comprises 40 or more words, display it in a freestanding block of text [indent 0.5 on the left only] and omit the quotation marks. Place the page or paragraph number outside (behind) the quote on the same line, if possible, with no period after the parentheses.”

Plagiarism is defined as not giving credit to all sources when copying/borrowing/using three or more consecutive words. You must include a citation with every statement of fact. Universities take plagiarism seriously. A university can

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expel you for plagiarizing. In case you have not thought of this, universities can review your dissertation up to 5 years after you graduate.

Remember, a citation must support every statement of fact. In my opinion and from my experience, you can get expelled more quickly by failure to give credit to another author than by anything else. This also applies to your pictures, charts, graphs, and figures. Unless a picture, chart, graph, or figure is public domain, you must contact the **original** author and obtain written permission for use. You must include this written permission in your appendices. While waiting for permission, write “Permission Pending” in the notes section directly under the picture, chart, graph, or figure.

Plagiarism has ruined many careers or cut short or severely damaged the reputation of many people. Following is a list of just a few people where plagiarism greatly tarnished their reputation and/or destroyed their career:

- Jane Goodall, primatologist
- Jotham Sederstrom, *New York Daily News* editor
- Vaughn Ward, Republican congressional hopeful
- Montana Senator John Walsh
- Jayson Thomas Blair, *New York Times* reporter
- Marie-Louise Gumuchian, CNN reporter
- Mustapha Marrouchi, University of Nevada English professor
- Lisa Rein, *The Washington Post* reporter

If in doubt of when to cite something, cite the information, cite even yourself (APA, 2010, p. 170). It is better to have too many citations than not enough. Remember,

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every statement of fact must have a citation. Your mentor/chair can always tell you if he or she thinks you have overdone citations. However, if a mentor/chair, a committee member, URR/full committee review, formal editor, or dean's representative suspects that you are guilty of plagiarism and reports you, you will get a letter from the dean's office. At this point, you will be thrown into what I call "dissertation purgatory," which will set you back months while they review your entire paper in detail. You cannot go forward while your paper is under review.

Over the years I have seen various methods used to resolve suspicion of an ethics violation. They might invite you to some sort of hearing wherein you will have to defend yourself. They might ask you to give the full cut and paste of information for every citation you used in your entire paper. They might force you to take an ethics course at your expense. In some cases, they simply send a letter that says the candidate has been removed from the university with no recourse. (Remember, you applied by giving your social security number. An ethical expulsion will follow you for the rest of your life.) Suspicion of plagiarism is the one issue that can be used like a hammer against you. Be careful.

### **References**

Every citation in your paper must be in your reference list, spelled the exact same way, and with the same year. Every reference in your reference list must be in your paper. Delete all references in your reference list that are not in your text. I cannot begin to stress how important this is. I do not recommend any software to help you keep track of references. Many programs claim to take care of all APA issues; well, they make mistakes. Keep a list of your references on an Excel sheet or just on a Word doc. Email

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this list to yourself about once a month. However, I do recommend software to check your references, Recite Works: <https://reciteworks.com/>. Some universities have purchased an amazing reference program that can tell if there are any missing references, if they are spelled the same in all cases, if et al. is used appropriately, and if each reference actually supports what the writer claims it supports. Recite Works is the closest software I can find to what these universities use.

When I cross check references, I also look for proper use of “et al.” and past tense when writing what an author or authors wrote. Remember to use past tense: Jones (2016) credited, proposed, discussed, believed, etc.; not Jones (2016) credits, proposes, discusses, believes, etc. I also make certain the authors’ names are spelled the same in the text and in the reference list when I cross check references.

### **Unclear Antecedents**

An issue with some chairs (especially Walden University) is the use of unclear antecedents. Some chairs will not allow the use of a pronoun without its antecedent (e.g., this, that, those, them, it, etc.). (If you need more information, use the following link: Using Indefinite Pronouns: <http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000030.htm>)

Replace pronouns such as *this*, *them*, *there*, *it*, *their*, etc. with a clear reference to defined subjects. For example, if a writer opined, “This is false because...,” the reader may ask, “What does ‘this’ refer to?” Avoid using a pronoun at the beginning of a sentence, as in, “This causes great concern.” Reason: “This” can refer to the subject of the previous sentence, the entire previous sentence, the entire previous paragraph, the entire previous section, the last-named noun, etc. Remember: A pronoun refers to the last-

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named noun. Most university editors do not allow the use of any unclear antecedents.

One last tip on pronouns, do use “that” to refer to a person, use “who.”

### **Vague References to Time:**

One of the most common committee criticisms I see is “vague references to time” (especially with Grand Canyon and Walden): for example, currently, soon, still, lately, now, today, etc. Following is a recent comment from a major university’s formal editor: [Student name] “should remove vague references to time such as: recent, current, currently, now, today, etc. People’s perceptions of these words vary. Sometimes removing these adjectives makes the statement stronger. If a time reference is needed, then some specific time frame should be stated.”

Think about this: With any luck, your dissertation will still be used as research in 10 years. Imagine a doctoral candidate in 2029 trying to figure out what “lately” means. Exchange these vague references for a year or a century, for example: Instead of writing, “Lately, the industry has increased the production of widgets.” [substitute] “In the 21st century, the industry increased the production of widgets.” [or] “Since 2012, the industry has increased the production of widgets.”

Remember, if your source is Jones (2014), you cannot say, “In 2019, the bankers started to do such and thus” (Jones, 2014). You must always remember that you are confined by the date[s] of your references. The best you can do with Jones (2014), for example, would be to write, “In 2014, the bankers started to do such and thus” (Jones, 2014).

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### **Passive Voice and Anthropomorphism:**

Some universities are quite strict about passive voice and anthropomorphism. To find the instances of passive voice in your paper, in most versions of Word, go to “File,” then “Options.” Under “Proofing” go to “When correcting spelling and grammar in Word” and make certain you have checked the drop-down box “Grammar & Style” beside “Settings.” Check on “1” or “2” spaces between sentences [check with your university], “Always” for commas, and “Inside” for quotation marks. (However, this rule does not apply unless you cite a source. For quotations by participants, the quotation marks must be outside the sentence. [e.g., Jones noted, “The paper was well read” (p. 3). Participant 1 said, “I have anxiety.”]). In the document (when you see your document on the screen), set your cursor to start in the first sentence, then go to “Review” and click “Spelling and Grammar.” This function should mark passive voice with a green underline.

Anthropomorphism (“an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics” [Merriam-Webster, n.d.]) is an example of “undesirable attribution” (APA, 2013, p. 69), and it is one of the most common APA issues that are found in student writing. “Essentially, writing with anthropomorphism means that the writer attributes action to objects that cannot take that action” (Walden Writing Center, 2017, para. 2). Examples: The study found [in the study, the researcher found], business excelled [the executives excelled], the bank raised the interest rate [the bank administrators raised the interest rates], etc.

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### **Acronyms (Abbreviations)**

I have seen much overuse and misuse of acronyms (abbreviations) in proposals and dissertations. Maybe these papers can slip through your chair, a committee member, or even URR/ full committee review, but the overuse or misuse of acronyms rarely makes it past the dean's reviewers. Quite honestly, some of these papers just look as though the writers got lazy. Please, use acronyms sparingly. (You must use an acronym at least three times, or you cannot use it.) Remember, these are scholarly papers. Acronyms often make a dissertation quite confusing.

- If you present an acronym (e.g., special education [SPED]), you must use that acronym thereafter, not the word or words).
- Use brackets to introduce an acronym if the phrase is inside parentheses; use parentheses to introduce an acronym if in text.
- Do not use an acronym unless you will use it at least three times in your paper. Just write out the words if you only use them twice or less.
- Yes, you can make up your own acronym, but try not to. The purpose of an acronym is reader clarity, so a jumble of letters will certainly not help your readers.
- Try not to use an acronym for short phrases or words. Remember, the purpose of an acronym is reader clarity. It would be much easier for a reader to read a couple of words than two letters that make absolutely no sense.

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APA has specific rules about acronyms. From the APA blog, “After you define an abbreviation (regardless of whether it is in parentheses), use only the abbreviation. Do not alternate between spelling out the term and abbreviating it.”

You cannot go back and forth. Either use an acronym consistently or do not use it at all. This applies to names of instruments and theories as well. However, do not use an acronym in a heading and do not use an acronym in your abstract. (Some chairs will ask you to present each acronym in each chapter; however, this is a chair requirement, and the dean can and probably will overrule this.)

By the way, never ever write United States (US) and think you can use this as an acronym for the United States. You may write U.S. if you are using United States as an adjective (the U.S. Congress [note the periods]). Always write out United States if used as a noun: I am proud to say I live in the United States. Much more is written about acronyms in the actual APA manual (pp. 88, 106-111), and I encourage you to read the manual if you plan to use more than a couple.

**et al.**

Probably most of the editing/APA questions I receive concern how to use et al. When in doubt, it will help if you exchange et al. for “and company.” The first time you list from three to five authors in your text, list all authors (e.g., Adams, Bole, Cannon, Dale, & Evans, 2018). The next time and all subsequent times you cite these authors, just list the first author and mention the rest of the authors as “et al.” (Adams et al., 2018). Just as you would not write Adams, and company; you would not use a comma between the name and et al. Whenever you need to list six or more authors in text, only list the first author and et al. (Adams et al., 2017). If you want to make the authors possessive

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(Bole's study, for example), place the apostrophe after the period and before the "s" (e.g., Adams et al.'s study). Remember, APA says to use "s" after names that end in s (i.e., Jones's research).

The method I recommend for checking if et al. is used correctly is to go through your references and highlight the second or third name of each reference with three or more authors and click "Find." You should only see the second or third author listed one time in your text (unless he or she is mentioned in another reference).

### **Scholarly Writing**

Unless told to refer to yourself in first person, do not use any personal pronouns, contractions, colloquialisms, or jargon. In other words, use scholarly writing. An editor cannot transform your paper into a perfect piece of literature. Editors must abide by an ethical code established to ensure the doctoral candidate actually writes his or her own dissertation.

### **Superfluous Words**

If you are having difficulty *cutting to the chase* or you find you constantly tie yourself up in your words, I recommend Wordrake (<https://www.wordrake.com/>). The company often offers a free trial.

### **ERIC or DOI Number**

Most universities require the ERIC or Digital Object Identifier (DOI) number for all articles in the reference list. I have found the easiest way to find them is simply paste the title of your document into Google Search (not Google Scholar, just plain Google). Most articles can be found this way. If it is an ERIC document, you should site it: Retrieved from ERIC Database. (ER123456). If it has a DOI, just list that number

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without any spaces. Do not add a period at the end of the number. However, if it is a DOI preceded by http, cite: Retrieved from <http://doi:1234567>. (Check to see if you can delete the http: and still retrieve the article. If so, only list the doi:.) If neither number can be found, use either the URL link to the actual article (if an online article only) or the URL link to the homepage of the journal. Do not list your university library access.

Wiens, P. D. (2012). The missing link: Research on teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 34, 249-261. Retrieved from ERIC Database. (EJ997265).

The Missing Link: Research on Teacher Education.

[eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ997265](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ997265)

by PD Wiens - 2012 - Cited by 5 - Related articles

A lack of comprehensive research in teacher education makes it difficult to understand the ... There is a missing link between what happens in teacher education ...

If you are searching for the DOI for a journal, I have found a couple of helpful websites: URL: <http://www.crossref.org/SimpleTextQuery/> allows you to paste an entire reference list into a box, and then the system provides the DOIs for all the references it can at one time. You will need to register with your e-mail address to use this service. To look up one DOI, you can go to: <http://www.crossref.org/guestquery>

### **How to Alphabetize Your References**

Highlight the references you want to alphabetize then go to the “Home” taskbar, “Paragraph” box, and look for “A Z” vertically with a down arrow, click “Sort by Paragraph.” Now, your references should be alphabetized. If you realize that you had hit “Enter” in the middle of a reference, click on the curled down arrow above the task bar or use **Ctrl+z** to undo what you did. (You can also alphabetize in Excel, but it is easier to use Word.) Now, make certain you have your references evenly spaced with a hanging indent of 0.5 (do not use the space bar, use the tab key).

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### **Action Words**

As mentioned previously, do not use any form of the verb “say” unless you heard the author give a speech on the issue in your paper. Do not use present tense when explaining what an author wrote. How do you know that person is even still alive? In addition, vary the action verbs you use. To help with that, following is a list of action verbs:

Accentuated; acclaimed; acknowledged; added; addressed; administered; admitted; advised; advocated; affirmed; agreed; alleged; analyzed; argued; asserted; assessed; assumed; attempted; based; believed; characterized; claimed; clarified; compared; completed; conceded; concluded; concurred, conducted; confirmed; considered; contributed; defined; delineated; demonstrated; denied; denoted; described; determined; developed; discovered; discussed; documented; doubted; emphasized; enunciated; espoused; examined; exhibited; expanded; explained; explicated; explored; expresses’ formulated; found; generalized; highlighted; hypothesized; identified; implied; included; indicated; inferred; interpreted; implied; introduced; maintained; mandated; noted; observed; opined; perceived; pointed out; posited; pontificated; presented; proclaimed; professed; promoted; propagated; proposed; proved; provided; recognized; referenced; referred; refined; related; reported; revealed; served; showed; specified; stressed; studied; submitted; suggested; surveyed; theorized; thought; viewed.

### **Hodgepodge of Issues**

Following is a hodgepodge of issues typically of concern to chairs and formal editors.

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**Wrong word:** If in doubt of a word, highlight the word, click on “Synonyms,” and make certain you really have the word you want. Do not just use a word because you think it looks important.

**Watch references inside parentheses:** Make certain they are in the same order as they are in the reference list—alphabetical: (Andrews, 2014; Boggs, 2018; Thomas, 2017; Walters, 2019).

**Use an ampersand (&)** only in the reference list and inside parentheses. Use the word “and” in text.

**Never use clichés, colloquialisms, or any other informal language:** Your dissertation must be scholarly (e.g., on the other hand—use conversely: hit or miss—use haphazardly, spasmodically, or occasionally).

**Watch spacing.** Check with your chair whether you should use one or two spaces between sentences and be consistent. Yes, this is important. Use no extra spaces between paragraphs.

**Split infinitives:** Split infinitives occur when an adverb is between to and a verb, for example: incorrect: to quickly go; correct: to go quickly. For more information on split infinitives, follow this link:

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/split-infinitives>

**Missing references:** You must account for every reference in your paper, and you may not have extra references (references in your reference list that are not in your paper). The count must be exact.

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**Repetitive text:** Do not cut and paste portions of your paper, except for your research questions and purpose statement, and use that copied text elsewhere in your paper. Any repeated text will be caught and deleted.

**Plagiarism:** If I can spot plagiarism just by reading a paper, think what sophisticated software can find. Plagiarism includes pictures, tables, graphs, and charts.

**Out of date references:** Most universities require that 85% of the total number of references be deemed current, which means published within 5 years of the date the dean signs the dissertation. You cannot use old references except for the historical section and for your theoretical/conceptual framework. (In rare cases, you can apply for and receive a waiver from this mandate.)

**Every statement of fact** must have a current, peer-reviewed source. (The exception is the theoretical/conceptual framework, which still needs a source for every statement of fact, just not current, peer-reviewed.) Just because you know something does not mean you do not need a current, peer-reviewed source. In the first three chapters of a dissertation, you know nothing.

**Formatting Issues:** University editors are quite fussy about margins, headings, and spacing. Abide by your dissertation manual.

**Prefixes.** Many prefixes do not require hyphens, including *co*, *anti*, *non*, *inter*, *intra*, *pre*, *post*, *re*, *micro*, *multi*, *semi*, *mini*, *pseudo*, *sub*, and *under* (See APA Tables 4.1 and 4.2, pp. 98-99). According to the APA Manual, “Write most words with prefixes as one word (see Table 4.2.). Table 4.3 contains some exceptions” (p. 100).

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**Sample:** A lowercase *n* should refer to the number of cases (generally in a subsample). A capitalized *N* refers to the total number of cases. Please reconcile this difference throughout your study.

**Theories.** Do not capitalize names of laws, theories, models, statistical procedures, or hypotheses with the exception of personal names that are in uppercase (APA, pp. 102-103).

**Paragraphs** must have at least three sentences and only have one thought or issue. Use a strong thesis statement to start most sections (exceptions: purpose, problem, research questions, definition of terms, etc.). Each paragraph must have a strong topic sentence as well.

### **Purdue OWL and the APA Style Blog**

Purdue Owl (The Owl or Purdue Owl [OWL is an acronym for Online Writing Lab]) is part of the Department of English at Purdue University. The Purdue OWL is one of a doctoral writer's best friends and something I recommend you bookmark. The OWL is a quick resource for APA, MLA, and Chicago formatting.  
(<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>)

The other resource for doctoral writers that I recommend they keep readily accessible is the APA Style Blog (<http://blog.apastyle.org/>). Many issues are covered in the blog that are not covered in the manual. The final resource I recommend for all writers is Quick and Dirty Tricks by Grammar Girl: <https://www.quickanddirtytips.com>.

**Follow all directions and adhering to all chair comments:** This is non-negotiable. You cannot make up your own rules.

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### **In Conclusion**

If after using all these tips, you find yourself in need of a coach or an editor, be careful. Please do not hire someone based on price alone. For as many actual, professional coaches/editors, twice as many wanna-be/frauds are on the Internet. Before you hire anyone, check out their LinkedIn profile. If this person does not have a minimum of 500 contacts, this tells me this person probably just started out, which is not a good sign. Ask for a link to dissertations where former clients have posted an acknowledgment for this person. Do not accept other forms of recommendation unless you are completely certain the recommendation is reliable. A friend, relative, or neighbor can make a phone call. If this person has a doctoral degree, ask to read his or her published dissertation. If it was published recently, this person is not qualified to help you. It takes years and many dissertations with various methodologies before anyone can rightfully call him or herself a professional dissertation coach or editor. Do not make your decision on price alone. Remember, you will get what you pay for.

In closing, I wish you all the best in your dissertation journey. If I have left you wanting more, just tell me.

Good Luck and Happy Writing!

Dr. Lyn Walden