

MANUSCRIPT GENERAL ERRORS

The information contained in this section is not unique to theses and dissertations--it is standard grammatical and typing practice. Because the candidate is expected to already know much of this information, the most troublesome points are presented. Please consult one of the recommended style manuals or any grammar book for more information.

General Errors

- Not reading and following the **NMSU Guidelines for Preparing a Thesis or Dissertation**.
- Not reading and following a style manual. If one has not been specified by your department use either Kate Turabian, [A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations](#), 6th ed. or the [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#) 5th ed. for general information.
- Using another thesis/dissertation as your style guide rather than consulting the style manuals.
- Not being familiar with the word processing program being used. If you are using style sheets or templates, you must be able to change the defaults built into them so that the finished document conforms to NMSU [Guidelines](#).
- Not being familiar with common journal formats used in your field.

Numerals versus Words

- Disciplines vary in the way in which numerals are written. Some write as a word any number under 10 while others require that all numerals up to 100 be written as words. Then many exceptions exist to these two styles.
- Use the style of your discipline when writing numbers. If your discipline does not clearly define a style then use the APA [Manual](#) or Turabian as a guide for when to write a number as a word or as a numeral.
- Never begin a sentence with a number written as a numeral. Spell it out or reword the sentence so that a number does not begin a sentence. This applies to chemical compounds and other terms which commonly begin with a numeral.
- Numerals are always used for the following: dates; time; ages; sample, subsample, or population size; exact sums of money; numbers that immediately precede a unit of measurement; statistical or mathematical functions; fractional or decimal quantities, percentages, ratios.
- Two digit numerals written as words must be hyphenated (twenty-five not twenty five but not for one hundred, two hundred and so forth).

Punctuation

- Be consistent with comma usage.
- It is acceptable to use or not use a comma before the final conjunction in a series (cats, rats, and dogs; or cats, rats and dogs). However, students following APA and MLA must use the comma.
- Not typing hyphens and dashes correctly--do not use a space before or after a hyphen or a dash.
 - 5 - 23 is a minus; 5-23 is a range although the word “to” is now preferred in some disciplines.
 - a hyphen (sometimes called an “en” dash) is also used to divide words--self-concept not self- concept or self - concept.
- A dash (sometimes called an “em” dash) is two hyphens typed together with no spaces before, between, or after--it represents a break in thought or another method of adding emphasis or clarity to sentence structure.
- The dash is overused so consider using another punctuation mark.
- Do not use two periods after an abbreviation that comes at the end of a sentence (We shopped at Acme Co. not Co., for example).

Latin Abbreviations

Most Latin abbreviations have been anglicized and are no longer italicized or underlined--these include et al., i.e., e.g., etc., cf., ibid. (the use of ibid. is now discouraged by most style guides), and many others. Consult a good dictionary--if the term is listed there it should not be italicized (Turabian, 1996:72).

- et al. means “and others”; et is not an abbreviation, al., standing for alia, is an abbreviation so the term is written as et al. with no italics, bold, or underline.
- Check your manuals or journal style for when you can use et al.--some disciplines say with 2 or more authors, others say 3 or more.
- Using et al.’s is not acceptable. Instead of writing “Smith et al.’s study” rewrite the citation to something like “the work of Smith et al.” or something similar.

Statistical Symbols

Statistical symbols must be italicized or underlined in text, tables, figures, and appendices. The APA Manual discusses this extensively and contains numerous examples. Some journals in their instructions to authors also provide good treatments for preparing statistical copy. If your journal does not provide this, then follow the APA Manual.

The symbol for chi-square is never italicized. Using the letter “x” to represent the chi symbol is not acceptable. Use the chi symbol from the symbols available in your word processor or write the word “chi.”

Font Errors

- Not having page numbers in the same font style and size as the text.
- Putting headings or captions in a different size font than the text.
- Not using the same font size and style as the text for footnotes.

Page Layout Errors

- Incorrect pagination--can consist of page number being in the incorrect location or counting errors.
- Incorrect margins.
- Not turning on widow and orphan control. This will prevent just one line of a paragraph from appearing at the bottom or top of a page. There must always be two lines of a paragraph at the bottom of the page or carried over to the top of the following page.
- A heading at the bottom of the page must be followed by two lines of text. If it won't fit then move the heading to the next page.
- Not filling all pages with text. If a table or figure will not fit below where it is first mentioned, continue text to fill that page and place the table or figure on the following page. A table begun on a page with text must be complete on that page (see Turabian, 1996, sec. 6.18, p. 94).
- Not following standard typing and other scholarly conventions.

Documentation Errors

- Not checking for agreement between references cited in the text against the same reference in the reference list.
- Not following your manual or journal style for how to arrange the reference list (an author who has works published as a single author and works with co-authors, oldest publications listed first, and so on).
- Not using issue number when a journal paginates beginning with page 1 in each issue.
- Not being consistent in the reference list (abbreviation of journal titles, using vol. or Vol. or not using vol. at all, and so on).

- Not using the same font size and style as the text for footnotes.

Ellipses

Use ellipses to indicate omitted material from within a quote. Do not use ellipses to denote omitted material at the beginning or end of a quote.

Type ellipses as three spaced periods: . . . not ... The fourth period in an ellipsis represents the end of the sentence and indicates that the sentence ended and then material was omitted. . . . or that part of the sentence was omitted Note the spacing before the first period.

Quotation Marks

- Use double quote marks around terms used in a special way only the first time the term is mentioned. Do not use quote marks in second and subsequent uses.
- Use single quote marks only for a quote that is within a quote run into the text. Some disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, and horticulture have adopted conventions that use single quote marks for some terms. This is an alternative acceptable use for single quote marks.
- Not typing quotation marks correctly--always place quotation marks after periods and commas (commas," for example) and before colons and semicolons (semicolons": for example). If you are using a single quote mark the rule is the same.
- For exclamation and question marks the quote marks may be placed before or after depending on the context of the sentence. Any grammar book or style manual will have detailed explanations of this as well as examples.

Quotation Marks with Citations

Quotation marks with reference citations take different forms.

- Run into the text--the last word of the quote" (Jones, 1995, p. 137).
- At the end of a block quote. (Jones, 1995, p. 137)

Quotation Marks or Italics for Emphasis

Placing words or phrases in italics or quotation marks is generally discouraged in style manuals and in style guides which journals provide to authors preparing manuscripts for publication consideration.

"Good writers use italics for emphasis only as an occasional adjunct to efficient sentence structure. Overused, italics quickly lose their force. Seldom should as much as a sentence be italicized for emphasis, and never a whole passage" (Chicago Manual of Style, 2003, p. 290, sec. 7.49).

“Quotation marks are often used to alert readers that a term is used in a nonstandard, ironic, or other special sense. Nicknamed ‘scare quotes,’ they imply ‘This is not my term’ or ‘This is not how the term is usually applied.’ Like any such device, scare quotes lose their force and irritate readers if overused” (Chicago Manual of Style, 2003, p. 291, sec. 7.58).

Capitalization

- Remember to capitalize forms of the verb “to be” in headings, reference lists, and table/figure captions when all major words in those items are capitalized.
- Capitalize consistently (do not capitalize a word or term in one place and not another).
- Do not capitalize for emphasis. Follow standard rules of capitalizing.

It’s or Its

Using “it’s” for “its” is probably the most common error made in theses and dissertations.

- It’s means it is. It’s a contraction.
- Its is a pronoun. Its is already possessive and, therefore, never takes an apostrophe.

These items are all standard grammatical practices and will be found, along with many others, in any style guide or grammar book.