

WRITING TIPS

The University of Texas at San Antonio. Always capitalize the article, even in mid-sentence. UT San Antonio is preferred over UTSA.

Numbers. In scientific and statistical material, all numbers are expressed in numerals. In nonscientific material, numbers are sometimes spelled out and sometimes expressed in numerals.

- The general rule is to spell out ALL numbers through one hundred and any of the whole numbers followed by hundred, thousand, hundred thousand, million, and so on. For all other numbers, numerals are used.
- Spell out and hyphenate fractions (e.g., one-sixth).
- Insert commas in numbers beginning with 1,000. No comma is used, however, in page numbers, street addresses, telephone numbers, ZIP codes, four-digit year dates, decimal fractions, chapter numbers of fraternal organizations, and so forth.

Percentages and Decimals. Numerals should be used to express decimal fractions and percentages. The word percent should be written out except in scientific and statistical writing, where the symbol % may be used.

- Use the symbol for percent (%) only when it is preceded by a number. Note that percentage, not percent or %, is the correct expression when no number is given. The number preceding either percent or % is never spelled out, except when it begins a sentence.
- In scientific contexts, decimal fractions of less than 1.00 must be preceded by a zero if the quantity expressed is capable of equaling or exceeding 1.00. For example: "a mean of 0.73"; the ratio 0.85."

Terminal punctuation. As typewriters are eclipsed by word processing and desktop publishing, the old convention of two spaces following a period at the end of a sentence is also falling by the wayside in favor of a typeset look. The convention has become to use one space, not two, following all terminal punctuation – periods, question marks, colons, and quotation marks.

Quotation marks. Commas and periods go inside (whether they are part of the quoted matter or not); semicolons and colons go outside; question marks can go inside or outside depending on meaning.

Conjunctions (and, or, but, however) should not be used to begin sentences; they are more effective when used within the sentence.

Dates: Use 1980s, not 1980's (and never '80s). Use 1985-90 instead of 1985-1990. Alternatively, "between 1985 and 1990"; "from 1985 to 1990." When month and year alone are mentioned, omit punctuation between them: "December 1995."

References to particular centuries should be spelled out in lower case: "the eighteenth century."

Parts of Works. References in the text to figures, tables, chapters, sections, appendices, and bibliographies should not be capitalized.

Abbreviations. Common abbreviations such as etc., e.g., and i.e., should be confined to parenthetical references within the text. Do not abbreviate months or American states. Do not use & unless it is part of a formal title.

Voice. Try to use an active voice rather than passive voice as much as possible.

Person. Be advised that in the text of your thesis or dissertation, use of the first person pronouns “I” and “we” is inappropriate and is to be avoided. Your thesis or dissertation is expected to stand on its own merits as an objective and dispassionate presentation of research. As such, it requires no explicit invocations of personal decision and/or action. Rather, the value of the work as a whole should and will be determined by the organization of your presentation, the soundness of your arguments, and the rigor of your analysis.

This is not to deny that there might be rare instances in which use of the first person is unavoidable (e.g., a thesis in anthropology on the subject of participant observation, in which the perspective of the researcher might be the very subject of the research). If you believe that your topic cannot be presented comprehensibly unless the first person is employed, you should consult as early as possible with your supervising committee and with The Graduate School.

Money. Round dollar amounts greater than one million should be rendered with the word: “\$3.5 million.”

Academic degrees. Spell out when used generically (bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, doctoral degree [or doctorate], but not doctorate degree). Abbreviate when referring to specific degrees: “B.S. in Biology”; “Ph.D.”.

Miscellaneous reminders:

- Criteria is a plural (criterion is the singular).
- Data is a plural (datum is the singular).
- Ethnic designations: black is not capitalized; African American is not hyphenated; American Indian (capitalize); but native (lower case) American.