

Academic Writing at the American Studies Center: A Handbook

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1. Introduction

This handbook contains the requirements for submitting thesis materials at both the BA and MA levels. Additional guidelines, recommendations, and important information can be found here. For any additional writing guidance, please contact our Academic Writing Coordinator, Dr. Matthew Chambers at: matthewjosephchambers@gmail.com.

2. Official Submission Guidelines

You will find all the requirements and documentation for the BA and MA examinations here:

BA program: http://asc.uw.edu.pl/programs/ba_program/ba_examinations.html

MA program: http://asc.uw.edu.pl/programs/ma_program/ma_examinations.html

3. Plagiarism Policy

*The purpose of this section is to provide an outline only. For a more detailed explanation, write to our Academic Writing Coordinator, Matthew Chambers: matthewjosephchambers@gmail.com

Plagiarism is the theft and use of another individual's words or ideas as if they were one's own. Plagiarism of any length is not permitted at the American Studies Center. The unintentional use of another individual's work will be considered plagiarism. The judgment of what is and what is not plagiarism resides with the authorities at the American Studies Center. Plagiarism present in either the BA or MA thesis will result in the student having to submit a completely new thesis with a different topic. In cases where plagiarism has been deemed to have occurred, further disciplinary action may be considered by the authorities at the American Studies Center.

Universities consider plagiarism a serious offense as it runs counter to the spirit of sharing and generating knowledge. Any piece of writing submitted will ask of you to demonstrate your understanding of the topic under review, and as part of that demonstration, you will need to cite the material you are engaged with. You must also distinguish your own analysis from those materials, as well as from the analyses of other authors you have read.

While there is information we refer to as “common knowledge” that is agreed upon in the field in which you are writing, you are still learning to become proficient in that field. It is advisable to vet any uncertainty you have of what is and what is not common knowledge with an instructor.

Paraphrasing is an invaluable and oft-used tool of academic writing. We paraphrase when we take another author’s words and re-write them in our own words, maintaining the original meaning of the text. Paraphrase is a way to maintain a stylistic consistency in one’s own writing while referencing other work. All paraphrase must be cited, and must change both the words and syntax of the cited text.

Workshops on avoiding plagiarism will be announced. All interested students will be invited to attend.

4. Resources

Library resources

University of Warsaw Library (BUW) – <http://www.buw.uw.edu.pl/en/>

ASC Library (main page) – <http://asc.uw.edu.pl/library.html>

National Library of Poland – <http://www.bn.org.pl/en/>

Online periodical databases

Login at BUW:

http://www.buw.uw.edu.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=57&Itemid=122

Chicago Manual of Style

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html> (one month free trial)

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/> (a good introduction to the essentials)

The Writing Center at Purdue University

A well-regarded, widely-used, and frequently-updated site on all manner of academic and professional writing topics.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Books

*The following titles can be found at the ASC Library. Please consult an Academic Writing instructor or librarian for further recommendations.

Booth, Wayne, Gregory Holcomb, and Joseph Williams. *The Craft of Research*

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*

Kirszner, Laurie & Stephen Mandell. *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*

5. Academic Writing and Additional Guidance

Incoming BA students to the ASC take two semesters of academic writing, which covers the fundamentals of critical reading, writing, and research with an eye on producing polished course papers and a BA thesis. In the first semester, students are introduced to the concepts of critical reading, paraphrasing and quoting, thesis statements, drafting, incorporating feedback, and revising. In the second semester, the focus expands to include the essentials of performing research and writing a longer paper incorporating secondary sources.

In addition to the Academic Writing courses, workshops will be run on topics such as plagiarism, library grants, meeting deadlines, American standards of punctuation and grammar, and much more. All announced workshops will be open to any ASC student who wishes to attend.

At the MA level, students enroll in a two-semester “Learning By Research” course of study. Students will further develop their knowledge and ability to perform advanced research with an eye on completing a polished MA thesis which effectively engages a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Additionally, students will receive directed guidance on the development of their MA thesis in their MA seminar.

The Writing Lab is a free service providing guidance on all writing matters regardless of assignment for all ASC students. The Lab is open Mondays and Tuesdays, 10:00-15:00. If you have any questions, please write to: ascwritinglab@gmail.com

6. FAQs and Common Concerns

Q: *How do I format my thesis?*

- Font: Times New Roman.
- Font size: 12 for text, 10 for footnotes.
- Double space not 1.5.
- Indent the first line of every paragraph.
- No extra space between paragraphs or after quotes.
- Begin each chapter on a new page (NOTE: this is a rule for MA theses; in BA theses sections are short and do not call for such breaks).
- Each chapter should have a title.
- The first page of the chapter should look like this:

Chapter One [font size 16]
Chapter Title [font size 20]

Begin text here.

(Note: no punctuation, no colon after Chapter One, no period after the chapter title.)

- For page numbers use Arabic numerals. Page one should be the first page of your first chapter. Prior to that, you should use lower case Roman numerals with no page number on the title page.
- Use footnotes not endnotes.
- Ask your supervisor how he or she wants you to number the footnotes: consecutively through your thesis or starting in each chapter of your thesis with number one (preferences vary among ASC

faculty).

- Format your notes according to the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Talk to your supervisor about the preferred structure for each chapter.

Q. When and how do I use quotations?

- Only use quotations when the author has a particularly unique way of expressing her ideas. Do not quote simply to convey factual information. Comment on your quotes and introduce them properly.
- Do not italicize quotations.
- Quotations which exceed 3 lines should be block quotations.
- Do not decrease line spacing or font unless your supervisor requires this.
- Ellipses (parts of the quoted text that you skip) are rarely needed at the beginning or end of quotations.
- Do not put brackets [] or parentheses () around ellipses – just dots with spaces between them.
- Always use double quotation marks, except for quotations within quotations.
- Punctuation marks (periods and commas) go inside quotation marks.
- Footnote numbers come after punctuation and quotation marks

Q. When do I use italics and when do I use quotation marks?

- Italicize book titles, names of newspapers and magazines, and film titles.
- Use quotation marks for titles of essays, poems, and song titles. In principle, if something is a part of something else (e. g., a song that is part of an album, an essay that is part of a collection or in a journal, an article in a newspaper, or magazine) then the title goes in quotation marks. These rules apply to titles both in the main body of the text, the footnotes, and the bibliography.
- Italicize foreign language words. If you can find the word in a standard American dictionary (eg., Merriam-Webster), then do not italicize it.
- Use italics to mark emphasis.

Q. What important punctuation rules must I remember?

For a good overview of some important conventions of English language punctuation, please refer to this relevant OWL Purdue section: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/6/>

Q. How do I punctuate numbers and dates?

- Use periods not commas for decimal places: e.g., 2.53
- Use commas not spaces for numbers over 9999: e.g., 2857 and 1,443,785
- Numbers: one million (1,000,000); one billion (1,000,000,000); one trillion (1,000,000,000,000). Remember, it is better to have a billion zloties than a billion dollars!
- Use lower case Roman numerals in footnotes for page numbers in introductions and prefaces.
- Spell out centuries. Do not use Roman numerals (nineteenth century, not XIX c.)
- Spell out cardinal numbers one through ten, and use numerals for 11 onwards.
- Similarly spell ordinals first through tenth, and use numbers for 11th onwards.
- Spell out non-specific numbers: Hundreds died in the earthquake. Thousands of troops stormed across the border.
- Use cardinal NOT ordinal numbers for dates: 22 January or January 22 not 22nd January or January 22nd.

– DATES: March 14, 1859 or 14 March 1859. Pick one format but be consistent: use the same format in the text and in your footnotes. (Keep in mind the former is mainly only used inside the US.)

Q. What false friends and other confusing words must I be aware of?

Manifestation

In American English, manifestation (or manifest) is not generally used to mean a public protest; the word you want is demonstration (or demonstrate).

Cinematography

This word is not usually used to refer to the science/discipline of film studies; it is primarily used to refer to the process of filming the movie.

Fragment

This word conveys the sense of something broken off, a chip, and while it may be used in a metaphorical way to refer to some sentences you have quoted for analysis or to a scene or film clip, it is rarely used in that way in American English.

Science/scientific

The US academy tends to draw a pretty clear line between the humanities and the sciences, and the latter is generally reserved for the hard (or natural) sciences like biology, physics, and chemistry. The general term which you may be looking for is “academic” or “scholarly,” which distinguishes the research professors and students do from the kind of reporting done for a newspaper or curious browsing.

Conscience – one’s sense of what’s right and what’s wrong (sumienie).

Consciousness – the state or quality of awareness (przytomność, świadomość).

Historic – momentous; historically significant.

Historical – of or relating to history.

Economic – referring to the economy

Economical – an efficient use of money

Farther – refers to physical distance.

Further – refers to logical distance.

Words rarely made plural: advice, research, evidence.

These words take non-count adjectives: much research NOT many researches. Often you’ll need to add additional words, if you want to emphasize the plurality of the word/concept or use a closely related word.

Q. What about using the first person in my writing?

– Do not use first person (I, we)

– Do not use second person (you)

– Do not use third person circumlocutions for first person like “the author of this thesis”

From time to time you may end up violating these precepts. Indirectly, they point to the question of audience. In most scholarly works, the first person should be avoided. You are writing a

thesis not a letter, confession, or personal diary. Exceptions include the introduction or preface to your work, where you may wish to address your personal engagement with the topic. In more popular writing, the first person is acceptable. You really do not need to say “in my opinion” (or “I think” or “I believe”). You can say:

Arguably,....

Clearly,....

It is clear that....

Q. *What or which?*

For a good breakdown on how to properly use relative pronouns, please refer to:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/645/01/>

Q. *Which verb tense should I use?*

Maintaining the same verb tense is important but tricky, particularly with the conditional tenses, but in general when you are writing about the past, use the past tense, or some variation thereof. The tricky part is when you are summarizing a source or the plot of a novel or film. There is a sense that the author WROTE the book in the past, but the book CONTINUES to say the same in the present as it did in the past. By contrast, plot summaries of works of fiction require simple present NOT simple past.

Q. *What else should I keep in mind?*

- Do not use etc. or itd. at the end of lists
- Paragraphs are more than one sentence.
- The possessive form of "it": "its" NOT "it's." "It's" is a contraction meaning “it is.”
- Pronouns must agree with the antecedent noun.
- Nouns and verbs must agree in number.
- Avoid words of empty praise: wonderful, amazing, great. When you praise something, be specific: describe it as well-argued, sophisticated, subtle, to the point.
- Avoid starting sentences with “and” and “but”.
- Use "there" only to indicate place, not as a subject of a sentence.
- Use "this" only as an article not as a pronoun.
- Do not use contractions (e.g., won't, isn't, can't)
- Do not use slang.
- Use American spelling NOT British
- When in doubt consult your supervisor or an Academic Writing instructor.

*This handbook was compiled by Matthew Chambers, William Glass, Agnieszka Graff, and Ludmila Janion.