

Style in linguistic essays and dissertations:

Department of Linguistics and English Language recommendations

How to discuss language

Always make a clear distinction between the linguistic items you are talking about and what you say about them. The following standard conventions make it easier for the reader:

- **cited form:** use *italics* (word-processed) or underline (handwritten) – they are equivalent – but if the cited form is on a line by itself, e.g. an example sentence, there is usually no need to italicise it
- **meaning:** put inside ‘quotation marks’
- **spelling:** put inside <caret brackets>
- **prefixes and suffixes:** put a hyphen at the joining end, as in *dis-* or *-ish*
- **phonetic transcriptions:** use the IPA within [skweə brækɪts]
- **phonemes:** use the IPA within /slɑ:nts/

All of these conventions can usefully be followed in exams too.

To show why it helps to follow the conventions of citation, here are two invented and exaggerated examples with – on the left – wording that is hopelessly obscure:

Not like this	Better
Jane Austen’s might could can be missed by a modern reader. Or: Jane Austen’s ‘might’ = ‘could’ can be missed ... – but even this is not clear.	Jane Austen’s <i>might</i> ‘could’ can be missed by a modern reader. This could be further clarified: Jane Austen’s use of <i>might</i> in the meaning ‘could, was able’ can be missed
Germanic sk became OE sh, written sc, ME ssh or sh.	Germanic [sk] became OE [ʃ], written <sc>, ME <ssh, sh>.

The first example on the left-hand side doesn’t help the reader to discriminate between the linguistic item under discussion and the words of the essay, nor between a 19th-century modal verb and its present-day meaning, while the second is vague and confused about spoken and written forms. The versions on the right are more helpful. These examples might come from course units in the history of English, but similar problems can arise in writing about any aspect of linguistics or English language, and the need for clarity is the same.

Special characters and fonts

Most accented European characters, Old English letters and even some Greek and IPA symbols are available now in standard fonts (in MS Word just click **I**nser**t** | **S**ymbol to find them). For other special characters, either hand-write them or – much better – use the recommended IPA/phonetic font, **Doulos SIL** (Unicode), if you are working in any Windows word processor. This font is available in University cluster machines and can be downloaded for your own computer by clicking or CTRL-clicking [this link](#); it goes well with Times New Roman. For further information on fonts (and much else), see [Computer resources for linguists](#) on the School website.

Example numbering

If you have a lot of examples and wish to number them automatically in MS Word and perhaps cross-refer to examples by number, there’s an illustrated how-to document with a [link](#) on the Computer resources page.

Glossing

If you are citing examples in a language which needs word-by-word or morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, you may wish to follow the so-called [Leipzig Glossing Rules](#). These offer a standardised approach to layout, notation and abbreviations, as well as clear and systematic advice for typical problem cases like absence of one-to-one correspondence between cited forms and English translation.

How to cite a source of information

Within the text you don't need footnotes or endnotes just to give bibliographic information. Simply add the author's surname, in brackets if it isn't already part of your sentence, and give the date of the work and wherever appropriate the page number(s) too. If you happen to have more than one item sharing the same author(s) and date, distinguish them with lower-case letters. If there are co-authors, use an ampersand (&) before the last of them, but use *and* when listing authors of different works. Thus your essay or dissertation might contain, say, such references as:

Kastovsky mentions the prefix *hyper-* and the suffix *-ish* (2006: 263, 264) ...

... standard accounts of 2nd-person pronouns in early Modern English (Wales 1983; Barber 1993: 186-7) ...

... two collections of essays edited by Fisiak (1985a; 1985b) ...

... papers by Börjars & Vincent (2000) and Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968) ...

Combined with a proper listing at the end, such references are complete yet economical.

Exact reproduction of a source is shown by single quotation marks (*not* italics). Quotes longer than 1-2 lines go in a separate paragraph, indented and without quotation marks.

List of references

Put some care into choosing the works you consult and refer to. Every work cited in your text must appear in your list of references, and normally you *only* list works which are cited. Authors are listed in alphabetical order, and date comes right after author, since author and date are the usual means of referring to a work. Format the whole list with hanging indent (use Paragraph | Special for this in MS Word) so that authors stand out. (Never try to achieve this effect with tabs, extra spaces or hard returns *within* an entry.)

In all cases you need **author**, **date** of publication, **title** of work. For a journal article, add **journal**, **volume** and **page range**; for a chapter in an edited book, **page range** and **editor**, plus the usual book information; for a book you need **place** of publication and usually **publisher**. For a web page you should include the **URL** (web address) and **date accessed**.

Style sheets vary on minor details: forenames versus initials; whether to mention book series; exact order of presentation. You can use any reasonable example of the author-date system – a modern linguistic work from a respectable publisher, the *MLA Handbook* or the [MHRA Style Guide](#) (a free download with much good advice on all aspects of presentation), or the advice on the [Harvard system of referencing](#) on the Humanities website – but on the details of bibliographic layout the Department now strongly recommends the [unified style sheet](#) announced on LINGUIST, in use in many linguistic journals, which is particularly logical and economical. The examples below follow that style. (If you generate your bibliographies with the EndNote program, a ready-made EndNote style for the unified style sheet can be downloaded from [this link](#), also given on the [Computer resources page](#).) The important thing is consistency. Aim to be helpful to the reader, and make it possible and indeed convenient for your claims to be verified or followed up.

Example references

- anon. 2007. Statistical semantics. In *Wikipedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statistical_semantics> [accessed 23 March-4 April 2010]
- Bermúdez-Otero, Ricardo. forthcoming. Cyclicity. In Marc van Oostendorp, Colin Ewen, Elizabeth Hume & Keren Rice (eds.), *The Blackwell companion to phonology*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Blevins, Juliette. 2004. *Evolutionary phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1986. *Knowledge of language*. New York: Praeger.
- Iverson, Gregory K. 1983. Korean /s/. *Journal of Phonetics* 11, 191-200.
- Johnson, Kyle, Mark Baker & Ian Roberts. 1989. Passive arguments raised. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20, 219-251.
- Lahiri, Aditi (ed.). 2000. *Analogy, leveling, markedness: Principles of change in phonology and morphology*. (*Trends in Linguistics* 127.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- McCarthy, John J. & Alan S. Prince. 1999. Prosodic morphology. In John A. Goldsmith (ed.), *Phonological theory: The essential readings*, 238-288. Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mugglestone, Lynda. 2003 [1995]. *Talking proper: The rise of accent as social symbol*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Murray, Robert W. & Theo Vennemann. 1983. Sound change and syllable structure in Germanic phonology. *Language* 59(3), 514-528.
- OED: Oxford English Dictionary*, online version at <www.oed.com/> [accessed 4 April 2011]
- Webelhuth, Gert (ed.). 1995. *Government and binding theory and the minimalist program: Principles and parameters in syntactic theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wyllie, A. 1998. Barclays fails driver. *Sunday Times, Money* section, p.1 (30 August).
- Yu, Alan C. L. 2003. *The morphology and phonology of infixation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California dissertation.

Layout

Every page must be numbered. For anonymous submission of undergraduate and MA work, every page should also carry your student number. Adherence to word limits is important, and in many cases an explicit word count must be provided; check the appropriate regulations carefully. For MA or PhD dissertations, follow the detailed University policy at <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/researchoffice/graduate/code/submissionandexamination/>.

See http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/writing/how_to_write.html for tips on presentation of UG work. Individual course directors may also have their own requirements.

Appropriate writing

Introduction

So far we have concentrated on the more mechanical – though very important – aspects of academic writing in our discipline. The following recommendations concern more general matters of approach, content and style. They have been assembled from documents produced by several members of the Department. A few points are not applicable to dissertations, but the majority are relevant to *any* written work produced as part of your studies.

An assignment, take-home essay or dissertation allows you to improve your analytical and writing ability. Hence assessment will be based on content *and* style. Organisation, clarity and conciseness will count heavily in assessment, as well as answering the question accurately and displaying originality in your answer. Basic stylistic rules should be followed, including accurate spelling and complete sentences, not run-on sentences. Some advice out there is a little old-fashioned: thus in a methodology section, say, first-person *I* may well be the straightforward choice, and occasionally it is more natural and appropriate to use a contraction than not. Beware of books on English usage that are merely opinionated rather than evidence-based; it helps more to absorb and emulate good writing than to follow rigid rules. Always reread your work before submitting it.

Structure and content

On content: first and most important, you must READ THE QUESTION CAREFULLY in order to answer it properly!

Your written work must do more than regurgitate information from textbook, readings and lecture notes. It must at least integrate information from readings, or (even better) give novel, insightful observations or criticisms of the material. Reading beyond the basic course texts is encouraged, as long as the additional material is well used. If possible, avoid heavy dependency on long quotes – try to paraphrase the idea in your own words instead (with appropriate citation).

Organisation is very important. The introduction should give background and state the hypothesis (or hypotheses) you will discuss. The conclusion should recapitulate the hypothesis/es, as well as make some interesting or pithy concluding remarks. Each assertion you make should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Evidence is either facts you present yourself, or citations from sources of evidence supporting the assertion.

Argumentation is logical reasoning that supports the more general assertion. Arguments from readings should also be properly cited. The overall hypothesis/es of the essay or other piece of work should be supported by the individual paragraphs. The assertion of each paragraph should be stated at or near the beginning of the paragraph, and the rest of the paragraph should provide support for the assertion.

You should take into consideration the common ground (shared knowledge) between you and your reader – don't presuppose too much from the reader. You should consider your audience to be a fellow Linguistics or English Language student who hasn't taken the course unit: you may assume knowledge of very general linguistic principles, but nothing of the specific course unit or dissertation topic. For instance, you must define any concepts and terms you learned in the course unit. Illustration of your points with examples also makes the work more comprehensible to your reader. Data must be presented clearly and accurately, and sources properly acknowledged (see above). Observe the standard conventions for examples, diagrams and tableaux: you should give them a number between parentheses, inset them, and separate them from the main text with blank spaces above and below. In assessment, higher value will be placed on your own examples vs. those given in class lecture or readings, and on number and variety of examples vs. a couple of examples of exactly the same phenomenon.

The work should be coherent. That is, each sentence should be relevant to the immediately preceding sentence; the evidence and argumentation should support the assertion of each paragraph, and each paragraph should support the overall thesis/theses. Padding the work with irrelevant or redundant information is not acceptable – hence the strict page or word limits. Conciseness is one of the virtues of writing good prose. There is good generic advice on the Faculty website – plus some links to external sources too – at http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/writing/how_to_write.html.

Plagiarism, citation and references: good practice

Any evidence of plagiarism will be investigated. The chief difference between plagiarism and proper research is citation: you will incur penalties for plagiarism but gain marks for proper citations (on which see page 2 above). You may also lose marks for lack of proper citations. Nevertheless, you cannot simply give a series of long quotations; you need to explain what the passages mean and how they support your argument. See the page at http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/writing/avoiding_plagiarism.html for a fuller discussion of what constitutes plagiarism, the disastrous effect it can have on marks, credits and progression, and how best to avoid it.