Below are: (I) a set of writing hints that should be followed as you prepare written assignments; and (II) details on the format of citations that need to be followed for written assignments.

**I. Writing Hints**

These writing hints are not a comprehensive list of rules for preparing papers, but are either “lessons I’ve learned the hard way” or items I’ve observed. The hints are in no particular order; follow them all with equal vigor.

1) Purge the word “there” from your vocabulary. The word indicates a location (i.e. “here” vs. “there”) and cannot be the subject of a sentence (it’s too indefinite). Sentences that have “there” as the subject can always be rewritten without this word (and usually the sentence is simpler).

2) The words “this” and “these” must always be followed by a noun. Like “there,” “this” by itself is too indefinite. If you are that indefinite, then you probably don’t know what you are talking about. Ponder the following sentence: “This is too short”. It tells you something is short, but doesn’t tell you what (this ladder? this person? this list of hints?).

3) Use of “that” and “which”: If the information in the clause that follows is needed, use “that”. If the information is ancillary, use “which” and set the clause off by commas. For example: 1) “The truck that crashed carried water.”—you are referring to a specific truck, the one that crashed! 2) “The truck, which carried water, crashed.”—the fact that the truck carried water is not essential, but the author thought that you would like to know it!

4) Use of “because” and “since”: If you are talking about cause-effect relationships or providing a reason for something, use “because.” If you are talking about the passage of time, use “since.” For example: “Because my professor in class overworked me, I have not had a vacation since January.” Try rereading this sentence again, but switch “because” and “since.”

Similarly, “while” indicates time and should not be used to indicate contrasts in an introductory phrase; use “although” or “whereas”. For example: “Whereas the results from my first experiment were clear, I could not write a summary of that experiment while I worked on the second experiment.” As above, “whereas” and “while” are not interchangeable words.

5) Paragraphs:

a) Purpose of paragraphs: Paragraphs act as visual cues that let readers know that you are going to talk about something different. Do NOT disappoint or confuse your reader: make sure that: (1) each paragraph presents and explains one and only one major idea; and (2) you do not scatter one major idea across many paragraphs. If you have more than one major idea in one paragraph, then break that paragraph into more than one. If you have a major idea scattered among several paragraphs, then bring the appropriate text together into one paragraph. NOTE: “Major ideas” is a relative term; the point here is to use visual cues to strengthen your writing rather than work against it.

b) Paragraph length: Although the length of a paragraph varies, use the following as guides: (1) A paragraph should have a minimum of 3 sentences. Paragraphs with only 1 or 2 sentences either are not major ideas (in which case the information should be deleted or put into a different paragraph) or are very poorly developed major ideas (in which case, do more thinking and writing, in that order).
(2) Maximum length is more difficult to define, but see 5.a. above. As a guideline, if a paragraph is longer than 1 page, then it is probably too long.

c) Paragraph structure: The first sentence of each paragraph should summarize the major idea in that paragraph. The rest of the paragraph should elaborate on that first statement, provide logical arguments to support the statement, etc. This technique will provide you with a number of benefits:

   (1) Your writing will stay focused around a particular topic, and you will be less likely to digress. (2) If you can’t write a 1 sentence summary, delete unnecessary information or break the paragraph into two. (3) To determine if the flow of ideas is logical and to help organize your thoughts and the text, you only need to read the first sentence of each paragraph.

6) Be concise.

7) Spell-check each document, then spell-check it again buy reading it carefully two make sure that correctly spelled words are knot used in the wrong context.

8) Be careful with the use of “it.” It is an overused pronoun. It is an acceptable indefinite pronoun (as opposed to “there” or “this” as #1 and #2 above describe it), or it represents a specific subject (similar to the pronouns “he” and “she”). It’s overuse coupled with the ability of it to be either indefinite or specific tends to make the use of it less clear than it should be. It should not be used if it can be easily replaced with a noun or if the sentence can be rewritten without it. It also often makes sentences more wordy (see #6 and #9).

9) Be precise.

10) Use of commas: Overuse of commas is a more common affliction than under use. Commas should be used: (1) to separate independent clauses (i.e. before conjunctions such as “and”, “but”, etc. when they join 2 clauses that are complete sentences); (2) to separate introductory words (e.g. “for example”, “however”, “in contrast”) or introductory phrases (e.g. phrases that begin with “although”, “because”, etc.); (3) to indicate ancillary information (see also #3).

   Note the absence of a rule that says: Always insert a comma before the word “and”!

11) Use the word “can” sparingly. Always try rewriting a sentence without the word. If a choice is clearly involved, then go ahead and use “can”. However, if you are using the word because you are not sure about something, then find out so that you are sure.

12) With few exceptions, do not change the tense of verbs within a sentence or within a paragraph. If you start in the present tense, then stay in the present tense. Usually when you change tense, you caused problems!

II. Citation Formats

To reference a source of information in your written assignments, two steps are typically involved for scientific writing. First, you indicate in the text where you got the information from. Second, you compile complete information on your references into an independent section called “Literature Cited”. Below are some details compiled from various journals’ “Instructions for Authors” that you should follow.

1) Format to indicate in the text where you got the information from:

   a) Journal articles, books, and book chapters
Immediately after the information, citations in the text should indicate the author's last name and the year of publication, both in parentheses. Examples: “(Carlin 1992)”; “(Brooks and Carlin 1992)”. If there are more than two authors, only the first should be named, followed by "et al." If two or more references are to be cited, list citations in year order (then in alphabetical order if same year) with each citation separated with a comma. Example: “(Brooks and Carlin 1992, Carlin 1992, Abbey 1997)”.

b) Web sites
Immediately after the information, citations for the web site should include the publisher of the web site and the year the information was posted, both in parentheses. If the year the information was posted is not available, then use the year that the web site was accessed. Example: “(Blackwell Publishing 2004)”. If two or more web sites are to be cited, list citations in year order (then in alphabetical order if same year). If web sites and printed literature are to be cited, then list citations in year order (then in alphabetical order if same year).

2) Format for complete reference information in “Literature Cited” section
References at the end of the paper should be listed in alphabetical order by the first author's last name or web site publisher’s name. If there is more than one work by the same author or team of authors in the same year, add the letters “a”, “b”, etc. to the year both in the text and in the list of references in order to differentiate the different citations.

a) Journal articles
Journal articles should include: name(s) and initial(s) of all authors; year; full title; journal title; volume number; first and last page numbers. Example:

b) Book chapters
Book chapters should include: name(s) and initial(s) of all authors; year; title of article; editor(s); title of book; edition; volume number; publisher; place of publication; page numbers. Example:

c) Books
Citations for books should include: name(s) and initial(s) of all authors; year; title; edition; publisher; place of publication. Example:

d) Web sites
Citations for web sites should include: publisher’s name; year; title of web page; URL; date accessed. Example: