

# The Department of English Style Guide

## Style Guide for the SLK English Degree Programmes

Department of English  
School of Communication and Culture  
Aarhus University

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## 1 Preliminary remarks

Academic writing, whether produced by professional scholars for publication or by students pursuing higher education, requires rules and standards for presentation, documentation and style. These rules and standards vary from one institution to another and from one academic discipline to another. Consequently, many different style guides are available, and you will see numerous variations in the published academic work you read. But that does not mean you can mix conventions at random in your writing. What is essential is to pick a specific set of conventions and stick to them. This choice has been made for the SLK English degree programmes at the Department of English at Aarhus University, as explained in the present *Style Guide*.

The rules and standards described here apply to all official writing you will produce for the degree programmes. The academic regulations for all degree programmes include Section 3.6 Spelling and fluency: ‘In the assessment of Bachelor’s projects and other major written assignments, emphasis must be placed on the student’s spelling and fluency, in addition to the student’s command of the content knowledge. In the assessment of all written exams, emphasis will be placed on the extent to which the student can present an academic topic and structure an academic assignment, including compliance with formal academic requirements (references, quotations, etc.). In the assessment of all oral exams, emphasis is placed on the student’s ability to present academic information, structure a presentation and take part in constructive academic dialogue’.

Please note that there are some rules, particularly concerning references and documentation, that apply specifically to work in one or more of the degree programmes’ sub-disciplines: linguistics, literature, history/society/culture, and media. Accordingly, you will find below two sets of instructions for referencing and documentation, based respectively on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 18th edition, and the *MLA [Modern Language Association of America] Handbook*, 9th edition.

Learning to follow stylistic conventions accurately is an important part of your training as a student and of your developing competence in English. It is also something you will almost certainly be required to do, one way or another, in your post-university career. Meanwhile, the extent to which you follow academic conventions of layout in accordance with this *Style Guide* will be taken into account in the grading of written exams. You should therefore ensure you have read the entire guide thoroughly and understood its contents.

## **2 Layout**

### **2.1 Page setup**

Set a 3-cm margin on the left of the page (to allow for binding) and 2-cm margins on the top, right and bottom.

Indent the first line of each paragraph by 1 cm. However, the first paragraph of each chapter or section should not be indented.

Set page numbers to print in the top-right corner of the page. A page number is not required on the first page of the main text. For the pagination of MA theses (*specialer*), see Section 5.2 below.

Font: Use Palatino or Times New Roman. Select 11-point (Palatino) or 12-point (Times New Roman) type size. All text should be black.

Set line spacing to 1.5.

Set paragraph alignment to ‘justified’.

Finally, set hyphenation to ‘off’ and widow/orphan protection to ‘on’ (the latter prevents single lines at the beginning or end of a paragraph from being printed at the top or bottom of a page).

Conforming to these guidelines will help ensure that your research paper or MA thesis meets the specifications for standard pages, which underpin the required lengths for research papers and MA theses (see Section 8 below). While these guidelines are intended to help you align character count with page count, there is no guarantee that they will do so. It is your responsibility to check that your research paper or MA thesis falls within the allowed page range for the exam by obtaining a character count from your word processor.

All research papers, MA theses, or other work submitted in connection with coursework should be formatted on standard unlined white A4 paper (unless otherwise specified by your teacher). All research papers and MA theses should be submitted as a single PDF file via Aarhus University’s digital exam system, [WISEflow](#).

### **2.2 Headings**

Section headings, if used, should be flush left. They should be numbered using the format ‘1, 1.1, 1.2 ... 2, 2.1’, and so on. Section headings should be in bold. Multiple subsection levels may be appropriate in linguistics research papers but

should be used sparingly, if at all, in literary and historical research papers. All fonts should be black.

For MA theses, see Sections 5.8 and 5.9 below.

### **3 Language**

Research papers and the MA thesis must be written in British or American English. Remember to set the spelling and grammar proofing language in your word processor accordingly.

### **4 Exam papers**

The contents of exam papers (research papers, take-home assignments, and so forth) are as follows and appear in the following sequence.

#### **4.1 Title page**

The research paper should include a separate title page. Provide

- the title of the research paper, centred near the top of the page
- your name and student registration number (*årskortnummer*)
- the title of the course for which the research paper is submitted
- the name of the teacher
- the submission date

The title page should *not* be numbered.

#### **4.2 Summary (obligatory for the Bachelor Project)**

The research paper for the bachelor's project must include a summary in English. The summary must be 1/2-1 page in length. The summary is considered a modifying factor in the overall assessment.

#### **4.3 Table of contents (optional)**

A table of contents listing the sections of the research paper is optional but may be included on a separate, unnumbered page. The list of sections should include page numbers. For best results, use the automatic table of contents function in your word processor.

#### **4.4 Main text**

Begin the main text on a new page. There should be no page number on the first page of the main text.

#### **4.5 Appendices (optional)**

Appendices appear after the main text and are relatively rare in research papers. They are mainly found in MA theses (see Section 5.10 below).

#### **4.6 Substantive notes (optional)**

Notes may be used for additional substantive commentary but not for citations. Keep such notes to an absolute minimum. Substantive notes may be either endnotes or footnotes and should be numbered consecutively throughout the research paper. Endnotes appear after the main text.

#### **4.7 Reference List (Chicago)/Works Cited (MLA) (obligatory)**

Documentation in the form of a list of sources, usually called 'Reference List' in the *Chicago Manual of Style* (18th edition) author-date system (hereafter 'Chicago') and 'Works Cited' in the *MLA Handbook* 9th edition (hereafter 'MLA') system, is obligatory. See Section 7 below for further details.

### **5 MA theses**

The contents of an MA thesis are as follows and appear in the following sequence:

#### **5.1 Title page (obligatory)**

The MA thesis should have a separate title page, including:

- the title of your MA thesis centred near the top of the page
- 'MA Thesis'
- your name and student registration number (*årskortnummer*)
- the name of your MA thesis supervisor
- the name of the Department
- the submission date

The title page should not be numbered.

## **5.2 Table of contents (obligatory)**

Chapters should be listed; sections may be listed as well. Any of the following items included in the MA thesis should also appear in the table of contents. As noted above, use the table of contents function in your word processor to generate a table of contents.

Start page numbering at this point with the Roman numeral ‘i’.

## **5.3 Summary in English (obligatory)**

Under the academic regulations, the summary must be 1–2 standard pages and in English. It is included in the overall assessment but is not counted towards the specified page total.

## **5.4 Acknowledgements (optional)**

Acknowledgements are used to express thanks for help with preparing the MA thesis, permission to reproduce material and so on.

## **5.5 Preface (optional)**

A preface is used for personal comments on the MA thesis, such as reasons for carrying out the work, but should not include material that is properly part of the main text itself.

## **5.6 Main text**

Start page numbering at one. There should be no page number on the first page of the main text. Pagination for the main text and end matter uses Arabic numerals.

## **5.7 Chapter headings (obligatory)**

Chapter headings should be centred. They should be labelled ‘Chapter 1’, and so on. They should be in bold, using a slightly larger font than the main text. All fonts should be black.

## **5.8 Section headings (optional)**

Section headings follow the same format and use the chapter number as the highest level. Thus, all section headings in Chapter 2 will begin with ‘2’: ‘2.1, 2.1.1 ... 2.2’, and so on. Leave additional white space above section headings. It is not necessary to start a new page for each section. All fonts should be black.

## **5.9 Appendices (optional)**

Appendices are used for materials to which the reader may need to refer but which do not form part of the MA thesis proper. Page numbering should continue through the appendices.

## **5.10 Substantive notes (optional)**

Notes may be used for additional substantive commentary but not for citations. Keep such notes to an absolute minimum. Substantive notes may be either endnotes or footnotes and should be numbered consecutively throughout the research paper. Endnotes appear after the main text. All fonts should be black.

## **5.11 Reference List (Chicago)/Works Cited (MLA) (obligatory)**

For details on how to list sources, see Section 7 below.

## **6 Quotations**

### **6.1 Acknowledging sources**

Words, information or ideas taken from any source must be acknowledged by precise documentation of the source.

Failure to acknowledge sources leaves you open to accusations of plagiarism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines plagiarise as ‘to take and use as one’s own (the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another person); to copy (literary work or ideas) improperly or without acknowledgement; to pass off as one’s own the thoughts or work of (another)’. Please see Section 11 below on academic dishonesty, including plagiarism.

### **6.2 Formatting quotations**

There are only two ways to mark quotations: quotation marks or indentation. See guidelines below on when to use quotation marks and when to indent. Do not mark quotations with both quotation marks and indentation.

Do *not* use italics, bold or a different font or font size to indicate quotations unless any of these are present in the original (or, in the case of italics, they are added for emphasis).

### **6.3 Incorporating quotations**

You should usually incorporate quotations (direct or indirect) into your prose rather than introducing them as separate sentences. They can appear at the beginning, middle or end of your sentence.

### **6.4 Marking direct quotations**

Material quoted directly from other sources must be marked as a quotation and properly integrated into your text. Depending on its length, the quotation can either be run into the body of the text and punctuated with quotation marks or indented without quotation marks.

Cite the source of each quotation parenthetically at the end of the sentence in which the quoted material appears, and include the source in the Reference List (Chicago)/ Works Cited (MLA) (see Section 7.1 below).

#### **6.4.1 Quotations of four lines or less**

Place quotations of four lines or fewer within quotation marks. See Section 6.7 below for the differences between British and American punctuation in quotations. The parenthetical reference, whether in Chicago or MLA format, should be followed, not preceded, by a final full stop.

#### **6.4.2 Quotations of more than four lines**

Indent quotations that are more than four lines in length by 2 cm.

Do *not* place quotation marks around indented quotations.

Do *not* change the font size, line spacing or any other aspect of the text's formatting.

#### **6.4.3 Quoting verse**

When quoting three lines or fewer, mark line breaks with a slash. For example: 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day / Thou art more lovely and more temperate'.

Indent verse quotations of more than three lines by 2 cm. Do *not* use quotation marks, italics, bold, or a different font or font size in indented quotations unless in the original, or, in the case of italics, they are added for emphasis, as at the beginning of this sentence.

## 6.5 Ellipsis

Ellipsis (omitting one or more words in a sentence) in quotations must be indicated by three ellipsis points: ‘The term *black hole* ... was coined in the 1960s’.

Ellipsis must not be used to change the *meaning* of the original source.

You can insert a word or phrase to make a quotation grammatical or to restore the sense after material has been cut. Place square brackets around inserted material to indicate that it is an alteration: ‘the mushrooms are ... [then] harvested’. Square brackets should also be placed around a capital or lower-case letter when the case has been changed from the original to fit the text. Place square brackets around the ellipsis points to show ellipsis if quoting from a text that itself includes ellipsis points.

Ellipsis is usually unnecessary at the beginning or end of a quotation when only a portion of the original source is being quoted.

## 6.6 Indirect quotations

You must indicate the sources of information or ideas from other writers, even when you do not quote their exact words. For example, you may summarise or paraphrase a writer’s argument in your own words. In this case, do not mark the passage with quotation marks or indent it. Cite the source parenthetically at the end of the sentence where the material is used, and document the source in the same way as for direct quotations.

## 6.7 British English and American English punctuation of quotations

An important difference between British English and American English concerns the punctuation of quotations marked by quotation marks.

British English uses single quotation marks, and American English double.

In both British English and American English, when a quotation occurs within another quotation, the other type of quotation mark is used for the embedded quotation.

In British English, quotations place any concluding punctuation outside the quotation marks, except when question marks and exclamation marks are part of the quotation.

In American English, commas and full stops (periods) that follow a quotation come before the quotation marks are closed, even if the punctuation belongs to the surrounding text rather than the quotation. Other punctuation marks come before the quotation marks if they were in the original, or after if they form part of the surrounding text.

The following examples demonstrate the main differences.

### **6.7.1 British English**

Hawking states that ‘up to about twenty years ago, it was thought that protons and neutrons were “elementary” particles’. But what does he mean by ‘elementary’?

### **6.7.2 American English**

Hawking states that “up to about twenty years ago, it was thought that protons and neutrons were ‘elementary’ particles”. But what does he mean by “elementary”?

Note that elsewhere in this *Style Guide*, examples are given in British English only.

In both British and American English, sentences that include quotations and end with a parenthetical reference (see Section 6 above) place the full stop after the final parenthesis. In other words, do not add an extra full stop before the parenthesis.

## **6.8 Quoting non-English sources**

Quotations should normally be given in the original language. Discuss with your teacher whether a translation is necessary.

## **7 Documentation**

The choice of documentation method will depend on whether your research paper or MA thesis is based on a linguistics, literature, history/society/culture, or media topic. These categories may sometimes overlap. If in doubt, consult your teacher to determine into which category your research paper or MA thesis topic falls.

For linguistics or media studies courses, research papers should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (18th ed., 2024) author-date system. Access the *Chicago Manual of Style* via the Royal Danish Library. For the most commonly

used source types, use the ‘Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide’/‘Author–Date’. For literature or history courses, research papers are usually documented using the MLA system, as described in the *MLA Handbook* (9th ed., 2021), which can be supplemented with the basic guidelines, updates and advice available at the online MLA Style Centre. Always check the information on the course’s Brightspace Course Site.

Instead of footnotes or endnotes, both systems use parenthetical references within the text, citing works in the list of sources (usually called ‘Reference List’ in the Chicago author-date system and ‘Works Cited’ in the MLA system).

### **7.1 Documentation: Reference list (Chicago)/Works Cited (MLA)**

Both the Chicago author-date and MLA documentation systems require a detailed list of only the sources cited in the paper. The titles for the list of sources vary, but the recommended choices are ‘Reference List’ for Chicago and ‘Works Cited’ for MLA.

The entries in the list of sources are arranged alphabetically by author's surname.

Format entries with a hanging indent of 0.5 cm. Use your word processor’s hanging indent function rather than the tab key or spaces to format entries.

The Reference List or Works Cited should be placed at the end of the paper. It should begin on a new page. Centre the title (Reference List/Works Cited) at the top of the page.

### **7.2 Citation management software**

EndNote, a citation management tool available free of charge to students at Aarhus University, includes predefined citation styles for Chicago 18th ed. (author-date) and MLA 9th ed. Citation information for sources can be imported directly from the Royal Danish Library search results and from most databases you will access via the Royal Danish Library. The programme will format your entries. Please note that EndNote does not replace this *Style Guide* or the sources mentioned above for authoritative information on citations. It will make it easier to cite sources correctly, although you are responsible for correcting any errors or inconsistencies.

### 7.3 Documentation guides

If you have any questions about how to format your references or the entries in your list of sources that are not answered by the information provided in this *Style Guide*, consult one of the following guides:

Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research*. 5th ed., U of Chicago P, 2024.

Rainsford, Dominic. *Literature in English: How and Why*. 2nd ed, Routledge, 2020. Chapters 14, 'Primary and secondary sources', and 15, 'Reading, research, writing'. (Available via the Royal Danish Library.)

Your course teacher or MA thesis supervisor may provide you with additional guidelines.

## 8 Length of exam papers and MA theses

The study regulations for examinations, in the Section "Regulations for assignments", specify the required lengths for written exams, including MA theses, in terms of a normal page, defined as containing 2,400 characters, including spaces. The settings given above in Section 1 should produce normal text pages with approximately 2,400 characters (including spaces) each. You are still responsible for conducting a word count and ensuring that your research paper or thesis meets the required length.

When you submit a written exam digitally, you must state the number of characters in the exam paper. You are required to report the number of characters accurately.

### 8.1 Substantive notes

Include the text in substantive notes in your word count.

### 8.2 Elements *not* included in character count

The following elements should *not* be included in the character count:

#### 8.2.1 Research papers

Title page, table of contents, acknowledgements, appendices, illustrations, summary (bachelor project), and list of sources/works cited.

### **8.2.2 MA theses**

Title page, table of contents, summary, acknowledgements, preface, appendices, illustrations and list of sources/works cited.

### **8.3 Diagrams, tables and other visual materials**

Some factors may affect the actual number of characters per page (for example, the use of headings or non-textual material). If you expect your research paper or MA thesis to include a substantial amount of non-textual material, consult your teacher or MA thesis supervisor.

## **9 Usage guide**

### **9.1 Academic style**

Academic papers should be written in an appropriately academic style. Normally, this will be compatible with an objective approach. For example, the first person will be used relatively infrequently, direct address to the reader will be rare, and the passive voice may appear more frequently than in non-academic writing. Slang, as well as contractions and abbreviations such as ‘don’t’ and ‘e.g.’, will usually be avoided.

An important element of academic English is the absence of bias in the language. The *Chicago Manual of Style* (18th ed.) addresses gender bias and other forms of language bias, and in the Section ‘[Inclusive Language and Minimizing Bias](#)’ provides alternative formulations to help you write bias-free English.

It is recognised that some variation in style may be considered appropriate. Consult your course teacher or MA thesis supervisor for further guidance.

### **9.2 Titles in English: italics or quotation marks?**

In the body of your paper, the title of a separately published work should be italicised, whereas the title of a subsection of such a work should be in quotation marks and not italicised. Thus, the titles of books, scholarly journals, plays, epic poems, websites, newspapers, paintings and films, for example, should be italicised.

For example, the titles of chapters of books, scholarly journal articles, short stories, poems (unless published as separate works), and newspaper articles should be in quotation marks.

Do *not* use bold or a different font or font size to indicate titles.

### 9.3 Apostrophes

English uses an apostrophe to indicate possession (except for possessive pronouns—*his, hers, theirs, its, ours, yours*). Most possessive forms are straightforward, but note the following:

|                   |                |                 |                       |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|                   | Joan's         | Jones's         | the Joneses'          |
| with the meaning: | <i>of Joan</i> | <i>of Jones</i> | <i>of the Joneses</i> |

Do not use an apostrophe in decades written as numerals. Instead, write them as follows: 1590s, 1800s, 2010s and so on.

Remember the difference between the possessive pronoun *its* and the contraction of *it is*, written as *it's*. For example:

What has Joan's dog got in its mouth? It's the Joneses' *Style Guide*!

## 10 Proofreading

Careful reading and correction of your work are two essential skills you can develop as an academic writer. You should not just write the final word of your paper and submit it. Instead, you should read the completed draft in full, view it objectively and eliminate mistakes and confusion. At the same time, you should check systematically that you have followed the instructions in this *Style Guide*.

## 11 Academic dishonesty

Please note that any unacknowledged input from another person that goes beyond proofreading and involves new content or 'ghost-writing' is a form of cheating closely related to plagiarism. In particular, it is not permissible to pay another person to write, proofread, correct or improve work that will be submitted for examination. Doing so constitutes academic dishonesty and will be treated as such.

For information on how to avoid plagiarism, you can consult:

The Aarhus University Library guide, [‘Avoid plagiarism - for students’](#)

The MLA’s guides [‘Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty’](#) and [‘Avoiding Plagiarism’](#)

## 11.1 Aarhus University guides

[Know the rules when you have an exam](#)

[Avoid Pitfalls at Exams: A Guide for Students on How to Avoid Cheating at Exams](#)

[Cheating at exams](#)

[Reference management for students - how to get your references right](#)

## 12 Generative artificial intelligence (GAI)

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools can support your academic work by helping you explore ideas, clarify concepts, and deepen your understanding of course materials; however, their use requires careful judgment and transparency. GAI outputs may contain errors, fabricated information, or stylistic inconsistencies. You must therefore critically evaluate and fact-check all outputs. As this *Style Guide* has emphasised, you are responsible for ensuring that all content submitted for assessment is your own intellectual work. If you use GAI-generated text (directly quoted or paraphrased), you must place it in quotation marks and cite it with proper references, consistent with the rules for secondary sources. For guidelines on documenting content developed or generated by artificial intelligence, see the MLA’s [How do I cite generative AI in MLA style?](#) and Chicago’s [FAQ: Citation, Documentation of Sources #422](#). Furthermore, if you use GAI at any stage of a written assignment (take-home exam)—including for research, analysis, drafting, or editing—you must download and complete Aarhus University’s [‘Declaration of use of Generative Artificial Intelligence \(GAI\)’](#) and submit it as a separate file under the ‘Attachments’ tab in [WISEflow](#) together with your assignment.

Always check the academic regulations for the course and consult your course teacher to confirm whether GAI is permitted for your specific exam. Any use of GAI must comply with Aarhus University’s rules on academic integrity and its policies on GAI use. For further information, see

[AU Guide to GAI for students](#)

[AU Studypedia - GAI and chatbots](#)

Student Guide to AI Literacy | Modern Language Association