

Formatting for Written Assignments

Formatting writing assignments is extremely important. Proper formatting not only provides uniformity and ease of reading for your audience, it more importantly addresses the far more critical issue of credibility. Just as your handshake offers an important first impression, the appearance of a document can make a tremendous initial impact on the reader's perceptions of the material.

Guidelines for creating a quality written assignment:

1. Assignments should be prepared in accordance with the directions. Failure to follow directions suggests to the reader that the writer is either careless or clueless.
2. The assignment should be keyed with one inch (1") margins on the left, right, and bottom. Top margins may vary depending on the number of pages of the assignment. A title page typically has a top margin of 1.5 or 2.0 inches while top margins for successive pages are usually one inch.
3. Left justification (ragged right side) should be used because it actually "lightens" the appearance of the message. It is also easier to read.
4. Spacing for assignments should be either double-spaced with indents of one tab at the beginning of each paragraph or single-spaced with double-spacing (blank line) between paragraphs and no indents. Follow specific directions for each assignment. Usually letters, memos, and e-mails are single-spaced. Reports may vary depending on the instructor.
5. Arial or Times New Roman font typeface with 12-point pitch should be used unless the instructor provides other directions.
6. If the assignment is more than one page, page numbers are usually in the header at the upper-right corner of the page or the footer, most commonly centered. This guideline may vary by instructor (again, follow any instructions given).
7. Headings, including the title, are important guideposts in any formal writing. They serve as reader cues for upcoming content and provide structure by indicating the major and minor sections in the paper.
8. Grammar and punctuation errors are "noise" to a written message. For a message to be interpreted correctly, it should be free of these errors. Writing errors distract the reader just as unwanted sound distracts from oral messages.
9. Personal pronouns, slang, and abbreviations are usually unacceptable in business writing. Personal pronouns are usually only acceptable when giving an opinion or when writing letters, memos, or e-mail messages.
10. Tables are single-spaced and should fit on one page if possible. If a table is so large it is on more than one page, the headings should be repeated at the top of the second page.
11. If it is requested, a cover page should contain: 1) the title of the assignment, 2) the professor's name, 3) the name of the course, 4) the student's name, and 5) the date. Keep in mind this information may vary by instructor. Some instructors also may have specific directions on placement: in a header, in the upper left-hand corner, upper right-hand corner, or some other placement.
12. Read your finished assignment out loud. This strategy can be a helpful way to proofread and identify any rambling sentences or incomplete sentences. Always keep your reader in mind and make it easy for that reader to understand your message. Break up long sentences and/or paragraphs as needed to make your writing more clear and concise.