

Recommendations for the formatting of academic papers

This document provides general tips to help you format your academic papers.

Don't hesitate to supplement these recommendations with specific recommendations from your teachers related to their discipline.

Formatting will help guide your reader

Title page, table of contents and bibliography are some of the essential elements. Depending on the requirements of each discipline, it might be useful to add an appendix, a glossary, an index, a list of abbreviations or illustrations (tables and figures).

Font: keep it simple

You might be tempted to beautify your work by choosing a more exotic font. Fonts with serifs such as Times are generally used in the body of the text, while sans serif fonts such as Helvetica are better for headings. Stick to two or three font types maximum for the entire document.

Go for style!

Word-processing software packages have a very convenient feature that is unfortunately too often neglected: Styles. Assigning a specific style to each heading level will ensure consistency throughout your document. This tool has the added advantage of letting you easily create and update your table of contents.

Acronyms are telling

The first time you use an acronym like WHO, write it out (World Health Organization). Furthermore, if you use more than five acronyms, consider providing a list of abbreviations at the beginning or end of your paper, depending on the standard practice in your field.

Don't leave your reader hanging

Make it a habit to use cross-references (a function provided in word processors); this lets you indicate other parts of the paper where you have referred to the same point.

Number the pages of your paper

If you want to polish your formatting, use lowercase roman numerals for the index, presentation, thank-you, and summary pages. Then switch to Arab numerals for the other sections.

Binding your document

Allow five to eight millimeters in the inner margin for binding. Word-processing software can do this for you. Because of the binding, you will have left and right pages. The page numbers for the left page will be even and aligned on the left. Conversely, right-hand pages will have odd page numbers aligned on the right.

Tables and graphs

Give your tables and figures titles

Titles are placed above tables, and below graphs.

Comment on tables and figures

What does the table or graph show? How is it organized? What data or important concepts bear repeating? Why is this data or concept important? What is the message?

Tables and figures should be listed in an index

Create an index for tables and another for figures, and place them after the table of contents. Use the corresponding function in your word processor to give the tables and figures titles. This function will then automatically create an index.