**SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY**                    **School of Social Work**

# Writing Guide

This writing guide contains a brief overview of common rules of punctuation and grammar, and definitions of the parts of speech. Please note that this guide does not cover all punctuation and grammar rules. For more detailed information and tips on effective writing, please visit these sites:

The OWL at Purdue:
Grammar and Mechanics sections:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

APA Writing Stylistics:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/15/

APA Guidelines on Avoiding Bias
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/14/

The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation:
http://www.grammarbook.com/english_rules.asp

## Section 1: Punctuation

### Apostrophe

Common uses of the apostrophe include:

1) An apostrophe is used to form possessives of nouns

Add 's after the singular of a word to indicate it is possessive

Example of correct usage:

The social worker's education prepared her to work effectively with a range of diverse clients.

This is the education of ONE social worker

Add s' after the plural of a word to indicate it is possessive

Example of correct usage:

The social workers' education prepared them well to work effectively with a range of diverse clients.

This is the education of MANY social workers.

NOTE:
<u>Do not use apostrophes for possessive pronouns</u> (his, her, its, my, yours, ours)

2) To show the omission of letters—used in contractions

Examples of correct usage:

don't = do not
I'm = I am
won't = will not
it's = it is

NOTE:
<u>AVOID contractions in professional writing</u>.

## **Commas**

<u>Common uses of the comma include</u>:

1) Commas are used to separate two main clauses when those clauses include a conjunction such as *but, however, yet, and*, etc….If these words are not used, the sentence is incorrect.

Example of correct usage:

Reed and colleagues (1997) use the term "positionality" to describe the ways in which all people are positioned within various social groups, and they note that each person is influenced by his or her social group identity, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

NOTE:
You could also take out the conjunction "and" and replace it with a semicolon:
Example of correct usage:

Reed and colleagues (1997) use the term "positionality" to describe the ways in which all people are positioned within various social groups; they note that each person is influenced by his or her social group identity, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

NOTE:

You could also make the two main clauses separate sentences:
Example of correct usage:

Reed and colleagues (1997) use the term "positionality" to describe the ways in which all people are positioned within various social groups. They note that each person is influenced by his or her social group identity, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

2) Commas are used between an introductory clause, phrase, or word and the main part of a sentence.

Example of correct usage

If child maltreatment is substantiated, then children are typically placed in out-of-home care and family reunification services are provided to the parents.

3) Commas are used to set off any non-restrictive parts of a sentence. Non-restrictive parts of sentences could be removed entirely from the sentence, and the sentence would still be correct.

Example of correct usage:

In 1994, César Chávez, who co-founded the National Farm Worker's Association, was posthumously honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

NOTE: You can take out the information contained between the commas and the sentence is still correct:

In 1994, César Chávez was posthumously honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

4) Commas are used to separate items in a series

Example of correct usage:

After completing the intervention, the participants reported fewer episodes of anxiety, depression, fatigue, and insomnia.

## **Semicolon**

Common uses of the semicolon include:

1) Semicolons are used to separate two sentences when the conjunction has been left out

Example of correct usage:

The child welfare system serves a culturally and ethnically diverse population; on a national level over 50 percent of children in out-of-home care are children of color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2004).

NOTE:
You could divide this sentence up into two separate sentences.

2) It is preferable to use a semicolon before introductory words such as *namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g.,* or *for instance* when they introduce a complete sentence. It is also preferable to use a comma after the introductory word.

Example of correct usage:

The move toward cultural competence in the child welfare system is both encouraging and imperative; however, there is still some confusion about exactly how child welfare systems are to become more culturally competent.

3) Semicolons are used to separate items in a list when those items have commas.

Example of correct usage:

The study includes participants from Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; and Phoenix, Arizona.

## **Colon**

Common uses of the colon include:

1) Use the colon after a complete sentence to introduce a list of items when introductory words such as *namely*, *for example*, or *that is* do not appear.

Example of correct usage:

Participants in the study completed three surveys: a demographic survey, the Beck Depression Inventory, and a self-efficacy scale.

2) Use a colon instead of a semicolon between two sentences when the second sentence explains or illustrates the first sentence and no coordinating conjunction is being used to connect the sentences. If only one sentence follows the colon, do not capitalize the first word of the new sentence. If two or more sentences follow the colon, capitalize the first word of each sentence following.

Example of correct usage:

Before treatment, participants in the study experienced a variety of symptoms: depression and anxiety were the most common.

3) Use the colon to introduce a direct quotation that is more than three lines in length. In this situation, leave a blank line above and below the quoted material. APA guidelines say NOT to single space the long quotation and to indent the quote only on the left side.

Example of correct usage:

Most researchers and practitioners agree that the development of cultural competence is a constant learning process that does not have an end point and for which there are no short-cuts. Green (1999) states:

> [cultural competence]…is really a system of learning. That is what it must be. There are simply no shortcuts. No one day workshops or list of intervention tips and guidelines will give anyone the skills for working well with others, especially others whom one does not know or understand (p. 38).

NOTE:

In most instances, it is preferable to paraphrase a quote. The use of quotes can break up the flow of the narrative and make it more difficult for the reader to understand how the author is interpreting or applying the information that is being cited.

Quotes should be used when it is important to maintain an author's exact words; for instance, in situations when you need to define something precisely or when the author (or the quote) is prominent or famous.

## Section 2: Grammar

### Verb Endings

Proof-read to make sure all verb endings are correct: s, es, or d, ed

Example of incorrect verb ending:

This study use a cross-sectional survey research design

Corrected verb ending (future tense):

This study will use a cross-sectional survey research design

Corrected verb ending (present tense):

This study uses a cross-sectional survey research design

Corrected verb ending (past tense):

This study used a cross-sectional survey research design

## Agreement of Subject and Verb in a sentence

If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural
If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular

Example of correct usage (singular subject: student; singular verb: is):

This social work student at SJSU is hardworking, ethical, and passionate about the social work profession

Example of correct usage (plural subject: students; plural verb: are):

Social work students at SJSU are hardworking, ethical, and passionate about the social work profession.

## Paragraph structure

All paragraphs should have a topic or transition sentence (beginning), supporting information (middle) and wrap-up/summary/conclusion (ending)

Common problems in paragraph structure:

Paragraph is too short: Make sure it has a beginning, middle and an end. In general, a paragraph should have a minimum of 3 sentences.

Paragraph is too long: If there are more than 2 ideas in the paragraph—split it up. Even if the paragraph only has 1 idea, break up the paragraph if it is a long paragraph.

In general try to keep paragraphs to about half of a page (double-spaced).

## Fragment sentences

A fragment sentence is an incomplete sentence.

Example of a fragment sentence:

Social capital is defined and operationalized in many different ways; some researchers consider social networks, such as friendships, or participation in formal groups as social capital, while others focus on social processes. Such as cohesion, trust, reciprocity, norms, cooperation, expectations or obligations.

Corrected sentence:

Social capital is defined and operationalized in many different ways; some researchers consider social networks, such as friendships, or participation in formal groups as social capital, while others focus on social processes, such as cohesion, trust, reciprocity, norms, cooperation, expectations or obligations.

<u>Run-on sentences</u>

Run-on sentences are two sentences that are not separated by a conjunction, comma, semicolon or period.

## **Section 3: Other Writing Errors**

### **Mis-used words**

<u>led vs. lead</u>

Led is the past tense of lead

Example of correct usage:

I led the research study

I will lead the research study

<u>effect vs. affect</u>

Effect is a noun meaning "a result"

Example of correct usage:

The drug has side effects

Affect is a verb meaning "to influence"

Example:

The drug affected me

HOWEVER, there are times when effect and affect have different meanings and uses.

Affect can be used as a noun when using psychological terminology to describe a person's demeanor.

Example of correct usage:

After participating in 6 weeks of cognitive behavioral therapy, the client's affect became more animated.

Effect can be used as a verb that means "to bring about" or "to accomplish"

Example of correct usage:

The social work profession hopes to effect change on multiple system levels.

<u>then vs. than</u>

Than is a conjunction used in comparisons

Example of correct usage:

Parents who received Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) used more positive discipline <u>than</u> parents who received parenting education classes.

"Then" can be used in different ways:

- At a particular point in time (next, afterward)

  Example of correct usage:

  Participants in the study first completed a demographic questionnaire, and then they participated in the focus group.

- In that case, therefore.

  Example of correct usage:

  If a participant does not sign the consent form, then they cannot participate in the study.

## **<u>Section 4: Definitions</u>**

<u>Noun</u>
Part of speech used to name a person, place, thing, quality or action, and can function as the subject or object of a verb.

<u>Pronoun</u>
A pronoun is a substitute for a noun in a sentence.

Subject pronouns are used if they are the subject of the sentence.
Subject pronouns include: I, You, He, She, They, It, We

Object pronouns are used when there is a separate subject in the sentence.
Object pronouns include: Me, You, Him, Her, It, Us, Them

Possessive pronouns show ownership (Note: NEVER use an apostrophe with a possessive pronoun): Its, Yours, Ours, His, Hers, Theirs, Whose

<u>Verb</u>
A verb is the part of the sentence that indicates the occurrence or performance of an action.

<u>Adjectives</u>
An adjective is a word that describes nouns or pronouns.

<u>Adverbs</u>
Adverbs are words that modify everything but nouns and pronouns. They modify adjectives, verbs, and other adverbs. A word is an adverb if it answers *how*, *when*, or *where*.

<u>Preposition</u>
A preposition links nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition. Common prepositions include: about, above, after, among, around, at, between, but, by, despite, during, except, for, from, in, of, through, to, within, and without.

<u>Conjunction</u>
A conjunction is a word that joins two clauses or sentences.
Common conjunctions include: And, But, Yet, However, Therefore