

Professor Potter's Paper Pet-Peeves

Paper Rules

- Follow the paper specifications (e.g., paper length, citation style)

Document Holders

- Don't submit papers in fancy document holders; a single staple will do

Clichés

- Don't use clichés (e.g., at the last minute, call the shots, piece of cake, plain and simple)

Incorrect Use of Apostrophes

- Be mindful of the correct use of apostrophes (e.g., it's vs. its; decades – incorrect: 1990's or '90's, correct: 1990s: '90s)

America vs. the United States

- The most correct reference to the United States of America is “the United States of America” or “the United States,” not “America.” (Same for “Americans”; can use “U.S. citizens.”)

British vs. U.S. Spelling

- Use U.S. English versus British-style English (e.g., labeled vs. labelled, recognized vs. recognised, color vs. colour).

Sexist Language

- If referring to general individuals, use non-sexist language. Obviously, if you're writing about the inmates in a men's prison or an all-male police force, it is OK to use masculine pronouns.
- “Latino” is a masculine term, referring to a male, so use “Latina” when using this term as an ethnic identifier to refer to a female. The plural version regardless of sex/gender that is often seen is “Latinos,” which is technically correct in the Spanish language. However, updated U.S. English writing of this is often seen as “Latinos/as” or “Latinas/os.” An even newer version to use is “Latin@s.”
- Additional examples of words NOT to use for general purposes: mankind, workman's comp, bail bondsman, manpower. (Arguably, the term “freshman” is sexist!)
- When referring to a female 18 years old and above, do not use the term “girl” to describe her (and, arguably, this can apply to teenaged females, as well). “Woman” is the appropriate term. (Case in point!: People typically do not write – or say – “boy” when referring to adult males.)
- When referring to the two majority genders, be careful of automatically listing the male pronoun first. A good standard to use is to alternate throughout the paper (e.g., “he and she...” then later, “she and he...”). Or you can even alphabetize the pronouns (e.g., “he or she...”, “her or him...”, “boys and girls...”).

Use of “They” as a Singular Reference to Mean “He” or “She”

- While there are some educators out there who say that the English language has transformed to the use of “they” – a plural term – as interchangeable with “she” or “he” – singular terms – I am not one of those educators. Though it may be awkward, and it may leave out those who identify as neither male or female, to write “she or he” or “s/he” is *more* grammatically correct when referring to a single person of a non-identifiable sex.

1st person, 2nd person, or 3rd person?

- Try to use 3rd person language as often as possible. However, depending on the type of paper being written (such as one that includes an experiential learning component), 1st person (I, me, we) is completely acceptable where applicable. Do NOT use 2nd person (you, your).

Please contact Professor Potter with any questions or suggestions: Hillary.Potter@colorado.edu