

Name of Student  
Name of Instructor  
Name of Course  
Date

### **How to Format a Paper for GCS Classes**

When we are with friends, we have a conversational style. When we give a speech or sermon, we are more formal. Many of us have been in formal speech clubs. Although the formality seemed artificial and seemingly unnecessary in the club, it helped us learn to conduct ourselves well when a formal situation did arise. Style is actually part of the message: it communicates an attitude toward the topic and toward the audience.

Just as a public speech is different than an informal conversation, an academic paper is different than an email. Although the same ideas might be communicated with either format, it is important for graduate students to learn to work in the more formal writing style of academic papers. Although content is much more important than style, an academic style indicates that you are approaching the subject with a certain level of expertise and discipline.<sup>1</sup> Writing style is an important part of a graduate education, and stylistic matters affect your grade.

Different schools and different instructors have slightly different preferences on style. Most of what we describe here is acceptable in a wide variety of graduate academic settings.

Notice the format we have used for this paper. We have one inch margins all around, and we use font Times New Roman 12. The main body of the paper is double spaced. The first line of each paragraph is indented ½ inch, and there is no extra space between paragraphs. At the top of the page is a “header” containing the page number. To get all these formatting details correct

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<sup>1</sup> Using the wrong style is like showing up at a church wedding in your beach clothes. Proper style conveys the message, “I know what I am doing, so there’s a good chance that this paper is worth your time.”

in Microsoft Word, we suggest that you use the Academic Paper Template on the Student Information section of our website: <https://learn.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=23>. Also on that page are instructions on how to use Microsoft Word's features.<sup>2</sup>

We begin the paper in the upper-left corner of page 1 with a brief description of the occasion: student, instructor, course and date. In a thesis, we should put that information on a more formal "title page." But for most class papers, a separate title page is not necessary. After the details of occasion, we give the title of the paper, which is boldfaced and centered. Then comes the main body of the paper.

## **Subheads**

In a one-page paper, subheads are not needed. In a longer paper, they can help a writer organize the ideas, and can help readers follow the sequence of thought. Here, we have a blank line above the subhead, and our subhead touches the left-hand margin (In Word's paragraph menu, it's "alignment left" and "special, none") and is boldfaced.

Occasional paragraph breaks also help the reader see how you have grouped your thoughts. If you have a paragraph that is one page long, divide it into two or three paragraphs to group similar topics together. Avoid colloquialisms, and write in complete sentences. Each sentence should have a subject and a verb. On the other hand, don't be overly formal or pedantic – don't use words just to make it sound more formal.

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<sup>2</sup> Other word processing programs will be different; we have given instructions for Word because it is the most widely used program. Several good free programs are also available: Google Docs, [LibreOffice](#), and [Kingsoft](#).

## Citations

Citations are one of the most important issues in formatting. It is important for writers to acknowledge the source of their information—especially any quotes. As a rule of thumb, whenever you copy more than five words in a row (and sometimes when you copy less), you should enclose those words in quote marks and name your source.

There are two widely accepted ways of citing sources: parentheses and footnotes. For a master's thesis, you should use the more formal style: footnotes. It is therefore a good idea to learn to use footnotes in your earlier papers, too. We prefer the format described in Kate Turabian's *Manual*<sup>3</sup> and Nancy Vyhmeister's book for religious writings.<sup>4</sup> “If a work includes a bibliography, which is typically preferred, then it is not necessary to provide full publication details in notes. . . . The note only needs to include the surname of the author, a shortened form of the title (if more than four words), and the page number(s).”<sup>5</sup>

Even when you use footnotes, *biblical* citations are normally given in parentheses—for example: (Luke 2:32, NIV).<sup>6</sup> Translations done by a committee are usually preferred, rather than the paraphrases that present one person's interpretation.

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<sup>3</sup> Kate L. Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (9th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). You may also use other recent editions. This is based on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, adapted slightly for academic writing.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (3rd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2014.

<sup>5</sup> [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/chicago\\_manual\\_17th\\_edition/cmof\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/chicago\\_manual\\_of\\_style\\_17th\\_edition.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmof_formatting_and_style_guide/chicago_manual_of_style_17th_edition.html). That page also has a “citation machine” that will give you the right format.

<sup>6</sup> If all biblical quotations come from the same translation, use a footnote on the first quote, such as: “All biblical quotes, unless noted, are from the New International Version.” The biblical citation is not part of the quote itself, so should not be inside the quote marks. For example: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35, NIV).

Quotes do not speak for themselves, and your paper should be more than a series of quotes—the paper is to reflect your own thought. You are welcome to paraphrase what another author says (and if you have paraphrased, it is still appropriate to give a citation), but sometimes the author said it so well that you would like to quote it.

If your quote is longer than four lines, it should be formatted as a separate paragraph. You should indent the paragraph ½ inch on the left and ½ inch on the right. This is called a “block quote.” Since the formatting indicates that it is a quote, quote marks are not needed. If there is a quote inside of the quote, you should alternate double and single quote marks.<sup>7</sup>

When you quote, you should quote exactly. Do not change words, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or meaning. If you leave any words out in the middle of the quote, put in an ellipsis (three periods). If you add anything, put the additions inside of square brackets [sample].<sup>8</sup>

You may make the following alterations:

- You may change the capitalization of the first word. For example, if you start quoting in the middle of a sentence, you may capitalize the first word, because it is the first word of your sentence.
- You may omit footnote numbers from inside of a quote.
- You may change quote marks to single or double, so that they alternate in your quote.

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<sup>7</sup> This formatting is particularly helpful when the quote contains quote marks inside of it. When there are quotes within quotes, sometimes it is hard for the reader to know exactly where the larger quote stops. The block quotation style helps group it together. It may also alert the instructor if you are overly reliant on long quotes from other people, and not including enough thoughts of your own. American style is to start with double quotes; British style is to start with single quote marks.

<sup>8</sup> If the quote already uses square brackets, your footnote can let your readers know that the material in square brackets was from the first author, not from you. If you omit the first part of the original sentence, you do not need to begin the quote with an ellipsis.

- When Bible dictionaries capitalize key words or add an asterisk to refer readers to other dictionary articles, you do not need to keep the capitalization or asterisk.
- If you add or remove italics, your footnote should say what you have done.
- Most quotes need some introduction, such as: Smith says, “This is an example.” Use a comma after a short introductory phrase, a colon after a long one.
- You need to indicate whether you agree with the quote, and how it is relevant to your point. For long quotes, you need to pinpoint what part of the quote is most relevant.

For punctuation at the end of a quote, put periods and commas inside of the quote marks, then the closing quote marks,<sup>9</sup> then the footnote number. If you are quoting a scripture, do not put a period at the end of the quote – use closing quote marks, the citation in parentheses, and then the end-of-sentence punctuation. In a block quote, put the end-of-sentence punctuation, then the citation in parentheses.

## **Bibliography**

A bibliography is part of standard academic work. If a paper is only two pages long, and refers to only one or two books, and the bibliographic details have already been given for those books, then the bibliography is not crucial. But otherwise, you should give full bibliographic details for all the sources you refer to. You need to be attentive to the details.

Sources are listed alphabetically by author’s last name first, and to help the authors’ names stand out, and for specific sources to be easy to find, the bibliography uses a different paragraph format than the main body of the paper. The first line of each entry is flush left, and all

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<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth students may use the British style of putting punctuation after the closing quote marks.

other lines in that entry are indented ½ inch (in the Word paragraph format settings, this is called “hanging”). See also <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html>. This makes it easy to find the last name of the authors.

Here are examples for a book, a chapter within an edited book or encyclopedia, a magazine article, and an internet resource:

Bird, Michael F. *Introducing Paul: The Man, His Mission, and His Message*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Evans, Craig A. “Sorting Out the Synoptic Problem.” In *Reading the Gospels Today*, edited by Stanley E. Porter, 1-26. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.

Gathercole, Simon. “What Did Paul Really Mean?” *Christianity Today* 52 (Aug. 10, 2007): 13-18.

Stedman, Ray C. “False Forces.” *Peninsula Bible Church*. n.d.  
<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/4021/3306.html>.<sup>10</sup>

The title and subtitle of a book should always be italicized. The title is not always the same as what’s on the cover. (The marketing department will sometimes play around with capitalization, or add slogans to the title of the book.) For the official title of the book, see the copyright page (the reverse side of the title page), which often has the Library of Congress data. If the book is part of a series (as many commentaries are), you’ll see the name of the series. In bibliographic data, the series title is not italicized.

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<sup>10</sup> Include the full path (not just the domain name) of each internet article you use. That helps your readers find good information and investigate where bad information is coming from. “n.d.” stands for “no date”; n.p. for no page numbers. (In the printout of a normal web page, page numbers will depend on your browser settings. However, for a particularly long web page, it can be helpful to include the page number of the quote followed by the total number of pages, such as “page 12 of 27.” This lets the reader know it’s about 44 percent of the way through.) If the document is available as a PDF file, give its internet address and give page numbers.

## Computer details

We prefer that you submit your paper in Microsoft Word. This gives us more flexibility in how we display the paper when we read it, and how we add comments. If you do not have Word, then save your file in PDF format. Or you may use a document conversion service such as zamzar.com to change the format to “docx.” Some instructors use the comment feature in Word to make comments on your paper, so if you are unable to read Word documents, let us know and we will send our comments in another format.

Before you send the paper, use your word-processing program to check the spelling and the grammar. Proofread it yourself, too, or even better, get someone else to proofread it. Mistakes in grammar and spelling can affect your grade.

Since GCS is an online school, papers are submitted electronically on the website. Please name your document with your last name first—e.g., Smith Youth Ministry Paper. When your last name is in the document name, it makes it easier for the instructor to find your paper in a list of files, and to return the right paper to the right person.

Here are instructions for how to upload a paper:

- Click on the assignment link.
- Click on the “Add submission” button.
- Click “Add.”
- Click on “Choose file.”
- Find the file in your own computer, and double-click.
- Click “Upload this file.”
- Click the “Save Changes” button
- Last, click on “Submit assignment.”

## Grades

We will grade the paper within one week after the paper was due. Every paper has somewhat different requirements, but in general, a paper would be graded a C if it barely meets

the minimum requirements of the assignment. There are minimal facts and minimal analysis. A paper might be given a grade of B if the basic facts are included, with some analysis as to why those facts are significant. Papers might be given an A if they show research well beyond the minimum required, with a good explanation of how various facts fit together to help us understand the subject better.

Longer is not always better (the same is true for sermons). Ask the instructor if you are allowed to go beyond the recommended length.

Additional considerations for a grade include:

- Good grammar, spelling, format, and clear writing. The paper includes a clear thesis statement concisely presenting the primary conclusion of the paper.
- Good research, based on reputable sources, with quotes that are appropriate to the flow of your argument, and the significance of each quote is explained.
- Good analysis – identifying crucial issues, properly analyzing the validity of arguments used by others, and weighting the evidence well.
- Understanding the significance of the topic for contemporary use in ministry.