

# Appendix D

## Dr. Bui's Writing Tips and Rules From A to Z

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### A:

- Active vs. passive voice: Use the active voice so that your sentences are more concise:
  - “The dog bit the boy.” (active)
  - “The boy was bitten by the dog.” (passive)
- Affect vs. effect:
  - Affect is the verb form: “The students’ reading scores were affected by the instruction.”
  - Effect is the *noun* form: “There was a positive effect on the students’ reading scores.”
- Also: Do not start a sentence with “also”—use other transitions such as “in addition,” “further,” and so on.
- Always use APA format in the text and in the reference section.

### B:

- Back it up: When you make a definitive statement such as, “Students with disabilities perform lower on standardized tests,” you need to back this up with a citation.
- Buffers: Do not write paragraphs where every sentence ends with a citation. This makes the writing extremely choppy. You need to include buffer statements in between the citations where you are connecting the information or expanding/commenting on it in some way.

## C:

- Chairperson: Communicate frequently with your chairperson. When in doubt, or if you get stuck, make an appointment to see him. Do not hide from your chairperson, especially if you are not making steady progress.
- Citations in text use APA format.
- Colons: Only use them sparingly and when you're making a long list. Then number the items.
  - "The intervention included the following components: (a) blah, (b) blah blah, (c) blah blah blah, and (d) final blahs."
- Commas: Do not go crazy with your use of commas.
  - Use them with lists: "preferences, attitudes, and behavior."
  - Use them in between compound sentences: "The students increased their scores, and the teachers improved their instructional methods."
  - Use them after dependent clauses: "When the students were grouped by disability, there was a difference in their scores."

## D:

- Data are always plural. Say, "Data are" or "data were."
- Don't (do not) use contractions in the thesis at all—spell them all out.

## E:

- Edit, edit, edit. Read your writing aloud to make sure it makes sense. Then have someone else read it before you turn it in to your chairperson.
- Et al.: This can only be used if you have listed all the authors the first time or if there are six or more authors (see APA). If you are going to use it, then it should be (Bui et al., 2013).

## F:

- Fragments: Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences, such as "While they were taking the test," or "Because they had a disability."
- Fluency: Use transitions and segues so your writing is not choppy (see buffers).

## G:

- Graphs (all figures) follow APA format.

## H:

- Headings: Use three level headings if you want to organize using the three parallel ladders strategy.

I:

- “It” is a pronoun—do not start your sentence with “It.”

J:

- Jargon: Terms that are uncommon should be briefly defined in the text. Longer definitions belong in the definition of terms section in Chapter One.

K:

- Keep paragraph structure intact. Start the paragraph with a good topic sentence and then make sure all the sentences within the paragraph fit the topic sentence.

L:

- Label all the acronyms the first time they appear: “students with learning disabilities (LD)”—after that, you can use the acronym alone, “students with LD.”

M:

- Match the subject with the appropriate pronoun: “The *student’s* score and *her* attitude.” “The *students’* scores and *their* attitudes.”
- Multiple works: When you have multiple works, group them together in alphabetical order—“Students of color are overrepresented in special education (Bobbett, 2004; Bui, 2008; Edwards, 2005; Hawk & Lee, 2013).”

N:

- Numbers should always be spelled out when they start a sentence. Spell out numbers under 10 and use figures to express numbers 10 and above.

O:

- Organizational structure: Be sure to structure your chapters using the three parallel ladders strategy.
- Outline: Before you write, you should create an outline of the topic sentence for each paragraph. Then you can see if your paper has funneled correctly in the Introduction and if you have the three related areas in the *Statement of the Problem* and the *Background and Need*.

P:

- Pace yourself: Set a writing goal for yourself every day whether it is a time goal or a completion goal. Do not wait two weeks before the thesis deadline. This is not something you can “wing” at the last minute.

- Paraphrase; do not plagiarize.
- Possessives:
  - For singular, the apostrophe goes before the "s"—"The teacher's class had eight students."
  - For plural, the apostrophe goes after the "s"—"The teachers' classes had a total of 50 students."

Q:

- Quotes: Use quotes sparingly, and if you do, you need to cite the exact page number from the source.

R:

- References: Look to see how APA formats citations in the text and in the reference list.
- Rhetorical questions: Do not ask rhetorical questions in the text.
- Run-on sentences: Break "long" sentences into shorter ones. This does not mean you should only write simple sentences. However, if your "sentence" is longer than four lines, it is probably a run-on sentence.

S:

- Save: Press the "save" button every time you finish writing a sentence or paragraph—this will keep you from having a nervous breakdown when your computer freezes.
- Segues and transitions: Make sure to segue between paragraphs. Headers are not transitions.
- Semicolons: Semicolons are used to separate independent clauses: "The students' behavior was atrocious; the teacher sent them to the principal's office." If you are not certain of whether or not to use a semicolon, use a period instead.
- Soften your language: Unless you have evidence to back it up (with a citation), you should soften your statement so it is not so definitive.
  - "Students' low motivation causes them to have poor self-esteem"—strong statement, needs a citation.
  - "Students' low motivation may negatively affect their self-esteem"—softer, does not need a citation.

T:

- Tense: 95% of the thesis will be in the past tense since most of the research has already been conducted.
- Their/there: *Their* is used to show possession—"Their behaviors were inappropriate." This is different from *there*, which indicates location—"The books are over there."

## U:

- Use “people first” language:
  - “Students receiving special education services”
  - “Students with disabilities”
  - “Students with special needs”
  - “Students with autism”
- Use formal, technical language and terms. Do not use informal language, slang, or vernacular, and do not “preach” to the reader (no standing on a soapbox).

## V:

- Value judgments: Do not use words that express worth or value. For example: “There were only eight students in the study.” “The students finally improved on their tests.” “The mean gains from pre to posttest were piti-ful.”
- Versions: Always date and properly label the versions of your writing—this will keep you from revising an old draft.

## W:

- Write, write, and rewrite.
- Writing center: If you need writing help, get it!

## X:

- Xerox copies: Have some form of copy of your writing—either in hard copy or electronic. E-mail drafts to yourself or save it on a jump drive, external hard drive, or “cloud” storage provider. Computers crash all the time—you do not have to.

## Y:

- You: “You” do not belong in the thesis—neither do we, our, I, us—always keep the writing in the third person (check with your chairperson).

## Z:

- ZZZZZZZ . . . get sleep. Writing is easier when you are rested. Take frequent (but short) breaks to rest your eyes—blink a lot when you are at the computer (do not strain your eyes). Write difficult sections when you are most alert. If you are hitting a mental writing block, do a less demanding task such as typing up your references.