

# PREPARING YOUR SUBMISSION FOR *ASPEERS*

In the following paragraphs, we have compiled a list of guidelines and specific pieces of advice that are meant to help you in preparing your paper for submission to *aspeers*.

## 1 General Considerations and Formal Features

Generally, *aspeers* embraces the diversity of academic traditions and formal styles prevalent in European higher education. We do, however, also notice a responsibility to help foster disciplinary unity and to encourage scholarship to adhere to a particular formal and intellectual style. This style is based in a US tradition of academic writing and in the traditions of the field of American studies. All academic styles undoubtedly are historically contingent, but this disciplinary tradition, implicitly or explicitly, shapes the expectations of our readers and our referees. Although we have no desire of overemphasizing disciplinary unity, we thus encourage you to adhere to the below guidelines on Argument, Structure, and Language in order to make your submission most successful.

### 1.1 Argument

As a most fundamental rule of thumb, *aspeers* prefers clarity of thought and of expression over complexity of sentence structure or wording.

Your paper needs to have a strong **thesis**. Please also make sure to organize your paper around this thesis and use all your arguments and readings to develop and prove it. Your whole paper in itself, in argument, language, and style of writing, thus has to be **argumentative**, not descriptive—it has to analyze, not describe. Accordingly, try to focus on functional relationships, not lists of observations.

Having a clear and precise thesis also helps your paper's **coherence**, a central feature of an effective scholarly argument. This means that your overall argument is easy to comprehend because your supporting arguments are presented in a logical and functional order and are effectively connected to strengthen your point. The same principle of organization should also be reflected in your paragraphs, each of which should contain ideas supporting only that paragraph's central thought. Both within and between paragraphs, appropriate transition signals (i.e. phrases such as 'first of all,' 'the second important characteristic,' and 'in conclusion') can improve coherence.

In fleshing out your argument, please keep in mind that *aspeers* has a diverse **audience** covering the full range of American studies. Not everybody will be familiar with the historical events or the primary (and secondary) texts you work with. Please use short sentences, possibly in footnotes, to contextualize events or texts to a degree that enables your readers to follow your argument. Also, please provide short plot summaries of the primary texts you use. If your paper gets accepted, our editors will help you decide how extensive such contextual information needs to be in order to best deliver your argument to our audience.

### 1.2 Structure

Your article must be preceded by an **abstract** of 160 to 200 words that summarizes what your paper focuses on and eventually achieves, preferably using the same vocabulary that you will use throughout the article.

Ideally, your **introduction** should include a general overview of the topic as well as an indication of its relevance for American studies and the issue's frame topic. It should conclude with a thesis statement that states what exactly you will argue. If possible, the thesis statement, or the passage before, also already foreshadows the structure of the article. Likewise, the **conclusion** should summarize your findings without introducing new aspects, ideally referring back to the introduction.

For **reader guidance**, especially so in longer papers, you should consider breaking up your argument into individual sections with short summaries at the end of these sections.

### 1.3 Language

Academic publications necessitate a **style of writing** that always strives to be objective, concrete, and specific rather than judgmental, speculative, or vague. Particularly, avoid rhetorical questions, insinuations, or vague suggestions that you merely propose to your readers. Instead, focus on argumentative content that you yourself fully endorse. Avoiding personal pronouns is another technique that can help with staying objective, but it should not unnecessarily obfuscate your writing. It is more important to check that you use arguments rather than opinions. Lastly, please also avoid language that is colloquial, informal, or potentially offensive to individuals or groups (i.e. that is considered ‘politically incorrect’).

In optimizing your paper’s readability, **paragraph length** is an important factor. Per paragraph, introduce one idea only and provide argumentative support in the paragraph’s body. Introducing only one main idea per paragraph helps your article’s **unity**. In the body of the paragraph, stick to the topic you introduced in the first sentence.

## 2 Documentation

Scholarly work always includes references to secondary texts, that is, to what other scholars have written about the topic. Secondary material is needed especially to provide your argument with a (theoretic) background, to ‘locate’ (i.e. position) your article in reference to previous work, and to support your interpretation.

In working with this material, you must indicate each and every instance in which you paraphrase or quote from a source. In addition, make absolutely sure that all the information you provide in your list of works cited is correct, complete, and without spelling mistakes. Take the necessary information from the title page (not the cover) of print publications and pay special attention to authors’ names, the full title (including subtitle) of a work, correct page ranges, as well as publication year, place, and the publisher.

Likewise, pay utmost attention to correctness when quoting or paraphrasing from somebody else—always double-check that the wording is correct and that you do not introduce typos or spelling mistakes or ‘repair’ mistakes in the original. In short, make sure to exactly reproduce the original. Also double- and triple-check that the page numbers are correct, that a paraphrase is accurate (neither a quote that should be marked as such nor a distortion of what the original says), and that all quotations and paraphrases are correctly attributed to the right source, avoiding any instances of vague source attribution.

Missing or ambiguous attribution of a paraphrase or quotation can constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism will eliminate your paper from the final volume at any stage of the review process and can have other consequences as well. For information on how to indicate and cite from sources, please refer to section 3.2 of this document.

## 3 The *aspeers* House Style / Deviations from the MLA

*aspeers* follows strict guidelines for writing and documentation that we ask you to follow in preparing your submission. Generally, please obey the conventions of the Modern Language Association in its newest, seventh revision. These guidelines are published in the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (2008, 3rd ed.) and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (2009, 7th ed.).

However, the *aspeers* style sheet differs in some instances recorded here. Mainly, this applies to areas where the MLA style remains vague or unspecific and thus warrants further clarification. In

addition, there are some open deviations from MLA style that we feel are beneficial to clarity and consistency. The differences from and additions to MLA style are ordered topically below.

Like rules of grammar, these guidelines are evolving. Future additions are very likely, revisions of rules previously stated are possible, but not very probable. The most up-to-date version will always be available at [www.aspeers.com/style](http://www.aspeers.com/style), and we will comment on changes in the editors' blog. In any case, these guidelines represent the most recent public snapshot of what *aspeers* deems good style.

### **3.1 Writing: Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation, etc.**

Generally, please keep formatting in your document to a minimum. We adjust papers to our own design format; less formatting makes the conversion easier. For instance, please ensure that the text does not contain hidden breaks, tabs, or spaces.

#### **3.1.1 General Spelling**

As a reference for correct spelling (see also *Style Manual* 3.3; *Handbook* 3.1), please use Merriam Webster's latest *Unabridged* version, to be found online at <http://unabridged.m-w.com>. (A free version is also available at <http://www.m-w.com>. In case of differences between these two publications, the spelling in *Unabridged* is preferred.) Should Merriam Webster list several possible spellings for a word, give preference to the main entry.

On capitalization, generally, follow the MLA's rules (*Style Manual* 3.7.1; *Handbook* 3.6.1). Adding specificity to the MLA's rule on capitalization after a colon, we ask you to capitalize the next word after a colon only if it begins a complete sentence.

#### **3.1.2 Hyphens**

For the use of hyphens generally, refer to the MLA (*Style Manual* 3.4.6; *Handbook* 3.2.6); for individual words, refer to Merriam Webster. Languages and spelling constantly evolve, and the use of hyphens seems to be one of the most fluid categories (with a general trend from open to hyphenated to closed). In specific cases, the closed spelling might already have become widely accepted, and in consideration of pronunciation, readability, and unambiguity, the final decision in these cases rests with the editors of *aspeers*, who will line-edit all papers selected for publication.

As regards the spelling of so-called hyphenated Americans, to avoid political bias or controversy, do not use any hyphens, neither for nouns nor for adjectives. For instance, write **African American**, **Chinese American literature**, **Italian Americans**.

#### **3.1.3 Italics for Foreign Words**

Generally, do not italicize foreign words. Only use italics if the word is not listed in Merriam Webster or if the meaning of the word is part of a specific register. For instance, italicize *hubris* when it does not simply refer to exaggerated self-confidence, but to the concept in Greek tragedy.

#### **3.1.4 Double and Single Quotation Marks**

Use double quotation marks only for quotations. Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations. Furthermore, use single quotation marks (not italics as the MLA suggests) to draw attention to a word as a word or to mark purposefully misused words. For instance, write **they found the term 'domestic violence' for it** for drawing attention to a word as a word, or, for a purposefully misused word, the Syndicate's **'laws'** (which were not truly legal tracts written down anywhere, but rules enforced by the mob as if they were laws).

In accordance with the MLA, you do not need to mark a word as a word if it follows 'so-called.' For example, write **a seven-year-long so-called national crisis**.

### 3.1.5 Commas

If you need further guidance on the use of commas other than what the MLA stipulates, we suggest using the relevant sections in the *Chicago Manual of Style* (2003, 15th ed.). Please pay special attention to the distinction between restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases, as these entail set consequences for the use of commas.

Still, there are some instances where the use of commas is not fixed but subject to the author's discretion. Obvious examples are the use of a comma to indicate a pause in a sentence and the question of what constitutes a "long introductory phrase" (as the MLA calls it) that gets separated from the sentence by a comma. In general, please be aware of these situations and use commas sensibly in these cases, always focusing on improving understanding and avoiding ambiguity.

## 3.2 Documentation

You must pay utmost attention to providing correct and sufficient information whenever you use sources (see section 2), either as inspiration for a general thought or as a source for quotation or paraphrases. When you do, please follow the MLA style sheet that will tell you how to document quotations, paraphrases, and how to set up a proper list of works cited (see *Style Manual* chapters 6 and 7; *Handbook* chapters 5 and 6). Deviations from and additions to MLA style in documentation are listed below.

### 3.2.1 Relevant Information in Bibliographic Entries

Contrary to what the MLA suggests, do not include whether a book is part of a series as long as this information is not pertinent to finding the relevant publication.

While the MLA generally merely allows for cross-referencing, this is not optional in our style sheet. As soon as you use two or more publications that are part of the same larger work, cross-reference them (for more information on cross-referencing, see *Style Manual* 6.4.6; *Handbook* 5.3.6).

### 3.2.2 Electronic Sources

The seventh revision of the MLA style introduced new guidelines for listing electronic sources. Unfortunately, the stipulations on how to find some of the information remain vague. For *aspeers*, we ask you to indicate the individual parts of the bibliographic entry as follows:

**Title of the overall web site.** For the correct spelling of the overall web site, use what your browser has as a window title when viewing the page (also to be found in the <title> tag in the source code of a web site). For instance, as of April 15, 2010, the title of <http://www.nytimes.com/> would be *The New York Times*, whereas for <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, it would be *washingtonpost.com*.

**Publisher/Sponsor.** It can be difficult to exactly determine what or who the publisher or sponsor of a web site is supposed to be, since many companies are subsidiaries or branches of other companies, making the necessary information hard to find. Thus, as the publisher/sponsor, use the registrant of the domain, who can be seen as the sponsor of a web site in the most direct sense. To find out the registrant of a domain, use web sites such as <http://www.whois.sc> (for .com domains), <http://www.denic.de> (for .de domains), and <http://www.dotgov.gov> (for .gov domains). In case of private persons publishing a web site or unresolvable difficulties in finding out the publisher/sponsor, 'n.p.' ('no publisher') should be used. Abbreviate publishers' names as much as possible, in accordance with the relevant MLA rules (*Style Manual* 8.5; *Handbook* 7.5).

### 3.2.3 Modifications to Citations

When modifying a word in a citation, put the changed or added characters in brackets if the word's stem remains untouched. If the modification entails a stem change or if you omit characters present in the original, set off the entire word in brackets. Simplified examples of how an original sentence changes can be found below:

- There is a political attitude. → He adds that “[t]here is a political attitude.”
- He promotes torture. → Allegedly, he “promote[d] torture.”
- She acquainted them with the facts. → “[A]cquaint[ing] them with the facts,” ...
- They went to catch a mockingbird. → After they “[caught] a mockingbird,” ...
- The NSA has monitored the email. → It authorized them to “[monitor] the email.”

To indicate an omission of words or sentences in quotations, always use brackets for your own ellipsis and no brackets with spaces only for original ellipsis.

Original ellipsis: “The . . . report estimates an unexpected increase.”

Your ellipsis: “The . . . report estimates an [...] increase.”

There is no need to explicitly draw attention to emphasis (i.e. italics or underscores) in the original text you quote. Simply copy the original emphasis and trust your readers to understand that the emphasis was in the original. However, if you add emphasis to a quote, identify it by introducing ‘my emphasis’ or ‘emphasis mine’ in parentheses after the quote.

### 3.2.4 Alphabetizing of Numerals

In alphabetizing your list of works cited, please sort numerals numerically, not, as the MLA suggests, as if they were spelled out. For instance, alphabetize *Lethal Weapon 2* before *Lethal Weapon 3*, even though, if spelled out, *Lethal Weapon Three* would come before *Lethal Weapon Two*.

### 3.2.5 Texts Mentioned Only Briefly

You do not need to include a bibliographic reference for texts you only mention in passing, as long as you do not use them as part of your argument and make sure not to quote/paraphrase from them. However, do ensure that the passing reference contains sufficient information to identify the work unambiguously.

### 3.2.6 Stage Directions in Quotations of Dialogue

When quoting dialogue (e.g. from a film or a play) and indicating stage directions (*Style Manual* 3.9.4; *Handbook* 3.7.4), *aspeers* opts for greater consistency in formatting, thus overriding your source’s formatting choices: Place stage directions after the period, italicize them, and put them in brackets. For instance, write

NICKY. [*voice-over*] To them, ...

### 3.2.7 Quotations in Parentheses

In the rare case that you put a quote in parentheses or otherwise have to indicate a source inside parentheses, use brackets for this. For instance, write ... insists on the “discursive nature” (14) of science (similar to notions of “discursive constructedness” [Sokal 123]).

### 3.2.8 Timestamp for Films, TV Series, etc.

When quoting from films, TV series, or other types of audiovisual media, you should indicate the timestamp for the beginning of the quote (in the format ‘hours:minutes:seconds’ with double digits for the minutes and seconds: 1:22:33). However, this may be omitted for scenes that can very easily be found through the context of your descriptions as well as for most TV series, as individual episodes are usually not as long as a film. When in doubt, add the timestamp.