Unit 4, Module 11, Video 1: Guidelines on Style, Mechanics, and Language Usage

As with Module 10, to work through this module, you’ll need your copy of Galvan, and you will also need your first draft of your literature review. If it has not yet gone through a peer review, you can go ahead and apply the guidance in this chapter and module, but if not, that’s okay. These are generally the sorts of considerations that you will want to address after you have clarified the line of thought in your work.

This video is also a bit on the long side, and you may not want to do this all in one session. You should be able to stop at just about any step and come back to it. Depending on the state of your draft, it will probably take you about an hour.

Assignment

I am going to ask you to do something that I’d actually advised against in one-author manuscripts: I want you to enable Word’s Track Changes feature to record the revisions that you made while you were going through this module. You will then upload that document to Zotero. It could be your first draft. Or, if you want to continue working on it and revising, that’s fine. Afterward, turn off Track Changes and keep working, if you would like. Ideally, though, you’ll do this after peer review but before your first draft is submitted.

Also, as with Module 10, this will be an iterative process, which means you will re-read it several times. One difference, though, is that I am going to consider Galvan’s guidelines somewhat out of order, as I want to foreground a topic that we’ve not directly addressed, but one that makes some students nervous: plagiarism. So, read Guideline 14, Use great care to avoid plagiarism.

Guideline 11.14: Use great care to avoid plagiarism.

As a UVM student, you have agreed to follow several policies about your behavior, both within courses and outside strictly academic settings. These are the broader Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities and then the Code of Academic Integrity, as well as a handy and informative list of frequently asked questions. You can get to these by clicking the links on the List of Online Resources. You may not be interested in reading all of them right now, but I want to present and then elaborate on the Academic-Integrity Code’s definition of plagiarism, but I’m going to divide it into 2 sections. :

1. Students may not plagiarize.

All ideas, arguments, and phrases, submitted without attribution to other sources must be the creative product of the student. Thus, all text passages taken from the works of other authors (published or unpublished) must be properly cited....Violations of this standard constitute plagiarism.
This is the aspect of the code that is most familiar to most students. Something that may not be as well known is this: instructors do not have the authority to establish the *intent* behind verbatim transcription of text without proper citation. In other words, I might detect such a thing in a piece of work. But I cannot take the logical leap and infer that it was intentional—and intended to deceive me or any other reader. That can only be done by the Center for Student Ethics and Standards. They have the responsibility of following UVM’s side of the policy in terms of due process.

I’m bringing this up now, at this level of detail, because I want you to understand your rights as a student. If another instructor accuses you of plagiarism, don’t freak out. But calmly ask if they intend to refer the matter to the Center. If they do not, but they tell you that they plan on deducting points, then (again, calmly) I’d suggest that you contact the Center and explain the situation. That’s because it’s a violation of the policy to deduct points, even for ‘technical’ problem, as you can see here in the policy.

Okay, then, let’s focus on how you can best prevent the appearance of plagiarism. It’s actually pretty simple, but difficult (as is the case with lots of important things in life!) Here goes: don’t copy and paste from your sources. EVER. In fact, the most fail-safe method is to do your work without looking at your sources.

What, you might say? And this points to the rationale for taking and using notes on the sources: they should represent your interpretation of the source, with an emphasis on the themes that it contains. Alright, let’s now look at the second part of the policy.

The same applies to paraphrased text, opinions, data, examples, illustrations, and all other creative work. Violations of this standard constitute plagiarism.

This, in my experience, is where students are more likely to get into trouble. There is a very strong temptation, I think, to copy, paste, change some words. That’s paraphrasing, sometimes called patch writing. Again, the preventative measure is simple: don’t write while looking at the source’s text: work from your notes.

The last of Galvan’s guidelines just advises you to get help when you need it and that’s really all I’ve got to say about that – I agree! So now I want to start from the top. Read through Guideline 1. As you do, imagine what I'm going to say about it. Hint: it has something to do with prior advice about how to use some of Word’s neat features.

**Guideline 11.1: Compare your draft with your topic outline.**

Here’s the deal: you don’t have to compare your draft to an outline if the headers *in* the draft *are* your outline. This also gets at a principle that I try and follow: minimize the number of documents that contain basically the same information. That way, you don’t have to keep them synchronized, which is really wasted effort. Next guideline.
Guideline 11.2: Check the structure of your review for parallelism.

This is a principle of writing that you probably have already encountered, and it may be something that’s so engrained in your habits that it seems to come naturally. I’d like for you to pause the video, review your draft, and look for this feature. If anything is lacking, you can fix it now or insert a comment reminding you to go back and do that later. After you’ve done that, I’d like to discuss the next guideline, which gets at an important aspect of APA writing style.

Guideline 11.3: Avoid direct quotations, especially long ones.

You may notice that I deleted the word, overusing. That’s because, in my experience, students tend to use quotations, but for a very good reason: they want to make sure that they have not misrepresented the source, and are especially worried that they will when they aren’t feeling like subject-matter experts.

Like I said, this is understandable. But both as an explicit matter of APA style, and as an important part of the exercise of carefully analyzing your sources, it’s important to resist this urge.

Chances are good that you’ve already done this and removing those quotations will take more time than you’ve got between now and your next deadline. If that’s the case, then I’d suggest pausing the video now, looking for this, and putting in comments—notes to yourself about revisions you’ll need to make.

I’m skipping the next guideline because, of course, you’re liberated from having to learn all these rules and letting Zotero do the work for you. Now, then read Guideline 5, which is long (in part because of a helpful example) and I’ll have a couple of things to say about it.

Guideline 11.5: Avoid using synonyms for recurring words concepts.

I’m going to pick on Galvan a bit here because I think that the, well, term, words, is confusing and misses the point he’s trying to make. Which is this: when you’re writing about a specific concept, resist the urge to refer to it by synonyms. That’s because chances are good that the alternate term is not a true synonym, or a different word with the same meaning.

So here’s what’s a bit unclear in this guidance. Use the same word for the same concept, every time. Even though it may seem to render the prose a bit repetitive and sing-songy. However, for other words, ones that do not refer to specific concepts or things, then use your judgment to employ synonyms that might then make the text easier to read.

This would be a great time to pause the video, and carefully review your draft with this in mind. Confirm that you’ve used the same term for concepts, and have used
synonyms only in other contexts. Then, I’d suggest you take a break before continuing on.

**Guideline 11.6: Spell out acronyms, but avoid them if you can.**

I’m again slightly re-casting Galvan’s advice because, in literature reviews, acronyms are often more confusing than they are helpful. Now, as you are reading original research reports, chances are very good that you’ll encounter them. Amongst other things they save space and help cut down the size of articles. But in a literature review, I’d take the lead from your source documents: if they don’t use an acronym for a concept, then chances are that it was an intentional choice on their part, and you can take their lead.

As before, while you’re thinking about the topic, if you used any acronyms, review those choices and see if you think that they are absolutely necessary. And if you’ve any doubt, check your original sources.

The next 4 guidelines stand on their own pretty well. Read them. Then read Guideline 11.11 and I’ve a few things to say about it.

**Guideline 11.11: Check your draft for common writing conventions**

I think that this is one of the most difficult and ambitious propositions in Galvan’s book. But it’s also a sort of grab bag and I think that the items in his list are categorically somewhat distinct. So, for example, the more-or-less mechanical considerations about numbers (e and g) are, in my opinion, rather cut and dried. Rules. The admonition to be clear should be familiar, as I long ago invited you to write in a manner that was *clear, concise, and concrete.*

Similarly, it is inconsistent with APA writing style to infer bias of any kind, not just sexism (as per item c). There’s a good elaboration of this point at the Purdue OWL. Pause the video and go read that—there’s a link on the links page: *Purdue OWL on avoiding bias.* You may notice that there are links at the OWL to further information on these matters at the APA web site. Okay, stay with me: we’re nearly done!

**Guideline 11.12: Write a concise and descriptive title.**

Titles matter—more than you might think. There are sometimes extensive negotiations between author and journal editor, usually because the author wants the title to make the research's results as strong and important as possible, while editors may be interested in caution and restraint. I think Galvan’s advice is good, but I would also make this – along with the Abstract – something you work on at or near the end, as the scope of your work may change during the course of your working on it.

Guideline 13 is all well and good and I really have nothing to add. We started out with a consideration of 14, and you already know about 15.
So with that, you’re done with this module! Just remember to upload a copy of your draft where you’d turned on *Track Changes* and let us see the ways you made your good work even better.