

Why is good writing important?

- The primary way you will be communicating your research, data, ideas, and understanding of public health topics in school will be though writing.
- 2 Good writing both contributes to and reflects good thinking.
- Potential employers will learn about your skills, experience, and interests primarily through your writing (e.g., resume, cover letter, writing sample).
- As a public health professional, you will be expected to produce high- quality professional communication products (e.g., manuscripts, reports) in writing.



Before you start, think about what you are going to do.



Before you begin, ask yourself:

- What kind of writing is this? (e.g., research paper, policy brief, compare/contrast essay)?
- What does writing like this usually look like? (You can find examples from your professor or online to get an idea of the appropriate format and structure.)
- What will I include? (It's a good idea to make an outline first.)
- Who is the audience? (In school, it is usually the instructor, but not always. In any context, the audience determines the tone, formality, and vocabulary.)
- How will my writing be evaluated (e.g., grading rubric)? (Knowing this can help you ensure your writing meets expectations and earns a good grade!)

Use the best words.



A varied vocabulary increases precision and minimizes repetition.

Example

The researchers...

- state
- argue
- explain
- discuss
- contend
- hypothesize
- clarify
- describe
- claim
- maintain

Look for Synonyms

Choosing the most precise and descriptive words is one of the keys to good writing. Consult a thesaurus regularly to find the best words to express your ideas.

*To find a list of synonyms, right click on the word and go to synonyms in the dropdown menu

Use Formal Vocabulary

Writing is not the same as talking (or texting). For academic writing, use more formal vocabulary and avoid using contractions.

Res No Yes a lot of many kind of somewhat besides other than till until
--

Note: In formal writing, using phrases like "I believe.." or "I think..." is rare. It is assumed that what you write is what you think/believe to be true.

Avoid Using Some Words and Phrases

"etc."

Example

Rubella was declared eliminated in the Americas in 2015; however, the virus continues to circulate widely, especially in Africa, the Middle East, etc.

Better

Rubella was declared eliminated in the Americas in 2015; however, the virus continues to circulate widely in Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the world.

"there is/there are"

Example

There are some vaccines that prevent infection from more than one virus.

Better

Some vaccines prevent infection from more than one virus.

Avoid Using Some Words and Phrases

this/that/those/these without the noun

Example

The patient distanced herself from environments in which smoking was common. However, this was not sufficient.

Better

The patient distanced herself from environments in which smoking was common. However, this strategy was not sufficient.

it

Example

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus emerged and caused an outbreak of unusual viral pneumonia. It has surpassed SARS and MERS in the spatial range of epidemic areas.

Better

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus emerged and caused an outbreak of unusual viral pneumonia. The virus has surpassed SARS and MERS in the spatial range of epidemic areas.

NOTE:

Some words should be avoided because they are less commonly used in American English than British English.

Examples:

Amongst (use among)
Firstly (use first)

Put the right words together

Collocations are words that are often combined, like **take** and **exam**, or **make** and **suggestion**. Make sure to use the words that most commonly go together.



Subjects and Verbs

These subjects and verbs are commonly used together:

- The **authors conducted** a study to...
- The **results indicated** that...
- The **theory posits** that...

Make sure to use the right verbs.

Example

The results **concluded** that there was no correlation.

Results cannot conclude anything, only people (e.g., researchers, authors, scientists) can conclude something. A better verb here would be, for example, **indicated.**

Verbs and Prepositions

These verbs and prepositions are commonly used together:

- Absorb in
- Abstain from
- Acquaint with
- Adapt to
- Charge with
- Comply with
- Confide in
- Consent to
- Elaborate on
- Infer from
- Prevent from
- Recover from
- Reply to
- Result in
- Stem from

Make sure to use the right prepositions.

Example

The report listed the health threats by of cigarette smoking.

Common Errors

return back

(the word **back** is unnecessary)

based off of

(the correct phrase is **based on**)



Be concise.

Cut out all unnecessary words.

Examples:

"The reason is because" Replace with: **Because**

"The existing regulation"
Replace with: **The regulation**

"According to past history"
Replace with: According to history



To connect and ensure smooth transitions from one idea/sentence/paragraph to another, use transition words and phrases like:

Use transition words and phrases

Thus,
Moreover,
Likewise,
Equally important,
In addition to...



Format numbers correctly.

Spell out the numbers **0-9** (e.g., eight). Write numbers **10** and **over** in numerals (e.g., 23). Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.

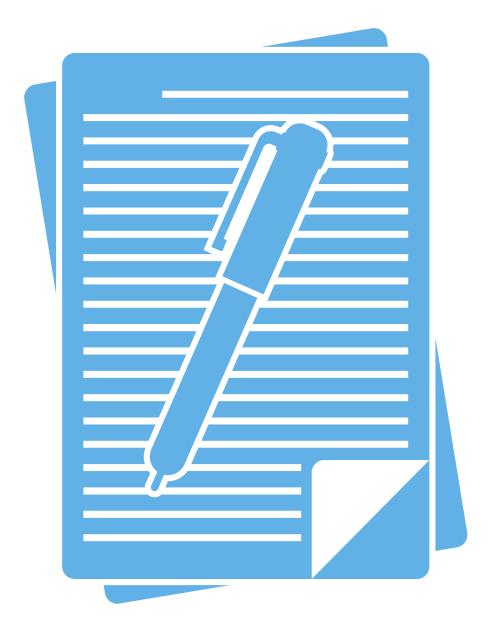
Example:

Of the **14** participants, two are opposed to the increases in funding, but **12** are in favor.

(Note: These rules may not apply for math/statistics.)



Follow grammar and punctuation rules.



When in doubt, Google it!

Capitalization

Only formal nouns are capitalized.

Examples:

- The Georgia Department of Health has designed new communication materials. (Georgia Department of Health is a formal noun; it is the official name of an agency.)
- None of the other state health departments had the resources to develop new communication materials. (State health departments is not a formal noun; it is not the official name of an agency.)

Formal nouns include the titles of written works.

Capitalize the words in titles, except for prepositions (e.g., of) and articles (e.g., the). Capitalize prepositions and articles only at the beginning or following a colon.

Examples:

- The title of the article is "The Benefits of the Application of Geographical Information Systems in Public and Environmental Health."
- The author's new book is called Climate Change: A Look at the Looming Disaster.

Capitalization

DO **NOT** capitalize the names of:



concepts
diseases
disorders
treatments
theories
hypotheses
principles

Examples:

cancer cognitive behavior therapy

DO capitalize a person's name when it is part of a term.

Examples:

Alzheimer's disease Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Commas

Only use a comma with a conjunction (and/but/or) to separate clauses with different subjects.

Example:

Forecasting is a process that identifies the recommended immunizations and delivers these recommendations to the healthcare provider.

(Forecasting is the subject.)

Example:

These patients are often older when they develop chronic medical conditions, and some may be at higher risk of having more than one underlying medical condition.

(Patients is the subject of the first clause. Some is the subject of the second clause.)

Apostrophes and Quotation Marks

Apostrophes

Add an apostrophe after the -s to make a plural noun possessive.

Example:

Both researchers' findings were presented at the conference.

Quotation Marks

Use double quotation marks for quoted material.

Example:

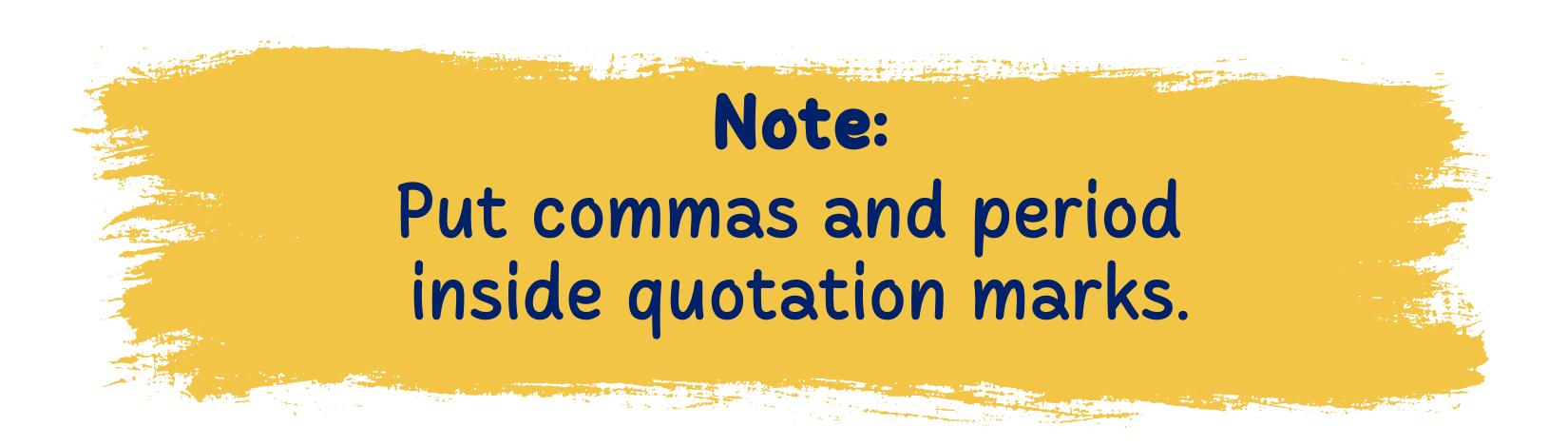
According to the CDC, in some cases, "a person with post-COVID conditions may not have tested positive for the virus or known they were infected."

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

Example:

The speakers said, "We are developing COVID therapies for 'long-haulers."





Example:

"I am a risk communication specialist," she said, "but this crisis has posed unique challenges for me as well."

Colons and Semicolons

Colons

Use a colon to introduce a list following a clause.

Example

The manuscript comprises four parts: introduction, methods, results, and discussion.

Semicolons

Use a semicolon to connect two closely related clauses.

Example

The theory was very well received; many researchers used it as the basis for designing smoking cessation interventions.

Note: clause = subject + verb

Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens:

Use hyphens in words.

Example:

The decision-making process was difficult.

Dashes:

Use dashes **between** words.

Example:

The process - including emailing the participants and making calls - was time consuming.

Hyphens are used in compound words that precede and modify a noun.

Examples:

The researchers will **follow up** after one month. The volunteers conducted 23 **follow-up** calls.

Many of the programs were expected to be of **high quality**.

None of the **high-quality** programs were included in the evaluation.

Write time periods using either to/from or during/hyphen.

Examples:

The model includes data from **2001 to 2009**. The model includes data during **2001-2009**.

Acronyms and Spelling

Acronyms

The first time you use an acronym, spell out the words and put the acronym in parentheses.

Example

Two representatives of the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NAACHO) attended the meeting. NAACHO's mission is to "improve the health of communities by strenghtening and advocating for local health departments."

Spelling

Always check your spelling. Some commonly misspelled words include:

- lose (opposite of win) and loose (not tight)
- **every day** (two words: daily) and **everyday** (one word: not special, regular.
- affect (as a verb: to make an impact/cause as a result) and effect (noun: result/outcome).

Note: dont ignore red squiggly marks under words



Verb Tenses

Verbs must agree in tense (time) and number (singular or plural) with the subject.

Example:

The 2018 narratives was based on the transportation theory.



The 2018 narratives are based on the transportation theory.



• The 2018 narratives were based on the transportation theory.



i.e. and e.g.

i.e. is used to mean in other words.

Example:

Only one group of hospital employees (i.e., the administrative staff) was able to work remotely.

e.g is used to mean for example.

Example:

Many common childhood diseases (e.g., measles) are caused by a virus.

Note: both i.e. and e.g. are followed by commas

Which and That

Which

Use which to introduce an independent clause. Separate the clause with commas.

Example:

The report, which introduced new data, was issued last week. (**Which introduced new data** is an independent clause because, while it adds information, it is not used to specify which report.

That

Use **that** and **no** comma for a dependent clause.

Example:

The report that introdiced new data was issued last week. (**That introduced new data** is a dependent clause because it specifies which report was issued last week.)

Parallelism

Sentences should used parallel structure (e.g., phrases or clauses that have the same grammatical structure).

Example:

She likes cooking, jogging, and reading.



Be consistent.

Use the same elements (e.g., tone, terms, punctuation, spelling, font size/style) throughout a document.

Consistency

Consistency also means the first word of each bullet point or list should have the same grammatical form (e.g., noun, gerund).

Example:

Do these things to keep your family safe:

- Take action: collect emergency supplies for your family
- Plan ahead: Know how the pandemic has affected emergency response.
- Create community: Find ways to support your neighbors.

Use appropriate citation and reference formatting.

Examples

APA

Sargent, J. (n.d.) Anorexia nervosa: Judy's story. http://www.angelfire.com/ms/anorexianervosa/

MLA

Sargent, Judy. Anorexia Nervosa: Judy's Story. 24 May 2020.

http://www.angelfire.com/ms/anorexianervosa/



Check the lengths of paragraphs and sentences.

 To avoid run on sentences, keep your sentences to 15-30 words.

To avoid "walls of text", keep paragraphs at around **3-5** sentences.

Example

Too Long

Social marketing — the use of marketing to design and implement programs to promote socially beneficial behavior change — has grown in popularity and usage within the public health community, though many public health professionals have an incomplete understanding of the field.

Better

The sentence has been broken up into two shorter sentences.

Social marketing — the use of marketing to design and implement programs to promote socially beneficial behavior change — has grown in popularity and usage within the public health community. Still, many public health professionals have an incomplete understanding of the field.

Example

Too Long

Extreme heat events have long threatened public health in the United States. Many cities, including St. Louis, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cincinnati, have suffered dramatic increases in death rates during heat waves. Deaths result from heat stroke and related conditions, but also from cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and cerebrovascular disease. Heat waves are also associated with increased hospital admissions for cardiovascular, kidney, and respiratory disorders. Extreme summer heat is increasing in the United States, and climate projections indicate that extreme heat events will be more frequent and intense in coming decades. Some heat-related illness and death risks have diminished in recent decades, possibly due to better forecasting, heat-health early warning systems, and/or increased access to air conditioning for the U.S. population. However, extreme heat events remain a cause of preventable death nationwide. Urban heat islands, combined with an aging population and increased urbanization, are projected to increase the vulnerability of urban populations to heat-related health impacts in the future. Milder winters resulting from a warming climate can reduce illness, injuries, and deaths associated with cold and snow. Vulnerability to winter weather depends on many non-climate factors, including housing, age, and baseline health. While deaths and injuries related to extreme cold events are projected to decline due to climate change, these reductions are not expected to compensate for the increase in heatrelated deaths.

Example: Better

The paragraph has been broken up into three paragraphs according to sub-topics.

Extreme heat events have long threatened public health in the United States. Many cities, including St. Louis, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cincinnati, have suffered dramatic increases in death rates during heat waves. Deaths result from heat stroke and related conditions, but also from cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and cerebrovascular disease. Heat waves are also associated with increased hospital admissions for cardiovascular, kidney, and respiratory disorders. Extreme summer heat is increasing in the United States, and climate projections indicate that extreme heat events will be more frequent and intense in coming decades.

Some heat-related illness and death risks have diminished in recent decades, possibly due to better forecasting, heat-health early warning systems, and/or increased access to air conditioning for the U.S. population. However, extreme heat events remain a cause of preventable death nationwide. Urban heat islands, combined with an aging population and increased urbanization, are projected to increase the vulnerability of urban populations to heat-related health impacts in the future.

Milder winters resulting from a warming climate can reduce illness, injuries, and deaths associated with cold and snow. Vulnerability to winter weather depends on many non-climate factors, including housing, age, and baseline health. While deaths and injuries related to extreme cold events are projected to decline due to climate change, these reductions are not expected to compensate for the increase in heat-related deaths.



Check the spacing between words, sentences, and punctuation marks.

Can you find the three errors in spacing?

Perinatal strokes are a specific group of focal cerebrovascular injuries that occur early in brain development and affect an estimated 5 million people worldwide. The objective of this review isto describe the epidemiology, clinical presentations, pathophysiology, outcomes, and management for the six subtypes of perinatal stroke.

Answer

Perinatal strokes are a specific group of focal cerebrovascular injuries that occur early in brain development and affect an estimated 5 million people worldwide. The objective of this review isto describe the epidemiology, clinical presentations, pathophysiology, outcomes, and management for the six subtypes of perinatal stroke.

The Final Word

Writing is a skill just like any other. To improve your writing:

Look at how the pros do it.

While reading for one of your classes, notice how each text is written. Reading good writing and paying attention to things like tone, vocabulary and grammar can help you.

Learn from your mistakes.

To build a skill, you will need to make mistakes and then learn from them. Review corrections and feedback from your readers (professors, classmatets, tutors) and use that information to keep improving.

Get help.

RSPH offers free writiting support through the Academic Resource Center (ARC). Writing tutors are experts who can provide the kind of one-on-one feedback guidance, and support that can really make a difference.

Practice, practice, practice.

You will be doing alot of writing in graduate school. Use this opportuity to practice and improve!