



## School of Graduate Studies

### Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) Error Checklist

#### Common Errors Requiring Correction

This list of common errors serves as a guide for making corrections before you submit your thesis or dissertation. From time to time, another common error appears, and we update the list.

For detailed information on the correct grammatical detail or stylistic nuance, consult the manual of style that you have chosen to guide your work. According to our Handbook, the style choice must be the style guidelines of the major journal in your field. If you need help beyond that manual, try Google. While you must not reference Wikipedia, it is an excellent starting place for general information and the first look at almost everything. If it is complicated, try YouTube. Finally, Word has this amazing feature called “Help.” Exploit its powers.

***Use as Checklist (The Morgan Dissertation and Thesis Handbook includes detailed discussions of most of these):***

- 1. Font type in paging cannot be different from font in text (it may be smaller).  
This is a popular error. The default for Word is always showing up in the headers, while you have carefully selected a font for your manuscript.
- 2. Incorrect page numbering:  
Abstract not counted; Title page is “i” but is not placed on the page; Chapter 1 begins with page 1. This takes a few steps in Word to sort, but hundreds of people have done it. The position of the number must be an inch from the margin. If in the corner, an inch from both margins is expected.
- 3. Margins incorrect.  
Must be 1.5 inches on left, 1 inch elsewhere.
- 4. Landscape pages must have page number in proper location and orientation.  
When printed and bound, the number should not be sideways. The landscape page will be printed sideways, place the page number in the position and orientation so that it will appear upright when printed.
- 5. Incorrect ellipses: “...” should be “...” (three spaced dots).  
Word automatically spaces three consecutive periods like this: “...” and places a space on either side. **This is not an ellipses**, it is a “continuation symbol.” There are a number of variants, but the Chicago Manual of Style, the APA Manual, and the MLA Manual agree on the three spaced dot version: “...” (like this).
- 6. Incorrect “et al.” NOT: et. al.; et al.; *et al.*; etc.  
The comma following it depends upon the grammatical context: “... according to Author et al. (2012),” or “... as shown by researchers (Author et al., 2012).” (This is an APA example.)
- 7. Misuse of dashes.  
Dashes are not colons, and the em-dash “—” is different from an en-dash “–”; no dash or hyphen usage has spaces on either side of it. Sticking a dash into a sentence because

you do not know the correct punctuation is not allowed. There are seven major dash forms. Avoid dashes if you are uncertain.

- 8. Appendices that are in the wrong order or do not belong.

Appendices must be in the order of their discussion in the manuscript. If you do not discuss or at least mention the appendix in the text, **then it cannot be placed as an appendix**. By the way, the plural form of appendix is now appendices.

- 9. Style guides are very specific regarding the reference style.

Please review the submission with great care. Most of the rules for the references resolve to about three or four common types. Locate examples of each and copy the format.

- 10. The serial comma.

The serial comma (the comma before the “and” in “x, y, and z”) is required by all the style manuals. Again, all style manuals use the serial comma.

- 11. The standard indent for paragraphs is one-half inch.

Make the indent using the tab key. Do not use the space bar. Word adjusts the width of the silent spaces and will not reveal the adjustment until the page is printed.

- 12. Remove the trailing extra spaces between paragraphs.

APA and MLA require double spacing throughout. Word default modes have an added space between paragraphs. Please turn that off.

- 13. Periods and commas always go inside the quote marks.

Periods and commas always go inside the quote marks unless a reference follows, then after the closed parenthesis. Of course, the British put the punctuation after the quote marks. Unfortunately for the British empire, Morgan is in Maryland, and Maryland separated from Great Britain several centuries ago.

- 14. Back-to-back parentheses are not allowed by APA.

Do not use them. Either rephrase the sentence, or separate the items with a semi-colon inside a single set of parentheses.

- 15. Approval and degree award dates are month and year.

Your thesis or dissertation was approved during a month and year shown on the signature page, and your title page will indicate the month and year of the graduation. The abstract must show the month and year of the graduation as well.

- 16. IRB cannot be included.

Your role as the author is to maintain a record of the approvals, permissions to reprint images and figures, and even permissions to reprint long literary passages (if required). You keep these records available for inspection should someone challenge your right to reprint. Do not place them in the dissertation or thesis.

- 17. The dissertation or thesis will be available on the Internet.

Common sense alone dictates that you will not place phone numbers, addresses, ID numbers, or signatures in a Web-published work. Do you want your signature and phone number published on the Internet? Remove them from your digital copy.

18. The infamous “n.d.”

Please step back from the computer. The indication of “No Date” (n.d.) should be reserved for when you have found a physical document that has no date on it. Finding stuff on the internet that validates your view or claim is nice, but if you cannot identify who said it and when, then look for a better source. The sloppiness of whoever it was who posted the internet item should not be the reason for sloppiness in your research. As a scholar, chase down a better source. Besides, it is the Internet, and the original source, with date, place, and author, is out there. It has been several hundred years since books were printed without dates; journals have always had a date, and everything on the internet has a date stamp.

 19. On the title page, abstract, and signature pages, spell your name correctly.

If you spell it wrong, do it consistently. It has happened.

 20. Use the same title on the title page, abstract, and signature pages.

Also, spell all the words correctly. Yes, we have seen three different titles with various spellings for technical terms, and every other variation.

 21. Degree titles:

Either: PhD, EdD, DrPH, DEng

Or: Ph.D., Ed.D., Dr.P.H., D.Eng.

Not:

Ph.D

Ed.D

Dr.PH

And definitely not: Name M.B.A, PhD. We are seeing a lot of this: Last Name, Ed.D

 22. Widows and Orphans

When you start a paragraph on the last line of the page, or you place the last line of the paragraph on the next page, you have created a widow/orphan problem. The widow is the end of the paragraph, and orphan the first (per *Chicago Manual of Style*). Do not “orphan” the heading of a section. Turn on the widow/orphan control to manage text, but note that linking the heading to the following text requires a manual step.

 23. Degree in the Abstract.

In the abstract, put your name, spell out your degree, i.e., Doctor of Engineering, and place the correct month and year of the degree award, i.e., May 2019.

 24. Headings not properly centered.

Oddly, centered headings will often be on the center of the next line, thus they are centered on the indented first word and the right margin. Center headings between the left and right margin. Word’s “Help” can explain how this happens.

24. Double quote marks.

The only use of single quote marks is if they occur inside a passage marked with double quote marks; like so: “The only use of single quote marks is if ‘they’ occur inside a passage marked with double quote marks.” Do not use ‘scare’ quotes.

 25. Hyphens are not bullets, and they are not colons.

Using hyphens instead of bullets or colons is odd, because so doing replaces the start of an item (bullet, etc.) with the same punctuation mark used to separate a full stop like a word from its definition. Hyphens can split a word at the end of a line or can join two words. They should not be overworked.

 26. Use of Personal Titles

Do not include personal titles when referencing an individual, referring to his or her work except when the title is explicitly consequential, such as referring to President Obama or President Eisenhower, Governor Hogan or the Mayor. Scholars consider other uses arrogant and backward. Learn to distinguish between a name and a title.

 27. No periods in the dissertation title.

Take a look at any book, poem, pamphlet, journal article. There is not period at the end of the title. Ever. Do not put a period at the end of the title of your dissertation.

 28. References in the abstract.

We do not know when this started, but the abstract for a dissertation or a thesis is published in abstracts and thus very remote from your reference list. Avoid at all costs placing references in the abstract. If you are building on a seminal piece by a well-known author, find a way to refer to it in a narrative, descriptive voice that identifies the work.

 29. Ethnicity and race terms.

The American Psychological Association approach highly recommends parallel construction: Black and White; European, Asian, and African; but not mixing European and Black, or Caucasian and Black. There is a special issue with Caucasian. Caucasian derives from late nineteenth-century eugenics, and though it is still commonly used in legal circumstances, its parallels are avoided and recognized as racist (making is racist). It was wrong then, and it is still wrong. Let’s give some thought how we use it.