

Thesis and Dissertation Format

Avoiding Common Errors

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[Click here to watch the workshop video.](#)

Session Outline

1. How to Make Sure Your Document Has Correct Format
2. Editing Strategies for Correct Format of Your Document
4. Avoiding Formatting Errors: Examples (APA Style)
5. Responding to Editor's Comments

1. How to Make Sure Your Document Has the Correct Format

KNOW THE REQUIREMENTS

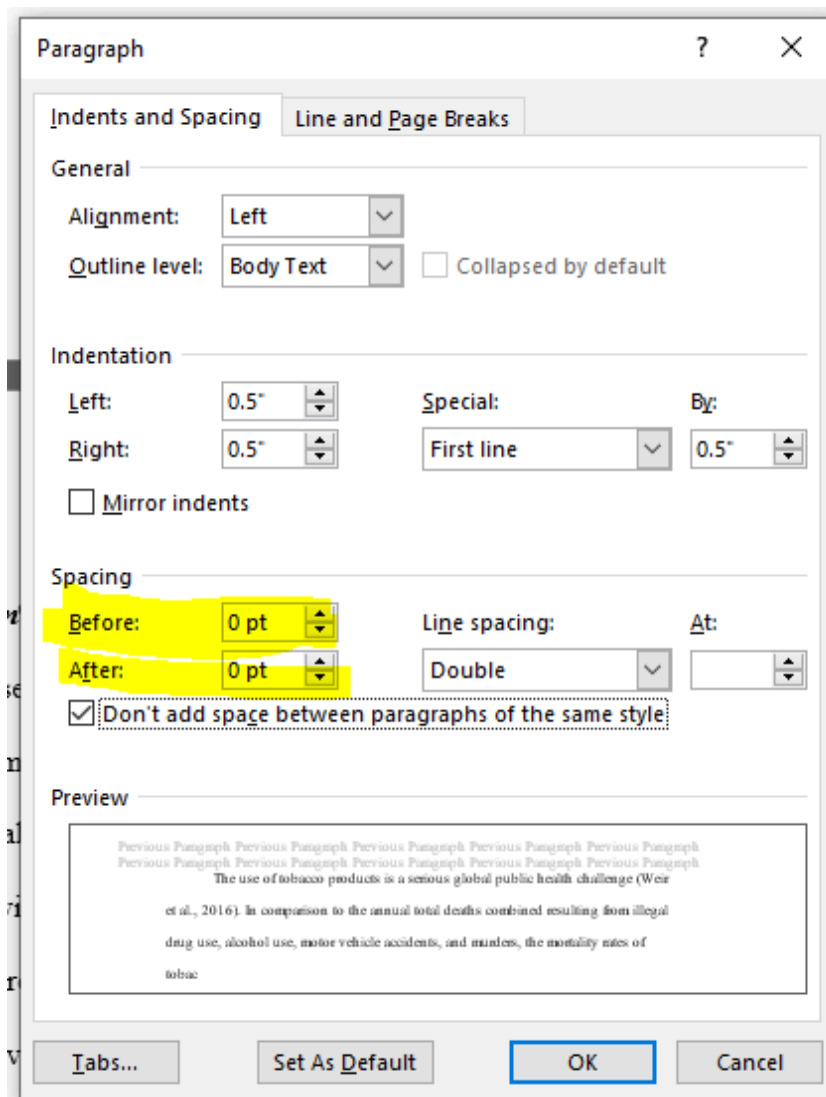
Before formatting your thesis or dissertation, review the following three sets of guidelines for formatting your thesis or dissertation:

- A. [JSU guidelines for doctoral dissertations](#)
- B. [Dissertation template](#)
- C. [Proquest guidelines](#)
- D. Style manual guidelines required by your department/program:
 - [APA](#) Style Manual, 7th edition
 - [Kate L. Turabian](#), 9th edition
 - [MLA](#), 9th edition
 - [ACS](#)
 - [IEEE](#)
 - [AMS](#)

You may also visit the [Richard Wright Center](#) website. See **Format Requirements for Theses and Dissertations**.

KNOW HOW TO USE MICROSOFT WORD

- Turn on the display of formatting marks (¶) in Word. This feature allows you to see spaces, breaks, tabs, etc. [See instructions here](#).
- Check the Ruler option under the View tab on the menu in Word. This will allow you to see the document margins and tabs.
- For help with page numbers, use [Formatting Theses & Dissertations using Word 2010: Numbering](#) from Atlanta University Center: Robert W. Woodruff Library.
- For help with the list of references format, see [How to Create a Hanging Indent in References](#) from Concordia Library.
- For instructions on how to align page numbers on the Table of Contents page, see the Youtube video [How to Create a Dot Leader Line in Microsoft Word 2010](#).
- When setting up line spacing, set the spacing before and after each paragraph to 0 pt and check the box “Don’t add space between paragraphs of the same style.” (See the image below.)



USE CHECKLISTS

Before submitting your document for review to the Division of Graduate Studies, go over the document using the [Checklist for Manuscript Submission](#). Additionally, you may create your own checklist based on a style manual adopted in your discipline and use it to check whether in-text citations, references, tables and figures in your document adhere to the manual's formatting requirements.

2. Editing Strategies for Correct Format of Your Document

The strategies below may help you avoid common pitfalls in formatting your document and make sure it aligns with the JSU and disciplinary requirements.

SET UP YOUR DOCUMENT PROPERLY UPFRONT

It is better to invest time in setting up your document properly in advance than make changes afterwards.

For example, if you plan to have tables or figures in your document, before creating a table or figure, read the JSU guidelines and study the style manual requirements for table and figure set up and examples provided in the manual.

You may use the [dissertation template](#) to set up the format of your document upfront. For a Word template, go to the Writing Center page in Canvas (see menu on the left for any of your courses in Canvas), click Modules→Writing in Graduate School→under “Thesis and Dissertation Writing,” click on the Dissertation Template to download it to your computer.

HAVE SEVERAL EDITING CYCLES

Each cycle should focus on one or two issues.

For example, set aside time to check the use of tenses in your document: Have you switched from the future tense (used in a proposal) to the present perfect or past tense? If you are using the APA style, check that you are using the tenses according to the APA style guidelines.

SMALL THINGS MATTER

Pay attention to capitalization, use of italics, punctuation, spacing, the format of quotes, apostrophes, and the difference between a hyphen, em-dash, and en-dash.

For example, always use curly quotes (“ ”). Do not use straight quotes (" ") that may transfer to your document if you copy something from the Internet.

Use an en-dash (–), not a hyphen (-) for numerical ranges, such a page number range when citing sources: e.g., pp 122–125. An en-dash can be created by pressing Ctrl and the minus button at the same time.

CROSS-CHECK IN-TEXT CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

Make sure that for each in-text citation, there is a corresponding reference entry and vice versa. Use the Find feature in Word to look up author's names in the text. If you do not find any mention of the source cited in References in the text, delete the source from References.

CROSS-CHECK THE TABLE OF CONTENTS AND DOCUMENT SECTIONS

The table of contents should accurately reflect the sections of the document and their page numbers.

AIM FOR CONSISTENCY

Style and format consistency within the document are important. Allow yourself time to check your document for consistency of margins, line spacing, section heading format, spelling, use of abbreviations, etc.

3. Avoiding Formatting Errors: Examples in APA Style

The examples below show the most common errors in dissertation formatting and ways to correct them. The examples are based on the APA style.

CITATIONS

<i>Incorrect Citation</i>	<i>Corrected Citation</i>
The author is identified incorrectly. As a result, the in-text citation is also attributed incorrectly.	The reference and in-text citation have correct authors' names. The reference citation also should be listed under the letter L as opposed to the letter N previously.
References National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). <i>Medications for Opioid Use Disorder Save Lives</i> (A. I. Leshner & M. Mancher, Eds.). National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/25310	References Leshner, A. I., & Mancher, M. (Eds). (2019). <i>Medications for opioid use disorder save lives</i> . National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/25310
In-text (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019)	In-text (Leshner & Mancher, 2019)

PUNCTUATION, CAPITALIZATION, and ITALICS

Incorrect Use of Capitalization and Italics

Jones, M. R., Viswanath, O., Peck, J., Kaye, A. D., Gill, J. S., & Simopoulos, T. T. (2018). A Brief History of the Opioid Epidemic and Strategies for Pain Medicine. Pain and therapy, 7(1), 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40122-018-0097-6>

Correct Use of Capitalization and Italics

Jones, M. R., Viswanath, O., Peck, J., Kaye, A. D., Gill, J. S., & Simopoulos, T. T. (2018). A brief history of the opioid epidemic and strategies for pain medicine. *Pain and Therapy*, 7(1), 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40122-018-0097-6>

Use sentence case for the title of the article. Capitalize only the first word and proper nouns.

Use title case for titles of journals and books. Capitalize each word, except for short prepositions, articles, and conjunctions. For journals, also italicize journal volume number.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Avoid unnecessary table borders: Use a border at the top and bottom of the table and at the bottom of the header row. Place the table title above the table, **outside** of the table borders, and italicize it. Put the note below the table, **outside** of the table borders. Text in the leftmost column should be aligned with the left margin.

Incorrect Table Format

Table 3. Odds of Mississippi Adults Receiving Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder, 2018-2022						
Insurance type	Unadjusted OR	95% CI	p-value	AOR	95% CI	p-value
Private (Reference)	1.0		-	1.0		-
Public	0.82	0.57-1.19	0.3021	1.15	0.78-1.69	0.4887
Uninsured	3.07	2.13-4.42	0.001	2.69	1.84-3.93	<0.0001
OR, odds ratio. AOR, adjusted odds ratio. CI, confidence interval. Adjusted for age, sex, and race						

Correct Table Format

Table 3

Odds of Mississippi Adults Receiving Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder, 2018-2022

Insurance type	Unadjusted OR	95% CI	p-value	AOR	95% CI	p-value
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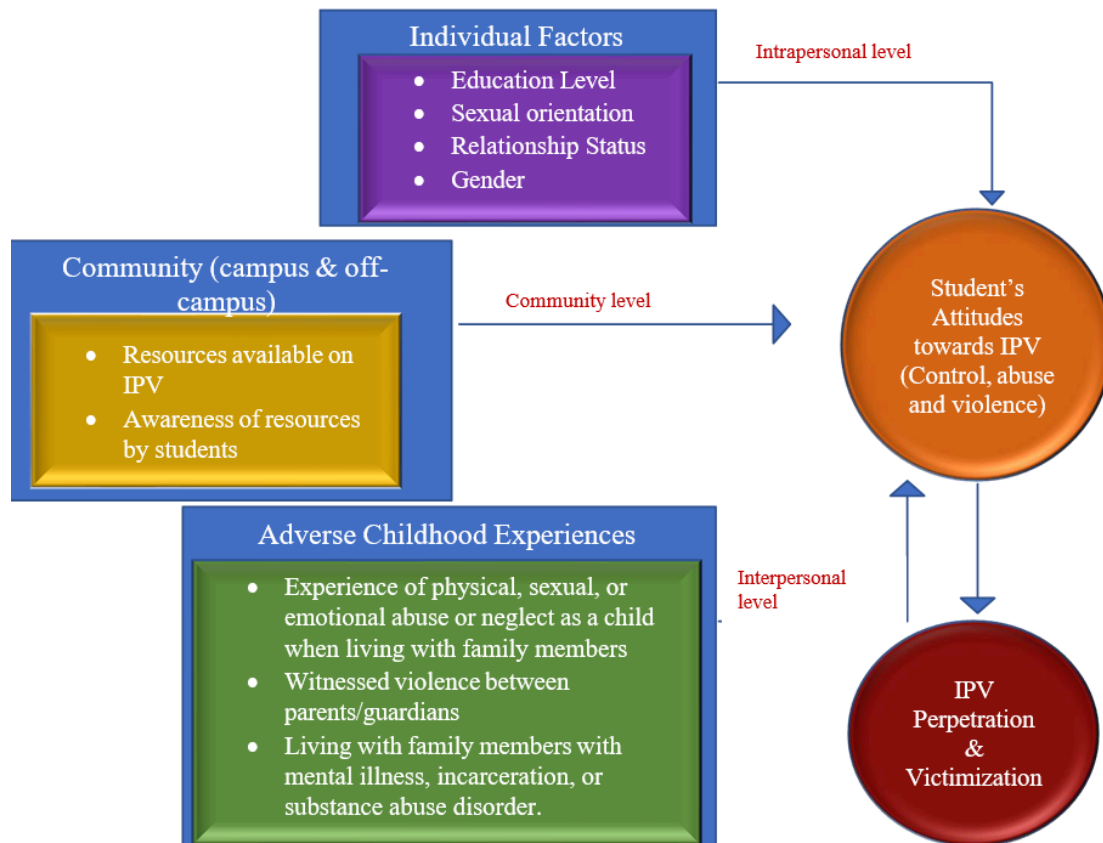
Note. OR = odds ratio; AOR = adjusted odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Adjusted for age, sex, and race.

When creating figures, use clear lines and fonts. Avoid distracting colors or other embellishments. Unnecessary color and effects, such as beveling, create visual clutter without adding any meaning. Align the figure title and the figure itself with the left margin.

Example of a Figure with Distracting Color and Effects

Figure 2

Application of SEM to understand IPV attitudes among college students



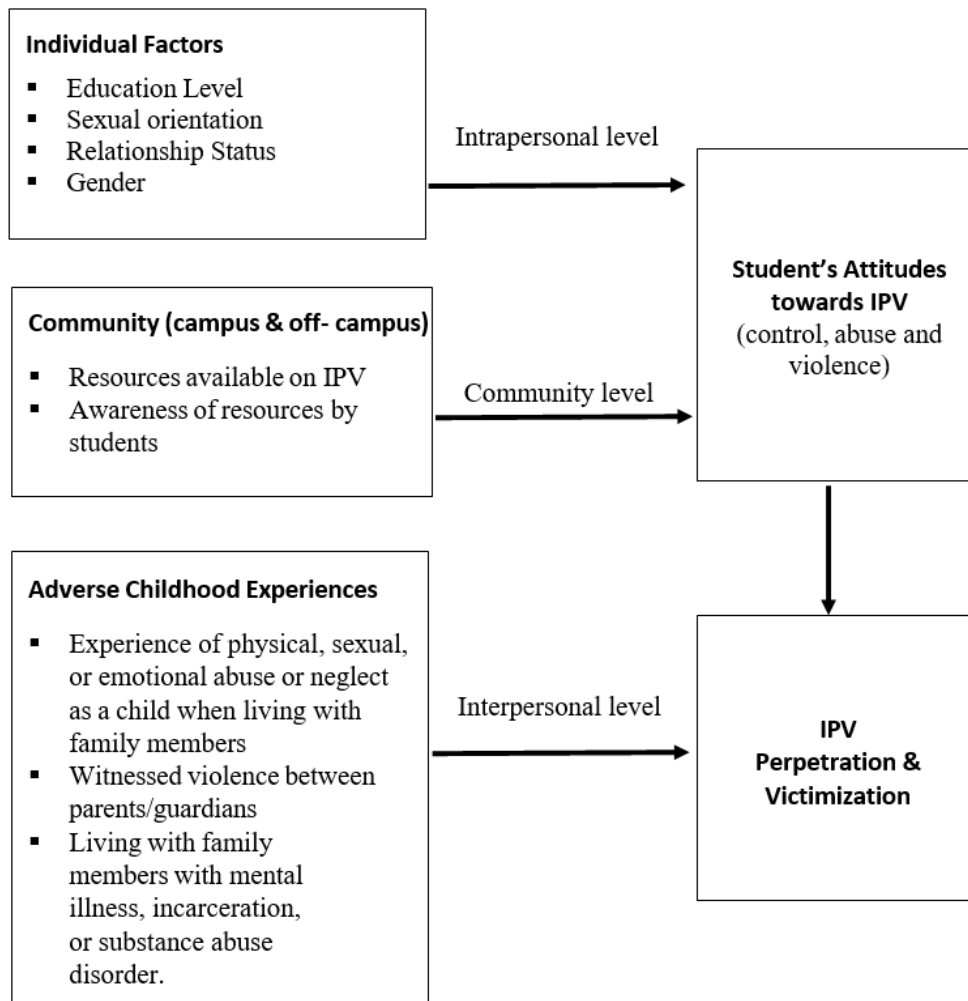
Note: Adapted from the SEM

Improved Figure Format

Notice clear lines and font and no distracting colors or other embellishments. The figure title and the figure are aligned with the left margin.

Figure 2

Application of SEM to understand IPV attitudes among college students



Note: Adapted from the SEM

4. Communicating with the Editor

REVIEW EDITOR'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

After the editor reviews your document, you will receive an email that includes an edited copy of your document in Word and a list of required corrections. The email may look like this:

Please make corrections in your dissertation manuscript following the recommendations listed below. For detailed comments, see the attached copy of your manuscript. Make sure to address each comment.

- Correct margins according to the latest update of the [Guidelines for Preparing the Doctoral Dissertation](#).
- Align the text with the left margin. Do not justify the right margin.
- Make sure that each paragraph is indented 0.5".
- Insert page numbers in the header or footer of the document, approximately 3/4" from the edge of the page.
- Correct tables and figures according to the [Guidelines for Preparing the Doctoral Dissertation](#) and the APA Style Manual: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/tables-figures>. Make sure that all images are clear and sharp and letters are readable.

Before re-submitting your manuscripts, please check its adherence to the [checklist for manuscript submission](#) and to [the APA style checklist for dissertations](#).

Reply to the editor to confirm the receipt. Follow the list of corrections and edits in the attached document to make changes in your document. Refer to the strategies for editing covered in Section 2 of this document.

Important: Copy your advisor, department chair, and the Dean of Graduate Studies on all communication with the editor.

RESPOND TO THE DISSERTATION REVIEWER

Once you have made all the corrections, send the corrected copy back to the editor. In your email, respond to the comments in writing. See example below.

Below are my line-by-line responses to your comments and recommendations in **red** font.

- Correct margins according to the latest update of the [Guidelines for Preparing the Doctoral Dissertation](#). - **Completed**
- Align the text with the left margin. Do not justify the right margin. - **Completed**
- Make sure that each paragraph is indented 0.5". - **Completed**
- Correct tables and figures according to the [Guidelines for Preparing the Doctoral Dissertation](#) and the APA Style Manual: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/tables-figures>. Make sure that all images are clear and sharp and letters are readable. - **Completed**

Here are a few additional responses to your comments on the manuscript:

- I have avoided leaving blank spaces on the page as much as possible. After consulting with my dissertation committee chair, I refrained from moving the figures to the Appendix because, given the large number of figures (>200), this would amount to restructuring the entire dissertation and hurt the flow.

