

RYAN'S RULES

For Technical Writing of Papers, Proposals, Dissertations and Theses
(Common mistakes students make gleaned from over 25 years experience)

- 1) always write in complete sentences, even in the Experimental section
- 2) thoroughly explain all concepts, don't assume the reader knows what you are talking about
- 3) define all abbreviations & acronyms the first time they are used in the text, you may have to redefine or define them more than once if they appear in more than one chapter or the abstract
- 4) use numerals whenever units follow, otherwise write out the number, e.g. "5 sec" or "3 min", but "five test tubes" or "three replicates"
- 5) always abbreviate units without a period, e.g. "sec, min, hr, V, °C, psi"
- 6) always leave a space between the numeral and the unit, e.g. "5.0 °C, 50 %"
- 7) always strive for consistency in everything that you do, e.g. if liter is abbreviated L, then milliliter is mL not ml
- 8) avoid contractions, use "does not" instead of "doesn't"
- 9) terms taken from other languages like Latin or Greek should appear in italics, e.g. *in situ*, *Mytilus edulis*,
- 10) tables should have a table caption at the top, figures should have a figure caption at the bottom and not one at the top (only one caption per figure or table)
- 11) every table and figure should be referred to specifically or directly in the text (this will normally be the very first reference to the figure or table) then subsequent references can be parenthetical
- 12) any ideas, concepts, theories or possible explanations taken from other sources must be referenced
- 13) word for word quotations must be indicated with quotation marks and a reference
- 14) figures or tables taken from other work can only be used with permission and must be properly referenced
- 15) references should primarily consist of citations to peer reviewed journals or books and the use of trade journals (e.g., C&E News, LC-GC, etc.) should be limited as should references to web sites
- 16) reference lists at the end of the document must have an established and consistent format
- 17) use standard abbreviations for journal names (e.g. Environ. Sci. Technol. & Anal. Chem.)
- 18) references to "unpublished work" or "personal communications" should only be used if absolutely necessary
- 19) break up major sections into logical subsections with headings
- 20) double space all documents for proofreading and editing purposes
- 21) email documents to me in MS Word format