In his famous book *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk Jr. wrote,

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell." (Quoted in Garrison Keillor, *Writer's Almanac*, June 24, 2006)

1. It is expected that college students will have mastered, by at least their second semester, correct citation forms for footnotes and references. For proper footnoting and, bibliographic form, refer to Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Theses, Term Papers and Dissertations*, 8th ed. Turabian gives examples of footnotes/endnotes with bibliographies at the end (which this guide calls “bibliography style,” traditionally called “Chicago Style”) and in-text citation (parenthetical) forms with reference lists at the end. See pages 160 and 216 of that edition for the sections on the two different styles. The most reader-friendly citation style is “bibliography (Chicago) style” with bottom of the page footnotes (so the reader doesn’t have to page over to a set of endnotes or a reference list for information on a source). You can start numbering footnotes anew in each chapter, or number them sequentially. Use regular (Arabic) numbers, not Roman numerals, for numbering footnotes.

Remember that you must give the page number, whether in-text or footnotes/endnotes are used. E.g., (McAdam 1982, 136). The only exception to this is when you are referring to a general argument that runs throughout the work, on too many pages to be cited individually. But this is rare.

DON’T mix footnote styles. Use one standard form consistently throughout the paper or thesis.

You must include an alphabetized (by surname of first author) list of references at the end of the paper if you use in-text citations, and a similar list (a bibliography) for a paper with bottom-of-page or endnotes.

Note that in Chicago-style bottom-of-the-page footnotes the author’s first name comes first, and commas are used to separate parts of the footnote. In the *Bibliography or References list*, the SURNAME comes first, and periods are used instead of commas. Be sure you have mastered this difference, as well as the abbreviated form that footnotes take after the first citation of a work. (You do not repeat the entire citation in a subsequent footnote to the same source; use “Ibid” or simply the last name if the same source was referenced in the previous footnote. If the source was cited earlier in the chapter, repeat only the author’s surname and the shortened title, without subhead, then the page number. For example: Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan*, 16.

Consult the guidelines at [http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/inex.cfm](http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/inex.cfm) which also has guides for two footnote forms. Another quick online reference is [http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc). But Turabian (8th ed) is the largest and most widely consulted writer’s guide, so I advise buying a copy. Do NOT use random internet sites like EasyBib.

Be careful, in citing edited books, that you give credit to the individual author of the chapter, not attributing the ideas in this chapter to the editors of the volume in which it appears. Footnote the work as (e.g.) Louis Fisher, “The War Power,” in Colton C. Campbell, Nicol C. Rae, and John F. Stack, Jr, eds., *Congress and the Politics of Foreign Policy* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), p. 3; and also list chapter authors and titles separately in your References or Bibliography. You must also cite ALL authors of an article or book when you use parenthetical citations, e.g., (Smith, Jones, and Thomas 1997, 6-10).
2. Citing internet sources: Remember that just because you found a source on the internet does not mean it is public domain. You must always respect the intellectual property of others and cite internet sources just as you would any other work that is not your own. Include the author, title and all identifying information, and include the URL itself so that the work can easily be located by the reader. If no author is mentioned, give the title of the article, identify the web site and the organization that maintains it, and give the URL. Many professors (myself included) allow only very limited use of internet sources because most have not been screened, may be extremely biased and incorrect, and may not remain online for checking. Unless you are told otherwise by a professor, use the internet ONLY for primary data at government web sites, on-line journal and newspaper articles that are also available in hard copy, and "official" organization web sites (e.g., government sites like omb.gov, thomas.loc.gov, the sites of the AFL-CIO, Republican Party, Common Cause, etc.). The latter sources may be useful for descriptions of the organization’s goals and activities, and in some cases for analyses of government data. Use of material from ideological organizations (e.g., AEI) may be quite biased and should be used with care, if at all. Such sources are not a good substitute for primary sources, scholarly journals or books by university and other major presses, which go through a rigorous review process and fact-checking.

Wikipedia is not suitable for a scholarly paper. Many Wikipedia entries (to whom anyone can anonymously contribute) are full of errors and even deliberate misrepresentation by people with axes to grind. It may be a quick place to look for published sources, but not to take as reliable information by itself. Scholarly journals, and some major newspapers, on the other hand, are subject (like books from academic presses) to an extensive review process and fact-checking. Scholars, major journals, and newspapers have reputations to protect and an interest in avoiding error. In today's world of viral internet fabrications launched for propaganda purposes, the reader who seeks reliable information must be especially vigilant.

Always ask the professor which types of sources are permitted in a research paper.

The common view is that internet surfing is a far too quick-and-dirty way to write a paper and that a paper too reliant on internet sources does not constitute genuine scholarly research. Plus, it can raise suspicions of plagiarism, since the internet makes it all too easy to cut and paste a paper. However, faculty today have access to sophisticated software for detecting plagiarism.

To repeat: your paper should generally use only scholarly sources, newspapers, and official data sites. You must attribute all words, intellectual ideas and observations of others to their original sources, whether they are paraphrased or quoted, and whether they come from print or internet sources.

To use information or ideas of others without citation is plagiarism, a very serious offence. At the very least, suspicion of plagiarism will result in a formal hearing with the professor and another department official, and a letter will be placed in your file. You really do not want to go through this. Write your own paper, and do it carefully.

3. In a research paper, avoid over-reliance on a few sources. A string of ibids is indicative of this problem. (In a short essay based on syllabus readings, you will not be expected to use a lot of sources—but use as many of the syllabus readings as you can).

4. Avoid over-reliance on quotes. A paper that strings together quotes shows little originality. As a rule of thumb, no more than 1/5 of a page should be direct quotes, and the shorter the paper, the fewer the quotes. Paraphrase wherever possible, saving quotes for extraordinary, pungent language (not just for simple facts). Don't be misled into thinking that changing only a few words is "paraphrasing". Paraphrasing means really putting the idea into your own language, using as few of the original words as possible (while being, of course, faithful to the original author's meaning). Note that you can paraphrase an author's statement but put a few words of exceptional language in quotes, e.g., Greenspan warned that stocks were overvalued and investors were demonstrating "irrational exuberance."

Be very careful not to twist or misinterpret the text you are paraphrasing. For example, don't attribute to an author an idea she lays out only to criticize it. When you DO use quotes, indent (about one inch) and single-space long quotes (four lines or more). Be very careful, when you quote, to quote the author’s words correctly. But again, use as few quotes as possible in your paper or thesis, and use them only for remarkable language. Everything else must be paraphrased. And (to repeat) both quotes and paraphrases must carry citations.
5. As a rule of thumb, every paragraph should carry at least one citation telling where the information came from. You may use one footnote at the end of a paragraph IF (and only if) all material in that paragraph is from the same source. Always footnote particular page numbers (and be specific, citing only one or a few pages) unless the reference is to a general theme or argument running throughout the work. There should be no paragraph without a citation UNLESS all the ideas in it are yours alone, or a summary of previously cited work or ideas.

A paragraph should generally be no more than a half page long; start new paragraphs for new subjects. A paragraph generally should address only one subject.

6. In research papers, always use as many sources as possible; use books and scholarly journal articles in preference to internet sources; use newspapers of record, like the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal (their regular articles, not editorial pages) in preference to other newspapers; and use the most recent works available on your subject, along with (where appropriate) older studies. Papers using only relatively old sources will always be suspect. (Of course, in historical analyses use of older primary sources may be quite appropriate).

Be very careful about "second hand" citations. For example, if Smith's book cites an article by Jones, you should not cite Jones as if you read it yourself. If you want to refer to the Jones article, either read it yourself, or say "Tom Smith cites Robert Jones as arguing..." and in your footnote, cite Jones's article and then say, "as cited in" Smith's book. Don't try to give the reader the impression that you have read ten little-known books and articles, rather than one text that cited all of them; that is dishonest, akin to plagiarism. It will always raise suspicions.

7. For research papers, use JSTOR, the Social Science and Humanities indices, CRS (Congressional Research Service) reports, and the P.A.I.S. (Public Affairs Information Service) index to scholarly articles. The Index to Legal Periodicals may also be helpful. Scholarly papers generally should not use mass market publications like U.S. News and World Report, or internet sources without listed authors. Cite journal articles downloaded from the internet in the same way as the journal itself, adding "(JSTOR)" or "online" at the end, if the article was found on line. You can locate newspaper articles through Proquest Historical Newspapers. Enter those words in the box at the CU library site, then choose the newspaper – preferably the NYT or Washington Post, which are most complete. Then use "Advanced Search" to enter keywords and date ranges.

8. When referring to an author or other person for the first time, use his/her first name along with the surname (Toni Morrison wrote that...). The next time you mention this person, you can use only the surname (Morrison contended that historical novels...).

9. Language: Avoid informal, flowery, or colloquial language. Avoid, in a scholarly paper, using words like "climate," "scene," or "scenario" (unless you are referring to a play or movie). Replace that sort of word with specific nouns. Instead of saying, "In that scenario, Europe was intolerant of immigrants," you might say, "given high unemployment, there was less support for higher levels of immigration."

Avoid judgmental language ("The absurdly short political campaign was horribly run;" “The 102nd Congress was fantastically productive”). Lay out the evidence for the argument and let the reader make up her own mind about how to evaluate it. An argument bolstered by evidence, that does not hit readers on the head with a message, will be much more effective than passionate advocacy. It is also best to avoid hortatory statements (like “The US should always avoid covert force to effect regime change.”) Instead, you might say, “The use of covert action to effect regime change is inherently risky, and violates international law,” etc. A research paper is not a political tract.

Avoid broad generalizations not backed up with evidence ("People loved Reagan because he seemed to be a kindly father figure;" "The American people are inherently suspicious of Europe;" "The protesters against health care reform are closet racists").

It is also usually advisable to avoid using first person pronouns (minimize the use of “I” and “you”) which can be a distraction from the argument you are making. In scholarly work, one usually meets personal pronouns only in
the preface or acknowledgements. Say “I will cite evidence...” rather than “I shall cite evidence” which sounds pretentious. Generally, use “will” and avoid “shall.” Do not use archaic preposition forms like “amongst” and “amidst.”

Avoid jargon, and carefully define all your key terms. Even philosophical terms like “justice” and “equity” need specific definitions if they are central to your argument.

10. Edit spelling and grammar VERY carefully. Make sure you know the difference between hyphens and dashes (a dash is two hyphens). A hyphen is used for a compound adjective or adverb (“He discarded the twice-used napkin”); a dash separates a clause or phrase from the rest of the sentence, in much the same way parentheses would. (“She grabbed her raincoat—the sky had suddenly darkened—and headed off to the demonstration”).

Know the different uses of commas and semicolons. The latter set off a series of phrases that include commas, or two complete (subject + verb) clauses. Never use a string of clauses separated by commas, or multiple clauses with no separating punctuation. This is a run-on sentence. Break it up into separate sentences, or use semi-colon to separate closely related clauses. A good grammar website is http://www.grammaruntied.com/intro.html For quick checks of tense (e.g., what is the correct past participle of the verb “shrink”), bookmark a site like http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/

Carefully review the meaning and use of prepositions (at, on, of, to, etc.). Students today, even at Ivy League universities, seem to be losing touch with the correct usage of prepositions and the nouns that follow them.

11. Do not overcapitalize. English is not German. Capitalize only proper names. Even “the president can veto bills...” does not use a capital P for president, and “congressional,” as an adjective, is not capitalized. While regions (North, South, etc.) ARE capitalized, adjectives like “southern” and “northern” are not. If you are unsure what needs to be capitalized, consult an up-to-date writer’s handbook (the best is Turabian).

12. Use simple, direct words and sentences. Avoid starting sentences with superfluous introductory phrases containing gerunds (e.g., “Looking at the causes of war, one can say that leader miscalculation is a common problem.” Instead, get to the point and write, “Leader miscalculation is a common cause of war.”) The clearest sentence has a subject followed by a verb, and any essential modifying phrases in the right place (close to the nouns or verbs they modify). If you never learned to diagram sentences, it is not too late to start.

It is much better to use clear, straightforward language than to try to be “fancy” and use long, convoluted, jargon-laden, hard-to-follow sentences and words that don’t really mean what you think they mean. If you use any unfamiliar word in a paper, look it up in a dictionary. Always aim for clarity in word choice, and simplicity in sentence structure. It is much more important to get your ideas across clearly than to use “sophisticated” words (which, when used inappropriately, make a bad impression on the reader). You are unlikely ever to get a paper back with the comment “you should have used longer sentences and more multi-syllabic and unusual words.”

13. Try to avoid repeating the same word, or a similar word, in close proximity, as it interrupts the flow of meaning. (e.g., “Populism was popular in the South”). And try not to use the clunky word “state” very often. Instead of “Jones states that...,” say, “Jones responds that,” or “Jones argues that,” and so forth.

14. Avoid contractions (say “it is,” not “it’s...”). Do not confuse contractions, plural forms, and possessive forms (e.g., “The Mullah’s have a lot of power” is wrong). Note that if a singular noun ends in s, you still add ’s for possessive —unless the next word begins with s. If the next word begins with s, add only an apostrophe (e.g., Prof. Sanders’s raincoat was left behind; Professor Sanders’ sedan was covered with snow). If you have ever been found guilty of abusing the apostrophe, you should pay a visit to the UK website of the Apostrophe Protection Society at http://www.apostrophe.org.uk/. Note that in the US, punctuation goes INSIDE the quotation marks.

15. Watch your use of pronouns, as they often introduce ambiguity. Instead of beginning a sentence with “This”, when the noun you are referring to in the previous sentence is not perfectly clear, repeat or paraphrase the noun. Learn the correct use of “that,” “which,” and “who” as linking words, since many people confuse them (especially tending to overuse “which”). Again, avoid the use of archaic conjunctions like “whilst,” “amongst,” and “amidst.” While, among, and amid are standard.
16. Always number your pages. Use standard fonts (10 or 12), and standard 1” or 1.5” margins. Do not play tricks on the reader to make the paper appear longer or shorter.

17. Bibliographies/Reference lists must list only works actually cited in the paper, not background reading. If a work does not merit a citation in the text, do not list it in the bibliography or list of references. Note again that the formats for footnotes/endnotes and bibliography/references are different (e.g., beginning with first or last name, using commas or periods, etc.). In footnotes, the author’s name comes first. In bibliographies, surnames are first.

18. Always save all your notes and drafts until you receive your final grade, in case any question of authorship arises. Never turn in your only copy of a paper. If you turn it in late, tell the professor in advance that it will be late, and get the date stamped on the front by a department representative. Talk to or email the professor to make sure the paper was received the day you turned it in.

19. For research papers, make sure your topic is approved before beginning work on the paper. If in the course of research you need to change the focus, make sure this change has the approval of the instructor. If not, the instructor may not accept the paper.

20. It is always recommended to have a face-to-face talk about your topic with the person who will grade it.

ADDENDUM

Ten Deadly Sins: Summary of the most common writing problems detected in early CU essays

1. No clear thesis statement in first paragraph (or at least on the first page) that serves as a road map through the paper.

2. Paragraphs containing sentences on different subjects. The first sentence of a paragraph should indicate what it is about. Every subsequent sentence should be related to that initial paragraph theme, except that the last sentence in the paragraph may link it with the next.

3. Hyperbolic (extreme) adjectives and factual claims (“He gained an immense following;” “These reforms brought justice and prosperity to the South”); “Because of their poverty, southerners were duped into supporting big government.”

4. Quotes. There are two big, opposite sins: (a) Use of the author’s language as if it is your own (without quotes or citation), and (b) over-reliance on quotes. The first is plagiarism and can get you into very bad trouble (remember, changing a few words isn’t enough to qualify as paraphrasing). The second is simply splicing together other authors’ words to make an essay; that is unoriginal, and will get you a low grade; this is not the way to write an essay. If one can’t put the point in one’s own words, does one really understand the point? In short, as stated in the Writing Pointers, either put the author’s words in quotes—saving quotes for extraordinary, pungent language (never use quotes for the commonplace, as in “The South welcomed the New Deal because it needed government help.”)—OR put the material completely in your own words, with no more than 1-3 words in common with the original.

5. Convoluted sentences that try to make a statement sound more sophisticated (rather than writing simple, subject-verb sentences with little or no adornment); a desire to sound sophisticated often leads writers to use words that don’t mean what the writer thinks they do, revealing that the writer has a limited vocabulary. Hemingway was smart, famous, and wrote simple, straightforward sentences. So should you, unless you are a reborn William Faulkner and can really manage ornate and complex language.

6. Vagueness and generality—the signal curse of bad writing that leads the reader to suspect that you don’t really know much, and haven’t done much reading. AVOID abstraction, or broad generalization; use of vague adjectives (“certain people liked Huey Long”) or ambiguous nouns (“Congress created new entities to deal with societal problems;” “the Democratic candidate understood the southern political scene;” “the climate was unfavorable to Governor Folsom;” “The bills targeted old problems throughout the nation”). Instead, always be specific. Use facts to buttress your argument; use specific nouns and verbs to describe reality. Only specific evidence—facts and logical reasoning—will convince the reader of the strength of your argument.

7. Repetition of the same thought, phrase, or claim, or restating the obvious. Similarly, “puffy” writing, with too many words that add little or nothing to the essay. This wastes your and the reader’s time, and gives the
impression that you don't really have much to say. NEVER use puffy writing to fill out the page requirement of an essay. A good writer has to prune, not puff his/her prose.

8. Careless chronology (as when an essay moves around in time, talking first about the New Deal, then the Progressive Era, than back to the New Deal)

9. Use of pronouns with unclear referents (it, they, this, etc.) when the previous sentence has several nouns, or no nouns that clearly go with the verb used after the pronoun).

10. Capitalization—or not. These rules are simple and must be mastered. Capitalize only proper nouns (names of people, holidays, political subdivisions, recognized historical eras or movements, organizations, and titles followed by a surname or that assume a particular person), e.g., Aung San Suu Kyi, President Reagan (or, when it is clear that the word refers to a specific individual, “The President said, ‘Tear down this wall, Mr. Gorbachev!’”), Myanmar, Civil Rights Movement, New Deal). For reminders, go to a site like http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g_caps.html

Words/phrases to avoid (because they are clunky, grammatically wrong, inherently vague, unnecessary, or non-scholarly):

“Scene; “climate;” “lifestyle” (refer instead to specific personal situations or characteristics); “structure” (unless its specific meaning is spelled out in close proximity); “in regards to” (replace with “concerning” or “with/in regard to” or avoid such circumlocutions altogether); “amongst” (old-fashioned usage, like “whilst”); “due to;” and useless introductory phrases like “It is important to remember that...,” “It must be noted that” (this is unnecessary filler; get to the point). And remember that a president can't "pass" or “enact” legislation. He can only propose, and sign or veto bills. Congress passes the bills that become law. To suggest otherwise is not consistent with a knowledge of how the US political system works. Generally avoid making nouns out of verbs (as in using the verb "disconnect" to mean "disjuncture").

Good writing is an art -- one absolutely necessary to logical thinking and the progress of democracy. It is learned through practice, and through reading the good writing of others. Writing coherently and logically helps us to think coherently and logically.