Formatting and Applying APA and MLA Conventions in Essay Composition

Gayle W. Griggs, Cluster 32
Nova Southeastern University

ITDE 8001-8002: Instructional Design

Dr. Todd Curless
October 10, 2004
Formatting and Applying APA and MLA Conventions in Essay Composition

Background

Puerto Rico has an estimated population of close to 4 million residents whose primary ethnicity is Hispanic. The official languages of the island are Spanish and English, both of which are taught in the public and private schools and the universities of the island. Close to 600,000 students are registered in the public school system, 300,000 are enrolled in the private school system, and close to 200,000 students study in one of the 47 universities on the island (Casiano, 2003). Although Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States, it is a country rich with culture and pride in their Taíno Indian, Spanish, and African cultural blend. Many of the residents considered the 1898 United States acquisition of Puerto Rico as a threat to their identity, and a form of imposed colonization.

At present, many of the university students are not properly prepared for writing compositions in English, and demonstrate minimal English proficiency. This “allows students to remain isolated in their Spanish-speaking world, which does not further their necessary English skills for future academic and employment opportunities” (Wagle, 2004, ¶ 2).

Setting. The University of Puerto Rico (UPR) was created in 1903 and is comprised of 11 autonomous campuses, each directed by its own chancellor. The University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) was established in 1911 and is known as a Land Grant institution comprised of the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Engineering and the Continuing Education and Professional Studies Division. The Mayagüez campus is accredited by the Council of Higher Education of Puerto Rico and has been a member of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education since 1946. The institution is a non-profit public university that offers Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees to its students in a variety of concentrations. There are a total of 69,000 students in the University of Puerto Rico system island wide, and almost 13,000 students are currently enrolled at the Mayagüez campus.

Every student enrolled in UPRM must complete a series of courses in English in order to
obtain a Bachelor’s degree. This researcher offers various courses to undergraduates, one of which is an elective in Expository Writing. In this course, students are required to write their papers in either the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA) formats, depending on their area of concentration.

Description of Learners. At present, a total of 56 students are enrolled in the researcher’s Expository Writing course. Of this sum, approximately one-half of them intend to pursue graduate studies in their fields. The evaluator will select as her target population approximately 10-15 undergraduate students enrolled in both sections of Expository Writing at UPRM who need to learn APA because they intend to pursue graduate degrees in the fields of psychology, education, or the social sciences. Another 10-15 students will be selected to learn MLA in order to further their studies in literature, the arts, or humanities. All students have personal computers (PCs), are familiar with and utilize Microsoft Word 5 or higher for composing documents and essays, recognize the features included in MS Word, including the “dashboard” menus and their general functions, and possess either the MLA or the APA publication manuals.

Problem Description

Most of the students enrolled in Expository Writing entered the course with minimal knowledge in formatting documents such as placing margins, double-spacing text, inserting headers, using the correct font, and indenting paragraphs. They also do not sufficiently apply MLA or APA conventions for formatting documents by using signal phrases, summarizing, and paraphrasing sources. The designer’s instruction will illustrate these skills, and demonstrate how to reference sources correctly both in-text, and on the MLA Works Cited or APA References page.

Because the learners intend to further their education at the graduate level, these students will be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for preparing correctly formatted documents that follow either MLA or APA format. This is not only a current need of the students at UPRM, but also one for future students enrolled in courses across the disciplines. Instruction in these areas will effectively solve the problem of formatting papers, using and acknowledging
sources, and applying MLA or APA conventions that are acceptable to the faculty and administration of UPRM, as well as the faculty and administration of the universities that the students choose for their graduate coursework.

Goal Statement

As emphasized by Dick, Carey, and Carey (2005), the instructional goal should include identifiable behaviors that clearly describe “what a learner will be able to do” (p. 28). In addition, they remind the designer that the instructional design should be able to solve “a significant organizational problem . . . through the use of new skills” (p. 26). This researcher’s instructional goal incorporates these points in achieving its proposed project purpose.

The purpose of the proposed project is to supply students with the appropriate skills and instruction for formatting a document following MLA or APA standards, and using and acknowledging sources accurately in their essays. The following goal statement will be incorporated into the proposed project:

The learners will be able to compose essays in MLA or APA format through applying the proper conventions for the title page, the identification, the header, the margins, the font, indentation, and double-spacing arrangement. Students will distinguish between paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting text; and demonstrate skill in introducing, composing, and documenting their sources properly for each within the text as in-text citations, and on the Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA) page. Students will also successfully construct in-text and reference citations for books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and electronic sources following MLA or APA conventions. For additional referencing needs, students will decide on the proper formatting procedure by locating the specific information listed in the MLA or APA manuals.
References

