

Italics

APSU Writing Center Handout

Italics serve several important functions in academic and professional writing. To ensure clarity and consistency, always consult your professor's guidelines, as academic essays do not typically use italics for emphasis.

Emphasizing Words or Phrases

Use italics to emphasize specific words or phrases for rhetorical effect.

- **Example:** "It wasn't the *only* time I'd ever slipped on the ice, but it was definitely the most embarrassing."
- **Example:** "I *swear*, Mrs. Smith, the dog *really did* eat my homework!"

Foreign Words Not Commonly Used in English

Foreign terms that have not been fully adopted into English (scientific Latin names) are italicized.

- **Example:** "*Homo sapiens* have a very complex central nervous system."
- **Example:** "I made a delicious *coq au vin* last night for our guests."

Words Used as Words

When mentioning a word as a word (rather than for its meaning), italicize it.

- **Example:** "Instead of using *the*, you should use the word *a*."
- **Example:** "While the word *menu* is technically French, it has been adopted into the English language."

Letters or Numbers Referred to as Themselves

When a letter or number is discussed as a character, not for its meaning, italicize it.

- **Example:** “Many people forget that my name is Anne, spelled with an *e*.”
- **Example:** “She realized that the *65* written in red on her paper meant that she could not raise her grade enough by the end of the semester to pass the class.”

Introducing or Defining Key Terms

The first time you define or introduce a technical term, put it in italics.

- **Example:** The basic principles of a beginning writer’s essay are the *introduction*, *body*, and *conclusion*.
- **Example:** An *odd* number is one that does not equal a full number when divided by two.

Mathematical Symbols and Scientific Variables

Algebraic symbols and physical constants are italicized.

- **Example:** “The speed of light, *c*, is approximately equal to 3.00×10^8 m/s.”

Titles and Names That Should Be Italicized

Italicize the titles or names of the following types of works:

Books (*The Scarlet Letter*, *Heart of Darkness*)

Magazines or journals (*Time*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*)

Newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*)

Websites (*Austin Peay State University Website*)

Plays or musicals (*Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Sound of Music*)

Television or radio programs (*The Colbert Report, Talk of the Nation*)

Movies (*The Shawshank Redemption, Casablanca*)

Legal cases (*Brown v. Board of Education*)

Music albums (*The White Album*)

Long musical compositions (*Nutcracker Suite*)

Works of art (*The Thinker, Mona Lisa*)

Long poems (*The Waste Land, Paradise Lost*)

Pamphlets (*The American Crisis*)

Comic strips (*Calvin and Hobbes, Peanuts*)

Ships, spacecraft, trains, and airplanes (H.M.S. *Pinafore*, U.S.S. *Enterprise*)

(Do not italicize “U.S.S.” or “H.M.S.”; only italicize the vessel name)