

## Developing Knowledge of Conventions

*Conventions* are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct (or appropriate) and incorrect (or inappropriate) in a piece of writing. Conventions include the surface features of a text such as mechanics, spelling, and attribution of sources, as well as more global concerns such as content, tone, style, organization, and evidence. Conventions arise from a history of use and reflect the collected wisdom of the relevant readers and writers about the most effective ways of communicating in that area.

Conventions facilitate reading by making material easier to comprehend and creating common expectations between writer and reader. As multimodal texts become more prevalent, teachers will also need to attend to the evolving conventions of these new forms, developing appropriate conventions with new students and colleagues.

Correct use of conventions is defined within specific contexts and genres. For example, a novice's grasp of a disciplinary documentation style is different from that of an advanced student's, and a writer's grasp of conventions in one context (such as a lab report for a chemistry class) does not mean a firm grasp in another (such as an analytical essay for a history course). The ability to understand, analyze, and make decisions about using conventions appropriate for the purpose, audience, and genre is important in writing.

Teachers can help writers develop knowledge of conventions by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- write, read, and analyze a variety of texts from various disciplines and perspectives in order to
  - investigate the logic and implications of different conventions,
  - practice different conventions and analyze expectations for and effects on different audiences,
  - practice editing and proofreading one's own writing and explore the implications of editing choices,
  - explore the concept of intellectual property (i.e., ownership of ideas) as it is used in different disciplines and contexts, and
  - identify differences between errors and intentional variations from expected conventions;
- read and analyze print and multimodal texts composed in various styles, tones, and levels of formality;
- use resources (such as print and online writing handbooks), with guidance, to edit drafts;
- practice various approaches to the documentation and attribution of sources; and
- examine the underlying logic in commonly used citation systems (e.g., MLA and APA).