Using Italics
(Underlining)

Italics are a slanting typeface used in printed material and can be produced by most word processing programs. In handwritten or typed papers, this typeface is indicated by underlining. Some instructors prefer underlining even if their students can produce italics. However, be consistent. Do not use both in the same paper, including the footnotes and bibliography. This handout will use italics only, but they should be considered interchangeable with underlined text. **Note: The rules for MLA and APA formatting differ from the standard rules (see page 3 below).**

Titles of Works - Titles of the following kinds of works should be italicized:

Titles of Books	*The Great Gatsby, A Distant Mirror*
Magazines	*Time, Scientific American*
Newspapers	the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Do not italicize the word "the")
Pamphlets	*Common Sense, Facts about Marijuana*
Long Poems	*The Waste Land, Paradise Lost*
Famous Speeches	Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*
Plays	*King Lear, A Raisin in the Sun*
Films	*Casablanca, Independence Day*
Television Programs	*Friends, 60 Minutes*
Radio Programs	*All Things Considered*
Musical Compositions	Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*
Choreographic Works	Twyla Tharp's *Brief Fling*
Works of Visual Art	Rodin's *The Thinker*
Comic Strips	*Dilbert*
Software	*WordPerfect*
Web Sites	*Barron's Online, ESPNET SportsZone*

The titles of other works, such as short stories, essays, songs, and short poems are enclosed in quotation marks. Do not italicize the Bible, titles of books in the Bible (Genesis, not *Genesis*), or titles of legal documents (the Constitution, not the *Constitution*). Do not italicize the title of your own paper.

Names of Vehicles

- *Challenger, Titanic, Orient Express, Spirit of St. Louis, Elizabeth II, Silver Streak, Sputnik*
- U.S.S. *Eisenhower* (Do not italicize the U.S.S.)
- H.M.S. *Pinafore* (Do not italicize the H.M.S. when you are talking about the ship. If you are talking about the light opera, then it is part of the title, *H.M.S. Pinafore*.)

Do not italicize names of vehicles that are brand names: Ford Explorer, Corvette, Boeing 747.

Words as Words – Italics are used when talking about words, letters, and numbers as themselves.

- The origin of the word *boy* is unknown.

- There were four *and*'s and one *therefore* in the last sentence. (Notice that the apostrophe "s" used to create the plural of the word-as-a-word *and*, is not italicized.)
- Sarah called her father by his given name, Johnny, but she was unable to pronounce the *J*.
- A big *3* was painted on the door.

Note: Quotation marks may be used instead of italics to set off the words mentioned above.

Foreign Words or Phrases - If a word or phrase has become so widely used and understood that it has become part of the English language — such as the French "bon voyage" or the abbreviation for the Latin *et cetera*, "etc." — we would not italicize it. Often this becomes a matter of private judgment and context. For instance, whether you italicize the Italian *sotto voce* depends largely on your audience and your subject matter.

Words as Reproduced Sounds

- *Grrr!* went the bear. (However, you would say, "the bear growled" because *growled* reports the nature of the sound but does not try to reproduce it. Thus, the bees buzz but go *bzzzz* and dogs bark *woof!*)
- His head hit the stairs, *kathunk!*

Frequently, mimetically produced sounds are also accompanied by exclamation marks.

Science - Italics are used in certain disciplines for various specific purposes. Here are two of the commoner ones. In biology, genus and species names of living creatures are italicized:

- The earliest known member of the genus *Homo* is *H. habilis*.
- The cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) is a familiar American bird.
  Note that a genus name always has a capital letter, while a species name never does.

Law - Names of legal cases are italicized: Example: The famous case of *Brown* vs. *Board of Education* was a landmark in American legal history.

Emphasis or Contrast - Italics can be used for emphasis; however, try not to overdo this or it will lose its effect. They may also be used to draw attention to some particular part of a text or to show contrast.

- The Battle of New Orleans was fought in January 1815, two weeks *after* the peace treaty had been signed.
- According to the linguist Steven Pinker, "Many prescriptive rules of grammar are *just plain dumb* and should be deleted from the usage handbooks."
- Standard English usage requires *in*sensitive rather than *un*sensitive.
- Lemmings have, not two, but *three* kinds of sex chromosome.

Quoted Thoughts – Quoted thoughts may be italicized to distinguish them from actual quotes that are surrounded by quotation marks. Example: "I don't know why you're so angry," he said. He rubbed the side of his nose and thought, *what a spaz*.

Prologues and Interludes - Sometimes prologues of novels are written in italics, usually because they are outside the frame of the rest of the story. The italics let the reader know that the prologue is a sort of preamble to the main work. Interludes or other small sections that occur between chapters may also be in

italics if they are also outside the main thread of the work. The same goes for epilogues at the end of the piece.

Hyperlinks - When composing in HTML, do not substitute underlining for italics, because underlining in HTML indicates that the underlined text is an active hypertext link. (All HTML editing programs automatically underline any text linked to another hypertext or Web site.)

Email – Many email systems do not allow for italics or underlining. In email, you can indicate italics by preceding and ending the term with underscore marks or asterisks. Punctuation should follow the coding. Example: I am planning to write my senior thesis on _Anna Karenina_.

MLA Format

The *MLA Handbook* provides the following advice for the use of italics and underlining in word-processed texts intended for print-only publication:

> Many word-processing programs and computer printers permit the reproduction of italic type. In material that will be graded, edited or typeset; the type style of every letter and punctuation mark must be easily recognizable. Italic type is sometimes not distinctive enough for this purpose, and you can avoid ambiguity by using underlining when you intend italics. If you wish to use italics rather than underlining, check with your instructor or editor.

APA Format

Italics (Underlining)

- Do not italicize or underline common foreign abbreviations (vice versa, et al., a priori).
- Do not italicize or underline for mere emphasis.
- Italicize or underline the titles of books and articles, species names, introduction of new terms and labels (the first time only), words and phrases used as linguistic examples, letters used as statistical symbols, and volume numbers in reference lists.

APA formatting also requires that you italicize Level 2, 3, and 4 headings. (See Handout No. 171, "APA Guidelines – Format a Paper.")

References – The following works were used in compilation of this handout:

About, 2005. Retrieved from the Internet 22 February 2005 http://teenwriting.about.com/library/weekly/aa120102a.htm.
APA Research Style Crib Sheet. Retrieved from the Internet 22 February 2005 http://www.docstyles.com/apacrib.htm#Italics.
A Guide to Grammar and Writing. Capital Community College, Hartford, Connecticut, 2004. Retrieved from the Internet 22 February 2005 http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/italics.htm.
Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference, Fourth Edition.* New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.
Harnack, Andrew and Eugene Kleppinger. *Online.* Bedford/St. Martins Press, 2003. Retrieved from the Internet 22 February 2005 http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite5.htm
Hart, Mark. *How Should I Use Titles in Critical Essays?* Retrieved from the Internet 24 February 2005 http://www.english.upenn.edu/Grad/Teachweb/mhtitle.html.
Trask, Larry. 2003. *Guide to Punctuation*. Retrieved from the Internet 24 February 2005 http://www.informatics.susx.ac.uk/doc/punctuation/node35.html.