
Book Review

Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, 9th ed. Revised by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, William T. FitzGerald, and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff.

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Reviewed by STEVEN E. GUMP

Have you ever sat down and read a reference book straight through? When a copy of the ninth edition of Kate Turabian's *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*—‘Turabian,’ for short—landed on my desk last year, my first thoughts were of a college friend who, while being homeschooled in Alaska, read the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (the lauded eleventh edition of 1910–1911). But an encyclopaedia is at least a sequence of narratives; and winters in Alaska are long and dark. Meant to be consulted (indeed, referenced) once the work's basic structure is understood, a writing and style manual is generally a bit more of a slog to read cover to cover.

Nevertheless, over the course of a couple months, I read every word of this nearly five-hundred-page work, and I came to appreciate the concision (and precision) of the text. I also came to appreciate how the research act has evolved over the past four-score-plus years—and how an understanding of an effective means for presenting the research-and-writing act to students has similarly evolved. Since the seventh edition (2007), in fact, Turabian has been more than just a reference work. Brought up on the fifth edition (1987), I am impressed by the makeover and wonder how I would have approached the current content some three decades ago. Would I have been overwhelmed? Relieved? Bored?

Turabian's original 1937 booklet, just over sixty pages on formatting dissertations for submission to the University of Chicago, was published in revised form with the present title in 1955, and the initial slim guide has been reworked and expanded periodically by various cadres of editors and staff at the University of Chicago Press as new technologies and new types of sources have arisen: 1967, 1973, 1987, 1996, 2007, 2013, and now 2018. From the start, Turabian has always been a bit of a mashup, presenting material adapted from then-current editions of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The revised edition (1955) was the first to include an index; the fourth edition (1973) was the first to include *annotated* sample pages (just two), reaching an apotheosis with a whopping twenty-six such pages in the fifth edition (1987) before the annotations disappeared (a loss); the seventh edition (2007) was the first to include a lengthy introductory section on research, adapted from *The Craft of Research*, another Chicago book authored by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams.¹ Turabian died in 1987, shortly after the fifth edition was released; Booth, Colomb, and Williams had all died prior to publication of the eighth edition (2013). For the ninth edition, pegged to the seventeenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2017) and the fourth edition of *The Craft of Research* (2016), Joseph Bizup (Boston University) and William T. FitzGerald (Rutgers University) join the roster of named authors on the cover and title page, having further revised the opening chapters with an emphasis on information literacy in the digital age.

In a sense, then, Turabian (the book) is a ship of Theseus, having been updated and structurally reworked over the years; but the voice of Turabian (the person) still rings through, particularly in the presentation of citation styles and formatting guidelines, the original heart of the work. In my dreams, the voice of Turabian is the voice of the University of Chicago Press: direct, precise, authoritative, conservative. Due to the perennial popularity of her work, Turabian was identified as the most-assigned female writer in college classrooms (ahead of Toni Morrison and Jane Austen), based on a study by the Open Syllabus Project as reported in 2016 by *Time* magazine.² (One cannot help but to wonder what she would make of the honour, just as one wonders how much of the current text Turabian would recognize as her own.)

Anyone who reads the Note to Students (xi) or Preface (xiii–xv) or even the back cover will know that the book includes three parts: a step-by-step guide to the research and writing process (fourteen chapters—the

aforementioned material adapted from *The Craft of Research*); a comprehensive guide to two methods of source citation that are particularly useful in the humanities and social sciences (five chapters); and a robust section on editorial style (seven chapters on spelling, punctuation, names, numbers, abbreviations, and the like). Turabian is thus everything a student researcher might need save a grammar guide and training in specific research methods (and, well, a viable research question).³ The addition of the section on research and writing with the seventh edition was, in short, a stroke of genius: it transformed Turabian into a textbook with assignable content to read. With the same revision, the bibliography (just 25 sources across two pages in the fifth edition, where a bibliography first appeared) mushroomed into a robust collection of curated lists of resources, arranged by theme, focus, and discipline (now 556 sources across twenty-six pages). As always, an appendix presents samples of formatted pages for theses and dissertations, most from actual University of Chicago dissertations submitted between 2005 and 2015. When you consider the sheer wealth of material contained or cited in Turabian, its US\$18.00 paperback and eBook list price is an absolute steal. Kudos to the University of Chicago Press for keeping the price so reasonable.

The chapters in the first part, on the research and writing process, exude a distinctly positivistic vibe; I'll concede that such an approach may be appropriate for novice researchers. I appreciate the emphasis on readers' needs, evident in several chapters: 6 (planning a first draft), 9 (revising), 10 (writing introductions and conclusions), and 11 (revising at the sentence level). Chapter 13 (oral presentations, posters, and conference presentations) feels out of place in what is ostensibly a style manual, but the information provided is sound. Yes, matters of style arise even in the opening chapters—inevitably, I would add, when one writes about writing. I applaud the advice to avoid quoting a dictionary definition at the outset of a piece (110) and to try to avoid 'clumsy' verbal road maps at the ends of introductions (70), despite their prevalence in the social sciences. But I wonder: How believable are such suggestions when the rationales are so brief?⁴ Yes, dictionary definition-based opening sentences are cliché, and textual outlines of the structure of a piece are inelegant snoozefests; but I know these things because I have faced a lot of academic writing. As I read Turabian, I kept reminding myself what it was like to lack a storehouse of knowledge about effective writing: in other words, I kept trying to imagine the intended audience of college students, and I kept wondering whether

they would accept everything at face value. I had trained myself, through years of consulting *The Chicago Manual of Style* (beginning with the thirteenth edition of 1982), just to accept the sage wisdom of Chicago. When I was still a tyro, though, would I have known to respect convention?⁵

The middle section of the book presents the two Chicago citation styles: ‘notes’ style (using footnotes—or endnotes—and bibliographies; chapters 16–17) and ‘author-date’ style (using parenthetical citations and reference lists; chapters 18–19). Turabian remarks how ‘even the best citation management tools can help . . . only part of the way’ (150), reminding readers that bibliographies and reference lists should be manually copy-edited upon completion of a research project: so true.⁶ I laud those revising Turabian for continuing to refresh the examples. Readers will spot, as sample citations from 2015 or 2016, a *New Yorker* article by Jill Lepore, a Wikipedia entry, a blog entry by Sharon Jayson, a Facebook post by Junot Díaz, a tweet by Conan O’Brien, a performance of *Hamilton*, a video by Beyoncé, an interview with Bernie Sanders, a Super Bowl advertisement for Fitbit. The ongoing project of revising Turabian—I presume the tenth edition is already in the works—must be a task that remains simmering away, ragù-like, on a number of staffers’ back burners at the University of Chicago Press. I also appreciate, given the conservatism and relative formality of Chicago style, that users of Turabian are permitted to create their own citation styles, adapting the conventions to their particular needs, as long as their styles are imbued by an inherent logic and are applied consistently.

That permissiveness flexes two ways: Turabian offers guidelines that may be overridden by the requirements of an instructor, department, institution, or discipline. Each chapter in the final section, on style (chapters 20–26), opens with the caveat that house rules and requirements take precedence over what Turabian suggests. Such an approach reinforces the use of Turabian as a reference: First, learn the guidelines of your home institution or field. Second, turn to Turabian when the local guidelines do not address your needs. Lucky users may inhabit an institution or discipline that follows Turabian wholesale, thus minimizing the number of exceptions or special cases to retain. This approach of offering suggestions—the normative auxiliary verb in Turabian is *should*, not *must*—also differentiates Turabian from other style guides most commonly used in classroom settings: it prepares students most realistically for the realities of scholarly publishing, where individual publishers set their own house styles and formatting expectations for submissions. By refreshingly placing more emphasis on adhering

to a logic instead of adhering to *this particular* logic, Turabian teaches students that ‘Chicago style’ is just one style of many possibilities.

Given that Turabian is a book about style and formatting—and a book that underscores the importance of readability—I am not sold on the sans serif typeface selected for examples: it makes differentiating between italic and roman type rather difficult. For example, distinguishing that the terminal *s* in ‘two *Chicago Tribunes*’ is set in roman type (295) is not easy, and one cannot tell whether the possessive apostrophe after the newspaper name in the phrase ‘the *New York Times*’ online revenue’ is italicized (297). (It shouldn’t be.) Knowledgeable readers know what to look for (and therefore know what to see); students who are new to the game might find some examples more inscrutable than instructive. Also, table-formatters are asked not to use a typeface smaller than eight points (92), but the footnotes, figure captions, and reference entries in the print version of Turabian surely seem smaller. (Perhaps the eBook version ameliorates the occasional need to reach for a magnifying glass. Or perhaps the printed book—counterintuitively—is simply intended for younger readers.)

I was delighted to learn, via email from Lauren Salas, senior promotions manager at the University of Chicago Press, that Turabian is now positioned as the second in a trilogy of books forming the core of the Chicago Style Suite. The first work, Kate Turabian’s *Student’s Guide to Writing College Papers*, recently released in its fifth edition (2019), offers students a basic introduction to Chicago style. The third volume in the sequence is, of course, *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The ninth edition of Turabian’s *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* intentionally demonstrates its greatest alignment yet with the style put forth in the current edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, supporting a nearly seamless transition as users graduate from one resource to the next.⁷ Instructors should expect that, upon release of a new edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, new editions of Turabian’s two manuals will follow in order to maintain stylistic consistency within the suite.

All told, Turabian remains an indispensable guide for student researchers, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. And in case you’re curious, my reference book-reading friend from college went on to become a Rhodes Scholar. Although I don’t foresee a transition to Oxford anytime soon for myself, reading Turabian straight through reminded me that presentational and citational predictability and consistency focus readers’ attention on what matters: the scholarship at hand. In short,

stylistic conventions aid the productive dissemination of knowledge. Writers and researchers, beginning or seasoned, thus owe a great debt to the publishers who are committed to keeping style guides current amid continuous evolution of the act—and art—of research.

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NOTES

1. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
2. David Johnson, “These Are the 100 Most-Read Female Writers in College Classes,” *Time*, 25 February 2016, <http://time.com/4234719/college-textbooks-female-writers/>.
3. Toward the outset of chapter 11, on revising sentences, readers with only a ‘dim memory’ of grammatical terms are urged to ‘skim a grammar guide’ before continuing (114).
4. Of course, some justifications remain pegged solely to ‘convention’ or ‘tradition’ (certain hyphenations, ordinal stylization, uses of lines in tables, locations of page numbers on manuscript pages).
5. Reading Turabian after having been intimate with *The Chicago Manual of Style*—I edited a journal over a decade ago that followed the fifteenth edition of CMOS (2003)—is like encountering an adolescent work by a favourite author: the style and voice are similar, but complicated matters are less nuanced, more straightforward (with the exception of the formatting of tables, the subject of chapter 26: there, CMOS is easier to follow than Turabian). Or perhaps Turabian, as a distillation, is an even more mature work? In an attempt to avoid overwhelming the readers, Turabian is neither as comprehensive nor as nuanced as CMOS. Readers are, in fact, occasionally referred to CMOS for greater specificity or additional examples.
6. The same goes for spell-checkers: ‘A spell-checker is not a substitute for a good dictionary and careful proofreading’ (294). Benjamin Dreyer refers to spell-checkers and autocorrect as ‘marvelous accomplices . . . but they won’t always get you to the word you meant to use.’ See Benjamin Dreyer, *Dreyer’s English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style* (New York: Random House, 2019), xi.
7. In fact, reading Turabian brought to my attention a change introduced in the seventeenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* that had previously eluded my notice: that of repeating the year of publication at the end of reference entries for media requiring a month or month and day (magazines, newspapers, websites, social media posts, interviews, performances, and so on) when using author-date style.