General Guide to Writing and Study Skills
Contents

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................. 4

ASSESSMENT .................................................................................................................................................. 6

WHY ASSESSMENT OCCURS ............................................................................................................................ 7

GETTING GRADES .......................................................................................................................................... 8

TOPIC ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................................................... 11

LAYOUT AND APPEARANCE .......................................................................................................................... 15

INTRODUCTION TO REFERENCING AND PLAGIARISM ............................................................................. 23

HOW TO RESEARCH .................................................................................................................................... 25

CRITICAL THINKING ...................................................................................................................................... 27

ESSAYS ............................................................................................................................................................ 30

REPORTS ......................................................................................................................................................... 36

ORAL PRESENTATIONS ................................................................................................................................ 46

WORKING WITH OTHERS ............................................................................................................................. 49

LITERATURE REVIEWS ................................................................................................................................ 51

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS ................................................................................................................................. 54

ePORTFOLIOS ............................................................................................................................................. 55

EXAMS ............................................................................................................................................................. 56

WRITING AS A SKILL .................................................................................................................................... 60

APPLYING WHAT YOU KNOW ....................................................................................................................... 61

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE .................................................................................................................................. 63

ACADEMIC TERMS & PHRASES ....................................................................................................................... 72

WRITING CONSTRUCTION ............................................................................................................................... 79

PUNCTUATION .............................................................................................................................................. 92

EDITING AND PROOFREADING ..................................................................................................................... 98

TIPS IF ENGLISH IS YOUR OTHER LANGUAGE .......................................................................................... 105

LIBRARY ........................................................................................................................................................... 107

THE MODERN LIBRARY ............................................................................................................................... 108

UNDERSTANDING ONLINE SYSTEMS ........................................................................................................ 109

THE BASICS OF ONLINE LEARNING .......................................................................................................... 110

MANAGING YOUR STUDY ............................................................................................................................... 112

TIME MANAGEMENT ..................................................................................................................................... 113

PROCRASTINATION ..................................................................................................................................... 119
INTRODUCTION

Commencing study at university can be daunting, particularly if you are the first in your family to do so. You may find it to be not only an unfamiliar environment, but also a challenging culture to enter. This response is normal, and nothing to be concerned about. The aim of this document is to help you gain an understanding of university culture, and acquire the academic language skills and critical thinking processes necessary to be successful in your study.

When submitting work for assessment, you will not just be assessed on what you say, but also how you say it, and what your work looks like. This guide provides general advice on the presentation of academic work at Federation University Australia, focusing on the key areas of: assessment format and appearance; writing skills; academic language and culture; managing your study; and citation. Follow the advice in this book if no specific presentation requirements have been provided in your course for an individual piece of work. If you are unclear about any submission requirements, consult your lecturer, tutor or teacher for clarification.

Strive to apply this advice to each assessment task to help you achieve an acceptable academic standard in your undergraduate study. You will also find examples and activities to encourage you to apply the principles as you read about them. You are not expected to master these skills at the first attempt; even postgraduate students are still developing their research and writing skills.

Rather than attempting to read this guide from beginning to end, use the links from the table of contents to jump directly to the information you need, when you need it. There’s an expanded table of contents at the back if you want to see more detail. The key topic areas in this book are:

- Assessment format and appearance
- Academic language and culture
- Writing and researching skills

Assessment format and appearance

Assessment tasks come in many shapes. This guide contains advice relating to essays, reports, presentations, group work, literature reviews, reflective journals, ePortfolios and exams. It also contains practical advice on topic and question analysis, critical thinking and researching. Improving the appearance of your written work is a skill you can master early with this advice on formatting and layout.

Academic language and culture

Understanding a new language is like reading a map: it’s easier if you know some road rules. This guide offers an entry point into academic language and culture by discussing aspects such as accessibility, generalisations, authoritative and objective writing and getting a feel for academic language.

Writing and researching skills

Academic work should be written in clear and concise English, using your own words but acknowledging other sources where appropriate. Try the practical activities in this guide to improve the construction of your writing, from sentence to paragraph level. Care should be taken with punctuation, spelling, style and word choice to achieve a suitable academic voice.
Managing your study
This guide provides useful tips on how to manage your time and study load effectively. These include: how to set up an environment conducive to study, time management, procrastination and effective note-taking and reading.

Introduction to referencing and plagiarism
Your work should demonstrate an understanding of the practice and principles of citation. Also known as citation, referencing is the process of acknowledging that you have used another person’s words, ideas, or data in your work. If you don’t acknowledge sources, you may be guilty of plagiarism. For detailed examples and advice on referencing, refer to The General Guide to Referencing, which is also available in campus bookstores. This guide will soon be available as an eBook.
WHY ASSESSMENT OCCURS

or

The reason you have those annoying assignments

The primary (broad) purpose of assessment is for you to demonstrate your knowledge and capabilities to your lecturer or tutor according to a set of criteria. It’s a way of showing that you are developing the abilities necessary for your field of study. Remember that the degree you are studying is designed around employment in a specific field. Your lecturers need a means of checking that you are able to work in that field, so that’s what assessment is about. But that’s only the broadest sense.

Different forms and different types of assessment measure a variety of skills or knowledge. Most courses include summative and formative assessment types.

- **Formative assessments** usually have low or minimal marks and can be in the form of short quizzes in Moodle, or an essay outline. They are learning activities and allow for the lecturer to give you feedback on how you are progressing. Some formative assessments will contain a summative element, e.g. ‘completion of all online quizzes is 5% of your total mark’.

- **Summative assessments** usually relate to the learning outcomes and carry most of your marks. These types of assessment are a tool for measuring what you have learned and can be a written assignment, an exam, group work or a presentation.

In any course, your abilities are demonstrated in different ways through:

- **Essays**, which evaluate your writing skills and also your ability to engage with the theory.
- **Practical tasks**, which evaluate your physical capabilities in an area, i.e. in a chemistry experiment or a nursing pharmacology lab.
- **Presentations**, which evaluate your speaking ability and how well you communicate information to a group.

In every assessment, you are expected to:

- Demonstrate your understanding of the material and theory.
- Demonstrate meaningful interaction with the subject matter.
- Develop your own opinions and understanding of the topic, and your own voice.
- Practise discussion of a topic in a professional context.

Importantly, assessment is *not* there for you to simply regurgitate information. Your interaction with your reading and lecture content is of most interest, whether that’s putting it into practice, critiquing or analysing it, or presenting on it. By doing this, you’re showing that you not only understand the material, but you can *use* that information for another purpose, be it drawing a new conclusion or developing a new procedure.

So, when given the chance, demonstrate your understanding of a theory or practice, and not simply that you remember it.

*Back to table of contents*
GETTING GRADES

or

How do I get a great mark?

To know how to do well in assignments, it helps to understand what you will be marked on. You may receive specific marking criteria on some occasions and, on others, the guidelines will be more general. But, there are general things that your lecturers will be looking for. To start with, let's look at how you can interpret your results.

What your results mean

Depending on what you’re studying, different marks will be used to grade your work.

Higher Education

The most common grades in higher education are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Specific range/interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>High Distinction</td>
<td>80% and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
<td>70% – 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>60% – 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>50% – 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>Marginal Fail</td>
<td>40% – 49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>39% and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XF</td>
<td>Non-assessed fail</td>
<td>You did not hand in any work for a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Ungraded pass</td>
<td>Assessments with S/U grades are usually ‘hurdle’ tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Ungraded fail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other possible grades for overall course results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Grading category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Withdrew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You withdrew from a course before the census date and don’t get marked for it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Late Withdrawal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You withdrew from a course after the census date and are therefore still marked for it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See other Higher Education grade descriptors.*

### VET

There are various grading categories in VET courses depending on your level of study, so it is best to ask a teacher within your course to clarify.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Grading category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Competent with Distinction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Competent with Merit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CY</td>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN</td>
<td>Not yet Competent</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See other VET grade descriptors.*

### How you will be assessed

There are multiple ways your lecturers and tutors will assess you, depending on the type of assessment task and its purpose. However, your result will have four key influencing factors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>This refers to what you have written or created. To do well here, examine the assignment criteria closely and respond to the given topic and any other requirements. Ask your lecturer or tutor what they’re looking for in assignments; they may give some pointers. This is where the larger portion of your marks will be awarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic language</td>
<td>This refers to your use of academic language in your writing. To do well here you need to use formal language and write clearly and concisely. You can read more about how to use academic language in the Writing Skills section of this book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing</td>
<td>If applicable to your particular assessment task, your use of the required referencing style can have a large impact upon your grade. Lecturers are looking to see how well you incorporate the ideas and research of others into</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
your argument. Don’t leave this to chance. Get a copy of *The General Guide to Referencing*, as it is loaded with examples to make your life easier.

| Layout and appearance | This refers to how the document looks and how it has been **formatted**. It won’t play a big part in your mark (unless it’s a visual assignment), but an assignment that has coffee stains and is illegible reflects poorly on your professionalism and dedication, which may subsequently result in a loss of marks. If you adhere to any formatting requirements and present the assignment neatly, you’ll get all the marks you need here. |

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**Rubrics**

Rubrics are just one type of marking guide that could be used to determine your final mark. They include a formula that breaks down marks into areas, and they look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level of Student Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workload 20%</strong></td>
<td>Did a full share of the work – or more; knows what needs to be done and does it; volunteers to help others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Getting organised 10%</strong></td>
<td>Took the initiative proposing meeting times and getting group organised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation in discussions 30%</strong></td>
<td>Provided many good ideas for the unit development; inspired others; clearly communicated desires, ideas, personal needs, and feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting deadlines 10%</strong></td>
<td>Completed assigned work ahead of time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As you can see, a rubric shows *where* you will get marks and the *weighting* of those areas. Whenever you receive a rubric or another marking guide, have it with you when you work on that assignment. This allows you to include the elements that your marker is hoping to see, and the weighting gives you a clear idea of the time you need to spend on certain areas. For instance, you might receive five marks for addressing pancake size, but detailing how delicious they are will give you twenty marks. Clearly you need to spend more time writing about pancakes’ taste than their size. In this way, a rubric is a handy guide on how to complete your assignment.

*Back to table of contents*
TOPIC ANALYSIS

or

What am I meant to be writing about again?

Topic analysis is a skill that can change a Fail into a High Distinction. Why? Understanding the topic is key to doing well in an assignment. If you misunderstand the question then you may fail because you won’t have answered the question. It’s important you know how to interpret the topic given to you.

What is topic analysis?

Topic analysis refers to the act of breaking down an essay question or research topic so that you understand it in detail. The aim is to have a clear idea of what you are meant to be writing before you start your research. That way you don’t write about cake for a project on noble gases. It’s common for students to lose marks because they ‘didn’t properly understand the essay question.’ So try this step-by-step process to avoid that possibility.

How to analyse a topic

Steps:
- Check meanings of words/re-write topic or quote
- Circle instructional words
- Underline the key words
- Bracket the limiting words
- Divide the topic into sections

1. Check meanings of words/re-write topic or quote

Do you understand every word in the topic question? Grab a dictionary for any words you are unsure about. This applies to phrases as well. For instance, you might understand what the words ‘noble’ and ‘gas’ mean separately, but do you understand the phrase ‘noble gas’?

After you’ve checked the meanings, it may help to rewrite the topic in a way that you better understand it, especially if you’ve been asked to respond to a given quote. This not only helps you to cement your understanding of what the question and/or quote is asking, but it can also provide you with a version of the topic that’s clearer to you, to which you can refer later.

Quantum mechanical tunnelling is the basic mechanism underlying several important technologies. Using clearly labeled diagrams, describe the operation of *one* technology that utilises tunnelling. A detailed quantum mechanical analysis is not required.

Some words and phrases are not commonly known in this topic. The big ones are ‘quantum mechanical tunnelling’ and ‘quantum mechanical analysis’. There are more, but those are the major phrases that may need defining. Such phrases won’t be found in a common dictionary, so you may need to review lecture notes or consult a text book.
2. Circle the instructional words

Instructional words tell you ‘how’ to respond to a topic. These are words like ‘discuss’, ‘outline’ and ‘debate’. Below is a list of the most commonly used instructional words and their definitions:

- **Analyze** – methodically examine in detail to explain, interpret and discuss
- **Assess** – evaluate and decide how important something is and give your reasons
- **Compare/Contrast** – describe, measure or note the similarities / how things differ
- **Define** – provide a clear, concise description of the nature, scope or meaning
- **Describe** – give a detailed account to illustrate the topic; explain in sequence or order
- **Discuss** – give both sides of an argument (plus evidence) and then your own opinion
- **Evaluate** – look at reasons for and against, draw conclusions, form an idea of the value of something
- **Justify** – show or prove a decision or viewpoint to be right or reasonable
- **Review** – re-examine and comment briefly on the major points

Sometimes your lecturer will expect you to present your own opinion, or suggest that one outcome is better, but other topics will require you to remain impartial and focus only on defining and providing evidence. This is why identifying the instructional words is important.

Let’s look at the same example again:

Quantum mechanical tunnelling is the basic mechanism underlying several important technologies. Using clearly labeled diagrams, describe the operation of *one* technology that utilises tunnelling. A detailed quantum mechanical analysis is not required.

In the second sentence, the word ‘describe’ means that you need to write about a single technology in detail without forming an opinion on it or criticising it. You can also see the word ‘using’, which is an instructional word that tells you to include whatever follows. In this case, it is referring to the fact that you need to include diagrams. Finally, the phrase ‘not required’ is instructional in that it tells you what not to do. This is equally as important, as it prevents you from spending time on a task that’s not necessary.

3. Underline the key words

Here you need to identify all words that are important in the essay question. This highlights every aspect that you’ll need to address in the paper. Let’s find the key words in our example:

Quantum mechanical tunnelling is the basic mechanism underlying several important technologies. Using clearly labeled diagrams, describe the operation of one technology that utilises tunnelling. A detailed quantum mechanical analysis is not required.

Many words have been identified as key words here. Let's have a look at why:

- **Quantum mechanical tunnelling** tells us the major focus. This is the theory we’re focusing on.
- **basic mechanism underlying...technologies** tells us the basic assumption that underpins this question. We know that quantum tunnelling is a core principle behind many things in our world.
- **clearly labeled diagrams** need to be included.
4. Bracket the limiting words

These words can also be viewed as key words, but limiting words have a specific focus. Limiting words relate to:

- Population (who?)
- Place (where?)
- Time (when?)

Not all topics include limiting words (such as the engineering topic above), but many disciplines require that you research a particular group of people in a specific location. For example:

Compare the health needs of adolescents living in rural Australia in the 1960s with those of today. Discuss these changes in the context of community health nurses.

If we bracket the limiting words:

Compare the health needs of [adolescents] living in [rural Australia] in the [1960s] with those of [today]. Discuss these changes in the context of the work of [community health nurses].

By identifying limiting words, you can pick up the specific focus of this essay that requires you to limit your research to Australian publications only. Highlighting limiting words helps to clarify further where your attention should be, and ensures that you don’t research or focus on irrelevant areas.

5. Break into sections

This last step helps to identify how you might organise your ideas in your work. ‘Break your topic into sections’ means that you should divide the question into smaller segments, making it easier to understand and respond to. This process can also help you to sort out the content of your main paragraphs so that the structure of your assignment is clearer. Let’s look at our example topic again. It could be broken into sections in various ways. We might break it up like this:

Describe the operation of one technology

that

Utilises quantum tunnelling

with

A clearly labelled diagram
This is just one way to outline the areas that will need attention; there is no one right way to do this. Dividing a topic into portions makes it easier for you to identify what you need to concentrate on and in which order you could address each area. You should do this in whatever way works best for you.

Once you've completed these five steps, you can then jump onto the Library website and start your search for relevant sources using your key and limiting words.

Now, have a go at applying these steps of topic analysis to your own assignment questions. Otherwise, apply the method to the essay topic below.

Activity: Topic analysis

Explore the nature of Australian society and its values in the 1970s. Use a character analysis format to demonstrate your understanding of how the characters in “Don’s Party” embody or react against the prevailing values of the 1970s.

Check your answer
Back to table of contents
LAYOUT AND APPEARANCE

or

How to look good

These are general guidelines for formatting and submitting your work. Please use these guidelines where you have not received specific instructions on formatting from your lecturer. Advice includes formatting specifications such as type, font and alignment, figures and tables, footnotes and endnotes, and submission of work.

Formatting specifications

All written work should be typed on a computer. Feel free to hand-write your notes, but not the final masterpiece. If you don’t have access to a computer at home, there are many on campus, in the libraries and numerous computer labs. It is critical that your lecturer can read your work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What your document should look like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page numbering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type, alignment, spacing and paragraphs

Fonts, text alignment and spacing can be changed in your word-processing program. If no font type is specified then the standard choice is 12pt Times New Roman, with text left-aligned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the contents of your document should look like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Font type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Font size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Header and Footer
The standard option is to include the page number and a shortened title at the top left of your Header, and your name top right. Shorten the title to ensure there is space for your name.

Alignment of text
Be consistent and apply only one style to your text. Use: either left-aligned – the text lines up straight against the left margin or fully justified – the left and right edges of the text line up straight against the left and right margins.

Spacing
Leave one space between sentences. Use double line spacing within paragraphs. Between paragraphs, spacing depends on whether they are blocked or indented. See example following.

Blocked/Indented paragraphs
The general preference is to use block paragraphs, but check with your lecturer if you are unsure. Be consistent, whichever you use.

**Blocked paragraphs** have an extra space between them. Do not indent.

**Blocked paragraphs** are separated from each other by an additional blank line space. Do not indent the first line of a paragraph when using this style.

**Indented paragraphs** follow on from each other with no extra space. The first line is indented from the left margin.

**Indented paragraphs** follow on from each other with no additional line space between. Indent the first line of the new paragraph from the left margin. Indented paragraphs follow on from each other with no additional line space between.
Figures and tables

If you need to include figures (i.e. graphs, pictures, charts, maps or diagrams) and/or tables in your work but have not received specific instructions, use the following guidelines. You can place them within the text itself, or at the end as an appendix. Check your chosen referencing style for more detailed instructions.

Consider whether the figures and/or tables are necessary for clarity. Include them in the body of the document if their presence directly illustrates your point. If, for example, a whole paragraph refers to a particular graph, then it would be most effective to place it directly below the paragraph.

Naming, numbering and noting

Number each figure and table consecutively and give each a descriptive title. Figures may need a 'legend' to identify things such as scale, direction of view or orientation.

Example: Place the name of the figure below the figure

Cite author(s), date of publication and page number.

Example: Place the name of the table above the table

Table 1. Value of integrated assessment – survey of participating students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>% Respondents Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was beneficial to have common material used in the assessment tasks for the three subjects</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing the Communication report on the company used for the first assessment task in Accounting helped me develop a better understanding of the importance of effective communication in accounting</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying report writing and writing a report in Communication prepared me for writing my Economics report</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting on the economics case study in my Communication class before writing the individual report for Economics improved my understanding of the case</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using common material in the three subjects has helped develop my understanding of effective communication within business</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brooman-Jones, Cunningham & Hannah, 2011, p. A8
Some figures or tables may need notes to provide one or more of the following:

- Specific information on a particular item in the figure/table
- General information on the figure/table as a whole
- Source information (if copied/adapted from another source)

Place any notes directly below the relevant figure or table.

Appearance

Whatever your reason for including figures or tables, aim for readability.

- Mark all axes clearly on graphs.
- Use descriptive column headings on tables.
- Type size is generally smaller than the text in the paragraph, but no smaller than 8 pt, or larger than 14 pt.
- Place them close to the paragraph where they are first mentioned.
- Do not extend them outside the page margins.
- Do not split a table over two pages (unless it is large); leave a small gap at the bottom of the page and carry it over to the next page.
- Alignment of data within table columns depends on the type of data and other specific requirements, but generally the following applies:
  - Whole numbers to be right-aligned.
  - Decimals to be aligned to decimal points.
  - Text in columns to be left-aligned.

Appendices - a final word

If the figure and/or table provides further evidence but is not critical to illustrate your argument, then include it as an appendix and refer to it in your text, like this:

“As can be seen in Appendix 1, the elephant population is in rapid decline.”

Footnotes and endnotes

Academic writing sometimes requires notes to the main text. These notes may contain information to supplement or explain the main text, and/or information about your sources. The notes may be displayed as footnotes (at the bottom of the page) or endnotes (at the end of the work). Notes are numbered in a single sequence throughout a piece of work and normally set one or two points smaller than the general text. Most word-processing software has a footnote/endnote function that inserts numbers and formats notes automatically.

Reference list / Bibliography

Your reference list should come at the end of the assignment. Depending on your chosen referencing/citation style, it might also be called a Bibliography. It should have the heading ‘References’
or ‘Bibliography’ and each source should have its own line. The formatting of the citations themselves should adhere to your chosen referencing style. Refer to The General Guide to Referencing for the glorious details about how to properly acknowledge sources in academic writing.

**Submission of work**

**Title page or cover sheet**

The Title page contains some or all of these details for identification. You could include a header and footer on this page, to ensure nothing goes astray.

- Name and student number (if group work, list all members’ information)
- Course ID
- Title of work being submitted
- Lecturer and/or tutor/teacher name
- Date submitted

A separate cover sheet and/or submission slip may also be required. Attach this to the front of your work. Some courses will provide one for you.

**Online submission**

When asked to submit your assignment online through Moodle, there are a couple of considerations: the size of the file; and its name.

**File size**

Saving your assignment at the right size is important because large files (over 10MB) can be difficult or impossible to upload.

**Reducing PDF file size**

PDF files are supported by most platforms – Windows, Linux, Mac OS – and the size of the file will depend upon what is in it; word documents with just text tend to be smaller than those that include images and graphical information. Aim to keep the size of your file below 10MB, unless you have been advised otherwise. There are many ways of compressing them to make them smaller. Here are just a few.

**Adobe Acrobat**

1. Open your PDF Document in Adobe Acrobat Pro
2. Go to “File” > “Save As Other”
3. Click on “Reduced Size PDF”
4. Choose a version from the “Acrobat Version Compatibility” dropdown. After you’ve saved it, check that the file size is more appropriate
5. Click “OK”
6. Add a new file name for your document and choose a location to save the document
7. Click “Save”
PDF Squeezer is a PDF compression tool for Mac OS that is available as an App from the internet. A PDF Squeezer alternative is available for all platforms, and the tool reduces the file size of large PDF documents.

Reducing image size in Word documents
If you have inserted images into your document, then the file size is likely to be larger than normal. This generally makes your file slow to open and up- or download. By simply compressing the images, you can reduce the overall file size. This is done via the Format tab.
1. First click on the image you want to resize
2. Click on the “Format” / “Picture tools” tab
3. Click on “Compress Pictures”
4. Select the options you require
5. Click “Save”

Keep in mind that reducing the size of the image will also reduce quality. If it is critical to maintain the quality of images (for example, if you are a visual art student submitting images of your work), then your lecturer, teacher or tutor will have good advice: ask them.

File name
Giving your file a particular name not only identifies your file from other students, but will also help you keep track of your assignments because they will be in a consistent format.

In general: Find out well before the due date whether your lecturer, teacher or tutor has a preference for file size or name.

Use the following standards in the absence of specific instructions from your lecturer, teacher or tutor. Their advice may appear in the course description or be provided through a student forum. If in doubt, ask them first.

Naming your files
Having a system, or standard method, of naming your digital files gives you a good chance of finding them again. It also helps with the submission of your work. Again, your lecturer, teacher or tutor may have a preference so ask them for advice.

In the absence of specific instructions from your lecturer, teacher or tutor, use the following standard format every time you submit your work online (see following for a description of its elements):

    coursecode_assessmentnumber_yourname_studentID.doc

In this format, the elements are:
1. coursecode
   This is a set of letters and numbers that is unique for each course you study.
   Example: LITCI1006
2. assessmentnumber
   Number your assessments in the same way they appear on your descriptions, usually starting at 1.

3. yourname
   This need only be a shortened version of your name, as your student ID is also supplied. Include your first initial followed by the first four letters of your surname, like this (if your name is Jo Student):
   
   Example: jstud

4. studentID
   This is your FedUni student identification number.
   
   Example: 21214237

5. .docx
   This 'file extension' identifies the type of document you are uploading. It goes at the end of the file name after a dot, and is usually only three characters long. It tells the computer which program to use to open the file. Common file types are: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .xml, .jpg, .txt, .rtf

   Standard format example: LITCI1006_1_jstud_21214237.docx

Submission checklist
These may seem obvious, but check off the following before you submit your work:
• What your lecturer specified as method of submission.
• If submitting electronically, save it and submit it as a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx).
• Make a copy of the final version and keep as a record.
• All required content is there and in the right order.
• If required, your reference list/bibliography should be after your main body of work.
• Appendices are attached near the end, depending on what referencing system you are using.
• Pages are stapled securely in the top left-hand corner. No paper clips.
• Do not use folders unless instructed to do so.
• Submit your work by the due date (an extension may be granted in certain cases, but it should be confirmed with your lecturer/tutor/teacher ahead of time).
• Submit your work to the right place and person.

Penalties for poor presentation
If you submit your work without meeting basic presentation standards, you can incur penalties. Many lecturers can be generous; however, you would be wise to avoid submitting a poorly presented assignment. Not only will you risk the outcomes listed below, but you also won’t be doing yourself any favours; your future boss won’t accept underperformance.

• Your work may be returned and you may be required to resubmit (lucky outcome).
• Your work may be marked down (not so lucky).
• Your work may not be accepted or credited in your final grade (bad).

Back to table of contents
INTRODUCTION TO REFERENCING AND PLAGIARISM

or

Isn’t there another book for this?

Yes. It’s called *The General Guide to Referencing* and you can access it through the FedUni website. It has detailed examples of the three most commonly used referencing styles used at FedUni. But this section is about why you should reference in the first place. So, read on…

Referencing

Referencing is the act of citing the work of another to back up your own claims. Acknowledging your sources demonstrates that your ideas and conclusions are based on research, and allows your reader to locate and follow-up on the information or ideas you present. Referencing correctly is also how you ensure you never accidentally plagiarise.

Plagiarism

This refers to taking the work of someone else and passing it off as your own. This isn’t always deliberate; plagiarism can happen accidentally. Be aware of this, because it’s a serious issue. The academic world trades in ideas and knowledge; academics are working to impart or discover new pieces of information. Therefore it’s important that those responsible for discoveries or work are properly credited. When you write something without referencing it, you are denying the original author credit for their work. Imagine if you spent hours baking a masterpiece of a cake, and a friend took it to the party and claimed that they’d made it. You, rightfully, would be a little upset. This is the same sort of thing. Don’t take credit for someone else’s writing (or their cake).

The most obvious form of plagiarism is the ‘copy-and-paste’, and paraphrasing (rewriting the work of another so that it reads differently) without a reference is also plagiarism. Sharing knowledge and discussing ideas is part of academic life, and often helps to solidify concepts or put your own ideas in context. But collaborating with others and not crediting them for the work is potentially plagiarism. Let’s keep the cake metaphor and look at the forms plagiarism can take.

- Verbatim copying: A fancy name for copying and pasting information. (Your friend grabs your cake and tells everyone they made it.)
- Sham paraphrasing: Copying and pasting information but trying to pass it off as paraphrasing. (Your friend grabs your cake and tells everyone they made it based on a cake that you made.)
- Self plagiarism: Using old work without permission from the course coordinator or lecturer. (You make the cake, but nobody eats much, so you put it in a cupboard and take the rest of the stale cake to a party later, telling everyone that you made it an hour ago.)
- Illicit paraphrasing: Reinterpreting what another has said without acknowledging them in any way. (Your friend takes your cake, turns it upside down so that it looks different, and tells everyone they made it.)
• Group work: Contributing little or nothing to a group project, but still claiming marks for it at the end. (You and your friend work together on the cake, but your friend tells everyone only they made it.) For more ideas on how to avoid this scenario in a group, visit Working with others.

Plagiarism penalties

If you are found to have plagiarised, there are a range of outcomes that could occur, from failing the assignment to failing the entire subject and even (in extreme cases) being removed from the degree altogether. For more information on this it’s best to check out the plagiarism policy.

Tips for avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is avoidable. The key is to reference your sources every time you refer to the work of another. Here are some other tips:

• Keep careful records of the information you access.
• Learn how to paraphrase and quote correctly.
• Get a copy of The General Guide to Referencing. It’s online or available as a hard copy at FedUni bookshops.
• Never copy and paste information without at least noting the link (if it’s online) or the hard copy details. Copying and pasting without doing this means you could lose track of where it came from and have to remove it from the document or face being charged with plagiarism.
• Never make up quotes or data: it is unacceptable. Use your creative tendencies elsewhere.
• Don’t copy the work of another, and don’t get someone else to do the work for you. Even if you paid the other person, these both count as plagiarism.
• Conversely, don’t write for another student. Discussing ideas and concepts is fine, but once you start putting pen to paper, it must be yours alone.
• Use a text-checking service such as Turnitin to ensure you haven’t accidentally included someone else’s work.

Back to table of contents
HOW TO RESEARCH

or

Knowing what you’re talking about

What is research?

Have you ever started an argument with someone, only to realise after thirty seconds that you actually have no idea what you’re talking about? Performing academic research ensures that you never find yourself in such a situation when you produce an assessment task.

Research broadens and deepens your understanding of a given topic. By researching, you can examine a specific field more closely than you might have previously. Understanding a topic in greater detail can also help you produce ideas for your assessment piece. Often if you don’t know what to write about a topic, it can be because you’re not familiar enough with it. It’s time to bury yourself in some academic literature.

Research also helps you to support any arguments you might be making; it lends authority to your statements. It’s the difference between saying ‘chickens aren’t aliens’ and ‘chickens aren’t aliens and here’s why’. ‘Citing’ or ‘referencing’ your research in your writing also allows others to follow where you got your evidence from.

When should I research?

Almost every assessment task will require you to conduct research. You shouldn’t research only when you have to use references in an assessment. It’s essential to research for every assignment to show that you’re not making things up.

How do I research?

Be strategic about researching. If you don’t, you could end up deep in the bowels of the library or internet for hours with little to show for it. Try the following routine for every assessment task.

1. Define your topic

Know what you’re searching for before you start. If you’re writing about chickens, it’s not helpful to spend two hours looking at papers on kittens (as cute as they are). Take time to understand what you need to know, and what other knowledge could be helpful. First gain clarity on your topic by undertaking thorough topic analysis.

2. Conduct a search

The Library has useful guides on how to conduct a search, but here’s a quick list on where to start:

- Refer to your course description first. Lecturers usually include a list of references as a starting point.
- Identify the scope. Can you only use articles from the last five years? Can you only use primary sources? Do you need to research broadly or narrowly?
- Identify the kind of source: should you use only books and journals, or something else?
- Identify how to search: online or browse a library’s shelves? If online, what sort of search engine should you use? Ask the information experts at a campus Library.
• Start with the Library's subject guides. Librarians have done much of the work for you by compiling a list of books, journals and online sources for different subject areas.

• Collate your research. Identify what is missing (do a thorough topic analysis to find what you need).

3. Identify what you’re looking at

When researching, being able to recognise the types of material available will speed up your process of selection. Some types are:

• **Books.** Usually contain a lot of information, but are produced by only a few people (unless it’s a collation of works). Limiting yourself to only one or two books means limiting your research to the opinions of only a handful of people. Also, information in a book can be out of date by the time it is published and finally arrives on the library shelves. Always check the publication date.

• **eBooks.** Digital versions of previously published books or recent digital publications. Evaluate them in the same way you would a hardcopy book. The Library catalogue clearly labels ebooks.

• **Journals.** Also known as periodicals. These publications are regularly produced and contain papers written by researchers and academics. Lecturers generally prefer that you use journal articles as they are usually peer-reviewed (evaluated for validity and relevance by other researchers in the field) and are more recent sources than books.

• **Websites.** Always assess the credibility of a website before using it. Here’s how:
  a) Find the publication date on the site to decide how current the information is.
  b) Decide if the source is reliable: Check the web address extension. Is the author an educational institution (with .edu extension)? A government body (with .gov extension)? A not for profit organisation (with .org extension)? These kinds of websites are likely to be more objective than business or personal websites (with .com extension).

4. Identify how useful a source is

When you find an article, keep these things in mind to help you determine how helpful it might be:

• Relevancy. Does it relate to what you’re studying and your topic?

• Objectivity. Does the research have any bias or agenda that might skew the information? Be wary of research/information bearing particular advertising as it might be biased towards that company. Objective research will draw a conclusion based on the findings, not a company’s agenda.

• Reliability. Determine if the source of information can be trusted. Generally, journal articles are considered relatively ‘reliable’ sources, though you should still question the reliability as you read it.

• Accuracy. Assess whether the information fits with what you already know or whether there are contradictions. Also, check if cited references are used and whether they are reliable.

• Currency. Nothing to do with money. Make sure your source of information isn’t outdated. However, you don’t always need to find the most recent document. If your topic requires you to refer to an historical event, or a specific theory that was created some time ago, referring to the original documents is fine, though it can help to supplement them with a modern analysis.
CRITICAL THINKING

or

Question everything

Bertrand Russell (a philosopher) once said, ‘In all affairs, it’s a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted’ (Quotationsbook.com, 2012).

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is your active questioning of the information you have. Instead of taking information for granted, you need to think about it and evaluate it before forming an opinion of your own. Your lecturer will be looking for this skill in your work. It demonstrates your capacity to carefully consider the information and offer your own opinion, and not just reproduce the material.

Critical thinking involves looking at the arguments presented and assessing whether or not they are reasonable and well-supported. Look for gaps or flaws in arguments where you can. This isn’t actively trying to tear apart every piece of work you read, but rather, keeping an open mind on what it is saying.

How to think critically

There’s no specific procedure for critical thinking, but here are some elements to consider. Thinking critically means having the capacity to exercise judgment. Weigh up the evidence and then identify the most valid viewpoints or the most reasonable cause of action. To do this, you need to be able to:

• Stand back from your own biases. Be aware of your own beliefs about the world and consider that there might be another viewpoint.

• Determine the strengths and weaknesses of an argument or perspective and what might be missing from it.

• Avoid taking things at face value. Do not automatically assume that what is written or said is valid or ‘true’. Again, you need to evaluate the soundness of an argument based on the type of evidence used.

Reading critically

When you conduct research, ask these questions to help you evaluate what you read:

• What is the purpose of the written text?

• What is the writer’s perspective?

• What arguments does the writer put forward to support this perspective?

• Do I agree? Why? Why not?

• What evidence does the writer use to support their idea/perspective/argument?

• What do other writers say about this idea?

• What are the strengths of this idea/perspective/argument?
• What are the gaps in this idea/perspective/argument?
• What assumptions has the writer made?

**Writing critically**

Beyond reading, you also need to apply critical thinking to your own writing, which involves assessing your own arguments and ensuring that your conclusions are supported by evidence. So, not only should you be questioning what others have argued but you should also question your own arguments.

At university, you are expected to move away from descriptive writing. But, there is still a place for being descriptive in some contexts. Descriptive writing tends to:

- answer the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘who’ questions,
- identify, describe or list,
- focus on the ‘facts’,
- be most useful for describing cases and situations, reporting data and findings, for outlining objectives, or giving historical background.

The shortcoming of writing descriptively is that it does not allow for interpretation, justification, analysis, argument, explanations, reflections or hypotheses, all of which are necessary for demonstrating critical thinking. Descriptive language also tends to be neutral and ‘objective’, i.e. the author’s ‘voice’ is removed from the content. By comparison, writing critically requires you to have a clear ‘voice’ in your writing, one that is synthesising, interpreting, judging and concluding (University of Sydney, n.d.).

Moving from descriptive to critical writing means asking yourself questions, such as the reading critically questions listed above.

It also means using phrases such as:

- “X’s argument that…is not convincing because… …”
- “A difficulty with this position is…”
- “A shortcoming of this argument is…”
- “The strength of this stance is…”
- “This theory demonstrates that…”
- “This perspective does not take account of…”
  and so on.

To illustrate, here are brief examples of descriptive and critical writing (University of Sydney, n.d.):

**Example 1: Description/reporting**

Australia has a political system based on the principles of federalism where sovereignty is divided between the national (federal) government and state, territory and local governments. While the powers of the states were well established through the Constitution at the time of federation in 1901, these powers have diminished as states have had to be more and more reliant on the federal government for funds as its sphere of influence has expanded (Singleton et al., 2000).
Example 2: Critical writing

The debate about the relative merits of federalism and its suitability as a political system for Australia has engaged political theorists and politicians since federation. For example, Galligan (1996, p.35) puts forward the view that Australian federalism is essentially democratic, suggesting that devolution of power to the states ensures government ‘close to the people’, avoiding centralisation of power. However, this position does not take account of arguments by those such as Patience (1997) who suggests that more representation at different levels of government does not mean better democracy. It would seem that what is at stake here is how democracy is understood in the Australian context and how the history of the federal compact is interpreted.

Note here the appearance of the writer’s voice. The writer has synthesised the positions in the literature and has made comments on these differing positions. This leads to a judgement or interpretation of the issue. The underlined words and phrases demonstrate the type of language that indicates a critical voice is being used in the writing.

Reserve judgement

Reserving your opinion about a piece can be challenging, especially when it is a topic about which you have already formed an opinion. At least try to hold off until the very end. If you decide that a piece is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ before you’ve finished reading it, your interpretation of the piece may be constrained to support your pre-existing opinion.
All is not equal: differences between disciplines

Not every discipline will want exactly the same essay. Fortunately, the essay format is fairly universal, so it’s hard to go wrong. Nonetheless, as you read about essays and essay structure, keep in mind that this is a general guide, and not specific to your discipline. If your lecturer or tutor provides a specific format or guide, use that. Only use this guide to help where you have not been given guidance. Should you have any specific questions about the structure of your essay, ask your tutor or lecturer.

The aim of an essay

In an essay, your main goal is to express an opinion or information to the reader. You should have one main point that you are trying to express. In university, occasionally you may be asked to write descriptively, which encourages you to review information and then collate it, applying a particular structure. But usually, you are expected to analyse, discuss or evaluate an issue, applying research to support an argument. Two typical forms of essay follow; please note these are not the only form you will encounter:

**Argumentative:** you are arguing that something is good/bad or right/wrong and the paragraphs provide evidence as to why that is the case.

**Analytical:** you are analysing or interpreting an event or theory, and the paragraphs contribute to that final understanding.

Either way, your essay should always have one major goal and it’s important to keep that goal in mind when writing.

Planning

There is a section on planning in this book for your reading pleasure. Have, at least, a brief plan before you start writing an essay as it can provide a guide for which ideas and information you include. A plan also allows you to lay out your essay structure before you begin writing. Then you can see whether some paragraphs are thin on evidence or have other issues. In some courses, you can be asked to first produce an essay outline which contributes to your overall mark, but otherwise planning is a good habit to get into.

Essay structure

Understanding essay structure is the key to simplifying the whole process. Distant memories of high school might offer some relief, but things are a bit different at university, so don’t rely on them. It may help to think of structure as the skeleton of your writing; if your body was missing a skeleton, you’d flop around, much like an essay that has no structure.

There are three main parts of an essay: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. One way to describe each part is as follows:

- **Introduction:** tell them what you’re going to say
Body: say it

Conclusion: tell them what you said

That’s oversimplifying it, but it’s a quick way to remember the purpose of each section. Here is a visual take on essay structure that shows you generally what to aim for:

### Structure your Essay

#### Introduction
- General
  - Introduce the topic, provide general background information
  - Narrow your topic or set context for your argument
  - Present your viewpoint or line of argument / thesis statement
  - Outline areas / main points to be discussed

- Specific
  - About 10% of total length
  - One paragraph or several, depending on length

#### Body
- The following is a look at the separate sections. But, please note, this information is a guide only and is not intended to be prescriptive.

#### Conclusion
- Specific
  - Usually one paragraph
  - About 10% of total length

- General
  - Sum up the main points and reinforce your thesis statement
  - No new information is included here.

1. **Introduce the topic, provide general background information**
   - Show the context of your essay by introducing some key words or concepts from your essay topic.


Example: Essay topic

“Discuss the impacts of the phenomenon of performance enhancing drugs in Australian professional sports on adolescent athletes.”

The first sentence of the example introduction may go something like this:

“Performance enhancing drugs have been shown to have a detrimental effect in the Australian sporting world since the 1980s as evidenced in the media and among professional sporting bodies (Fenanigan & Crawley, 2013).”

As you can see, three key words have been introduced here, which are: ‘performance enhancing drugs’, ‘Australian’ and ‘professional sports’. Following this, you may then want to write another couple of sentences expanding on this information.

2. Narrow your focus, set the context for your argument

Introduce the other key words from your topic to set up the context for your upcoming thesis statement. You may want to define certain words at this point as well, for example:

“Young adolescent athletes, generally aged between 14 and 18, are not immune to the prevalence of drug use. This is not only based on their awareness of its existence in professional sports, but their own attitudes towards performance enhancing drugs (Hagan, 2013).”

The other key words from the original topic were introduced here, ‘adolescent athletes’, which completes the picture and now leads the reader towards your specific angle on this subject.

3. Present your viewpoint/line of argument/thesis statement

Next you state the main argument or focus for the body of your essay based on the background information you provided for the reader. Your argument can be a ‘direct answer’ to a question posed in the essay topic (e.g. “Why are nurses more susceptible to chain smoking compared to other professionals?”), or a statement about an issue highlighted in your essay topic. Just make sure all key words from the topic have been introduced by this stage, so that your reader is given the complete context for your ideas. For example, a thesis statement for our original essay could be:

“Drug taking in sport has only negative impacts on adolescent athletes with regard to their own potential moral code as professional sportspeople and also their propensity for participating in drug taking itself.”

4. Outline areas/main points to be discussed

This leads into the body of your essay, informing your reader about what is coming next. In particular, state what the main points in the paragraphs will be about. For example:
“This essay examines impacts on the attitudes and aspirations of young athletes as a result of drug use in sport, and how these arise as a result of role modelling and exposure to drugs through sports clubs.”

It should be noted that the four sections described above do not have to be followed in this rigid order. Use them as needed in your essays, but always follow your marker’s instructions in the first instance.

Generally, your introduction makes up approximately 15% of your total length. So, if you were asked to write a 2,000 word essay, your introduction would be about 300 words, as a general estimate.

Example: Topic and introduction (adapted from LaTrobe University, 2014)

Analyse the role of the MCH nurse working in partnership with the family to care for a child with a diagnosed developmental delay

Background information Narrowing focus Thesis statement Outline of main ideas

Monitoring the growth and development of children at regular intervals allows for the early detection of developmental delay. One of the key aims of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nursing practice is the early detection and the referral of children with a developmental delay (Neil & Marcuson, 2011). In the transition from suspicion and concerns about their child’s development, to the confirmation of the diagnosis of developmental delay, the lived experience for the family takes on a whole new chapter. Depending on the degree of severity and permanence of the developmental delay, families may face a rollercoaster journey of therapies, testing and appointments (Collster, 2009). Families may also face the loss of the sense of normality of their child eventually growing into an independent adult, as well as mounting financial burdens (Foster & McCauley, 2010). MCH nursing practice has a role to play in supporting families beyond the diagnosis, especially in the context of more major persistent delay where there is significant impact on the family. In the context of the impact on the family, this essay explores the question of what happens following a diagnosis of developmental delay and how MCH nurses can work collaboratively with families. Developmental delay is discussed generally rather than with reference to a specific type of delay, and the role of the MCH nurse (MCHN) in the care of the child is critically analysed along the spectrum of working in an expert role to working in partnership with the family.

Body

The body consists of a series of paragraphs, and each paragraph should cover only one topic. A key to writing effectively in the body of your essay is including topic sentences. The Topic Sentence is generally written in your own words and tells the reader what the paragraph is about. Using the original essay topic on sports, drugs and adolescents, you might start your first body paragraph with:

“Inevitably, being a professional athlete in Australia means there is the additional responsibility of becoming a role model or the ‘face’ of a sport for younger generations.”

There should be no need to reference this sentence as it is supposed to be your idea that you have developed based on your own research. What would follow after this topic sentence would be evidence
(examples and references) for your statement that explores and justifies why this is the case. For more information about writing winning paragraphs, see Writing Construction.

**Example: Body paragraph**
(Adapted from LaTrobe University, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic sentence</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Linking words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The diagnosis of developmental delay can result in a wide range of reactions from family members. Head and Abbeduto (2007, p. 293) note that some families have high levels of stress with sustained impairment of functioning, while some thrive on the challenges associated with the child’s developmental delay. But, the impact of having a child with a developmental delay on a family can never be underestimated. There are often very intense emotions such as grief, anger, disbelief and isolation (DCDR, 2008, p.13). In particular, the time of diagnosis can be a crisis where the parents’ expectations are turned upside down (Sen & Yurtsever, 2006, p.239). Because the child is most influenced by their family, it is very important to empower the family (Blann, 2005, p. 265) and so the nature of the relationship between families and health professionals is important. Specifically, how the family is treated at the time of their child’s initial diagnosis can have long term impacts (DEECD, 2010a, p.27). Therefore, it is important that the MCH nurse leaves room for hope at this initial stage, as this leads to a family’s healthy functioning within a framework of optimism (Kearney & Griffin, 2001, p.589) and helps build a connection between the MCH nurse and the family.

**Conclusion**

This is where you wrap it all up. It’s much like the reverse of the introduction in that you remind your reader what the focus of your essay was. This includes your thesis statement, and an outline of your arguments from the body. You then finish up by making recommendations about what research could happen next (if that’s appropriate) or writing a neat summary sentence. There should be no new information in the conclusion or any references. This is your own summary of your own writing.

**Example: Conclusion**
(Adapted from LaTrobe University, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reminder of thesis statement</th>
<th>Re-statement of main points</th>
<th>Concluding statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The role of the MCHN has been critically analysed in the context of the question of “What happens afterwards?” for families once their child has a diagnosed developmental delay. The appropriateness of MCHN involvement has been questioned particularly from the view of not wanting to place a greater burden on a family who may already have multiple practitioners involved in their care, and a time consuming schedule of appointments. It is acknowledged that in some circumstances particularly where there are complex needs, it may be in the families’ best interests to not have MCHN involvement. However, the MCHN’s availability could be invaluable for families who require support if issues arise… For families who do have ongoing contact with the MCHN service, the role of the MCHN may involve assisting parents with their child’s basic needs of attachment, feeding, sleep and behaviour, and normalising behaviour which is not part of the delay… As the need arises, the MCHN can offer
information and referral to support services, and as a free service the MCHN does not add to the financial burden on the family. When they need to share and be heard, the MCHN may be the only person that mothers and families can go to, and as such, this is a vital role in the health and wellbeing of the family.

Reference list (APA), Bibliography (Chicago Note) or Works Cited (MLA)
This section comes after the essay and includes full publication information for all the in-text citations you used to write your essay. In higher education, this is expected in every essay you write. For more information on referencing, consult *The General Guide to Referencing*.

Appendices
Sometimes, not often, you may need to include an appendix with your essay. These are only required when you have documents, figures or other statistics that are relevant to the essay, but which are too large to be inserted into the document. If you want to refer your reader to the information in an appendix, write in brackets at the relevant point in the body paragraph (see Appendix).

Appendices usually appear after the references, but check with the style you are using as each one has different expectations.

*Back to table of contents*
REPORTS

or

I already did the research! Now you want me to write too?

All is not equal: differences between disciplines

Unlike essays, reports can be completely different in structure depending on what you're studying. A business report, a psychology report, a nursing report and a scientific lab report look very different. As a result, what follows is broad advice about writing reports, so check your course description or ask your lecturer for guidelines if you need specific instructions.

The aim of a report

A report is written to outline some sort of research (be it observational or conducted in a lab), or to present information to inform a decision, or to account for specific actions. The following section outlines the basic differences between reports across various disciplines. The types of reports include: research reports, business reports and scientific reports.

Research reports

Research reports are usually written in science, engineering and psychology disciplines and require you to outline and analyse specific research you have conducted. But, as you will see in examples further on, the structure can vary according to the field of study. Generally, the basic structure for a research report is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Sections</th>
<th>Content of Each Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Report</td>
<td>Concise heading indicating what the report is about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents (not always required)</td>
<td>List of major sections and headings with page numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract/Synopsis</td>
<td>Concise summary of main findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Why and what you researched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review (sometimes included in the Introduction)</td>
<td>An overview of other relevant research in this area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>What you did and how you did it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>What you found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Relevance of your results; how it fits with other research in the area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Conclusion

Summary of results/findings

Recommendations
(sometimes included in
the Conclusion)

What needs to be done as a result of your findings

References or
Bibliography

All references used in your report or referred to for
background information

Appendices

Any additional material which will add to your report

(Adapted from University of Adelaide, 2008)

For more detail about the content of each section of a report, go to Section content below.

**Business reports**

The purpose of writing reports in business is to prepare you for the workplace where most forms of information are communicated in some form of a report. Depending on the aim of the report (and specific business area), a report can require presentation of information only (financial statements for Commerce and Accounting), information with interpretation (product analysis for Marketing) or information with analysis and recommendations (Management and other areas).

**What is the difference between an essay and a business report?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Expresses a point of view in relation to a particular claim</td>
<td>Often recommends an action to solve a specific problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Format and structure</strong></td>
<td>Has introduction, body and conclusion sections that normally do not use headings</td>
<td>Uses cohesive paragraphs to link ideas rather than using dot points to list them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses cohesive paragraphs to link ideas</td>
<td>Uses shorter, more concise paragraphs and dot points where applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Abstracts are not normally needed as readers read the text carefully from start to finish</td>
<td>Always has an abstract (or executive summary) as readers are typically ‘time poor’ and skim and scan through the text quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graphics</strong></td>
<td>Rarely uses graphics (such as tables and graphs) as written evidence</td>
<td>Features graphics for supporting main points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generally the result of individual work

Often the result of group work

(Adapted from the University of Sydney, n.d.)

**General structure of a business report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front Contents</th>
<th>Body of the Report</th>
<th>Back Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Cover</td>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>- Appendices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Title Page</td>
<td>- Findings and Discussion</td>
<td>- References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Abstract or Executive</td>
<td>- Conclusions</td>
<td>- Glossary (if required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>- Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Table of Contents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- List of Figures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scientific reports**

The purpose of scientific reports can be to communicate results from your technical or science experiments, or outline the state of a technical or scientific research problem. Usually, they follow the IMRAD structure (introduction, method, results and discussion).

**General structure of a scientific report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front Contents</th>
<th>Body of the Report</th>
<th>Back Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Cover</td>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>- References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Title Page</td>
<td>- Materials &amp; methods</td>
<td>- Appendices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Abstract</td>
<td>- Results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Table of Contents</td>
<td>- Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Abstract</td>
<td>- Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engineering reports usually follow a technical report structure that has the same front and back matter as a scientific report, but the body contains an introduction, middle sections with headings and a conclusion. Regardless, to make sure you are using the one preferred in your course, always check with your lecturer first before following any specific report structure.

**Section content**

The following information outlines what you could include in each section of your report. Please check your own course requirements before applying these guidelines.
Table of contents

If a report is several pages long, it is helpful to include a table of contents to help the reader locate information quickly. The table of contents also provides an overview of the structure of the report. The contents pages should be separated from the rest of the report and include all headings and subheadings:

- written exactly as they appear in the report
- numbered exactly as they appear in the report
- with their page numbers (Unilearning, 2000).

List of figures

This is used mainly for reports containing numerous figures. It includes the figure number, caption and page number, ordered as they appear in the text.

Example: List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>This is your first figure. As it is the introduction, it could be a nice flow chart describing the main idea or process of your research……..</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>This figure could be a nice image of chocolate or something more relevant to your research……..</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Some people will consider this art. Especially if it is a really nice image of chocolate……..</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>You actually don’t need to read these figure captions. They are just filling text used for this example…………</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>A multi-coloured figure? Now you’re talking. It’s good to include a bit of colour into your document as long as it’s not too gaudy…..</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Some figures can have brief descriptions….</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Or even shorter….</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Your figure may have more descriptive text than others. You can even have paragraphs… To prove a point… Or another point…</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from: luckylion.de/vasco/tutorials/indesign_beyond_the_thesis/a_pictures/list_figure_example.png)

List of tables

This list is used mainly for reports containing numerous tables. It includes the table number, caption and page number, ordered as they appear in the text.
Example: List of tables

| Table 1. | This table shows a standard empty table | 5 |
| Table 2. | This table shows a standard empty table with a limited caption width using important data from Smith and Watkins (2012) | 7 |
| Table 3. | Moon data | 8 |
| Table 4. | This table shows nothing but a sideways table and takes up a whole page by itself. | 11 |
| Table 5. | Software available in the 139 Durham labs in the early 2000s | 15 |

(Source: http://i644.photobucket.com/albums/uu164/thinktank1985/Untitled-1.jpg)

List of appendices

This list is used mainly for reports containing numerous appendices. It includes the appendix letter (each separate appendix should be lettered i.e. Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.), its title and page number, ordered as they appear at the end of the report.

e.g. Appendix A Data on pancake consumption
     Appendix B Histograms on pancake consumption

Abstract

The abstract is a short summary of the essential elements of the report/essay from the introduction through to, and including, the recommendations. It should be independent (can be read on its own), comprehensive (covers all the main points), clear and concise. As a general rule, it should be short, only 10-15% of the length of the report/essay, and should be written in full sentences. Write the abstract after you have written the entire report (or essay).

Some people confused the structure and purpose of an abstract with that of an introduction. Spot the differences below…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Purpose</td>
<td>-Background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Scope</td>
<td>-Narrow focus / Set context for argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Main points</td>
<td>-Present argument / thesis statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Conclusions</td>
<td>-Outline main points to be discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, the abstract is a summary of all of the contents of the report, including the conclusion and recommendations and is usually written using the present or past tense. The introduction, on the other hand, only tells the reader what is going to be discussed in the body in the last part (outline main points) and uses the future tense.
**Example: Biology abstract**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many plants in Australia have their seeds buried in order for the species to survive fires. The seeds start to germinate under the soil at certain temperatures. Seeds of <em>Acacia terminalis</em> and <em>Dillwynia floribunda</em> were examined in this experiment. It was hypothesised that the seeds need heat for the germination to start. Seeds of the two species were treated in hot and cold water and left to start germinating. <em>Acacia terminalis</em> showed a significant response in germination after the hot water treatment while <em>Dillwynia floribunda</em> did not. Neither seed showed a response in germination after cold water treatment. The results for <em>Dillwynia floribunda</em> were unexpected but may be explained by factors such as water temperature and the length of time the seeds remained in the heated water.</th>
<th>Background Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outline of what was investigated in this experiment</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Method</td>
<td>Summary of Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Unilearning, 2000)

**Executive summary**

An executive summary is mainly expected as part of a business report. Although it is similar to an abstract in that they both summarise a paper and have a similar framework (see above), there are key differences. An executive summary:

- is written as a stand-alone document and can be quite long – up to 15% of the word-length of the report;
- starts with the key findings of the research, which are then expanded upon;
- often uses dot points for emphasis and to keep it short;
- has a strong focus on the recommendations and their justification; and
- must accurately reflect what is in the report (the recommendations are sometimes word for word from the report).

**Example: How to write an executive summary** (University of Maryland University College, 2014)

Inform the reader of the objective, or purpose, of the report. For a health benefits report model, this paragraph might explain how the report demonstrates that a change in the organisation’s employee health plans would be beneficial to the organisation. The goal of the report is to support a change in the organisation’s benefits policy.

Then you might outline the benefits of the plan or course of action that you recommend. A bulleted list can be an effective way to state the benefits in a clear and concise way. Since an executive summary will
not contain extensive data or details, this is an excellent way to summarise data in the report. For example, the organisation should consider a change for the following reasons:

- The organisation is currently spending an average of 32% of its annual earnings on benefits.
- The current health insurance is unsatisfactory according to the employees, since the current provider has raised deductibles and reduced benefits.
- A change to plan ABC from company XYZ would increase both profitability and employee satisfaction.
- Better health benefits will also improve the company’s ability to recruit and hire talented job candidates.

Finally, conclude the report with a specific recommendation based on the information in the summary. The organisation needs to switch to company XYZ’s health package at the beginning of the next fiscal year, since this will increase profitability and employee satisfaction.

Introduction

Scientific/technical reports

Write your introduction after you have written your method and results sections, then you will know exactly what your body section is about already and you won’t sound vague. The introduction can include:

- the background to the topic of your report
- a clear statement of the purpose of the report
- a clear statement of the aims of the project or research
- technical background necessary to understand the report, e.g. theory or assumptions
- a brief outline of the structure of the report if appropriate.

Example: Engineering technical report introduction (Monash University, 2014)

A dual carriageway bridge with two traffic lanes in each direction is to be constructed on the Calder Freeway crossing Slaty Creek in the Shire of Macedon Ranges in Victoria. The bridge is to span 125 metres between man-made compacted fill embankments, and is approximately 15 metres above the river surface, with a grade of 0.056 m/m.

This report presents two possible concept designs for the bridge. In evaluating these designs, the following criteria are considered: construction method, construction and maintenance costs, possible disruption to traffic during construction, the durability and the aesthetics of the bridge.

The two conceptual designs are presented in the form of sketches of the elevations and cross-sections of the structures.

Business reports
The content of an business report introduction is similar to an essay introduction as it moves from general to specific information. You should write this part after you have written the body of the report. Answer questions like “What is this report about?” and “How is it useful?” and include:

- brief background information
- a description of the overall purpose and key objectives
- an overview of the issues that you will discuss (scope)
- an outline of any limitations to the report, or assumptions.

**Method**

The method is one of the easier parts to write in a report. In this section, you need to outline how your research was conducted. Depending on whether you’re writing a psychology report or a scientific lab report, it can be be written in prose form, or using dot points. The types of questions you need to answer in your method section also depend on the discipline.

### Sample questions to answer in your method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline area</th>
<th>Types of questions to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific lab report</td>
<td>What materials did you use? What methods did you use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology report</td>
<td>Who were my subjects/participants? (demographic details) What materials did I use? What procedure did I follow?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example: Method section of a biology report (excerpt)**

Growth rates were determined by estimating the number of bacteria in a culture at zero time and after 1 hour of growth at 37°C. In order to make this estimation, a dilution series was performed by diluting aliquots of the bacterial culture, at each incubation time, by a factor of 10, 100, and 10 000 with nutrient broth, and then plating out 0.01ml of each of these dilutions onto quadrants of a sterile agar plate. Following one week’s incubation at 25°C, the colonies of the plate were counted manually.

In this excerpt, no amounts or descriptions of equipment have been included nor would they have been necessary, as someone wishing to repeat the experiment could change these and still get the same effect.

(University, 2000)

If anybody were to read your method, they should be able to recreate your research exactly. Ask yourself whether that would be possible, based on your account of the method. If the answer is ‘no’, then you
may have left something out. Your purpose is not to comment on the method, you're simply describing how it was done.

Results
This section discusses the results of the research but does not comment on them. It can be a brief section where you simply write what the outcome of the experiment was. This section should be written in full sentences, but can also include tables or figures if you are instructed to do so.

Example: Results of a chemistry report (excerpt)

| When samples of hydrolysed and unhydrolysed BSA were analysed by ascending paper chromatography, the appearance and separation of the two samples were quite different. The unhydrolysed BSA had very little colour and appeared to remain on the origin (Fig. 1). In its hydrolysed form, however, the BSA sample separated into a number of spots which were bright pink or purple (Fig. 1). |
| Description but no explanation |
| Notice that there is no direct reference to figures but to the results themselves. |

(Unilearning, 2000)

Discussion
The discussion is one of the larger sections of a report and includes an analysis of your results and what they mean. You also need to:
• explain and interpret your results
• assess whether the questions you raised in your introduction have been answered
• refer back to any theory or research you referred to in your introduction
• identify any significance in your results in the context of the theory.

Do your findings contradict the findings of previous research? Then mention it in the discussion.

You also need to mention any limitations of your research in this section. Limitations are any problems with your method that could have been improved upon or that might have affected the results in some way. Perhaps your sample size wasn’t large enough, or an item was contaminated. Be sure to mention that here. Despite it being called the ‘Discussion’, it should still be written as objectively as possible.

Example: Discussion from a chemistry report
The activity of the salivary amylase enzyme in this experiment increased with temperature up to 37°C. This was probably an effect on the reaction itself, as the rate of chemical reactions generally increases as temperature increases because there is more energy in the system at higher temperatures (Stryer, 1995, p. 46). Most enzymes are denatured at temperatures above 50°C (Perkins, 1964); however, in this experiment, the activity of the amylase was highest at 70°C. This may be explained by the variation in temperature that is experienced in the mouth during eating, which may require a high degree of heat-resistance in the amylase enzyme ...

State the major results again

Interpretation/explanation based on what is known (cite references)

An unexpected result

Attempt to explain how/why the result occurred

(Unilearning, 2000)

Conclusion

Your conclusion is a summary of the overall report. Remind your readers of your original purpose and write down what you found. Finish with a strong conclusive sentence that leaves the readers with a firm impression of the research outcome.

Reference list

A reference list should be attached to every research report and follows as a new page after the conclusion. It consists of the full citation of every cited work and uses the relevant referencing format. Most referencing styles have their own guidelines for writing a reference list, so refer to The General Guide to Referencing for more information.

Appendices

Appendices are more common in reports than in essays, and come at the very end (after reference lists and all). Your lecturer or tutor will tell you if you require appendices at the end of your work. Appendices are typically made up of items used in your report for readers to refer to for more detailed information that could not be included in the body of the report, or which would guide others wishing to conduct the research themselves. For example, if you used a questionnaire, you might attach it as an appendix.

Back to table of contents
ORAL PRESENTATIONS

or

Tips other than imagining everyone naked

Not many people are a fan of oral presentations unless they really like the sound of their own voice (or, you know, are just confident people) but presentations can be made a little less stressful with a certain approach. Your classmates all have to do them as well, so they are probably on your side. There will always be a know-it-all classmate to ask you lots of questions. Don’t take it personally - they’re just showing off.

The speech

This is the core of it — talking to an audience about a subject. Keep these things in mind to make the experience easier:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Know your subject matter</strong></td>
<td>Sound obvious? Before giving the presentation, get as familiar with the topic as you can. It’s much easier to talk about something you fully understand. Think of how easily you can talk about your favourite TV show or movie, and then think of something that doesn’t interest you much. Talking about the first is much easier than the second, right? It’s the same for presentations. If you know what you’re saying, then you’re less likely to stumble and you’ll generally feel less stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read from something</strong></td>
<td>You don’t have to write the whole speech down word for word. An audience will engage more with you if you’re able to make eye contact. Something written down will keep you on track, but avoid needing to read every word. Try dot points on an A4 sheet, put notes on cue cards, or draw pictures on the back of your hand. Whatever works for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stick to a format</strong></td>
<td>Like any other assignment, presentations need to be structured. Have you ever had a conversation with someone when they couldn’t stay on track? Listeners can become frustrated by an unstructured presentation. Try dividing your points into sections, with some sort of introduction and conclusion that flow logically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use clear and simple language</strong></td>
<td>Don’t complicate your language if it isn’t necessary. A key to giving a successful presentation is to impart information to a broad audience, so avoid using language that alienates anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involve the audience</strong></td>
<td>It’s not mandatory, but an audience that actively participates in a presentation is generally more attentive than a passive audience. If you have a particularly dull topic, involving the audience could be a good way to hold their attention. It can be as simple as directing questions toward them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Supporting material

Not every presentation calls for supporting material, but it can often help you to emphasise key points, or portray information in a different way. It can also be used to spice up the presentation so that your audience remains interested. There are many different tools you can use in a presentation, but they won’t be appropriate for every situation. Knowing how and when to use them can improve your presentation immensely.

PowerPoint

This is the popular go-to card for any presentation assignment, but there are a few important things to remember about using it. In brief, less is more with PowerPoint presentations.

- **Only put essential information or key points on the slides.** They should complement a speech, not replace it. Writing your entire speech on the slides will mean the audience will just read it and not listen to a word you say. Not to mention you’ll have your back to them whilst you read it.

- **Avoid distractions.** Busy or fancy PowerPoint presentations will draw the audience’s attention and you’ll be ignored. People may then miss your pearls of wisdom, so keep the slides simple.

- **Have a plan B.** So you spent all night preparing a beautiful PowerPoint. It’s a work of art. You stroll into the room with a big grin on your face, plug in the USB and… the computer’s not working. It’s a bad situation. As wonderful as modern technology is, it is not 100% reliable, so factor that in. If you’re designing an electronic presentation, then bring a back up. Perhaps print the slides and have them with you, or take cue cards. Just please take something.

- **Set up beforehand.** As interesting as your speech will be, setting up for a speech is rarely as fascinating. Try to set everything up before you start speaking and check that everything works.

Posters

Posters are only useful in specific situations or when directly requested. Use them when your audience will have the chance to read them in detail. Posters aren’t practical if you need to talk at the same time, as the audience may be distracted. They can work well if they reflect the structure of your talk and elaborate on certain factors. If you’re using it because you want to indicate certain passages of it while talking, then you’re using it more like a paper version of a PowerPoint presentation, and the same rules apply.

Video

Showing a video can emphasise a point well, but don’t use it unless it adds to your presentation. Your classmates might love it if you show them videos of light saber cats for five minutes, but it won’t get you the marks. Use only short videos and only one or two, as it’s not your own work and therefore cannot count towards your grade. Saying ‘I found this great video’ and hitting play doesn’t count as a presentation. Usually, people embed videos into PowerPoint presentations. Check that the technology (internet) works beforehand, as clicking play and having nothing happen doesn’t add to a smooth performance.

Audio

The rules here are similar to using video: only use it if it emphasises a point that you are making. Don’t use it just to fill in time or do your work for you, because you won’t get many marks for it. And don’t forget to check that the room can actually play audio.
Demonstration

A demonstration can be a way to involve the audience, especially if it calls for their participation. However, keep the set-up time low, or people may resent the effort you’re forcing them to expend. Demonstrations are useful to explain something physical, or to explore a hypothetical situation, as long as you have enough willing participants. That said, don’t use it simply for the sake of demonstration, as it can cut a chunk out of your time. There are also topics that don’t lend themselves to demonstrations. If your presentation is on dinosaurs, doing an impression of a velociraptor is not the best way to use your time.

Back to table of contents
WORKING WITH OTHERS

or

Play nice

At some point during university study, you will have to work with other people. Yes, other human beings. Just as the human race is a lottery of personalities and traits, so too is group work. The people in your group may never turn up to meetings, or they may all want to take control. You might end up with a group of perfectly nice people; that happens too.

Setting up your group

Introductions: Say hi! You will be working with these people for a few weeks, so straighten your tie, flatten your fringe and smile. Okay, the first two are optional, but smiling is compulsory. Spend the first meeting getting to know each other; the work will feel easier after that. Don’t forget that you already have something in common: your study.

• Contacts: Group work won’t succeed if you can’t get in touch with one another. Share around everyone’s preferred contact details.

• Time: Make this one of the first things you decide upon. Arranging a sequence of meetings will help everyone turn up at the same time in the future. This way you’ll know when you will see each other next and who will bring the cupcakes.

• Place: Decide on a regular place to meet and make it ‘The meeting spot’. Restricting your meetings to a single location will reduce the chance of anyone getting lost or confused. Make it somewhere everybody is familiar and comfortable with. Be sure to give everyone clear directions before they leave.

• Be inclusive: Nothing is worse than feeling left out of a group. Give everybody a chance for input. If something isn’t working for someone, then help to identify the issue and possible solutions. Being able to compromise in a group setting is an important skill to have.

Challenges ahead

Group work is notorious for being challenging. Not only do you have to do the work, you also have to navigate it with a group of semi-strangers. It’s important to note that lecturers are reluctant to get involved if there is conflict within a group, so you are normally expected to resolve any issues you have within the group amongst yourselves. So, to prevent conflict later on, try to create a positive scenario through communication and compromise. Discuss the following topics with your group as a way to bring everyone together with a common aim:

• Group dynamics: Every group will create a different dynamic, depending on the nature of its members. A typical group could have any of the following ‘types’: quiet; disruptive; know-it-all; disinterested; and needy. Recognising the different personalities and styles apparent in your group will help you to navigate interactions and (hopefully) smooth the way.

• Workload: There are specific roles that help to create group cohesion. For example, one member may naturally want to take the ‘leader’ role to guide discussion and delegate work. But, another member may be more interested in making sure that everyone is included in discussions and that not
one person is dominating the conversation. Whatever role you take, it’s important that the actual tasks are shared evenly amongst the members, and that one person is not doing most of the work. Some lecturers will ask students to mark each other’s contribution to the group project (often described as ‘peer evaluation’), in which case loafers won’t get away with doing nothing. Handy fact: it is a form of plagiarism for someone to do no work in a group project and then claim marks for the project.

- **Absences**: Life will happen, and people (yourself included) won’t make it to every meeting. Develop a plan of action just in case. For example, the absentee could notify the other group members by text or email, and someone could send the results of the meeting to them. Make sure you stick to the plan.

- **Cultural differences**: Groups with mixed cultures can sometimes experience misunderstandings due to language differences or different ways of working together. Bring out that old-fashioned polite behaviour and make sure each member feels they can contribute to discussions and decisions.

- **They’re human**: People have lives outside of group work, as do you. A group member who is doing no work might be a problem, but they could also have other commitments, or be dealing with a crisis. Don’t judge the person before you know all the facts. Talk to your group if you think something is unfair or not working.
LITERATURE REVIEWS

or

Writing about other people writing about other people

Literature reviews are not always easy to write. This is because it can be difficult to understand what a literature review is exactly. It is not a movie review, so submissions like “The twist in the end was spectacular. I didn't guess that the Spanish would kill the Aztecs. 4/5. Would read again.” are not acceptable literature reviews (even if they are entertaining). So let’s take a look at what a literature review is and how you go about writing one.

What is ‘literature’?

When we’re talking about a literature review, ‘literature’ refers to all the texts and works surrounding a particular topic. This means that if you’ve been asked to do a literature review on the history of the Aztecs, the ‘literature’ refers to any books, journals or other pieces of work about (or by) the Aztecs.

Primary sources

Using the example of the Aztecs, a primary source would be a first-hand report of an encounter with them or any work by an Aztec. Primary sources are always considered the strongest means of evidence.

Secondary sources

These evaluate or discuss primary sources. Essentially, a secondary source is written after an event or based on the work of another person and is usually an analysis of the original source. It’s important to not take any single secondary source as a complete representation.

Tertiary sources

These collate a broad array of information on a topic and present it in one location. A text book, for example, is a tertiary source, as it takes heaps of information within a field and presents it in one document.

Aim of a literature review

If you are writing a thesis or dissertation, the aim of writing a literature review is to understand the context of your own research by surveying and evaluating what has already been written on the topic. Surveying the literature can enable you to clarify your own focus and methodology. Evaluating each publication can also clarify what has been proven, or what is valid in your field of study. A literature review defines the gaps in a particular area and outlines the areas that require further research. When reviewing literature, you refer to what others have written or done on the topic.

How many references should I use?

The following is a general guide only and you should always check with your lecturer first.

- Undergraduate review: 5-20 titles depending on level
- Honours dissertation: 20+ titles
• Masters thesis: 40+ titles
• Doctoral thesis: 50+ titles

Structure of a literature review
The structure of a literature review is very similar to an essay with an introduction, body and conclusion.

The introduction
• Defines the general topic or issue, setting up the context for the review.
• Outlines what has generally been published on this topic before, including any gaps in research.
• Presents your reason for reviewing the literature on this topic, outlining what criteria you will use to analyse and compare the literature as well as what type of literature you are including (or not including) in the review.

The body
• Paragraphs in your literature review should be grouped by topic with clear topic sentences.
• Paragraphs are set out in a logical order. Literature should be grouped according to a clear system, such as combining qualitative or quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, or sorting in order of chronology.
• Each article or source should be summarised briefly with details highlighted depending on what you want to emphasise.

The conclusion
• Summarise the significance and contributions of the literature to your overall topic.
• Evaluate the general consensus, but include any limitations or flaws in any research papers.
• Include a general comment on your topic and the importance/relevance to your discipline area.

Writing a literature review
To start with, you need to do research — a lot of it. This is a review of the literature, and you have to cover your topic extensively. Find any and all pertinent literature on the topic. This doesn’t mean that you have to use every document ever written (or you’ll be writing it for years), but you need to make sure that you give an accurate portrayal of the literature in the field. Researching that will take some time. Depending on your year level or program, read a lot of different sources (articles, books, etc.). The quantity you’ll be required to read will climb as the word length for the literature review expands. Organise the literature you’ve found, either chronologically or based on similar views or approaches. This process could serve as a basic plan for the overall literature review. At the end of that, you should know what each paragraph will be about and what order they will go in.

A literature review must be written in complete sentences. Cite all the articles you’ve found just as you would in an essay. You can’t just list them all at the end or talk about them all individually. This is why it’s important to arrange them into topics beforehand. Write each paragraph as a discussion of the topic and use the literature in doing so.
Good and bad reviews

Neuman (1991, p.94) provides an example of a good and bad review.

Example: Not so good review excerpt

Smith (1990) conducted an experiment on fear and self-esteem with 150 undergraduates. In the study he tested subject self-esteem and then exposed subjects one at a time to a fear-inducing situation. He found that those with lower self-esteem felt greater fear. Jones and Jones (1982) surveyed elderly residents. The respondents who had the greatest independence, self-esteem and physical health, had the lowest degree of fear of being a victim of crime…DeSallo’s study (1984) of 45 college males found that those who had the greatest self-esteem felt the least degree of fear. Yu (1988) found the same for college females…

Example: Better review excerpt

People with greater self-esteem appear to be less fearful. Laboratory studies with college students (DeSallo, 1984; Smith, 1990; Yu, 1988) find a strong negative relationship between self-esteem and fear. The same relationship was found in a survey of elderly people (Jones & Jones, 1982). Only one study contradicted this finding (Johnson, 1985). The contradictory finding may be due to the population used…

Activity: Literature reviews

From the example above, identify why the second literature review excerpt is better than the first.

Check your answer

Back to table of contents
REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

or

Finally! Personal pronouns!

Reflective journals are one of the few assessment tasks where relating a personal experience is not only allowed but required. They can be fun to write and the content can come easily. However, there is a specific purpose to them and criteria to follow, so don’t get caught up and write five thousand words on your weekend.

What is a reflective journal?

A reflective journal is a record, written over a specific period of time, of an experience you have had, or are undergoing. It sometimes relates to a specific, arranged experience, such as going on teaching rounds or nursing placements. Your entries detail and discuss the experience in relation to relevant theory and practice. The language is still required to be clear and professional, but it doesn’t have to be as formal as for an essay or report; your own thoughts and opinions are welcome.

The aim of a reflective journal

The purpose of this task is twofold. First, it asks you to look at your own experience retrospectively and analyse it. This helps you to gain a deeper understanding of what you did and why, and how you might improve upon it in some way (if the task was a practical one). Second, it requires you to relate the theories you are studying to a real-life scenario; the theories are framed in practice and experienced in context.

Writing a reflective journal

The exact details of how to write a reflective journal differ between courses and disciplines, so first check your course description for particular specifications. Following are a few key elements to writing a reflective journal.

• **Limit each entry to one experience (or as few as possible).** Unless your task is to reflect on a period of time rather than a particular experience, keep each entry focused around a specific event or theory. Journal entries easily become unclear if one entry details many experiences. If you must write about several things at once, start a new paragraph for each experience to differentiate.

• **Analyse your own experience.** Simply describing an event won’t be enough to get full marks (unless your assessment task requires just that). Reflecting on your own experience is vital — hence the name.

• **Weave in theory.** This is an important aspect of writing a reflective journal. Not only must it be apparent that you have learned from the experience, but you must also be able to demonstrate that you can apply learnings from your course to the experience. To do this, refer to relevant articles for each entry where you can (you don’t need 20 references, just a few. Check with your lecturer.)
ePORTFOLIOS

or

Do they just put ‘e’ in front of everything now?

What is an ePortfolio?

An ePortfolio is an electronic space where you can display your work to lecturers, peers, prospective employers or whoever you want, really. ePortfolios offer you a lot of control about how much you show and who can see it. It essentially works as a space where you can store a large amount of work for a variety of tasks including images, documents and just about anything. None of it will be visible to the public eye until you are ready. You can arrange the items you’ve uploaded into particular groups or ‘views’ and then provide people with permission to view them.

The aim of an ePortfolio

An ePortfolio is designed to act as a digital, editable portfolio of your work that can then be shown to others. It allows you to store data, and then customise how that data is displayed. The ePortfolio provides the user with special links and other means of displaying specified data to particular audiences, allowing you to have the portfolio appear differently to different audiences.

Producing an ePortfolio

There’s no universal criteria for determining what makes a ‘good’ ePortfolio, as what is required of an ePortfolio varies from course to course. If you’re being assessed via an ePortfolio, then the work being assessed is your submission, not the ePortfolio itself. You’re not being marked on how pretty your ePortfolio is, but rather on the content. That said, you should still aim to make your ePortfolio easy to read and clear for your viewers, because if your lecturer can’t find the assessment task, then they’re not going to be able to give you the HD you deserve.

As for how you go about creating an ePortfolio, guidance will generally be included in the course. If you missed that bit, then you can log on via the FedUni home page: go to the bottom of the page and click ‘ePortfolios’. After that, enter your student ID and password in the box and shazam! You’re in your very own ePortfolio. You can also find the link here. It might look daunting at first, but there are instructions on the page to help you through the basic steps. Follow the guides available to you. If you still struggle to make sense of them, then you can find further support on the log in page.

Back to table of contents
EXAMS

or

Ready, set, GO!

If the word 'exams' hasn't already sent you running, then congratulations. This chapter looks at the sort of question you might encounter in an exam and outlines some tips for tackling them effectively. If the mention of exams makes you feel anxious, then consider visiting one of the university support services. It is perfectly normal to feel apprehensive about exams, but take a look at our tips on how to study for exams to help ease any concerns you might have. You'll find it in the chapter, 'Managing Your Study'.

Know where to go

You need to know where to go; the exam won't wait for you if you're lost on campus somewhere. You will receive both a draft exam timetable and a finalised one in your student email. They are sent out well before the exam period, so start checking your student email regularly from about week ten. The timetable will give you information on when and where your exam is, how long it is, and what materials you are permitted to bring. Prepare ahead of time: write the information somewhere, anywhere. Write it on the bathroom wall. Write it on your forehead and don’t shower until after exams-whatever it takes to make sure you get there.

Take all necessary materials

Turning up to an exam only to realise that you’ve forgotten a pen is not a good start. Get everything you will need the night before and put it in your bag, or somewhere useful. Take more pens and pencils than you’ll need; running out of ink is no fun. You can also take in a single, unmarked water bottle. Being hydrated will help your brain to function (usually).

Theoretical and practical exams

These are two types of exams you may encounter. Theoretical exams are the normal kind, where everybody sits quietly and writes until their hands fall off. They aim to test your knowledge of theory through written expression. Practical exams, on the other hand, involve some sort of physical expression, whether it’s demonstrating how you would take blood (if you’re training to be a nurse), a role-play, or participating in a sporting activity. The rest of this chapter refers to theoretical exams, as practical exams tend to have their own rules depending on the exam itself. For more information on a practical exam, check with your lecturer or look at the course description. Details about practical exams are generally provided within the course.

Open book

In exams labelled as open book, you can take in any textbooks or sheets that you like to assist you with the exam. Be aware, though, that your open book exam might list criteria as 'limited'. This means you can only bring certain items as specified by your course coordinator. These are usually listed in your course description, but ask your lecturer if you’re uncertain.
Cheat sheets

Often a ‘limited’ open book exam refers to the opportunity to bring in your own cheat sheet. A ‘cheat sheet’ is a sheet written by you that can contain whatever notes you decide are worthwhile. It may be key theories or formulae, or the information you found most difficult.

Find out the rules before you write up your cheat sheet, because you can’t just take a thousand pages. Sometimes a cheat sheet can be a single A4 sheet, sometimes it can be ten pages. Sometimes they must be handwritten and sometimes typed. Make sure your cheat sheet adheres to the rules or it may be removed, and nobody wants to lose this object of beauty!

Here are a few key things to remember when writing up your cheat sheet:

- **Make it easy to read.** It is tempting to fit the entire year’s information on one sheet in size 4 font, but you’ll struggle to read it quickly. Order the content logically and in a way you can read easily.

- **Use all allowable space.** Don’t leave blank space on your sheet, no matter how confident you are. Fill your cheat sheet with as much information as you can; you won’t regret it.

- **Place important information first.** Start with key formulas or information you’ll need regularly and work your way down. You might not be able to fit everything in, so include the really important stuff first.

How theoretical exams run

Exam format

Exams for different courses are often scheduled together, so expect students from other courses to be in the same exam hall. There will be a few lecturers wandering around, and you’ll need to raise your hand to ask them if you need help. Another lecturer will use a microphone at the front of the room to explain the rules of the exam — like no talking — and give you any other important information. Generally, exams are broken into two parts: reading time and writing time.

Reading time

Reading time will almost always be a total of ten minutes. In that time, you can’t touch a pencil. How you best use the time depends on the sorts of questions in your exams. First, flick through the exam to get a quick overview of what it contains. Then, if you have written answer questions to do, start thinking and planning for them. As you can’t write anything down yet, it can be pointless to begin answering multiple choice questions in your head. Use your reading time, don’t waste it looking around.

Writing time

Writing time is when the exam actually starts. You and every other student will snatch at your pens and scribble furiously for the next few hours. That’s right: exams last for hours. This is usually clear in the timetable, so check that part. Most theoretical exams are between one to three hours, but they can be longer. You can leave during writing time if you finish early, but don’t even consider it until you have checked through your work a couple of times and you are certain you can’t do anything more to maximise your marks.
Types of questions
You’ll find a range of questions on your exams. Here is a general overview of the types you might encounter.

**Multiple choice questions**
There are a few neat tricks to dealing with multiple choice questions efficiently.

- **Divide up your time.** If you have 120 multiple choice questions in a one-hour exam (and no other type of question) then designate thirty seconds to each question. This will ensure that you look at each one.

- **First answer those you know.** These are often worth the same points, so grab the easy ones. If you don’t know the answer immediately, move on and come back to it later.

- **Make sure you answer in the right spot.** Some exams come with a separate answer sheet attached, and you have to put your answers on that piece of paper rather than on the exam paper itself. You’re usually allowed to detach the answer sheet, though, if that makes it easier.

- **Make your answers clear.** When you’ve settled on an answer, clearly mark it. If you change your mind, a clearly marked ‘X’ through the original selection is usually enough to make it obvious. Clearly mark your second choice.

**Short answer questions**
You may only get a few of these. Other times there may be twenty listed and you only need to answer five, and sometimes your exam might be comprised solely of short answer questions. They require a response in a few paragraphs; around half a page, depending on the size of your writing. There are a few key things to note:

- **Read the instructions.** Short answer questions vary, so you should read the instructions at the start before writing. Please don’t spend the whole exam answering all twenty questions if you only have to answer three.

- **Read the question.** Rather important. Read the whole question and make sure you understand it before you respond. Misunderstanding what the question is asking of you can cost you marks and time, so read it thoroughly.

- **Write legibly.** When you’re under pressure it’s tempting to write at the speed of sound, but your lecturer can’t give you marks if they don’t know what you’re saying. Write in a way that can be understood.

- **Choose your questions before you start.** If you don’t need to respond to all the questions, don’t start until you’ve read all the questions and selected the ones you’ll answer. Otherwise you might respond to one you’re not sure about only to discover that the next five are easier.

**Long answer questions**
These are similar to short answer questions but... long. This time your response to the given question should be around two pages instead of half of one. The questions are often broader and require more
detailed answers. Due to the length required, your response should use the format of a small essay: include an introduction and conclusion, and divide your paragraphs into body paragraphs, allowing for a single topic within each paragraph. Unlike an essay, though, you won’t need to reference unless the resources have been provided. Nobody will expect you to have memorised thirty journal articles. If you have, you’re possibly over-studying, but that’s super impressive.

Maths questions

This section includes any question requiring calculation and working out to reach an answer. There are usually multiple parts to these questions, but various ways to rack up points.

- **Show the working out.** The final answer is only a small portion of where you get your marks. Be sure to show how you arrived at the answer. Your lecturers will give you points where they can see how you thought through the question, so give them the opportunity. If you just show the answer, and it’s wrong, then they can’t give you any marks.

- **Put the answer in context.** In a maths question, it's usually not enough to say ‘43.56’. You have to write what ‘43.56’ actually means. Is it the number of elephants that you can fit in your car? Is it the average velocity of an African swallow? Write what it means in the bigger picture.

Drawing questions

Occasionally, you may come across a question that requires you to produce a diagram or figure of some kind. Aim to convey the necessary information by making it clear and neat, with all relevant labels, but don’t spend time making it into a masterpiece. Finish all the questions you must do, then go back if you have time.

Back to table of contents
WRITING AS A SKILL
APPLYING WHAT YOU KNOW

or

Wait. This seems familiar.

Coming to university for the first time can feel like starting over. You are in a different world. Everyone seems to be speaking another language, asking you to do things you’ve never done before. As a result, it might be tempting to think you know absolutely nothing. Well, you’re wrong. It doesn’t matter what you’ve been doing for the past decade, you already have a set of skills that will help you. Yes, you do.

You have life experiences you can draw on. Perhaps you used to write business documents or you organised events at your children’s school or you went overseas in your gap year. It doesn’t matter if you used to be a full-time mum and now you’re studying nursing, or you came straight from high school and you’re studying engineering, your life experiences will hold the keys to your learning. Things you already know will be relevant to university study; it’s a matter of recognising what they are, and building on them.

Whatever you do, don’t give up.

Reflect on your past experiences.

Now compile a list of accomplishments.

Consider how they can apply to your degree.

How?

Here’s an example. Organising a school fete involves:

• talking with other parents, teachers, children (key stakeholders) about it
• drafting a plan based on those talks
• getting help from other parents, businesses and service providers
• organising and promoting the fete
• managing the team of people you recruited on a terrific, successful day

Now for your study, think of it in terms of:

• talking = researching, getting relevant information on the topic
• drafting = writing an outline of the essay / assessment task / report
• getting help = sourcing the information, asking a librarian, finding material
• organising = writing, drafting, redrafting, finding more sources if needed
• managing the team = editing, proofreading and submitting it

See?

It may not be apparent right away, but your existing skills and preferences will in some way benefit your study. Reflect on your list each time you approach a task, and be open to developing your existing skills while you study. That’s the way it works - university adds to your skills and gives you the chance to build new ones so you have the necessary resources to win the job you want. But it is important to remember...
what you already know. You have *been* places; you are *going* places; and university is just another stop along the way. And it’s going to benefit from your past just as much as any other stage. So don’t, even for a second, think that you don’t know anything.

**Now**

Not all aspects of university study will be familiar to you. Just like visiting a different country, the language may be new and strange. Because it has rules and systems, though, that makes it possible to learn. Think of it as putting on a different coat, or hat, or whatever metaphorical piece of clothing you like. It will feel strange to start with, but you will wear it in over time. Have a dictionary handy when you are reading academic texts. Look up unfamiliar words. Use them when you get a chance. Academics started that way too, by adopting words and phrases. Before you know it, the new language - that of university study - will be a part of you. Welcome to the new you.

*Back to table of contents*
One of the hardest things about writing an academic essay can be adopting the style and language needed. Yes, you already know English, but there are some details that help to convince the reader that you know what you’re talking about. Mastering a few key elements of academic writing will put you on the path to sounding knowledgeable. Treat it like learning a new language; once you’ve grasped some rules and practised a little, you’ll soon get the hang of it.

**Formal and informal language**

There are two distinct ways to write and, in case the heading didn’t give it away, they are formal and informal. Choosing which to use is about knowing your audience. If an academic audience consists primarily of experts and academics within the field, or readers of a knowledgeable publication, what kind of audience will your academic essay have? Here’s a hint: they would wear a tux to a birthday party. Yes: formal.

If we put both styles side by side, you’ll quickly understand what each style is about. Let’s first look at the tracksuit-wearing member of the pair: Informal. Informal language is what we use for almost every writing task we do in our daily lives, whether a personal email, a Facebook post, or the caption beneath the Instagram shot of your feet that nobody really wants to see. This book also mainly uses informal language. Informal writing tends to copy spoken language, so it uses slang or colloquialisms, simpler sentences, and assumes some sort of familiarity with the reader. Remember the joke about Instagram earlier? Or these direct questions? They are all indications that this is written in an informal style.

Formal writing is reserved for important workplace communication, legislation, academic writing, and other similar documentation. Like a tuxedo, it is brought out on special occasions. If informal writing is how you talk at a friend’s party, formal writing is how you talk to the queen. It avoids colloquialisms. It also shifts the focus from expression to content. In academic writing, it’s about what you say, not about how you say it, so forget about likening the fall of the Roman empire to a dying rose (unless you are studying creative writing).

Here are a few tips for formal writing:

- **Write in the ‘third person’**. This means avoid using words like ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’ or ‘you’, to make your writing sound objective and detached. The only time you may need to write in the ‘first’ person (‘I’ etc.) is when you’ve been asked to write a journal or other task that specifically seeks your view on something.

- **Use entire words, not abbreviations.** This includes shortened words like ‘don’t’; in a formal style, this becomes ‘do not’. Others to avoid are: can’t, won’t, shouldn’t, haven’t, aren’t, etc.

- **Maintain clarity.** Don’t lengthen your sentences and use long words just to ‘sound clever’, because it can easily create confusion. Your argument must be as clear and thorough as possible.

- **Express your objective/s.** Formal writing has a purpose, and that should always be obvious to the reader. Your writing should be structured and your argument progress logically.

The two paragraphs below reflect the same story. No prizes for guessing which style is which.
Did you see Jimmy last night? Jeez, he was wobbling all over the place! I think it was those two bottles of Johnny Walker he had. Nobody should drink that much, man! I saw him passed out in the gutter later too. I reckon he was blind.

According to witnesses, James Fitzgerald was seen last night in an unstable state after consuming two bottles of whisky — an amount reported to be unsafe for consumption (Blotto, 2013). Later in the evening, he was spotted in a street gutter, unconscious. From this evidence, it can be assumed that James Fitzgerald was severely intoxicated last night.

**Inclusive language**

Academic writing should use inclusive language, which refers to writing that treats all people fairly. It does not express bias or prejudice on the basis of such characteristics as gender, culture, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion. This doesn’t mean you can never refer explicitly to such characteristics, however. For example, a reference to gender will be necessary in certain instances, such as reporting on research into the reaction times of males and females. Here are some suggestions for how to write more inclusively:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-inclusive language</th>
<th>Inclusive language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>man or mankind</td>
<td>‘human beings’, or ‘people’,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the average man</td>
<td>‘the average person’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policeman</td>
<td>‘police officer’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairman</td>
<td>‘chair’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid generic use of male pronouns (‘he’, ‘his’, ‘him’)

Omit the pronoun: *A staff member’s seniority can be judged from salary.*

Rewrite it as plural: *Lecturers should display their timetables on the door.*

Make it impersonal: *The driver of the offending car is not allowed to leave.*

Use both pronouns: *A student should submit his or her essay early.*

‘Male nurse’ or ‘female judge’

Including reference to gender may be inappropriate unless the context requires it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘the girls in the office’</th>
<th>‘the staff in the office’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’</td>
<td>Use ‘Ms’ except where the traditional forms are more appropriate, as it shows bias to imply marital status for women but not men. Use titles or first names consistently for both men and women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ‘men and women’, ‘he and she’, and ‘husband and wife’ These phrase patterns subordinate women as they are all presented second. Avoid such a pattern in your own writing by varying the order.

| Gender biased text                      | Consider paraphrasing a quote that reflects an unnecessary or inappropriate bias, rather than quoting directly. By including bias, you are supporting it. |

Avoiding these sorts of terms and ‘old fashioned’ language patterns will reduce the possibility of someone in your audience feeling excluded.

**Activities: Developing your objective writing skills**

**Verbosity**

The word ‘verbosity’ reflects its meaning: long and unnecessarily complex. Being ‘verbose’ refers to using too many words. It’s when you could have made the point in five words, but instead you threw in extra adjectives and five-hundred-syllable words and now your sentences is as long as your arm and ravenous enough to consume the rest of your essay and it still refuses to stop and just keeps going and going and people want to stop reading because there’s not even a point to it anymore.

‘Verbose’ is just like that sentence.

As academic writing is concerned with clarity and conciseness, use no more than the necessary words. Being verbose can easily occur when you’re trying to reach a word count but you haven’t read quite enough to add anything of value. While adding fancy adverbs or rehashing the content might stretch you to the illustrious 1000 words, it will come at the cost of quality. Verbose writing buries the message.
If you’re having trouble reaching a word limit, consider whether you could cover another point instead, or a different angle. If it’s a research report, then look for facets of the research that could be explored further. Don’t add more words for the sake of it, as you may become accidentally verbose. If you think you can spot verbose writing, try this activity.

**Jargon**

Academic writing avoids certain categories of words, including jargon. This is technical or specialised words or phrases used within a particular profession. If you have to use such terms in particular contexts, topics or subject areas, make sure you use them precisely. Other categories of words to avoid are colloquialisms, cliches and generalisations. These often become ‘fillers’, adding nothing to your content or argument.

**Objectivity**

Academic writing seeks to be objective - removed from personal expression, feelings or opinions. Similarly, much essay and report writing requires objective presentation of data and ideas. However, sometimes you will be asked for your conclusions or opinions, which should be expressed clearly as your own. Avoid using generalisations such as ‘It is obvious that’, or ‘As everybody knows’. Common sense or ‘universal’ knowledge is not academic evidence.

**Using objective language**

Compare the following two paragraphs (University of Adelaide, 2009) in terms of the language expressed in each one.

**Example 1: Subjective paragraph**

Indeed, there are countless values that are shared by our Australian community and which are extremely relevant to the life-threatening issue of compulsory childhood immunisation. Of course, the protection of the health and well-being of Australian kids must be a shared response. Obviously, they are such vulnerable creatures who cannot protect themselves and it is the full responsibility of the Australian community to stop endangering their fragile lives. Mandatory childhood immunisation policy is definitely consistent with the view we share as Australians, that is, our children’s healthcare is a total priority. Clearly, if childhood immunity is not vigorously promoted across Australia, then all our children will contract ghastly vaccine preventable diseases leading to death!! So, enforcing childhood immunisation programs TODAY is the only logical way for us to watch over the precious youth of our nation.

The first paragraph uses judgemental and opinionated language, such as ‘must be’, ‘of course’, ‘obviously’, which is acceptable in conversation, but in academic language this would not be expected. Also, there is no sound evidence backing up the writer’s claims.
Example 2: Objective paragraph

There are a number of values that are shared by the Australian community and which are relevant to the issue of compulsory childhood immunisation. The protection of the health and well-being of Australian children should be a shared response (Australian Government, 2007). Children can be seen as potentially vulnerable individuals who do not have the capacity to protect and promote their own healthcare, and it is therefore the responsibility of the state and the Australian community at large to behave in ways that do not endanger their lives. It can be argued that a mandatory childhood immunisation policy would be consistent with the view shared by many Australians, that is, children's healthcare needs should be considered a priority (Anton et al., 2005, p.24). If childhood immunity is not promoted across Australia, then children may become at risk of contracting a variety of vaccine-preventable diseases leading to possible death (Gray & Davies, 2004, p.201). Enforcing timely childhood immunisation programs, therefore, would be highly beneficial for protecting the youth of this nation.

This second paragraph is more cautious in the claims it makes using objective language such as ‘can be seen’ or ‘it can be argued’. Also, the writer has included evidence (in-text citations) to back up any claims made in the text.

Useful phrases for developing objective language
(Unilearning, 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVOID using personal judgement words</th>
<th>USE words referring to the evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
<td>From examining the findings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel</td>
<td>In light of the evidence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe</td>
<td>From previous research,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am convinced that</td>
<td>Considering the results,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disliked</td>
<td>According to the figures,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked</td>
<td>As shown in the diagram,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree</td>
<td>It is evident from the data that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disagree</td>
<td>The literature suggests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am sure that</td>
<td>Given this information,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is my belief that</td>
<td>Some theorists argue that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘It’ statements replace ‘I’ statements

(Unilearning, 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It could be argued that</th>
<th>It has been suggested that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It can be seen that</td>
<td>It appears that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was found that</td>
<td>It is generally agreed that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It could be concluded that</td>
<td>It seems that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It tends to be</td>
<td>It is widely accepted that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is doubtful that</td>
<td>It is evident from the data that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities for developing objective writing skills

The following exercises allow you to practise using objective academic language. There is no absolutely ‘correct’ response for any of these exercises, but a link to possible answers has been provided after each activity.

Personal language – There is no ‘I’ in detached

When writing academic language, you are rarely asked to use the first person (I) unless you have to produce reflective writing based on your placement experience. Therefore, using the passive voice or ‘it’ statements’ can help you to express ideas more objectively. For example:

**Personal judgement:** I believe that dark chocolate has multiple health benefits

**Objective (detached) statement:** It has been suggested that dark chocolate has multiple health benefits.

It would also be expected that the objective statement is supported by evidence from research.

Activity 1: Avoiding personal language

Change the following sentences to remove the personal pronoun ‘I’ and other non-objective language elements.

- I interviewed several film directors over a period of five weeks.
- I think that all rabbits should be immunised against the Calici virus.
- I got lots of people to fill in my survey.
- I am convinced from my survey results that the Prime Minister should avoid swimming in public.

**Check your answers**

Bias/judgement — let’s be fair

Bias can infer prejudice towards or assumptions about a specific group, or expressing unfair characterisation that perpetuates stereotypes. In your writing, you need to be sensitive to racial, ethnic,
age, religious, socioeconomic, political, occupational, and gender groups. Also, bias refers to making judgments about people or events that are generalised and are not supported by evidence. Remember that objective language in academic writing avoids 'blanket statements' and is more cautious in its expression on facts.

**Biased statement:** Dark chocolate should be a regular part of the diet of the common man.

**Objective statement:** It is evident from the data that dark chocolate could be a useful regular inclusion in the human diet.

### Activity 2: Avoiding biased language

Convert these biased sentences into unbiased ones:

- The average university student is anxious about his marks.
- The Sydney Gay Lesbian Mardi Gras is always a popular event for young people.
- Sean Connery, despite being elderly, maintains a strong acting career.
- Even though all Australian nurses follow the Code of Ethics, if they don’t use their common sense, hospital patients will not be safe.

**Check your answers**

### Emotive language — don’t be cranky

This style of writing appeals to the emotions of the reader using exaggeration and other methods to achieve an emotional response. Even though this is a form of persuasive writing, commonly used in journalism, academic writing uses evidence and merits to persuade the reader rather than emotion.

**Emotional statement:** There is a shocking link between the overconsumption of dark chocolate and horrifying cases of severe indigestion.

**Objective statement:** According to research, there is a link between the overconsumption of dark chocolate and indigestion.

### Activity 3: Avoiding emotive language

Remove the emotional tones from the sentences below.

1. Good quality teachers are being prevented from helping their poor students from achieving their best through the introduction of this overly bureaucratic program.
2. It's thoroughly amusing that staff at the Flockful Hotel were terrorised recently by a group of threatening seagulls.
3. Amazingly, the scorching temperatures only managed to fry some of the fragile leaves on the rare and extraordinary Truffula tree.
4. The crazy importation of chocolate dipped potato chips has led to a shopping frenzy at all quality supermarkets.
Check your answers

Colloquial language — don’t bang on about it

Colloquial words and expressions are those used in our everyday spoken language. They are not found in formal academic language unless they are under examination in a linguistics essay.

**Statement with colloquialisms:** Lots of kids are having a bash at eating dark chockie.

**Objective statement:** Many children are starting to eat dark chocolate.

![Activity 4: Avoiding colloquialisms](image)

Replace the colloquial words and phrases with more formal ones.

1. Doctors have sussed out that getting kids to have injections can be done with lollies.
2. The findings are pretty substantially supported, but the limitations of this study mean there is still mountains of research that needs to be done.
3. The main bit of her focus is on lowering mental illness, getting higher energy levels, keeping your brain sharp and having a high sense of self-esteem.
4. It’s a shame that the government can’t be more flexible and open to everyone’s views instead of pushing their own barrow all the time.

Check your answers

Acronyms and initialisms

These two words are very similar. They both take the first letter of a string of words and condense them, such as USA (United States of America) or QANTAS (Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service). They’re not always too stringent on ‘take every first letter’, but the point is, the letters *stand* for something.

In an initialism, the letters are still pronounced as letters when read aloud. So the term ‘USA’ is an initialism, as we pronounce each letter individually — u, s, a. In the case of an acronym, though, the letters are pronounced as a word on their own when put together. When we say ‘QANTAS’ we pronounce it ‘quon-tuss’, not ‘q-a-n-t-a-s’. Interestingly, a lot of acronyms have now entered our language as a proper word. ‘Laser’, for instance, is actually an acronym for ‘Light Amplification for Stimulated Emission by Radiation’ (which is why you should never spell it ‘lazer’, by the way).

When using acronyms and initialisms in academic writing, make sure that you spell out the entire word in the first instance, then include the acronym or initialism in brackets afterwards, like this:

> According to a study performed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), dogs are actually aliens on a secret mission.

Any subsequent reference to it can use the acronym or initialism only.
NASA continued to suggest that dogs merely lick us in order to mark us for death when they rise up. So contrary to what some people believe, licking is not a sign of affection.
**ACADEMIC TERMS & PHRASES**

or

How to talk the talk

**Glossary of instructional words**

Instructional words are used by your lecturer to explain how they want you to respond to an essay, assignment or exam question. It is vital that you understand their meaning so your topic analysis is accurate. Below are some of the most commonly used instructional words and their meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional word or term</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>account for</td>
<td>give reasons for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give an account</td>
<td>describe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take into account</td>
<td>consider, think of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyse</td>
<td>methodically examine in detail explain and interpret; discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argue</td>
<td>give reasons and evidence systematically to support or reject an idea or position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess</td>
<td>evaluate and decide how important something is and give your reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assume</td>
<td>accept that it is true, without proof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classify</td>
<td>arrange into groups or classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comment on</td>
<td>express an opinion or reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compare</td>
<td>describe, measure or note the similarities and/or how things differ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concise</td>
<td>short, brief but comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the context of</td>
<td>referring to, within the subject of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contrast</td>
<td>compare and describe the differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional word or term</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criteria</td>
<td>the standards by which something is judged; questions that should be answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticise</td>
<td>analyse and discuss faults and disadvantages, or merits and facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deduction</td>
<td>inference of a particular conclusion after considering a general law, principle or fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>define</td>
<td>provide a clear, concise description of the nature, scope or meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describe</td>
<td>give a detailed account to illustrate the topic; relate in sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>give both sides of an argument and then your own opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distinguish between</td>
<td>point out and describe difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elaborate</td>
<td>present your answer with more detailed reasons and examples (i.e. Yes or No is not enough)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluate</td>
<td>look at reasons for and against, draw conclusions, form an idea of the value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain</td>
<td>clarify by describing in more detail or interpreting to show reasons, causes and effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to what extent is (x) true?</td>
<td>explain in what ways (x) is true and in what ways (x) is not true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factor</td>
<td>a circumstance, fact or influence that brings about a result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>function</td>
<td>a purpose or activity that is natural to something or someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify</td>
<td>establish, indicate and describe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indicate</td>
<td>show, explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illustrate</td>
<td>clarify by using examples, diagrams, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implication</td>
<td>conclusion that can be drawn from something although it is not explicitly stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>justify</td>
<td>show or prove a decision or viewpoint to be right or reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limitation</td>
<td>explain a limiting circumstance or restriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional word or term</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>list</td>
<td>provide a number of connected items or points (often expressed one below the other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outline</td>
<td>give a general description stating the main points of something but not the details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prove</td>
<td>demonstrate truth or the existence of something by evidence or argument with/by reference to – make sure you write about the following</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relate</td>
<td>make or show connections, relationships and associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in relation to</td>
<td>in the context of; in connection with a certain part of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>review</td>
<td>re-examine and comment briefly on the major points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role</td>
<td>the function of something; how it works, especially in co-operation with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>express a position clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summarise</td>
<td>give a concise account of the main points of something, omitting details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>validity, valid</td>
<td>is there logical or factual soundness in this statement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Linking words**

The following words and phrases can help you to connect ideas and get your writing to flow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contrasting ideas</th>
<th>Comparing ideas</th>
<th>Sequencing ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>However</td>
<td>Similarly / Similar to</td>
<td>At first / Firstly / First of all / Initially / To begin with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevertheless</td>
<td>More generally</td>
<td>Following this / Prior to this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although</td>
<td>Likewise</td>
<td>Since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing examples</td>
<td>Cause and effect</td>
<td>Adding an idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For instance</td>
<td>As a result</td>
<td>Moreover / Furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In particular</td>
<td>Thus</td>
<td>Another reason / example / aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this case</td>
<td>Consequently</td>
<td>So</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Especially significant is</td>
<td>Therefore</td>
<td>Indeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an example</td>
<td>An effect of this is</td>
<td>In addition / Additionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to argue this</td>
<td>Otherwise</td>
<td>Relating to this is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example</td>
<td>Hence</td>
<td>Equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically</td>
<td>Due to this</td>
<td>In the same way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternatively

Just as Smith (2001) claims…, so too does Jones (2004), who…

Before continuing

On the other hand

Equally

Subsequently

In contrast to this

In the same way

Finally

Whereas

Not only…but also…

Lastly

While Smith (2009) claims this, studies by Jones (2008) show that…

By comparison

As a conclusion / In summary / In conclusion

Unlike …., Green (2011) stresses that…

In a similar study…

Simultaneously
**Introducing examples** | **Cause and effect** | **Adding an idea**
---|---|---
By way of illustration | For this reason | Above all
In other words | This suggests that… | As well

### ‘It’ statements

- It might be thought that…
- It could be perceived that…
- It is often argued that…
- It is interesting to note that…
- It would seem that…
- It tends to be the case that…
- It could be concluded that…

‘It’ statements can replace the personal pronoun ‘I’ and help you substitute phrases such as “I think…” to make your ideas sound more objective and formal. Go to more ‘it’ statements and tips on using objective language.

### Academic phrases

#### Sentence beginners

If you have writer’s block and just don’t know where to start, try the following sentence starters in your essay or report.

#### How to include other writers’ work

**Paraphrasing** the work of others helps to strengthen your argument. Let your reader know how to find those sources by referencing them, as in the examples below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence beginners</th>
<th>How to include other writers’ work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some additional points need to be considered…</td>
<td>To quote Green, “…(quote)…” (2004, p.16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This approach raises some important questions…</td>
<td>In the words of Brown, “(quote)” (2009, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It might seem as if…</td>
<td>It is Black’s contention that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main concern of this assignment is…</td>
<td>Smith (2012) supports the idea that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some writers have suggested…</td>
<td>Jones (2006) sums up the view that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various people have emphasised…</td>
<td>Thomas Green (2008) speaks of…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerous studies ( ) have been conducted…</td>
<td>Hathaway (2011) finds that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the evidence indicates…</td>
<td>Many of the writers on this subject find that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It must be acknowledged that…</td>
<td>Waugh (2012) writes that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the main, the findings suggest that…</td>
<td>Waugh (2012) writes that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is clearly at odds with…</td>
<td>One author’s findings are particularly interesting. Black (2013) discovered…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further support can be found in the work of…</td>
<td>While Smith (2009) addresses the question of …, Jones (2006) emphasises a different point in the debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A recurring theme in the report is…</td>
<td>Green’s statement highlights the need for…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These authors imply that…</td>
<td>While not stating it overtly, Jones (2008) implies that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the issue of…</td>
<td>Smith’s remarks illustrate…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing in the Australian content…</td>
<td>Jones’s observations underline the need for…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence beginners</td>
<td>How to include other writers’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is consistent evidence that…</td>
<td>Black’s claims are well-substantiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In line with predictions…</td>
<td>Margaret Green (2011) subscribes to the theory that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is worth noting that…</td>
<td>To encapsulate the findings of Arnold Finklestein (2003),…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrary to expectations…</td>
<td>Gray’s essay challenges Foucault’s contention that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the basis of the first experiment…</td>
<td>Bronway holds the opposite view, stating that, “…(quote)…” (2011, p. 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the basis of this, it can be inferred that…</td>
<td>Blathe, in his article titled ‘My Article’, writes, “…(quote)…” (2009, p. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the exception of (… ), there has been little published work aimed at…</td>
<td>In order to thoroughly understand the issue, it is useful to examine the findings of Alexander Brown (2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient information exists about…</td>
<td>As reflected in the study of Holstead (2002)…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers have employed different methods, thus it is not surprising that results have tended to be equivocal…</td>
<td>Brown and Smith (2008) are likeminded in their approach to…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research has yielded some interesting, albeit seemingly contradictory, results…</td>
<td>Many experts echo the notion that… (Ford, 2008; Kristic &amp; Miles, 2010; Wales, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These findings are particularly intriguing given the extensive literature on…</td>
<td>It appears true that, in Smythe’s words, “…(quote)…” (2003, p. 32).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By logical extension, it can be argued that…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar inferences can be drawn from…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.hsc.csu.edu.au

*Back to table of contents*
WRITING CONSTRUCTION

or

How to make words make sense

Imagine being the first person to discover that the earth was in fact round. At a time in history that locked people away for such crazy ideas, how would you write about your discovery in a way that would keep you out of the insane asylum?

Language is how we convey messages to other people. Through language, others can be aware of our thoughts, knowledge and experiences such as our world-changing discoveries. In academic writing, we write to convey our ideas to others, or in the case of assessment, to demonstrate our knowledge. It is important, then, that your writing makes sense and your message is clear.

Sentences

Sentences are our main method of communicating ideas in writing. Every language has its own rules about how to put sentences together, and it is possible to speak a language fluently without being able to define those rules exactly. The rules guide you to express your message in a way that others can read easily.

Academic writing should be written in complete sentences, unless you are asked to list ideas using dot points, or when it is creative writing. For a sentence to be a sentence, it needs two major parts:

• A subject: the thing that is the focus of the sentence. The subject is typically an object, a person or a group.
• A verb: an action, commonly called a ‘doing word’. The subject has to do something.

Here’s an example:

The explorer ran out of the building.

The subject is ‘the explorer’, and our verb is ‘ran’, because that’s what the explorer did. Because we have those two things, it works as a complete sentence. What would happen if we removed the second half?

The explorer ran.

Is that still a complete sentence? Yes. It still contains our subject and verb. We don’t need to say where they ran. It still makes sense and sounds fine. But what about the second half of the sentence?

Out of the building.

Is that a complete sentence? Does it contain a subject or a verb? No. Both are missing, so it’s not a complete sentence and it doesn’t tell us anything. Let’s look at leaving the verb out of the sentence.

The explorer.
The explorer…did what? Don’t leave me hanging like that! Adding the verb ‘ran’ to it solves the problem.

As you can see above, even if you can’t tell what the subject or verb is, the first two examples make sense and the last two don’t. Whether or not it makes sense is a good indicator as to the completeness of your sentence. If it doesn’t make sense, then rewrite it.

Complete sentences

Fragments

A common error in written language is the ‘fragment’, where the sentence is missing information so it does not make sense (as seen above). On a computer, a fragment is often identified with a squiggly line underneath those words. For example:

Eating dark chocolate can have many benefits. Such as improved blood pressure, greater brain function and other health benefits.

Some fragments are incomplete because they lack a subject or a verb, or both (as in the above description of the benefits of dark chocolate). Other fragments can be confusing as they appear to have a subject and a verb, but the thought is not complete. In these cases, some words that often begin one part of a sentence, such as ‘if’, ‘after’, ‘when’, ‘because’, ‘although’ and ‘while’, depend on another part to make sense. Without that other part, the thought is incomplete, like these:

Although the expedition involved a large crew (will we ever know what the problem was?)
When the authorities finished reading the report (what did they do next?)
If the camera had been invented (what would it have changed?)

These words have a fancy name; they are ‘subordinators’. Their role is to:
• make one sentence dependent on another to make a complete thought
• join two sentences together
• make a logical connection between ideas

Examples of other subordinators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause/effect</th>
<th>because, since, so, that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison/contrast</td>
<td>although, even though, though, whereas, while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>after, when, until, whenever, before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>if, unless, whether, as if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place/manner</td>
<td>wherever, where how</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subordinators can also come in the middle of a sentence.

The crew was famished after their long voyage.
The explorer needed more ink even though he’d only written three pages.

**How do I fix fragments?**

Remember: subject + verb + complete thought. These are the basics. Scan your writing for subordinators. If you spot one, then make sure the thought is complete and your reader is not left hanging, never knowing what happened next.

---

**Activity: Fixing fragments**

Can you complete the sentences below by matching the right endings to the beginnings? The comma has the job of separating the two parts of the message.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginnings</th>
<th>Endings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  After three years on the high seas,</td>
<td>a warrant was issued for the explorer’s immediate confinement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Although the expedition crew all witnessed the discovery,</td>
<td>then the explorer would not have had to rely on inadequate writing skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  When the authorities finished reading the report,</td>
<td>the explorer’s crew was exhausted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  If the camera had been invented,</td>
<td>not one other crew member could write as well as the explorer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check your answers**

**Sentence length**

Keep in mind that short sentences (less than 20 words) are often easier to read than long sentences. Longer sentences need punctuation, like the commas in the above examples. There is nothing wrong with writing short sentences, particularly if the meaning is clearer. Don’t feel you must write long sentences just to ‘appear’ to be writing like an academic. The most important part of writing is to communicate your ideas. If you find that your longer sentences become confused, then remind yourself of the specific point you wanted to make and try not to put too many ideas into one sentence. As you become more familiar with writing in an academic style and more confident with punctuation, you will start exploring different sentence lengths.
Run-on sentences

These are also called ‘fused sentences’ or ‘comma splices’. These types of sentences are easy to create if you’re trying to write an epic sentence. It’s where you have combined two complete sentences together without making a clear connection or distinction between the ideas.

Whales were often mistaken for sea monsters, in the past they damaged sailing ships.

The comma in the above sentence (which has ‘spliced’ the sentence) does not help it make sense. It would be easier for the reader if you added as or because to show how the two ideas are related, like this:

Whales were often mistaken for sea monsters, because in the past they damaged sailing ships.

Here is an example of a run-on sentence from a first year Health Sciences essay:

“Stem cells are able to replace any cell that dies any day, for instance cells that are present in our skin, blood and the lining of our intestines, and is the reason why we rely on stem cells, throughout our lives.”

There are too many ideas in this sentence, and some commas are in the wrong places. The meaning could be improved by putting one of the ideas into a sentence of its own.

Stem cells are able to replace any cell that dies any day, for instance, cells that are present in our skin, blood and the lining of our intestines. This is the reason why we rely on stem cells throughout our lives.

How do I fix run-on sentences?

Remember: subject + verb + complete thought.

a) If the thoughts are not connecting (are spliced by a comma), then add a subordinator.
b) If there are too many thoughts in the sentence, then separate it into at least two sentences.

Activity: Fixing run-on sentences

The following sentences are too long and also don’t make sense. Improve them by using punctuation and adding or removing a word or two to help them make sense.

1. Although many explorers have identified sea monster carcasses as whales that were badly deformed due to decomposition but others remain completely unexplained.
2. When one creature was actually witnessed while it was still alive as it tried to protect itself from two killer whales.
3. After it lost the battle despite such a rigorous fight back while its body was discovered on a South African beach.

4. If the explorer had named the creature as all explorers like to name discoveries after themselves then it would have been named Smith but it was called ‘Trunko’ due to its huge elephantine trunk.

**Check your answers**

**Active and passive voice**

Academic writing has its own style, or voice. You will be asked to write using ‘active’ or ‘passive’ voice, depending on your field of study and the personal preference of your lecturer. In brief, in active voice, the focus is on what is *acting*, whereas in passive voice, the focus is what is being *acted upon*. Thus, active and passive.

Prepare yourself for disagreement about which voice to use. In scientific writing, for example, there is a general expectation to use passive voice. It implies objectivity - to shift the focus off the researcher and onto their brilliant work. In other disciplines, such as creative writing, using the passive voice is considered a bad idea and quite *inactive*. In fact, if you’ve used Microsoft Word, you might recall seeing the dreaded green line quietly appear under your sentence, only to right-click on it and have the computer tell you that the problem is ‘passive voice’. Before you start writing, it would be handy to know what voice your lecturer prefers.

First, a reminder: a **complete sentence** requires a subject and verb - someone or something performs an action. For us to make a distinction between active and passive voice, there also needs to be an *object* in the sentence. That means not only is someone doing something, but they are doing it *to* something. So the format becomes **subject, verb, object**.

**Active voice** is when the **subject** is the focus of the sentence. This means that whoever is performing the action is the most important element.

Leading researcher, Ernie Coli, examined the growth of bacteria on George’s pancakes.

**Passive voice** occurs when the roles flip, and the **object** becomes the focus of the sentence. This means that the sentence now focuses on the object having something *done to it*, rather than who/what is actually *doing* it.

The growth of bacteria on George’s pancakes was examined.

In that second example, the focus is more on the growth of bacteria rather than the researcher or George. Often, the person doing the action - the researcher - is left out of the sentence altogether. That’s **passive voice**, and it’s often criticised as sounding more complicated. It can sometimes produce wordy, clumsy or unclear sentences that can be confusing to readers. As long as it is always clear ‘who’ is doing ‘what’ in your sentences, you should be fine.
Activity: Active versus passive voice

Convert the following sentences from the active to the passive voice.

1. Medical practitioners have used various treatments over the years to fight severe chocolate addiction, but with little success.
2. Government officials have prohibited the use of genetically engineered wheat in the production of commercial pancake mixtures.
3. Time Magazine (2014) conducted a survey that showed politically conservative people preferred dogs as pets.

Check your answers
Back to table of contents

Tense

It is a curious coincidence that this grammatical concept also means ‘unable to relax because of nervousness, anxiety, or stimulation’ (thanks oxforddictionaries.com). In grammar, ‘tense’ indicates the time of an action occurring, and is obvious by using a particular choice of words. In academic writing, tense needs to be consistent throughout your piece, unless a change in tense is necessary. In fact, for any given piece of writing, the tense should be consistent or your reader will get confused.

Past tense reads as though what is being written about has already occurred. It uses words like ‘had’, ‘said’ and words with ‘-ed’ endings. When you are reporting on things in academic writing, such as research results or surveys, you are generally expected to use past tense.

Researchers had no trouble finding hungry students to participate in research into pancake consumption. Numerous studies found consistent results.

Present tense reads as though what is being written about is occurring in the present time. Present tense is often used in academic writing when including evidence or analysing things.

Recent research shows that some students develop strong immunity during their undergraduate years. Leading research by Ernie Coli indicates the cause to be a high intake of pancakes containing bacteria (2014).

Future tense reads like a prediction, as though something will occur. Future tense often uses extra words to do this, such as ‘will’.

In spite of health warnings, researchers conclude that students will continue to eat pancakes containing bacteria.

Remember, once you start using one tense, you should stick with it unless there is a clear and obvious reason for it to change.
Activity: Tense

Convert the following examples of present tense to past tense by removing and/or changing some words.

• Researchers are undertaking a series of interviews with affected students to determine the link between the quantity of pancakes eaten and the severity of symptoms.
• So many students are signing up to be part of the research that researchers are keeping a waiting list.
• Researchers are convinced that students want to participate to get free food.

Check your answers

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are related sentences bundled together to make a point. They should have at least three sentences and always begin on a new line. Each paragraph has just one main point or idea throughout. This idea is usually expressed in one sentence at the beginning of the paragraph: the topic sentence. Each sentence in the paragraph expands on the topic sentence providing evidence and justification for that one idea.

The structure of a paragraph contains the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic sentence</th>
<th>This is your idea (developed through your research) expressed in your own words and not an idea from a cited source.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting evidence</td>
<td>These sentences are cited examples, theories or information from other sources that help to justify your topic sentence idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connecting ideas within a paragraph

To make your ideas flow from one sentence to another, you can use linking words or phrases to great effect.

Example: Paragraph

Exploring the world on long-distance ocean journeys can have considerable impacts on the health of sailors. For example, the sea voyage itself is shown to have lasting effects on the body’s immune system resulting in an array of illnesses (Lu et al., 2010). In particular, cardiovascular disease is the most common ailment identified amongst seafaring crew members (Hearty, 2009). Moreover, studies by Sponge and Lope (2011) indicate that these health effects are mainly due to two contributing factors: diet and lack of physical exercise on board the ship. “There’s too many worm infested crackers and not enough deck scrubbing” explains one ship captain (Blackbeard, 1720).
Activity: Paragraph structure
(Adapted from Powell, 2013)
Below is a paragraph from the body of the essay, ‘Violent video games should be banned. Discuss’. Identify the following parts of the paragraph:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic sentence</th>
<th>Linking words/phrases</th>
<th>Supporting evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Companies that produce video games, as well as many gamers, claim there is no link between increased violence in the community and violent video games. To support their opinion, they cite studies by psychologists which indicate that gamers are no more likely to commit violent crimes than non-gamers. Specifically, a report by Braxton College in the United States found that among 234 gamers, arrest and conviction levels for any form of crime were actually 8% lower than from non-gamers (Malone, 2012). Indeed, both those who produce and those who play the games claim they are being unfairly blamed for the problems of society (Falloy & Croydon, 2011). As Carrox (2013) points out, no one would ever demand that books with violent themes should be blamed for their negative influence.

Check your answers

Organising paragraphs
In the body section of essays, reports and similar assignments, your paragraphs should be presented in a logical order according to how one main idea connects with the next main idea. The best way to achieve a logical order is through planning. Set out your paragraph topics before you start writing the paragraphs themselves so that you avoid accidentally talking about the explorer being locked away and the difficulty for the crew being on the high seas for three years in the same paragraph. Remember: one paragraph = one idea.

As a general rule, begin a new paragraph when you want to do any of the following:
- start or end a part of your argument
- introduce a new idea or point contrast information or ideas
- break up an overly long paragraph

Back to table of contents

Using evidence in your writing
As highlighted above, and in the Critical Thinking section, you need to justify any idea or argument you have in academic writing. This is achieved by referring to studies, theories, or examples from other authors. There are three possible methods you can use to incorporate the ideas of authors into your writing, these methods are: direct quoting, paraphrasing or summarising.
### Direct quotations vs. Paraphrasing vs. Summarising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct quotations</th>
<th>Paraphrasing</th>
<th>Summarising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>match the source word for word</td>
<td>does not match the source word for word</td>
<td>does not match the source word for word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are usually a brief segment of the text</td>
<td>involves putting a passage from a source into your own words</td>
<td>involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, but leaving out details or examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uses the voice of the original author</td>
<td>uses your own voice</td>
<td>uses your own voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appear between quotation marks (&quot;&quot;&quot;)</td>
<td>changes the words or phrasing of a passage, but the original meaning is exactly the same</td>
<td>presents a broad overview, so is usually much shorter than the original text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must be attributed to the original source</td>
<td>must be attributed to the original source</td>
<td>must be attributed to the original source</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from University of New South Wales, n.d.)

**How do I know when it’s better to paraphrase than to quote?**

The above points outline the purpose of each method, but overall you need to keep direct quotes to a minimum as your lecturers don’t want to see you copying and pasting material that they are already familiar with (yes, they know almost everything you’re going to read). They want to see how you have interpreted and expressed the information yourself, and this is done through paraphrasing and summarizing.

**Direct quotes**

**When do I use direct quotes?**

Direct quotes are used when you want to copy one or two sentences exactly from a source. This method is most commonly used:

- when the author’s words convey a powerful meaning
- when you want to use an authoritative voice in your own writing
- to introduce an author's position you may wish to discuss
**How do I use direct quotes?**

Copy the sentence/s exactly and insert quotation marks. Even if there are spelling mistakes in the original text, you need to copy it exactly. If you want your reader to know that the spelling error is from the original source and not you, you can use the Latin phrase *sic* in square brackets immediately after the spelling error. It means ‘thus’ in Latin (or, ‘don’t blame me’).

**Example: Using a direct quote**

According to Parker (2014), Batman is “the best superhero, because he didn’t need to get bitten or thrown in acid to be great. He was just naturally awesome [sic] all on his own.”

Use *block quotes* if using a larger section of text. You can separate the quote from the rest of your writing by indenting and use italics instead of using quotation marks. But you will need to check exactly what is acceptable when using block quotes according to the referencing style you are using (Yep, yet something else to check). You can also leave out sections of a quote, if parts of the information are not essential for your purposes, by using ellipsis (...).

**Example: Using a block quote**

There are mixed views about whether Batman is a true superhero as he lacks the usual superpowers possessed by other crime fighters. Yet, his approach created a similar element of fear as that of his counterparts.

> Batman mixed his nearly unlimited budget with his devotion to physical perfection and...crafted his image by utilizing terror and fear as a weapon against the criminal element outside of the confines of the law... This (made) criminals hypervigilant, paranoid, and even more violent to counter Batman’s overwhelming capabilities (Kessock, 2012).

So, the claim that only superpowers can engender fear is dispelled in this context as Bruce Wayne was able to apply his financial and intellectual capabilities to achieve a similar outcome as his superhero peers.

**Paraphrasing (or Indirect quoting)**

**When do I use paraphrasing?**

Paraphrase short sections of work:

- as an alternative to a direct quotation.
- to help your reader understand complex concepts or terminology.
- to change the order of ideas to suit your writing purpose.
- to demonstrate that you’ve understood what you’ve read.
How do I paraphrase?

Ideally:
1. Take notes from original source
2. Look away from the source and then write - if this is hard for you, you may need to re-read to check your understanding strategies
3. Re-write the passage using a number of strategies (not just one or two)
4. a) Break up long sentences into two shorter ones or combine two short sentences into one long one.
   b) Change the sentence structure, i.e. start at a different point in the sentence or change the order of the ideas as long as they still make sense
   c) Change the voice, e.g. from active to passive
   d) Use synonyms and different forms of expression as much as possible
   e) If using any unique or specialist phrases, use quotation marks (" ")
   f) Make sure that you have retained the original meaning.

But beware! An unacceptable paraphrase is when there are only minimal changes made to the original text, such as replacing some of the words with synonyms or changing the sentence order. If a paraphrase is too close to the original, then it is considered to be a direct quote without acknowledgement and shows that you do not have a sound understanding of the original idea. A good paraphrase is more concise than the original. Don’t forget to reference your paraphrasing to acknowledge the original author.

Example: Paraphrase

compare original quote...

According to Parker (2014), Batman is “the best superhero, because he didn’t need to get bitten or thrown in acid to be great. He was just naturally awsome [sic] all on his own.”

...with paraphrase

According to Parker (2014), Batman was superior to all other superheroes due to his natural ability and the fact that he was not gifted with superpowers.

Activity: Paraphrasing

Decide which paraphrase is the better one.

1. Original: “Someone who lacks affection, recognition or the fulfilment of other emotional needs may turn to food”.

Paraphrase 1. An unloved or unrecognised person may eat for emotional fulfilment.

Paraphrase 2. Eating to satisfy emotional needs can occur in those who have an absence of love and recognition.
2. Original: “Exploring a region of the ocean typically involves travelling to an area on a ship and collecting detailed information.”

Paraphrase 1. Usually, regional ocean exploration entails boat travel to a specific area accompanied by meticulous data collection.

Paraphrase 2. Oceanic exploration consists of boat travel and information gathering.

Check your answers

Summarising

When do I summarise?

Summarising is useful when you want to highlight main points from chapter or even an entire study. It is most effective when you want to...

- outline the main points of someone else’s work in your own words, without the details or examples
- include an author’s ideas using fewer words than the original text
- briefly give examples of several differing points of view on a topic.

How do I summarise?

1. Read the specific text and highlight the main points.
2. Re-write those main points in your own words leaving out examples or evidence.

Example: Summary

compare the original quote...

According to Parker (2014), Batman is “the best superhero, because he didn’t need to get bitten or thrown in acid to be great. He was just naturally awsome [sic] all on his own.”

…with a summary

According to Parker (2014), Batman lacked any superpowers.

Point form

Point form (dot or bullet points) is a way of highlighting or communicating pieces of related information in a brief manner. The pieces of information can be as short as one word, or a sentence fragment, or as long as a paragraph. They are generally presented as a list. Your lecturer or tutor may be opposed to using point form, so check before including them in your academic work. Parts of a practical report may need to be presented entirely in point form, while essays are usually presented as prose with no points. These general guidelines apply when presenting information as point or bulleted items:
**Example 1**
The lecturer listed the most common reasons that marks were deducted:
- Spelling or grammatical errors
- Incomplete citation
- Poor presentation
- Late submission

**Example 2**
The report recommended that:
- an investigation into student drop-out rates should begin immediately;
- regional students, particularly those from isolated areas, should be interviewed; and
- extra funding for counselling should be requested.

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### Examples: Point form

The following examples are drawn from the table above.

- Precede items with an introductory phrase, sentence or paragraph.

  The lecturer listed the most common reasons that marks were deducted:

- Follow a similar pattern within each series of items (e.g. all full sentences, all phrases) to reinforce their connection. Beginning short items with a similar word or type of word (e.g. all nouns or all verbs) is an effective linking device.

  - Spelling or grammatical errors
  - Incomplete citation
  - Poor presentation
  - Late submission

- Items that are complete sentences should begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

  - The report recommended that: ....
  …counselling should be requested.

- Items of single words or incomplete sentences that are introduced by a complete sentence (usually ending in a colon) can begin with a capital or lower case letter (be consistent throughout a piece of work), and require no closing punctuation.

  …reasons that marks were deducted:
  - Spelling or grammatical errors
  - Incomplete citation

- Items that are part of a sentence begun by an introductory phrase should begin with a lower case letter and be punctuated like a sentence.

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*Back to table of contents*
PUNCTUATION

or
I can put a comma here, right?

While the words of a sentence are what we use to convey meaning, punctuation tells us exactly how to read it. It functions much like a pair of glasses for someone without brilliant eyesight. Without the glasses, they know there’s a tree over there, but they don’t know exactly what kind of tree. Put the glasses on, and everything is clearer. In the same way, punctuation helps the reader to know exactly what you’re talking about. When writing academically, you don’t want your masterpiece of a thesis to be misunderstood because of a misplaced comma.

This section is written with the academic context in mind. If you’re writing fiction, the rules are far more flexible. In academia, the focus is on clarity and consistency, so if you’d planned on being experimental with semicolons, then save it for another time. It’s worth mentioning that, while this seems like a very basic skill, knowing how to use punctuation correctly can be the difference between a Distinction and a High Distinction. So polish up those punctuation glasses and let’s take a look at a few basic elements of punctuation.

Full stop

This is also referred to as a ‘period’ in American English. The full stop is used to indicate that a sentence has finished. If the sentence hasn’t finished, don’t use it, or the rest of the sentence will get drunk with power and attempt to turn themselves into an independent clause, and nobody wants to see that. If you’ve put a full stop in and you’re not sure if it’s the end of a sentence, take out that portion and see if it makes sense on its own. Can it stand by itself and still make sense? If so, then congratulations! Your sentence is all grown up and ready to be read. If not, you may need to rephrase it.

Full stops for abbreviations

The only other use for this stoic little dot is to indicate an abbreviation, such as ‘etc.’ (short for et cetera), or to mark the initials of a person (A. A. Milne). The full stop is occasionally used to denote a title (Ms.), an initialism (U.S.A.) or an acronym (L.A.S.E.R.). However, we don’t typically do this in Australian English. If you’re not ending a sentence, using an abbreviation or someone’s initial, then the full stop isn’t the punctuation mark for you.

Question mark

The title might give it away, but this mark is used to denote a question and is used at the end of a sentence instead of a full stop. You’ll hopefully be answering more questions than you’re asking in your essays, but in the world of academia nothing is straightforward, and research doesn’t always go as planned, so it’s best to be prepared.

If you start a sentence with one of the basic questioning words (who, what, where, when, how, why) then you’ll probably need to cap it off with a question mark. Yes, even if the question is rhetorical*. When writing academic text, your use of question marks should be straightforward and limited. Generally, it is not necessary to ask a question of your reader in an essay or research report.
*A rhetorical question is a sentence phrased as a question that does not actually require or expect an answer. It is typically used to demonstrate a point, or when the answer is implied such as in “You didn’t expect this book to have ALL the answers, did you?”

**Exclamation mark**

You will almost never use an exclamation mark in academic writing unless a quote you use contains one. An exclamation mark is used to denote strong emotion and personal commentaries or strong emotions are not at home in academia. Generally, exclamation marks are usually reserved for personal interactions like texting or social media.

**Comma**

That's comma, with two 'm's, not coma. If the latter ends up in your essay there may be some larger issues than punctuation. The comma is possibly one of the easiest punctuation marks to misuse because it's a rather popular one and, boy, do they end up everywhere. They can be overused, underused, or slide into the wrong place. They're the hyperactive member of the punctuation family, and rarely end up where you want them.

**Commas for lists**

A comma is used to make a distinction between parts of a sentence and clearly tell your reader how to read the sentence, and to show what words go together. Perhaps the most obvious use for the comma is in a list.

I need to buy broccoli, tomatoes, lettuce and milk.

**Commas for ‘extra bits’**

The next major use is to segregate a part of the sentence that isn’t necessary to the overall meaning.

The comma, as we all know, likes to get around.

The ‘as we all know’ isn’t necessary, and the sentence could work just fine if we said ‘The comma likes to get around’. Remember that you need to put a comma both before and after the segment when you do this.

There are far more uses for the comma. In truth, the comma is possibly the one mark without a strict set of rules around it. Try and use it sparingly, and only if you feel the sentence suffers without it. Some comma fans will say to insert one wherever you want your reader to pause or take a breath in your sentence. It comes back to meaning; if putting in a comma changes the meaning of what you want to say, then leave it out.

**The Oxford Comma**

Now for a contentious issue: the Oxford comma. The Oxford comma refers to putting a comma before a conjunction (and, but, or). It's neither wrong or right to do this, but you can find people out there that hold firm beliefs around the subject. Some detest it, and claim you should never comma before a conjunction. Some, though, believe that a conjunction should almost never occur without it. In Australian English, we
typically advise against the Oxford comma, meaning that a conjunction should not have a comma before it, so if you want to play it safe, don’t put a comma before ‘and’ or the rest of the bunch.

**Why I still use the Oxford Comma**

**WITH:**
I had eggs, toast, and orange juice.

**WITHOUT:**
I had eggs, toast and orange juice.

(Source: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-rINAqKQI1Qs/Tws-O1L2ulI/AAAAAAAAAes/30wZgE_URyU/s1600/Oxford+Comma.jpg)

In the first image above, it’s clear you had three separate food items for breakfast because the comma is placed after each of their names. By placing a comma only after the word ‘eggs’ in the second example, it appears that you had toast with orange juice, hence the different image.

Just remember that the purpose of punctuation is clarity, so don’t sprinkle them around because you feel you should.

**Apostrophe**

This poor cousin of the comma is also misused a lot. It’s often forced to go to the party where it knows nobody, and it sits there, awkward and out of place, knowing it should be somewhere else. Well, it’s up to you to make sure this maltreated mark ends up in its proper place.

There are two primary uses for the apostrophe, and they are:
1) to show ownership (possession), and
2) to show that letters are missing. Let’s look at an example.

Please don’t wear Frank’s shirt. It could have been anywhere.

The first apostrophe informs the reader that ‘don’t’ is the shortening and joining of the two words ‘do not’; the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter. The second apostrophe tells us that the shirt belongs to Frank. The apostrophe is now happy because it was used twice and wasn’t shoved in a word where it wasn’t welcome.
When not to use the apostrophe

Errors commonly made with the apostrophe are with plural nouns and it’s/its. Some people feel compelled to use an apostrophe in the following ways:

- She’s ordering pizza’s for her friends
- or
- I gave the puppy it’s toy

The apostrophe is not needed in pizza’s. Something that has ‘s’ at the end because there are more than one (i.e. plural noun) does not need an apostrophe as it is not about ownership nor is it a contraction. Your order is for one pizza or twenty pizzas (or maybe fewer).

In the case of ‘it’s’, the word ‘it’s’ either stands for it is or it has. If you don’t want it to mean either one of those, then the word you need is ‘its’ with no apostrophe sticking its nose in between the letters. ‘Its’ is a possessive pronoun just like ‘theirs’, ‘yours’, ‘ours’, ‘hers’ and ‘his’. None of those words need an apostrophe, so don’t provoke rage in your lecturer by putting one in. Write these rules on a post-it and stick it to your wall. That apostrophe doesn’t want to end up out of place again.

Activity: Apostrophe of ownership

Place an apostrophe in each of the following sentences to show ownership. Be careful with plural collective nouns that end in ‘s’ like ‘babies’. Ask yourself ‘what or who owns it’, and place the apostrophe accordingly.

- The researchers stopwatch was stolen.
- He was beginning to test his lecturers patience.
- The childrens hats were drenched by the rain.
- The four students house was a mess.
- She borrowed her parents car.
- The ladies heels were ruined by the muddy grass.

Check your answers
Activity: Apostrophe of omission (missing letters)

Place an apostrophe in each of these sentences to show where letters are missing, which may or may not be where the words have been joined.

They’re running late.
Whose coming to the lecture?
You’re not welcome.
It’s been a busy semester.
He wouldn’t agree with the decision.

Check your answers

Activity: To apostrophe or not to apostrophe

This one’s easy. Or is it? Some of these sentences need an apostrophe while others don’t. Can you tell?

The printer needed its cartridge replaced.
The babies cried at the book’s terrible jokes.
The mistake is yours.
It’s going to be a long afternoon.
The researchers’ results were a world-first.

Check your answers

Colon

No, not the body part. The colon denotes that there is more information to come, relating to whatever came immediately before the colon. If what follows the colon doesn’t elaborate on the part before, then you need to use a different punctuation mark. The easiest example of this is in the definition of something, or a list.

Game of Thrones: the most sadistic book/television series on the planet.

Bring the following items to the exam: black or blue pens, a calculator, a ruler and your student card.

It always denotes extra information will follow. The only other occasional use for the colon is as an expression of time or ratio, such as It is 9:30 am or add flour and water at a ratio of 2:1. That said, in Australian English, time is most often expressed with a full stop: ‘9.30 am’.
Dashes

There are three different kinds of dashes. The shortest dash is the hyphen. This is used to connect words, usually when they need to function as one.

Time for a well-earned study break.

The middle dash is called an ‘en dash’ or ‘en rule’. As strange as that sounds, it’s called that because it is the width of the letter ‘n’. It is only ever used to express some sort of span, usually in place of the word ‘to’.

My study break will occur 10:00–12:00.

The longest dash is called an ‘em dash’ or ‘em rule’. No prizes for guessing why it got that name. Yes, it is the width of the letter ‘m’. This is actually the most commonly required dash, and unlike the previous two, which both have very specific jobs, the greedy ‘em dash’ has a range of tasks.

It can be used instead of a colon:


It can be used in place of commas or brackets for extra information:

‘Firefly’ — possibly the greatest show ever — was cancelled after one season.

There’s more to the ‘em dash’, but when writing academically, these are likely the only two uses you’ll encounter. Now, we’re lucky enough to live in an electronic age where these dashes happen automatically. Microsoft Word often does a good job of figuring out which dash you meant and replacing it accordingly. This means you don’t have to remember these perfectly, but it helps to have a rough idea when you proofread. Microsoft Word can miss some things. Or Skynet may finally become a reality and its first act of computer rebellion is to mess up the dashes. You never know. Remember your dashes and stop the Terminator becoming a reality.

Quotation marks

The two forms of quotation marks (double and single) both perform the same task, but different organisations have a preference for how they are used. In every case, one will be used for quotes, and the other to show quotes within quotes (quoteception).

In most academic writing and in Australian English, the preference is to use single quotation marks (’) for quotes and double quotation marks for quotes within quotes (””). This means that you generally want to use the single quotes, unless the person you are quoting quotes another person in what they say. It sounds confusing, so look at this example.

Robert said, ‘We all remember the famous words of Winston Churchill: “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on”.’
EDITING AND PROOFREADING

or

How to make it sound good

Your lecturer may not talk about the importance of correct punctuation or spelling, but they will notice errors. They may also deduct marks from your work because of them, and that isn’t a happy story.

Is there a difference between them?

Yes. Editing is a different process from proofreading. Editing is the more in-depth process, and the job to do first. It involves reading through your work in detail and adjusting or rewriting paragraphs and sentences to improve the content or meaning.

Proofreading is a final check before you hand it in; scanning the document for basic errors like spelling or punctuation. You are not necessarily looking at content at this stage, just polishing it up.

Tips for editing

Make time

Editing is a key part of your work, so factor it in to your planning. To edit properly requires at least an hour, if not more. You not only need time to look closely at your manuscript, but also to rewrite parts if necessary. Be ruthless during this stage; your aim is to ensure your line of argument is clear. Don’t be afraid to rework it. To make your work the best it can be, allow at least a few hours for this process.

Take a break before you start

This is where you put your work down for a few hours at least; preferably a day or two. If you try to edit immediately after you finish, then your brain will remember what you meant to write, and read it that way. Well, thanks for trying, brain, but no thanks. Taking a proper break will defamiliarise you from the text a little so that when you return, your brain won’t substitute errors in the text. It will then be easier for you to spot mistakes and you can finish crafting your masterpiece.

Editing checklist

The list below is for editing a report; many of the items are relevant to other types of assessment.

Read on for more editing tips.
Use this editing checklist on your final report to ensure that it has been written in an appropriate style and is as complete as possible.

Have I:
- Checked the report follows an appropriate structure?
- Ensured the headings and subheadings accurately reflect the content of each section?
- Ensured each paragraph contains a topic sentence?
- Used paragraphs that aid the flow and analysis of the report’s findings?
- Structured sections of the report logically?
- Used language/expression in the report that is:
  - Appropriate to the report’s purpose?
  - Clear and easily understood?
  - Concise?
  - Non-sexist, non-racist, inclusive?
  - Suited to the needs of the reader?
- Made the report’s purpose clear?
- Met the criteria?

Written an introduction that:
- Explains the report’s purpose?
- Defines the problem?
- Guides the reader into the body of the report?

Written a body section that:
- Has headings and, if necessary, subheadings?
- Presents factual and objective information?
- Analyses the findings?

Written a conclusion that:
- Draws ideas together?
- Summarises the content and findings?

Prepared recommendations that:
- Offer solutions to any problems in the body?
- Are concrete, specific and action oriented?
- Are acceptable to the reader and possible to implement?

Included appendices that are:
- Relevant to the report?
- Clearly labelled?
- Necessary?
- Referenced appropriately in the text of the report?
- Included a complete reference list?

Be thorough

Look closely at the following aspects of your work, and click to find the relevant information if you are unsure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have I...</th>
<th>Where to find it in this book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressed the task?</td>
<td>Topic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured my argument?</td>
<td>Topic sentences; Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the right structure (essay or report format)?</td>
<td>Essay structure; Report structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported my argument?</td>
<td>Referencing; Academic language; Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met the word-count?</td>
<td>Essay structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used academic language and expression?</td>
<td>Academic language; Academic terms and phrases; Understanding academic speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the appropriate voice (active or passive)?</td>
<td>Academic language (active and passive voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been consistent in my use of tense?</td>
<td>Tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used appropriate words and phrases?</td>
<td>Academic language (colloquialisms; clichés, jargon, inclusive language);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic terms and phrases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-read and re-read

Because you are intimately familiar with your own work, you may not see every mistake in the first reading. Re-reading it will capture the sneaky errors that escaped you the first time. It also gives you the chance to check any parts you have rewritten. It’s not uncommon to need to rework parts a few times; this is all part of drafting any assessment task.

But wait, there’s more

Just when you thought it was safe, there’s more editing to do. The English language can be strange. Not even your word-processor will pick up all the details when it comes to some words, so also check for homophones. They are so notorious that they have their own collective name. These words sound exactly the same so they can confuse anyone. Here’s how to differentiate.
Homophones

Their/there/they’re
‘Their’ is only ever possessive. Only use it when you talk about ownership of something:

Their research into pancake consumption by students had alarming results.

‘There’ denotes a position or place:

Lead researcher, Ernie Coli, stated his main concern was that students left cooked pancakes “on the bench over there for hours”.

‘They’re’ is a contraction of ‘they are’. To check this is correct, replace ‘they’re’ with ‘they are’ and see if it still makes sense. If it doesn’t, you’re using the wrong word:

He issued a strong warning that they’re likely to develop food poisoning if they ate the pancakes.

In summary then, remember that: They’re doing their research over there.

More homophones: your/you’re
‘Your’ is also possessive. It only ever shows ownership:

The students were becoming upset at the researchers’ methods, and one yelled in hunger, “They aren’t your pancakes!”

‘You’re’ is a contraction of ‘you are’. Again, try replace it with ‘you are’ to check the meaning. If it doesn’t work, you probably meant ‘your’.

“You’re going to get in deep trouble for stealing our pancakes”, threatened another student.

Even more homophones
• whether / wether / weather
• course / coarse
• here / hear
• sure / shore
• where / wear
• made / maid
• no / know
Similar sounding words

Affect/effect
These two have similar meanings, which is probably why they are so often confused. However, one is a verb and one is a noun, which means one is an action and the other is a thing.
‘Affect’ is the verb, so something has to DO it, or it has to be done to something:

Pancakes containing bacteria may affect your health’, said the researcher in defence.

‘Effect’ is the noun, meaning it is treated like an object or thing:

Students were surprised to learn that the effect of bacteria in pancakes can be severe illness.

Then/Than
‘Then’ is a conditional word. It means that, if one thing occurs, something else is going to as well:

If bacteria are introduced to food, then a sleepless night may follow.

See the comma before ‘then’? It keeps the two related things nicely contained in their own part of the sentence.

‘Than’ is a comparative word. It is used to show some sort of difference or disparity between two things, or simply contrast the items in some way.

Researchers concluded that the students would experience worse problems than sleepless nights if they continued to ingest the pancakes.

Editing finale: a fresh pair of eyes
Asking somebody else to read your work can be helpful. If they haven’t seen it before, their eyes are ‘fresh’ and they are more likely to notice any inconsistencies. It may be more effective if that person doesn’t study the subject; they will learn about it based on what you’ve written. They don’t need to understand every nuance, but they should be able to follow your line of argument.

Help, I found some problems while editing!
My writing seems disjointed
A disjointed effect occurs when your ideas jump around, rather than shifting logically from one to the next. This indicates that you have not structured your writing, either at the sentence level or in terms of your argument. First check that your sentences are complete. Next ensure each paragraph has a topic sentence followed by evidence to back up your argument.
I’m not sure I’ve addressed the topic

If this is your concern, look back to your plan and topic analysis. If you’re not sure what the topic is asking, go back to the chapter on topic analysis. Ideally, you want to have this sorted out before you start writing, but it doesn’t always work that way. Once you understand your topic, rewrite accordingly. If you still feel unsure, then look at the structure of your assessment task. Do you have obvious topic sentences? Do your paragraphs relate back to the topic?

Does my writing ‘waffle’?

This problem is common, and is something we should all watch out for. Writing that ‘waffles’ is often a long way over the word count, and leaves the reader feeling as though they haven’t read much that is new. A similar sin is writing that is ‘verbose’, which means to use more words than are needed. The good news is that this can generally be improved without too much bloodshed. First, trim unnecessary words. In the following example, the word ‘quite’ does not add anything useful to the sentence. Delete it.

The results showed that the experiment had been quite successful.

Next check for duplication of information, or where you may have said the same thing twice in slightly different ways, for example:

The increase in the number of soldiers attending such a funeral reflected the General’s popularity. There was a greater number present than expected. He was well-loved by all he commanded among the military divisions. In particular, the 15th (Scottish) division performed the Highland Dirk dance in his honour.

Activity: Clean up your writing

The following sentences could be much more concise. Delete the unnecessary words that do not add anything to the content.

Exploring the expansive world on extremely long-distance ocean journeys can have considerable impacts on the health of all sailors. For example, the demanding sea voyage itself is shown to have lasting effects on the sailor’s body’s immune system resulting in an array of unfortunate illnesses (Lu et al., 2010). In particular, cardiovascular disease is the most commonly diagnosed ailment identified amongst seafaring crew members (Hearty, 2009). Moreover, studies by Sponge and Lope (2011) indicate that these negative health effects are mainly due to two contributing factors: diet and lack of physical exercise on board the sailor’s ship. “There’s too many worm infested crackers and not enough deck scrubbing” explains one well-known ship captain (Blackbeard, 1720).

Check your answer
Tips for proofreading

Use a ruler

‘How does a ruler help in proofreading?’ you might ask. It doesn’t have to be a ruler, just something with a straight edge that is long enough to cover the document. You could even use another sheet of paper. Rest the ruler/paper/unknown implement underneath the line you’re reading, and move it down as you read. This prevents you from reading ahead and forces your concentration onto one line only. The technique is helpful for finding misspelt words or wayward punctuation marks as it gives you tunnel vision. Be aware though, that it won’t let you pick up on overall sentence or paragraph structure.

Read it aloud

Reading your work out loud can give you a great sense of how it really reads. Speaking your own words aloud can highlight poor sentence structure, as confusing passages can be difficult to say. If any of it is hard to understand, try to find another way of saying what you mean. The next step is to hear someone else read your work. There is an excellent software program that can do this for you called WYNN. You simply upload your document and it will read it back to you (in different accents, too!). This software is available on certain FedUni computers.

How do I look?

Think of formatting and layout as your assignment’s suit when it goes for a job interview. It needs to look good. If your lecturer hasn’t given you any guidelines for the presentation of your work, follow our layout and formatting standards.

Proofreading finale: a fresh pair of eyes

Yes, this is the same as the last editing tip, except this time it’s just to pick up spelling or grammar errors. Ask someone to scan it for incorrect punctuation marks or where you’ve accidentally spelled ‘made’ as ‘maid’.

Back to table of contents
TIPS IF ENGLISH IS YOUR OTHER LANGUAGE

or

This language was hard enough already

Congratulations for being here! Many Australians don’t take the opportunity to learn another language, and choosing to study in a different culture is not easy. Here are some tips to help you with the challenges that can come with studying in a second language.

Language confidence

It can be tricky to be immersed in an English-speaking environment if English is not your native language, not to mention a university, which has a language of its own. But don’t worry, as Australian born students also have to learn academic language.

Let’s have a look at what specific challenges you may face as a non-native speaker of English…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social context</th>
<th>Possible issues</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australians speak quickly and often mumble and have a distinct accent.</td>
<td>You may feel pressure to pretend that you know what is going on, especially if you do not feel confident to speak.</td>
<td>Give yourself time to get used to the Australian accent. Once your ear adapts to the new way of speaking, you will not feel so overwhelmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australians like to shorten words: barbecue = barbie football = footy afternoon = arvo</td>
<td>You may think your English isn’t good enough and your confidence can drop.</td>
<td>Spend time with native speakers to get used to their way of expressing the English language. Start by getting to know your Uni Mentor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

University context

Group work with Australian students can be challenging due to different expectations.

Participation in tutorials is difficult when the conversation moves quickly.

You may become confused about what’s been decided about the group project.

You might not join in tutorial discussions.

Ask a lot of questions so you can be clear about yours and others’ expectations.

Prepare for tutorials in advance, so you know what words, phrases and ideas might be discussed.
Talking to your lecturer/tutor

Sometimes, a lack of confidence in using English can mean that you don’t feel comfortable talking to your lecturer or tutor. If, for example, you know you won’t be able to finish your assignment on time, what do you do?

• either email your lecturer to ask for an extension,
• or speak to them after class to ask for an extension…
• …at least a few days before the assignment is due.

Don’t contact your lecturer the day before the due date to ask for an extension. Your lecturers will not be impressed. You must give them at least three days’ notice for an extension. This way, you will not lose marks and you will reduce your stress and have more time.

Australians value direct communication. Lecturers prefer it if you are honest with them and warn them about your difficulties in advance; that is an example of being polite and respectful. If you hand in your assignment late without asking for an extension, your lecturer will simply deduct marks and will not have a good impression of you.

Electronic dictionaries

Try not to rely on your electronic language dictionary for an accurate translation or synonym of a word you don’t know. Electronic language dictionaries do not always have current translations and don’t always have accurate discipline-specific translations. Always check an English-English dictionary or a subject-specific dictionary to be certain. These are available online or at the university Library. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use it at all — especially when it can be so helpful in a quick situation — but try only to resort to it when you have no other option.

Using Google translate

Another helpful resource for speakers of other languages can be Google translate. The temptation to - type in what you want to write in an assignment directly into Google Translate, press ‘translate into English’, then copy and paste it into an assignment - is not worth it. Whatever comes out may not make much sense, nor will it be in an academic style. So, if you think you need to use Google translate, limit it only to phrases that you find hard to convert into English, but then always check that it is a ‘true’ translation by translating it back into your other language first. One way to check how accurate this software is: type in some text from an academic article that’s been written in English and translate it into your first language. See what comes out…

Back to table of contents
THE MODERN LIBRARY

or

Didn’t they have books once?

The libraries of today are almost limitless in the services they provide. It’s ‘almost’ because you can’t buy a tame lion at your library so you can forget that. What is does offer is a wealth of resources, facilities and workshops from which you can draw — and it’s free for FedUni students.

Libraries still offer books, but now they’re available in hard copy and digital form, so you don’t need to study on campus to access them. The FedUni Library website gives you access to a massive range of eBooks and other online resources, so if you can’t be bothered getting off the couch, you can still do all the research you need. And stay in your pyjamas.

When you do venture into the library on campus, you’ll find some handy facilities:

• computers for student access
• dedicated study areas
• couches and other relaxing areas to stretch out in while on a study break
• teaching resources
• newspapers and journals

Not to mention that other perk of the modern library, the temperature controlled environment. Perhaps one of the most useful residents of the library, though, are the librarians.

Librarians

They don’t just check out books, librarians are information experts. They know how to find information and academic resources, and they want to help you. You can get their help face-to-face, via email or an online chat, so you don’t have to study on campus to access their expertise.

These are just some of the things librarians can help you with:

• which database or set of databases would be best for your assignment
• questions about referencing and how to use RefWorks
• developing a research plan and search strategy
• using the library catalogue and setting up your personal reading history
• finding resources, including items from other libraries
• self check-out and online book renewal

Library skills classes are a must-do. Classes run at the beginning of semester on some campuses and cover everything you need to know about researching and sourcing material for your study and assignments.

For a short-cut to relevant databases, websites and other resources, find the Subject Guide that is tailored to your course. The Library website has it all.

Back to table of contents
UNDERSTANDING ONLINE SYSTEMS
THE BASICS OF ONLINE LEARNING

or

For those of you playing at home

Studying online is a way to tailor your study to fit you. It affords you more flexibility in your study, but you are more reliant on technology and need to be more self-directed than if you were studying on-campus.

There are two main forms of online learning:

- **Asynchronous** - no set times for your study means you can complete tasks anytime; and
- **Synchronous** - you need to attend regular, scheduled online activity in real time

Responsibilities of the online learner

Self-motivation

When studying online, you are responsible for your own learning and self-motivation. While face-to-face students are expected to be responsible for their own learning too, being motivated to study can be a challenge when you don’t have to physically be anywhere, or actually meet with others. You need to be your own motivator and drive yourself.

Availability

Despite the electronic nature of online learning, you, your peers and your lecturers or tutors still have lives, and cannot be expected to be online and available all the time. Similarly, you aren’t expected to be perpetually available to them either.

Online étiquette

Perhaps one of the most important responsibilities for online learners is ensuring that you conduct yourself in an appropriate manner. In other words, the sorts of manners that are expected of you if you were speaking in person are still expected of you in an online course. Talking to a screen can make it easy to forget that you are engaging with other people. When involved in a discussion, make sure that you behave as you would in person. Apart from the personal impact that impoliteness can have, your mark may contain a component that reflects your participation in group discussions.

Know your technology

Become familiar with the technologies required for your course. You’re not expected to understand them perfectly from the start, but you need to be prepared to get to grips with new technologies. Ask for help if you need it!
Strategies for Online Learning

Managing your time is an integral part of online study just as it is when studying on-campus. Following are a few differences relating to learning online.

Have a study space

Developing a study space is important to any study mode, but critical to a successful online learning experience. For the online learner, the home study space is likely to be where everything happens, so it’s important that you make the space as practical and comfortable as possible.

Time management

An online course (especially an asynchronous online course) requires that you manage your time carefully. Schedule study time where and when it suits you, but make it a regular time. This will allow you to get into the habit of studying on a regular basis. Without classes to attend, it can be easy to let things slide.

Potential limitations of technology

Be aware of your own technological limitations. This ranges from knowing what platform you’re on (Mac, Windows) to your own capabilities, and even the reliability of your internet connection. Sometimes the technology of an online course can encounter problems you can’t predict, such as software incompatibility or losing your internet for a week. It’s important to be aware of this and consider your alternatives if the worst happens.

Things to consider for online learning

- What operating system are you using? (Windows, Mac or Linux)
- What internet browser are you using? (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, Google Chrome, etc.)
- Is your computer reliable? (Does it frequently crash or stop working?)
- Is your internet connection reliable? (Do you often lose connection to the internet?)
- Is there an alternative study space available to you? (And does it have all the necessary equipment?)
- Will you require plugins and do you have the necessary plugins? (Flash, Quicktime, etc.)
- Do you know who to contact for help if you encounter problems?

Back to table of contents
MANAGING YOUR STUDY
TIME MANAGEMENT

or
I know I had something to do this week…

With the increased responsibility that uni brings, it helps to keep track of what work you have to do. Some people are naturally good at doing this, and others have to work at it. Recognising how well you manage your time is an important first step. If you find yourself with three assignments due at the same time, and you left yourself one day to do them, then you should read on. The fact is, your courses won’t coordinate with each other; one won’t give you a break because you have something due in another. It is possible that all of them will give you a major project at once: at the end of semester.

Planning

To handle it all with minimal stress, you need to plan how you use your time. That is what time management is about. But don’t worry: the skill of prioritising your study workload and retaining your social/ family/ friends/work/sports/parental duties can be learned. Using a few key strategies will make study easier in the long run, so start now. Managing your time can be broken down into three main areas… Drumroll please…

Plan your year

Plan your week

Plan your work

Plan your year

A calendar or wall planner is a good visual aid, giving you the whole year or semester at a glance. It’s your ‘bigger picture’ and an effective tool for planning, particularly if you add both academic and social deadlines and priorities. You’ll quickly see which weeks of semester may dampen your social life. On your calendar, include things like:

• semester dates
• assignment due dates
• exam times
• personal events

Adding these commitments to your yearly planner gives you a structure to work around. Put your yearly planner on the wall where you most often study so you can see the whole semester whenever you’re working on assignments. Crossing items off as they are completed will help you feel a sense of progress. As there is only a small space for each day on a calendar or wall planner, it probably is not the place to record the details of your tasks, though: it needs a friend. Consider using a diary in addition to a wall planner, where you can continue with the breakdown and planning of tasks (you’ll have more space for writing).
Plan your week

Using a diary or weekly planner is a good way to record the details of your activities. You can use the tried-and-true paper method (get a free student diary), or some newfangled gadget like a phone or a tablet. It’s a case of choosing the tool that’s right for you. If you’re unsure, use more than one for a while and you’ll naturally stop using the less convenient one.

Record everything. Write down the fixed deadlines: major assessment tasks/practicals/exams and other important uni-related details such as class times. Allocate time to do specific tasks of each assessment task or activity. For example, to write an essay, schedule time to:

- choose your topic
- analyse and research it
- organise your information
- write drafts
- review, rewrite and edit it, and then
- proofread and check on layout and presentation.

If you work backwards from the due date to plan each task, you can not only space out the workload, but you can also determine the latest starting date that guarantees you complete it. The more detail you can record, the better. Once you can see clearly the steps involved with your study load and when everything is due, you can identify what weeks/months might be tricky. With everything written down, your diary is your best friend.

Plan your work

The job of planning your work is harder if you don’t know what time you have available for it. Do you know what time is not available in your week? This will be time that is for:

- scheduled classes
- travel to and from uni
- preparing and eating meals (your meals and/or the family’s)
- sleeping
- shopping and domestic activities
- working (paid employment or volunteering)
- parental responsibilities
- regular recreation activities like sport, going out, visiting friends

Use the Weekly Planner to find out what time you have available for study outside the classroom, and how much ‘free time’ you might have. If this is less than 10 to 15 hours then you really don’t have much choice about when you study. The approach you will need to take will be different from a student who has more than 10 to 15 hours of ‘free time’ per week. With little spare time, you will need to be more goal-orientated and avoid procrastination.
Set your study goals

Being goal-orientated has nothing to do with soccer, or football for that matter. This method of time management means you schedule in advance exactly when you intend to work. The following suggestions can help you:

Allocate your study time in blocks. Give yourself a half-hour or an hour in the free areas of your timetable, adding it to your diary or wherever you record the detail of your days.

Choose study times that suit your preferences, if possible. Do you study better in the evening or the morning?

Start working and record your study time as you complete it: not as a way to procrastinate, but to get a picture of the work you have actually done. The idea is to reward yourself afterwards for the study you did. Without a celebration of the goals you achieve, a busy schedule can dampen even the most enthusiastic student. Also, being aware of how you study best is important in setting your goals. Consider things like your study environment, and your learning style to make the most of your time.

Write a To-Do list. This is a list of what you need to accomplish, so can be a handy way to record your study session goals. To-do lists can be used over the short-term, like a day or a week, or more long-term (but you need to remember where you’ve put them). The great thing about lists is that you can shift things around if you want to accomplish tasks earlier.

Practical stuff for time management

Time management matrix

Don’t be deterred by the complex name. This is handy a way of figuring out what tasks need your attention now and what tasks can be put off. The matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Not Urgent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study for tomorrow’s exam</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do laundry</td>
<td>Watch the latest episode of Hannibal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Put tasks that you have to do soon in the ‘Urgent’ column and put things that can be done later in the ‘Not Urgent’ column. Tasks that are important to you, or that must be completed properly, go in the ‘Important’ row. Things that you can possibly miss or defer go in the ‘Not Important’ row. You could put as many tasks in the boxes as you like, and make a matrix for a day, week, month or semester.

Clearly, the task in the top left of the table (Urgent/Important) is the one you need to pay the most attention to, and not the bottom right task (Not Urgent/Not Important), unless you are procrastinating. Seriously though, the matrix helps to prioritise tasks by differentiating between those you might like to do, and those that you must do. It is most useful when you have a lot of competing priorities at any given
moment, and you need to clarify what needs to be done immediately. Using these every day is certainly possible, but it's probably excessive as a general time management tool; it might even border on being a good procrastination tool... Try it here.

Same deadline blues
If you have two assignments due on the same day, then record in your diary an early completion date for one of them. Then, spend a little time scheduling both assessments so that you spread out the workload. It may seem like a lot to figure out, but it will make your study load more consistent, and (hopefully) prevent you from having to do two tasks at once. Not only is it stressful, but when you work on an assignment you need the headspace to think about that task alone. Otherwise you’ll end up confused and writing about the Spanish civil war in your business report.

Weekly planner
Locate your weekly planner and follow the following steps to help you work out your weekly activities.

Activity: Find your free time (weekly planner)
Find out what time you have available for study, and what your ‘free time’ might be.

Step 1:
In the ‘weekly planner’ table:
1. Fill in all of your committed time (the above list).
2. Total the number of hours and add the time allocated for sleep.
3. Enter this total in the space allocated (A).
4. Do not include your private study time in this part.

Step 2:
In the ‘study planner’ table, you’ll need a reasonable estimate of how much study time you will need. As a guide, start with three to four hours of study per course per week outside the classroom. So, if you are doing five courses, then expect to spend between 15 and 20 hours per week doing private study. Ask lecturers or mentors to guide you further, or check the course outline for the number of hours you need to allocate. Keep in mind that the course work and your level of understanding of the material will affect how much time you will need. Then:
1. Fill in your estimate for each course.
2. Calculate the total and write this in the space provided (B).
Step 3:
Are you ready to find out how busy your life will be? Finally,

1. Add the number of committed hours (A) to estimated study time (B). Enter this total in the space at C.
2. Subtract the total in C from 168 (there are 168 hours in a week) and put the result in D.

D is the total number of non-study hours remaining: your ‘free’ time.

If this is less than 10 to 15 hours then you really don't have much choice about when you study – you will probably have to be goal-orientated to ensure your study is done. If you are a full-time student and this figure is greater than 10 to 15 hours then this means you have some flexibility in how you assign your workload and when you prefer to study. Don’t forget your work commitments will fluctuate throughout the year, so anticipate busy periods and quiet ones.

Tips for time management

Start assignments early
This is simultaneously the most obvious and the most ignored tip on time management, mainly due to a student’s innate ability to procrastinate. To start early, you need to know when assignments are due, otherwise you won’t know when ‘early’ is (that part is logical). Then plan the work you will need to do for each assignment, spacing out the tasks over weeks. Aim to get one done before another, or stagger parts of them along the way to the due date. So take a look, plan ahead, and start before it’s due.

Over-estimate the time required
Factor in time for the unexpected. If your day is packed full, then the smallest interruption will topple your careful plans. Things can also take longer than you think, so leave breaks between activities or simply allocate extra time to them. This way, if the unexpected happens, like a car breaks down or a child needs to be picked up from school early, you can shuffle your activities around to accommodate it.

Use your time wisely
This includes avoiding the temptation to write a 3000-word assignment in one hour. If you have just worked a 15-hour shift, then don’t write an essay (please): you’re not awake enough. Set yourself small tasks for busy days and big tasks for the days you have more time. This partly involves being self-aware: some days our brain can’t even wake up. That’s fine, give it the day off and tackle the task tomorrow. If you wake up full of energy (does anyone do that?), then use it - don’t spend the day on the couch.

Go over notes immediately
Reviewing the notes you took during a lecture or tutorial straight away helps to confirm the information while it is still fresh in your mind. It will also allow you to correct any error you may have made, because you can still recall the material. Doing this will save you a lot of time in the long run, so it is not only a good study technique, but also a time management strategy. Nobody wants to discover during their exam that they misunderstood a particular bit of their scrawled notes. Take fifteen minutes to half an hour to read what you’ve written; you’ll thank this book later (hopefully).
Break tasks down

Breaking tasks into smaller chunks is a great time management trick. Thinking of an assignment as one big task can make it appear impossible. For example, rather than writing in your diary that you have a 1500-word essay due on Friday, first split the task up into smaller parts, then assign the parts to several days, or preferably weeks. Your study days will be less daunting if your diary tells you to write 250 words on Monday, another 250 on Tuesday and so on, instead of the total on one day. This strategy is best done at the start of the semester so your diary (or whatever you use) details the smaller parts and you can see it in context of your overall workload. This will help you to work through assignments steadily, and avoid having to write five assignments in one weekend.

Time-saving tips

• Back up your work on hard disk or CD to save you from doing it all again. USBs can malfunction or get lost.
• Expect things to take x2, x3, x4 or x10 longer. Plan with this in mind and start early.
• Keep an ongoing note of all books and journals for use as references.
• Sign up for library info sessions on ‘Refworks’ software. It will cut down the time you spend on referencing.
• Network with others doing the same courses either in study groups or by using Moodle.
• Plan time to enjoy your friends and family. Being relaxed with a balanced lifestyle will make your time at university more efficient.

Back to table of contents
PROCRASTINATION

or

Just one more episode...

Before you start this chapter, take a look at this picture. Aren’t they adorable?

It comes from a website called GOATS Rule!!!(http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/sites/animals/ren.php) and it has nothing except three pictures of baby goats and some ranting about how cute they are. The internet really can take over your time, can’t it? Anyhow, let’s get back to what we should be doing.

Procrastination is when you delay or postpone something, like looking at baby goats instead of reading the chapter on procrastination. The dangerous thing about procrastination is that it can gain momentum quickly: by delaying your study, there is twice as much to do the next time. This inevitably makes it more intimidating, and before you know it, you are watching kittens fall over on YouTube. Then your study load is three times as large, so you watch a movie instead, and end up in a vortex of avoidance. You must crush procrastination so that your precious study time is not wasted. Here are some ways to avoid it altogether.

Recognise that you’re procrastinating

The first step is to know when you are procrastinating. Typically, you will notice a nagging sensation that you should be doing that assignment. You may also ‘suddenly’ feel the urge to do other tasks, like the washing or cleaning or activities that you don’t usually feel excited about. It is likely you are procrastinating. Once you recognise the behaviours, it will be easier to manage; you can’t fix a problem if you don’t know it exists.

Manage your time

Managing your time effectively is one of the best ways to avoid procrastination.

Break tasks into smaller parts

If you’ve read the time management chapter, then this idea will be familiar. By treating ‘the assignment’ not as one task, but as a series of smaller tasks, you will be less tempted to procrastinate. Being faced with an entire research report is more daunting than the job of finding some articles today, then tomorrow just writing the introduction.
Minimise distractions

When you need to get work done, avoid or remove the things that distract you. This can range from studying in a quiet room to physically removing the distraction: unplug the modem if you’re addicted to checking Facebook or email. This process can also help to get you into the right headspace to study.

Reward yourself

Start rewarding yourself for your achievements, be that in the form of shopping, movies, an enjoyable activity, food or something else. If you’ve broken your task into smaller parts, you could gather rewards along the way. For example, if you enjoy coffee (after all, caffeine is fantastic), you could allow yourself a coffee after writing 250 words each night. This may motivate you to work each night. You could then give yourself a larger reward for completing the overall task, or for working consistently. The key is to be strict about the system; don’t let it unravel by giving yourself the treat when you didn’t do the work. Make the reward something special so that it means more for you.

Get a support team

Making your friends or family aware of your new process can help you stay on task. You could ask a parent, sibling, friend or housemate to check your word count every hour, or randomly drop by to make sure you are working. Tell them that you need to find five articles tomorrow so that they can nag you about it throughout the day. Make sure, though, that you choose friends who aren’t going to lead you astray…

Back to table of contents
THE STUDY ENVIRONMENT

or

How to make sure you stay at your desk

Nobody wants a study session to take all day. There are a thousand other things you could be doing, like visiting friends, cleaning, shopping, cooking, watching videos of kittens on YouTube, watching the latest episode of your favourite TV show - the list goes on. If, while you study, you find yourself thinking about how your chair gives you cramps in odd places, or what the strange smell is that’s wafting around the room, then your study is likely to be ineffective. The question of where you study and having the right study environment will impact on how well you study. Some people work best at a desk at home, others at the library, and some study best in bed. Figure out what will work best for you by considering a few factors.

Noise level

Do you work best in total silence or during feeding time at the zoo? Do you prefer the low murmur of your own music? Do you talk to yourself? It’s important to know what sort of noise level lets you work most efficiently. If your housemates, siblings and/or children nag you at home, then consider studying elsewhere. If silence makes you uneasy, then avoid the quiet spaces in the library. Once you know what works best for you, avoid the environments that don’t suit, or think about what adjustments you can make to your chosen place of study to achieve the noise level you want.

Distraction

Look at your options for where to study: what happens there? Do your housemates encourage you into a night of drinking right before an exam? Does your family like to watch TV at a ridiculous volume? Does the computer pull you towards it like a cowboy with a lasso? Take an honest look at what distracts you and remove it from your study environment. If you find that the worst culprit for distracting you is yourself, then what you’re doing is procrastinating, and you should jump to that chapter.

Comfort

Nobody works well on a bed of nails. You need a more comfortable environment; one that allows you to study for long periods of time. If an hour at a desk causes you physical pain, then look at your alternatives. A beanbag might be your idea of a perfect seat, so try studying there. Some people work best lying down, but generally, sitting at a desk in a good chair is probably the best all-round option; think twice about using one you found on the side of the road.

Amenities

As odd as it may seem, having access to certain facilities will help your study. A rumbling stomach or your caffeine addiction will quickly drag you away from it. Quicker still is the sudden realisation that you’ve had three cups of coffee in the last five minutes and you’re not sure whether you will make it to the toilet in time. Either find somewhere that provides these basic amenities, or take them with you (food, obviously; please don’t take a toilet with you). If home is your study location, then this is covered (as long as you had enough money to afford groceries this week).
If you’re still not sure what your ideal study environment is, start with a desk somewhere quiet and relatively distraction-free. At home, convince your family to give you your own study space without the TV and a long way from the practise drum-kit. If it helps, tell your family this book told them to.

Back to table of contents
NOTE-TAKING
or
Not every word matters

Taking notes can be arduous work, but it’s an important skill at university. It’s a way to ensure you have a hard copy of any important information for easy reference. Note-taking can be useful in a number of situations, like lectures, or while reading, or at group meetings. Keep these things in mind to make the process easier.

Know why you’re taking notes

Remember the purpose of your notes when you take them, as that can influence both what you take down and how you do it. Are you taking them to review a reading? Are you taking notes in a lecture on everything important? Knowing what assignments are coming up can help you record the most relevant material, as taking notes for an essay will differ from taking notes for exam preparation. Here are some different settings for note-taking.

1. Notes from written text

First, know why you are reading. It will sharpen your focus on the information you need. To be a good note-taker, you also need to be a good reader. Effective note-taking means being able to:

- Know what information is relevant
- Identify main ideas
- Use a note-taking system that’s effective for you
- Condense information into point form or a diagram
- Express ideas in your own words
- Record the publication information for referencing later on

Example: A strategy for note-taking from written text

(Adapted from UNSW, n.d.)

Divide your page into three columns, as follows, and use the headings below to guide your note-taking:
2. Notes from lectures

Sometimes you can wonder whether it’s better just to listen during a lecture rather than take notes. Well, the answer is: do both. Note-taking is helpful as it can:

• Help you to recall the lecture content
• Provide the basis for further research when you leave the lecture
• Jog your memory when you revise
• Help you stay awake

If you are writing notes in a lecture and the lecture slides are available to you on Moodle, then there is no point writing down what it says on the slides, as you can download the presentation afterwards. Instead, focus on any supplementary information that the lecturer adds to those notes that could be of use. So, just like the notes you take when reading, try to:

• Identify the main points of the lecturer’s presentation
• Write down key words and phrases the lecturer uses
• Focus on any examples the lecturer provides that can help you understand the concepts
Be prepared before the lecture as well. At least have some idea of what the topic is going to be and read up beforehand from any recommended texts. You should be able to get this information from the course description.

**Have a system**

Eventually, you’re going to have to re-read whatever you’ve scribbled down, so it’s a good idea to organise the information as clearly as you can. Your future self will thank you. What kind of system will vary depending on how you think. You may use different coloured pens for different ideas, or generate a mind map. You may write dot points or draw a picture that captures the main points. When taking notes in lectures, whether it’s by hand or on a laptop:

- Don’t worry about spelling or sentence structure. Correct that later.
- Try different ways of presenting the information, e.g. mind maps, diagrams, symbols.

Whatever it is, as long as you have a system, the information will be easier to record and easier to refer to later. You could have several systems, too, like using use dot points and adding a mind map at the end. Experiment. Get crazy. Nobody will look at these notes but you.

*Back to table of contents*
READING EFFECTIVELY

or

So many words!

The first part of effective reading is knowing what you need to read. Don’t spend a precious hour reading a textbook only to discover that you have the wrong one. Required readings are usually listed in your course description or the course Moodle shell. You’ll also have to find and read other articles for research when it comes to certain assignments. You may read different types of materials, which have differing levels of complexity. Approach them in different ways to get the most out of your reading time. Here’s a sample.

- Fiction book: a detailed read for plot, style, themes and other elements.
- Nonfiction book: a detailed read of relevant chapters for meaning, argument and evidence.
- Text book: a detailed read of chapters relevant to your course, in particular, key concepts and case studies.
- Journal article: read the abstract to gain an idea of what is contained in the article, then read in detail if relevant, or read the relevant sections.
- Newspaper: scan for relevant stories. Skim individual stories for relevant information.
- Manual: skim quickly for an idea of the steps involved, then read again in detail whilst performing the steps.

The next section takes a more detailed look at the structure of books and journal articles, as those are the most commonly encountered texts.

Strategies for reading effectively

There are a number of ways you can approach any reading, and it will depend on your purpose for reading. Sometimes you might use several ways for one document, and other times only one. But before you apply a particular strategy, you need to know why you’re reading in the first place…

Your purpose for reading

Your approach to reading will depend on the text, and your purpose for reading it. For example, you may be doing some background reading before a lecture, reading a text in preparation for a tutorial discussion or doing research for an essay.

Whatever your purpose for reading, it is worthwhile spending some time before you begin reading by noting down what you already know about the topic, and any questions that initially come to mind. You may find that you know more than you originally thought! Writing down your initial thoughts helps you to engage with the text as you read. You can refer back to your notes and ask: Do I still think that? Have I found any evidence in this text which supports my initial thoughts? Have I found any evidence which has made me change my opinion?

Questioning as you read

As you are reading, ask questions to help you to actively engage with the text and focus on what you are trying to find out from your reading. It’s a good idea to think of some questions before you start reading in
depth and to keep these in mind as you read. It can also be helpful to add more questions as you read the text and become familiar with the author's ideas and arguments.

The type of text you are reading will affect the questions you ask. Below are some general questions to get you started.

**Example: Ask yourself…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before you begin reading</th>
<th>About the writing</th>
<th>‘What do I think?’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do I want to find out?</td>
<td>What is the author's basic argument?</td>
<td>Which bits of the author's argument do I want to use/reflect on in my essay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I think now?</td>
<td>How effectively are the author's ideas evidenced?</td>
<td>How does this fit in with my own theory/beliefs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do I think this?</td>
<td>What would I like to ask the author?</td>
<td>How does it fit with the opposite theory/beliefs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the limitations or flaws in the evidence?</td>
<td>How does it fit with other relevant theory/beliefs I've come across?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What examples would prove the opposite theory?</td>
<td>Is my own theory/belief still valid? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can the theory be disproved or is it too general?</td>
<td>Am I surprised? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is this convincing? Why/why not?</td>
<td>Do I agree? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the implications?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the alternatives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from University of Sussex, 2014)

To find answers to the above questions, use the following strategies to find the information quickly and efficiently:

**Scanning**

Scanning is done first to gain an idea of whether or not a document is useful to you. The aim here is to figure out what the work contains as quickly and efficiently as possible. To do this, look at the following sections of these two types of text to find out the overall content:
### Skimming

If you are still unsure what the text is about, glance through a few pages to get a sense of the content: what they discuss and how they discuss it. To skim a text, quickly read:

- subheadings
- words in that are in bold, in italics or underlined
- diagrams
- an abstract, introduction or conclusion
- the first sentence of every paragraph (topic sentence)
- chapter questions (for textbooks) or chapter summaries
- discussion section and conclusion (journal article)

### Main ideas

Reading for main ideas is about identifying the key words and concepts without spending a great deal of time reading the entire work. Begin with skimming first, as that generally gives you a good idea of what sorts of words, themes and concepts continually appear. Note those words down. Armed with the key phrases and concepts, locate the areas that discuss those clearly and in detail, then read those segments so that you closely understand the main ideas. This should leave you with a decent understanding of the main points.

For an individual paragraph, find the topic sentence to find out what the main idea is. But what if you skip the rest of the information in the paragraph? Will you miss something? What is the rest of the information in the paragraph there for?

The other parts to consider that can help you gain a deeper understanding of the text are: key words or phrases and any examples or evidence that support the topic. Take a look at the following example text for these elements:
Traumatic stress disorders have been documented in a variety of animal species — from great ape veterans of pharmaceutical testing and elephants rescued from brutal circus training to canine veterans of armed conflict. How similar is PTSD in different animal species? It’s hard to know, but there are many shared symptoms, from changes in temperament and mood, difficulty sleeping and more sensitive startle responses to possible flashbacks of traumatizing events. In his book Second Nature, the ethologist Jonathan Balcombe shares an account of PTSD at the Fauna Sanctuary in Quebec, Canada, a refuge for chimps who’d been used in research. One afternoon, keepers loaded a shipment of materials onto a metal trolley they pushed past the enclosure of two chimps, Tom and Pablo. As soon as the chimps caught sight of it they let out frightened shrieks and became inconsolable. The staff later realized that the same brand of trolley, or one that looked like it, had been used to transport unconscious chimps to the surgery room at a research facility where Tom and Pablo had lived, and been experimented upon, two years earlier.

(Text source: Braitman, 2014)

Activity: Find the main idea in this text

Resources are a critical element in effective teaching of studies of society and environment. Unfortunately, teachers tend not to use a wide range of resources and the limited number they do use are often recycled year after year. Creative teachers access a wide range of resources because not only do they have the information literacy skills, but they have the need to accommodate the diverse range of interests and learning styles of their respective students (Marsh & Hart, 2011, p. 53).

Based on information in the above text, complete the following sentence:

In effective teaching, teachers...

- A) creatively use resources in their lessons.
- B) consider and incorporate a diverse range of resources to meet the needs of their students.
- C) use a number of resources in their lessons.
- D) have an awareness of what resources are available that meet the needs of their students.

Check your answer

Locating specific information

Looking for specific information is similar to reading for main ideas, except you focus only on points of interest. Your surveying or skimming skills will be useful here, but not quite enough. The key to finding specific information (apart from a coffee refill) is knowing what you are seeking (see the ‘Ask yourself’ table above). After that, scan and skim quickly through books and journals until you find some that address the points you have noted down. Once you’ve found that, read the relevant areas in detail. Throughout this process, keep checking that you’ve answered all your questions. When you find information, add further questions that the information raises. Your list will get longer, but you will gain a more detailed understanding of the topic.
Reading for detailed knowledge: SQ3R (or reading for exams)

When you need to gain a thorough understanding of something, such as when you are preparing for exams, this approach can help you to cement the information you've read. SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall and Review (the term was coined in 1946 by F.P. Robinson and is used widely today as a recognised effective reading strategy), and the technique includes some of the strategies described above.

Steps of SQ3R method

• Survey the material to decide what needs to be learned in detail.
• Question what you understand (or don’t) from your survey of the material. Generate specific questions to answer through your reading to give yourself goals. This will help your reading to be focused.
• Read with the intention of answering your questions and identifying the main ideas. This kind of active reading will make it easier for you to remember the points you cover. Re-read passages that are initially difficult to follow. This will reinforce the main points. If you like to take notes, do it at the end of a section, then try to recall the main points. Taking notes while you’re reading can be a poor substitute for understanding, as your brain is focused on moving the information from the reading to the page rather than absorbing it.
• Recall the information to test yourself on comprehension. Without recalling information, you are likely to forget it. Systematically do this for each section. Plan your reading by setting places in the text where you will stop reading and recall. Use the questions you raised to quiz your understanding. Re-read the sections you have trouble recalling. Do not proceed without being sure you understand so that you can build on your knowledge progressively.
• Review the material. Re-examine it by surveying the general structure and ideas, thinking of more questions and seeing if you can answer them. Then, re-read the sections that you forgot. Reviewing is best done immediately after first covering the material and then at regular intervals before you need to demonstrate your understanding.

Entertainment

This one you can do however you want. After all, you’re reading for enjoyment!

Speed reading

You may hear people promote speed reading as a way to work quickly through a document. Reading faster is not sufficient to ensure you take in what you’re reading. Comprehension and strategy are the most important aspects to reading for study purposes. Reading rates will differ wildly anyway, depending on the material and your understanding of it. Think of how easy it is to read a magazine in the doctor’s waiting room compared with the time it takes to trawl through scientific text. Reading quickly might sound appealing, but it can often result in you having to go back and re-read sections to properly understand them, and that’s not good time management.
OVERCOMING ACADEMIC CULTURE SHOCK
UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC SPEAK

or

This seems like another language

Academic writing can be daunting when you read it for the first time. It sounds and reads differently from other styles of writing; it is certainly not the style of a romance novel. The language you use in emails to your grandmother probably won’t cut it, unless you use words of four or more syllables. This chapter looks at academic language, what it is and how you can familiarise yourself with it.

So what is it?

Academic language is about presenting your work in a clear and logical manner. It conveys scholarly analysis, evaluation and reasoned argument. Academic writing is a formal style of expression that aims to be inclusive of the wider population. It avoids colloquialisms, or slang, so the language is not conversational in style.

This is meant to be clear and accessible?

It may sound odd to say the language should be ‘clear’ when it uses complex words, but that refers to the way academic writing should leave no room for different interpretations. The main aim is to give the exact meaning you want rather than generalisations, so word choice is important. ‘Accessible’ language doesn’t use words or phrases that only certain pockets of society know. For instance, slang is culturally specific, so while an average Australian might use a phrase like ‘this will wet your whistle’, people from another culture could be confused by that, and may think you intend to wet a musical instrument.

What are generalisations and how do I avoid them?

Generalisations are broad phrases or ‘sweeping statements’ that are almost always unsupported, such as ‘everybody thinks Brussels sprouts are the worst vegetable’. In the academic world, you would be asked to produce evidence (even though everybody knows Brussels sprouts are hated by all). In the academic world, it becomes:

According to a study by Johns (2005), 90% of people rated Brussels sprouts as their least favourite vegetable.

Now we know exactly how people feel about sprouts. The evidence also makes the statement more convincing. If you heard the first statement, you’d probably chuckle and nod in agreement, but the second statement is even more convincing. So, if you can’t back it up, then avoid that kind of statement.

Do you have a problem with authority?

Authoritative writing does not refer to folding your arms and ordering others around; it refers to the tone of the work. It has been written by someone in a position of (assumed) knowledge. In academic writing, the writer claims to know what they’re talking about by the way they use language and evidence to support their argument. Even after researching extensively on your essay topic, you may feel like you know nothing. It is likely, though, that you know more about it than most people, which is what puts you in a ‘position of authority’. That’s the crux of academic language: convincing your reader and writing in
an authoritative voice. Think of all the articles you’ve found convincing; it is likely that their language was clear and they contained logical evidence.

Do I have the right to use an authoritative voice as a first year student?

Yes, you do. The more you read about a topic, the more informed you will be. You may even start to develop an opinion about that topic. Your lecturers are interested in how you’ve interpreted the readings, so they are usually expecting you to respond to the writers’ ideas and express a particular view. This is most obvious in essay or report topics that include instructional words like ‘evaluate’ or ‘discuss’. Just make sure that when you express your opinion in writing that your claims or ideas are justified with evidence from readings. Using our least favourite vegetable as an example again, you could write:

Brussels sprouts are not highly regarded by many Australians, as indicated in John’s study in which 90% of people rated Brussels sprouts as their least favourite vegetable (2005).

How do I know if my source is written by an authority I can trust?

Part of the job of researching is being able to identify in your readings where someone may have a hidden agenda or a particular opinion on a topic. Learning to evaluate your sources to determine their reliability and to identify bias is all part of developing effective researching skills. It is important to know when you’re being influenced into believing something by someone who is not being entirely objective.

Compare the following statements to see which author may be expressing bias:

Esquire’s (1969) theory is the most influential for scholars in education…

Esquire’s (1969) theory remains one of the most influential for scholars in education…

Did you notice the phrase “the most influential”? This language shows that the author believes Esquire to be the only theorist influencing education scholars. The author is using judgemental language and this statement could easily be challenged in academia.

If you’re not sure how to pick up on bias, ask yourself the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The author</th>
<th>The source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is their background or expertise?</td>
<td>When was it written?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they include more than one perspective or argument?</td>
<td>Does the writing reflect the attitudes of a particular period in history?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they use <strong>objective language</strong>? (e.g. they don’t use generalisations, judgemental or emotive language)</td>
<td>Why was it written?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who was it written for?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to get a feel for academic language

The best way to familiarise yourself with the language is to experience it. Read, read, read it. This eBook contains academic word lists that you can sample and borrow from for your own writing. Start by finding articles of interest to you and reading them. Better still, read articles on topics you’re familiar with so that the content is easy to understand. It may feel like learning a second (third?) language, but the longer you spend with it, the easier you’ll understand it. The sections in this book called Academic language and Writing construction delve into how you can adapt your writing to take on the style of academia.

Back to table of contents
YOUR OWN LEARNING STYLE

or…

I did things my way

You could easily default to studying in a way you did previously (whether it was successful or not), or you could try another method to see if it improves your learning. Actively seeking to understand your own strengths and learning style can help you to identify the best study method for you.

Learning styles include visual (seeing), auditory (listening) and kinaesthetic (touching). Generally, you will have elements of each to a greater or lesser degree. For example, visual learners will recall diagrams, maps, illustrations or graphs easier than remembering large chunks of written text. So when visual learners study for exams, using visual stimuli can enhance their ability to remember and recall information (James Cook University, 2013).

In the same way, lecturers' styles of teaching will differ, and it helps to be aware that their style may not necessarily complement the learning styles of their many students. You won't be able to change their teaching style, so take a flexible approach.

Activity: What’s your learning style?

VAK Learning Styles Self-Assessment Questionnaire – short version

(Mislett & Chapman, 2005)

The table below indicates three responses to the same question, which differ depending on dominant learning style - visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. The column with the higher number of responses indicates your strongest learning style. You may have combinations of learning styles and no one style is ‘better’ than others; this simply indicates a preference for a learning style or styles. Please note: this is a quick and simple learning style indicator – a link to a more comprehensive questionnaire can be found on our Additional resources page.

First, select the answer that most accurately represents your behaviour from column 1, 2 or 3. Circle or highlight that answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ask yourself…</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I operate new equipment, I generally…</td>
<td>read instructions</td>
<td>listen to explanation</td>
<td>have a go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I need travel directions, I usually…</td>
<td>look at a map</td>
<td>ask for spoken directions</td>
<td>follow your nose and maybe use a compass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I cook a new dish, I like to…</td>
<td>follow a recipe</td>
<td>call a friend for explanation</td>
<td>follow your instinct, tasting as you cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I teach someone something new, I tend to…</td>
<td>write instructions</td>
<td>explain verbally</td>
<td>demonstrate and let them have a go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually say…</td>
<td>I see what you mean</td>
<td>I hear what you are saying</td>
<td>I know how you feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I have to complain about faulty goods, I am most comfortable in…</td>
<td>writing a letter</td>
<td>phoning</td>
<td>sending/taking it back to the store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My leisure time is mostly spent…</td>
<td>visiting museums and galleries</td>
<td>listening to music and talking to friends</td>
<td>playing sport or doing DIY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to say…</td>
<td>show me</td>
<td>tell me</td>
<td>let me try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I go shopping for clothes, I tend to…</td>
<td>look and imagine what they look like on</td>
<td>discuss them with shop staff</td>
<td>try them on to test them out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I choose a holiday, I usually…</td>
<td>read many brochures</td>
<td>listen to recommendations from friends</td>
<td>imagine what the experience would be like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mostly say…</td>
<td>watch how I do it</td>
<td>listen to me explain</td>
<td>you have a go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To choose a new car, I would…</td>
<td>read reviews in the newspaper and magazines</td>
<td>discuss what I need with friends</td>
<td>test-drive what I fancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total the number of answers you selected from each column:

1 =
2 =
3 =

If you chose mostly 1, you have a VISUAL learning style.
If you chose mostly 2, you have an AUDITORY learning style.
If you chose mostly 3, you have a KINAESTHETIC learning style.
Interpreting your score

Once you have identified your learning style(s), read the explanation for it/them below. Some people find that their learning style is a blend of two or more styles. In this case, read about all of the styles that apply to you. There is no right or wrong learning style.

When you know your preferred learning style(s), you can understand and choose the types of learning that best suit you.

The stronger your preference for one particular sense, the more you may need to find ways of using it to make learning easier. Be creative. You might also like to consider whether you would gain from using your other senses more.

VAK learning styles explanation

The VAK learning styles model suggests that most people can be divided into one of three preferred styles of learning.

Visual

• a preference for seen or observed things, including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-chart, etc
• use phrases such as 'show me', 'let's have a look at that'
• best able to perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first
• work from lists and written directions and instructions

Auditory

• a preference to learn through listening to the spoken word of self or others, of sounds and noises
• use phrases such as ‘tell me’, ‘let’s talk it over’
• best able to perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert
• happy with spoken instructions over the telephone
• can remember all the words to songs that they hear.

Kinaesthetic

• a preference for physical experience - touching, feeling, holding, doing, practical hands-on experiences
• use phrases such as ‘let me try’, ‘how do you feel?’
• best able to perform a new task by going ahead and trying it out, learning as they go
• like to experiment, hands-on, and never look at the instructions first
For contemplation

1. How could you change the way you study to best fit your learning style?
2. Now you know your learning style, how will that impact on the way you work in lectures, tutorials and in taking notes?
3. For more information about learning styles, head to the Reference list.

[NB. This is not a scientifically validated testing instrument – it is a free assessment tool designed to give a broad indication of preferred learning style(s). More information about learning styles, personality, and personal development is at www.businessballs.com. With acknowledgements to Victoria Chislett for developing this assessment. Victoria Chislett specialises in performance psychology and its application within organisations, and can be contacted via email: performance_psychologist at yahoo.com. ]

Back to table of contents
GETTING STARTED

or

Thinking before you speak (or write, as the case may be)

You've set up your study environment, wiped out procrastination, and now you're ready to start work on your assessment task: a masterpiece that will receive a Distinction. That is, except for one thing: you don't know how to start. Suddenly all the information seems overwhelming and your task insurmountable. Slow down and take a few deep breaths. Planning your attack will make the battle much easier. Here are eight steps to get you started.

1. Analyse
2. Research
3. Skeleton
4. Plan
5. Write
6. Revise
7. Reference
8. Review

Analyse the task

The topic for a written assignment is usually specific in what it asks of you, yet allows for a range of answers. Some topics may be broad. Check the assessment criteria also. Your first step is to analyse the topic, a strategy that is covered in detail in this book. This involves breaking down the question to clarify what is required in your answer. Isolating any instructional words will help provide you with clues about what is required. This is the time for critical thinking, so schedule time when you are at your sharpest.

Research

Once you have broken down the question into tasks, you are ready to start planning your research. Don’t leave this part to chance – our chapter on how to research will put you on the right track.

Skeleton outline

Creating a skeleton outline helps you manage your research notes, and also gets you started with some writing. It is a basic structure that will give your work some shape while you figure out how your research fits together. For example, to work out how the structure and content of the body of your assignment will look like, try the following as a guide:
Record the source of your material and notes about why you think the evidence is relevant. Start building a list of references with the very first source you use. This will reduce the time it takes to collect them at the end of your work. Consider using a referencing program like RefWorks.

**Example: A skeleton outline with topic ‘Role of an Advertisement’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First main point/Topic sentence</th>
<th>Evidence / support (reference)</th>
<th>Your notes</th>
<th>Evidence / support (reference)</th>
<th>Your notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make sales</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My notes: Organisations promote their product/s to make money for operational expenses rather than primarily informing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: Tetteh, 2008, p. 87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My notes: Advertising is mostly to make a profit – make sales – although there is a move to other purposes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distract / confuse / amuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: Lubinski, 2007, p. 64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My notes: Advertising can actually confuse people and impede their ability to make an informed choice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Create brand personality and loyalty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: Varaprasdreddy, 2006, p. 42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My notes: Makes people want to be associated with a brand – sales generated through advertising and appeal of that brand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inform consumer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? (need to do more research)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plan
Planning saves you time in the long run. Review the information in your skeleton outline and check that you have researched all aspects of your topic. Consolidate your material by grouping similar issues together. Look for connections. Cut out material that doesn’t answer the question. By doing this, your skeleton outline becomes a basic plan for your assignment. A plan will give direction to your writing, and help keep it relevant to the topic.

Write
Confirm the format in which your assessment task is to be written. Refer to other parts of this book for the structure and general advice on writing essays, reports, literature reviews, and reflective journals. Once you are sure of the overall structure, compare it with your skeleton outline and set yourself word counts for each part of the structure, if relevant. Next, start building your paragraphs around topic sentences, using the material in your skeleton outline. This method ensures you cover the topic, while also presenting your argument clearly.

Revise
The writing process will take longer than you expect. Your masterpiece won’t emerge straight away; you need to draft it, then revise it, then re-draft it, and possibly rewrite whole sections. Stay focused and think critically about your writing. Keep asking yourself if you have answered the question, and if your writing is saying what you want it to. Does the evidence you found support your argument? Does your argument progress logically?

Reference
Ensure you use the required referencing style – check your course description for this. Acknowledging the source of your material is important in academic writing. The FedUni publication *The General Guide to Referencing* has pages of examples of how to reference correctly, so have one nearby as you write.

Review
Once you find yourself tinkering with parts of sentences rather than paragraphs, you may be near your final draft. At that point, it’s time to move on to editing and proofreading. As you have put considerable effort into researching and writing, don’t let poor presentation detract from the content. When preparing your final draft, give some thought to the layout of your paper and details such as margins, spacing and font size. Have you used formal language in writing your paper? Be sure to check your spelling and punctuation before submitting it, too!

*Back to table of contents*
LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

or

Staying sane

It’s not uncommon for study (or procrastinating) to feel like it’s taking over your life. It can be hard to make time for anything else when the university workload builds up, but being buried is a sure way to suffocate. If your friends can’t remember what you look like and your lecturers are the only people you see in a week, then a few things need to change. It is not only unhealthy, but that sort of lifestyle is also detrimental to your study. It is easy to think that spending 100% of your time studying guarantees you a high distinction, but it’s not the case. Being tired, stressed, sick or bored will make studying much harder. The key to good study is balance, so consider these few things.

Exercise

If this word makes you groan and want to go back to bed holding a block of chocolate, this section is for you. It is a fact that the human body is built to move around (walking from bed to couch doesn’t count); that means exercise will impact on your study and it will actually help you learn. There are many studies that link exercise to memory and attentiveness, but it would get messy to include them all here. (If this information seems too good to be true, then google it.) The good news is that you don’t have to go for a run or visit the gym, because almost any moderate-intensity activity counts. You could take up a sport or some activity with some level of physical exertion (not chess). If you dance for hours every Wednesday night, maybe you’re already doing it. Think of it as a way to break up the study and keep you healthy.

Sickness

Avoid it. In case it’s not obvious, being sick is a bad idea. When you’re sick, you can’t concentrate properly and often can’t study at all. Therefore, do everything in your power to fend off the germs. A quick consultation with the doctor could be the difference between acing your exams and spending the day moaning as you grasp for the nearest blanket. On-campus health centres offer bulk-billed (free) appointments for students, and domestic students can access free consultations at most other clinics with a Medicare card and Health Care card.

Diet

So many students suffer from a poor diet that it’s almost a criterion of study. Whether it’s due to a lack of money or time, eating cold beans straight from the can for the fourth night in a row is not a good diet. Put the can down and let’s talk about it.

What you put into your body affects how well your brain absorbs information and your likelihood of getting sick. Apply common sense: eating only red meat isn’t balanced, nor is eating only Mi Goreng. Vary what you eat, take the time to prepare decent meals when you can, and minimise the instant meals. If you are busy during the week, then spend a few hours on the weekend preparing your meals for the week and freeze them. What else is a freezer for?

Being financial

It is a fact that eating helps your brain to function. Balancing the time you spend working and studying is important, because if you overwork, your studies will suffer. Likewise, spending all your time in the library
can leave you struggling to pay the bills. Aim to give your study first priority. After all, to get the job you desire, you will need to do well at your study. It is important to avoid starving while you are here though, so try to work around your study. If you have a huge amount of contact hours at uni, then you may not be able to work as much. Don’t forget that to get your degree, you will need to do extra study outside your contact hours. If you go to work whenever you’re not at uni, you risk burning out. Remember that being a student does give you some perks, and a few options exist specially for students to help with financial woes. Scholarships are available for eligible students at FedUni and also through businesses and industry. However, scholarships won’t come looking for you so you will need to do some investigation to find it. Start at FedUni’s scholarship website

Socialising
It is important to talk to people. We’re social creatures and, however introverted you may be, interaction with others is healthy. Going out and partying isn’t compulsory, but locking yourself in a room for weeks to study could turn you into a hermit (plus you’ll smell bad). Take time to catch up with friends or relax with your housemates. It will help relieve stress and put study into perspective: other things matter too. Your friends are your support network, and you can tackle the challenge of uni life together.

Relax
It might sound contradictory, but you should make the effort to relax. When you learn or create things, your brain needs time to consolidate the information. Rather than spending hours flooding your brain with information, a more effective method is to study for a while, then relax with an activity or even a nap. Admittedly, some people are a little too good at napping. Your subconscious brain is clever though, and will continue working while you do something else. Relax and let your brain go to work.

Sleep
Sleep deprivation is a form of torture, right? There’s a good reason for that: getting enough sleep is critical to healthy body function. The exact amount varies between people, but even night owls need their sleep. Aim to have about eight hours’ sleep a night. Doing an all-nighter to get your assignment finished is not a good study technique.

Getting enough sleep has a massive effect on your ability to study. A tired brain is bad at remembering and worse at learning. Ask any new mother; try to work while you are tired and the process will take about ten times longer. Routine is good for your body; if your sleep schedule is erratic, your body will have no idea what it is supposed to be doing. If it is thinking, “Should I be awake or trying to sleep?”, you will function at half capacity, and nobody wants to write an essay at half capacity. Well, nobody wants to write an essay, but especially not at half capacity. Get some sleep. No, not now. Is it four in the morning? Ok, then put the book down. Goodnight.

Back to table of contents
DON’T GIVE UP

or

No, seriously. Don’t give up.

At some point in your time at university, it may all feel overwhelming. The good news is: that feeling is common. Almost everybody experiences it at some stage, and the natural response is to want to leave. Don’t Do It. No matter how badly you might want to quit, there are options worth trying first.

First, talk to someone about your thoughts of quitting, preferably someone who knows about your course of study. Your program coordinator, for example, can advise you of the options. Don’t do anything drastic before you have the facts on quitting or changing your study load.

Next, can you pinpoint what is causing the stress for you? Talking to a doctor or counsellor could help you to uncover the issue/s. Stress does strange things to us, so you’re more likely to succeed in your studies if you don’t feel stressed or overwhelmed. No question is silly. There are many people at uni to help you, whether it’s about an academic, health, or other matter. Please, please, don’t be afraid to ask for help.

It’s also important to remember that you (probably!) entered university for a reason. You don’t study nursing because you want to be a nursing student. You study it because you want to be a nurse. University will give you experiences and skills that will impact on most parts of your life, and that’s positive. However, it can be easy to lose perspective when the workload builds up. One way you can keep sight of your goal is to look both forwards and backwards: remember where you’ve come from and where you want to go.

Write some things down

1. Consider how you got to be here. Did you always want to be a nurse? Are you following your father’s footsteps? Did your parents expect you to go to uni?

   What brought me here? ________________________

2. Where do you want to go? Do you have a profession in mind? Is it about salary? Are you studying to help you figure out what you really want to do?

   Where do I want to go? ________________________

By the way, the answer to 2 could change as you go, and that’s just fine. One year of uni may help you realise you want a different career. It’s important to let that happen, even if it means you’re here for longer. Do you want to do something you love, or graduate a year earlier?

Keep your answers somewhere useful, and take them out when you are feeling overwhelmed about study. Reflect on them. If you are wondering what you are doing at university, those answers are… well… your answer.

One of the biggest reasons not to give up is that you’d be shutting a door on your future. That may sound like a line from a B-grade movie, but if you quit, you reduce all the opportunities that might have opened up as a result of achieving your university degree.

Back to table of contents
At university, learning is all your responsibility. Nobody tells you what to do as they did when you were in high school or in your teens. Your lecturers won’t hold parent/teacher interviews to make sure you’re performing well, and they won’t necessarily check on your marks or make sure you understand the material. Think about it this way: your lecturers will provide you with some direction, but 90% of the effort must come from you. With this new approach to learning, uni can seem a heavy responsibility.

When you first realise all the learning is up to you, it can be a shock. You may feel you have been faced with a sheer cliff and told to start climbing. Recognising that it’s up to you is the first major step in the journey. It might be hard to convince yourself to start climbing, especially if you focus on the size of the cliff. This is where motivation is important.

Get motivated

Motivation is your drive to keep going. It is about moving forward. If you find yourself standing still instead, it is time to remind yourself what study means for you and your future. Whatever you do, don’t give up. It’s far easier to motivate yourself if you aim for a specific point, so keep your goal in mind and strive to reach it. Actively managing your study load, rather than letting your many tasks take over your life, can also be a useful motivator. It is your job to develop strategies that maximise your study time. Again, no lecturer will nag you to finish your assessment task, or improve your study techniques. There are many ways to make studying easier; like better ways to read, take notes, and manage your time. There is no doubt that your new self-sufficiency will serve you well once you finish your degree.

Perhaps the most important responsibility you now have is knowing how, when and where to get help. FedUni has many people who want to help you; you just have to take the step to access them.
ACCESSING HELP

or

Stop beating your head against the wall. You’re making a mess.

If your answer is YES to any of the following, drop in to see us soon.

Q. Do you feel frustrated about your ?

Q. Would you like to improve your ?

Q. Do you need to find someone to ?

ASK us. No question is too small.

Contact Us:

These three methods will help you find your way.

ASK Service

Aim any academic question you have at the ASK (academic skills and knowledge) service. If they don’t have the answer, they’ll know which direction to point you. If you are feeling shy, email them at ask.sal@federation.edu.au.
WANT MORE INFORMATION?

FedUni has several study programs aimed at helping you to get the most out of your time at university. This includes:

- **FedReady**: a free week-long course for FedUni students to give you the tools to succeed at university, no matter what your degree. Available twice a year,
- **PASS**: peer assisted study sessions (selected courses) help you to develop effective study strategies
- **Mentors**: first-hand support in the first few weeks of your study, when it matters most
- **ASK service**: any academic question answered here. If they don’t have the answer, they’ll know which direction to point you
- **Learning Skills Advisors**: assist you to develop academic skills such as structuring assignments

Help yourself; **find out more**.

**FedUni students page**

A direct link to **all the assistance, support and services** available to you at FedUni.

**FedUni Contact Centre**

Call us on 1800 333 864

*Back to table of contents*
ANSWERS to General Guide Activities

Academic language
Remember, these are possible answers, and not the only possible correct response.

Activity 1: Avoiding personal language
Several film directors were interviewed over a period of five weeks.
Upon examination of the findings, rabbits should be immunised against the Calici virus.
Many people completed the survey.
The survey results indicate that the Prime Minister should avoid swimming in public.

Back to table of contents

Activity 2: Avoiding biased language
1. The average university student is anxious about marks.
2. The Sydney Gay Lesbian Mardi Gras could be perceived as a popular event for young people.
3. Sean Connery, now in his eighties, maintains a strong acting career.
4. Even though it is expected that Australian nurses apply the Code of Ethics in their work, common sense can also assist in hospital patient safety.

Back to table of contents

Activity 3: Avoiding emotive language
• Teachers are being challenged by the bureaucratic elements of this program, which they feel inhibit their abilities to support their students effectively.
• Some people may be amused to know that staff at the Flockful Hotel were seemingly frightened recently by a group of seagulls.
• It was seen as surprising that the extremely hot temperatures only managed to burn some of the leaves on the rare Truffula tree.
• The importation of chocolate dipped potato chips has led to a marked increase in purchases at supermarkets.

Back to table of contents
Activity 4: Avoiding colloquialisms

• Doctors have established that encouraging children to accept injections can be achieved with confectionary.
• The findings are substantially supported, but the limitations of this study mean there is still a large amount of research that needs to be done.
• The researcher’s main focus is on reducing the likelihood of mental illness, achieving higher energy levels, maintaining brain alertness and ensuring high self-esteem.
• It could be viewed that the government is not being inclusive of a variety of opinions and only appear to be representing a specific viewpoint.

Assessment

Bad review excerpt

Smith (1990) conducted an experiment on fear and self-esteem with 150 undergraduates. In the study he tested subject self-esteem and then exposed subjects one at a time to a fear-inducing situation. He found that those with lower self-esteem felt greater fear. Jones and Jones (1982) surveyed elderly residents. The respondents who had the greatest independence, self-esteem and physical health, had the lowest degree of fear of being a victim of crime…DeSallo’s study (1984) of 45 college males found that those who had the greatest self-esteem felt the least degree of fear. Yu (1988) found the same for college females…

No topic sentence to tell the reader what the paragraph is about.
Too many unnecessary details, when studies could have been combined to show similarities.
No indication of how studies’ results were similar or dissimilar.

Better review excerpt

People with greater self-esteem appear to be less fearful. Laboratory studies with college students (DeSallo, 1984; Smith, 1990; Yu, 1988) find a strong negative relationship between self-esteem and fear. The same relationship was found in a survey of elderly people (Jones & Jones, 1982). Only one study contradicted this finding (Johnson, 1985). The contradictory finding may be due to the population used…

Clear topic sentence and purpose.
Combined relevant studies with similar results, which saves space and time.
Showed comparisons between studies.
Editing and proofreading

Activity: Clean up your writing
Exploring the expansive world on extremely long-distance ocean journeys can have considerable impacts on the health of all sailors. For example, the demanding sea voyage itself is shown to have lasting effects on the sailor’s body’s immune system resulting in an array of unfortunate illnesses (Lu et al., 2010). In particular, cardiovascular disease is the most commonly diagnosed ailment identified amongst seafaring crew members (Hearty, 2009). Moreover, studies by Sponge and Lope (2011) indicate that these negative health effects are mainly due to two contributing factors: diet and lack of physical exercise on board the sailor’s ship. “There’s too many worm infested crackers and not enough deck scrubbing” explains one well-known ship captain (Blackbeard, 1720).

Punctuation

Activity: Apostrophe of ownership
The researcher’s stopwatch was stolen.
The children’s hats were drenched by the rain.
The four students’ house was a mess.
She borrowed her parents’ car.
The ladies’ heels were ruined by the muddy grass.

Activity: Apostrophe of omission (missing letters)
They’re running late.
Who’s coming to the lecture?
You’re not welcome.
It’s been a busy semester.
He wouldn’t agree with the decision.

Activity: To apostrophe or not to apostrophe
The printer needed its cartridge replaced.
The babies cried at the book’s terrible jokes.
The mistake is yours.
It’s going to be a long afternoon.
The researchers’ results were a world-first. OR* The researcher’s results were a world-first.
*The placement of this last apostrophe depends on whether there was a team of researchers (apostrophe after the ‘s’), or a single researcher (before the ‘s’).

**Back to table of contents**

**Reading effectively**
In effective teaching, teachers...
○ A) creatively use resources in their lessons.
✓ B) consider and incorporate a diverse range of resources to meet the needs of their students.
○ C) use a number of resources in their lessons.
○ D) have an awareness of what resources are available that meet the needs of their students.

**Back to table of contents**

**Topic and question analysis**
**Steps 2-4**
Underline the **key words**.
Highlight the **instructional words**.
Bracket the [limiting words].

*Explore the nature of [Australian society] and its **values** in the [1970s]. **Use** a **character analysis format** to **demonstrate** your **understanding** of **how** the [characters] in "Don’s Party" **embody** or react against the prevailing values of the [1970s].*

**Step 5**

*Explore Australian society and its **values** in the 1970s.
**Use** a **character analysis format**
**to show**
*How the characters in “Don’s Party” **embody** or react against the prevailing values of the 1970s*  

**Back to table of contents**

**Writing construction**

**Activity: Fixing fragments**
1. After three years on the high seas, the explorer’s crew was exhausted.
2. Although the expedition crew all witnessed the discovery, none of the other crew members could write about it.

3. When the authorities finished reading the explorer’s report, they ordered him to be locked up.

4. If the camera had been invented, then the explorer could have shown the jury his discovery and not relied on his poor writing skills.

Back to table of contents

Activity: Fixing run-on sentences

1. Although many explorers have identified sea monster carcasses as whales, that were badly deformed due to decomposition, others remain completely unexplained.

2. When one creature was actually witnessed, it was still alive as it tried to protect itself from two killer whales.

3. After it lost the battle, despite such a rigorous fight back, its body was discovered on a South African Beach.

4. If the explorer had named the creature, as all explorers like to name discoveries after themselves, then it would have been named Smith. But it was called ‘Trunko’ due to its huge elephantine trunk.

Back to table of contents

Activity: Active versus passive voice

1. Various treatments have been used over the years to fight severe chocolate addiction, but with little success.

2. The use of genetically engineered wheat in the production of commercial pancake mixtures has been prohibited.

3. A survey conducted in 2014 showed that politically conservative people preferred dogs as pets.

Back to table of contents

Activity: Tense

Convert the following examples of present tense to past tense by removing and/or changing some words.

1. Researchers undertook a series of interviews with affected students to determine the link between the quantity of pancakes eaten and the severity of symptoms.

2. So many students signed up to be part of the research that researchers kept a waiting list.

3. Researchers were convinced that students wanted to participate to get free food.

Back to table of contents
Activity: Paragraph structure

Identify the following parts of the paragraph:

*Topic sentence*    *linking words/phrases*    *Supporting evidence*

Companies that produce video games, as well as many gamers, claim there is no link between increased violence in the community and violent video games. To support their opinion, they cite studies by psychologists which indicate that gamers are no more likely to commit violent crimes than non-gamers. Specifically, a report by Braxton College in the United States found that among 234 gamers, arrest and conviction levels for any form of crime were actually 8% lower than from non-gamers (Malone, 2012). Indeed, both those who produce and those who play the games claim they are being unfairly blamed for the problems of society (Falloy & Croydon, 2011). As Carrox (2013) points out, no one would ever demand that books with violent themes should be blamed for their negative influence.

Activity: Paraphrasing

Decide which paraphrase is the better one.

1. Original: “The individual who lacks affection, recognition or the fulfilment of other emotional needs may turn to food”.

   Paraphrase 1. An unloved or unrecognised person may eat for emotional fulfilment. *More succinct and less risk of plagiarism due to changes in expression, sentence structure and word choice.*

   Paraphrase 2. Eating to satisfy emotional needs can occur in those who have an absence of love and recognition. *Similar length to original, although different sentence structure. Still acceptable.*

2. Original: “Exploring a region of the ocean typically involves travelling to an area on a ship and collecting detailed information.”

   Paraphrase 1. Usually, regional ocean exploration entails boat travel to a specific area accompanied by meticulous data collection. *This paraphrase is very close to the original as it has a similar sentence structure and uses obvious synonyms, so it is not ideal.*

   Paraphrase 2. Oceanic exploration consists of boat travel and information gathering. *More succinct and less risk of plagiarism due to changes in expression, sentence structure and word choice.*
REFERENCE LIST
and additional resources

Academic language


Assessment


Critical thinking

How to research

Learning styles


Note-taking

Reading effectively


Writing construction


For more paraphrasing techniques, visit:
http://owll.massey.ac.nz/referencing/paraphrasing-techniques.php

For hands-on paraphrasing tutorial visit:
http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/paraphrasing-tutorial

Back to table of contents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY ASSESSMENT OCCURS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GETTING GRADES</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What your results mean</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you will be assessed</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubrics</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOPIC ANALYSIS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is topic analysis?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to analyse a topic</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Check meanings of words/re-write topic or quote</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Circle the instructional words</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Underline the key words</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bracket the limiting words</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Break into sections</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAYOUT AND APPEARANCE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formatting specifications</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type, alignment, spacing and paragraphs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocked/Indented paragraphs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures and tables</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming, numbering and noting</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices - a final word</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footnotes and endnotes</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference list / Bibliography</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of work</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title page or cover sheet</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online submission</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research reports ......................................................................................................................................... 36
Business reports .......................................................................................................................................... 37
Scientific reports .......................................................................................................................................... 38
Section content ............................................................................................................................................ 38
   Table of contents ..................................................................................................................................... 39
   List of figures ........................................................................................................................................... 39
   List of tables ............................................................................................................................................. 39
   List of appendices .................................................................................................................................... 40
Abstract ................................................................................................................................................... 40
   Executive summary .................................................................................................................................. 41
Introduction .............................................................................................................................................. 42
Method ..................................................................................................................................................... 43
Results ..................................................................................................................................................... 44
Discussion ............................................................................................................................................... 44
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 45
Reference list ........................................................................................................................................... 45
Appendices .............................................................................................................................................. 45
ORAL PRESENTATIONS ............................................................................................................................... 46
   The speech ................................................................................................................................................. 46
Supporting material ..................................................................................................................................... 47
   PowerPoint .............................................................................................................................................. 47
   Posters .................................................................................................................................................... 47
   Video ....................................................................................................................................................... 47
   Audio ....................................................................................................................................................... 47
   Demonstration ......................................................................................................................................... 48
WORKING WITH OTHERS ............................................................................................................................. 49
   Setting up your group ................................................................................................................................ 49
   Challenges ahead ....................................................................................................................................... 49
LITERATURE REVIEWS ................................................................................................................................ 51
   What is ‘literature’? ...................................................................................................................................... 51
   Primary sources ....................................................................................................................................... 51
   Secondary sources .................................................................................................................................. 51
   Tertiary sources ....................................................................................................................................... 51
   Aim of a literature review .......................................................................................................................... 51
How many references should I use? ................................................................. 51
Structure of a literature review ................................................................. 52
  The introduction ...................................................................................... 52
  The body ................................................................................................. 52
  The conclusion ....................................................................................... 52
Writing a literature review .................................................................... 52
  Good and bad reviews ............................................................................ 53
REFLECTIVE JOURNALS .............................................................................. 54
  What is a reflective journal? ................................................................. 54
    The aim of a reflective journal ............................................................. 54
    Writing a reflective journal ................................................................. 54
ePORTFOLIOS .......................................................................................... 55
  What is an ePortfolio? ............................................................................. 55
    The aim of an ePortfolio ...................................................................... 55
    Producing an ePortfolio ...................................................................... 55
EXAMS ........................................................................................................ 56
  Know where to go .................................................................................. 56
  Take all necessary materials ................................................................. 56
  Theoretical and practical exams ............................................................. 56
    Open book ........................................................................................... 56
    Cheat sheets ....................................................................................... 57
  How theoretical exams run ..................................................................... 57
    Exam format ......................................................................................... 57
    Reading time ....................................................................................... 57
    Writing time ....................................................................................... 57
    Types of questions .............................................................................. 58
WRITING AS A SKILL ................................................................................ 60
APPLYING WHAT YOU KNOW ................................................................. 61
  How? .................................................................................................... 61
    See? ................................................................................................... 61
    Now .................................................................................................... 62
ACADEMIC LANGUAGE ............................................................................. 63
  Formal and informal language ............................................................... 63
  Inclusive language ................................................................................. 64
Question mark ............................................................................................................................................... 92
Exclamation mark ......................................................................................................................................... 93
Comma ......................................................................................................................................................... 93
Apostrophe .................................................................................................................................................. 94
Colon ........................................................................................................................................................... 96
Dashes ........................................................................................................................................................ 97
Quotation marks .......................................................................................................................................... 97

EDITING AND PROOFREADING ................................................................................................................... 98
Is there a difference between them? ............................................................................................................ 98
Tips for editing ............................................................................................................................................. 98
  Make time ................................................................................................................................................ 98
  Take a break before you start .................................................................................................................. 98
  Editing checklist ....................................................................................................................................... 98
  Be thorough ........................................................................................................................................... 100
  Re-read and re-read .............................................................................................................................. 100
  But wait, there’s more ............................................................................................................................ 100
Homophones ............................................................................................................................................... 101
  Their/there/they’re .................................................................................................................................. 101
  More homophones: your/you’re .............................................................................................................. 101
  Even more homophones ........................................................................................................................ 101
Similar sounding words ............................................................................................................................. 102
  Affect/effect ............................................................................................................................................ 102
  Then/Than ............................................................................................................................................. 102
Editing finale: a fresh pair of eyes .............................................................................................................. 102
Help, I found some problems while editing! ............................................................................................... 102
  My writing seems disjointed ................................................................................................................... 102
  I’m not sure I’ve addressed the topic .................................................................................................... 103
  Does my writing ‘waffle’? ....................................................................................................................... 103
Tips for proofreading .................................................................................................................................. 104
  Read it aloud .......................................................................................................................................... 104
  How do I look? ....................................................................................................................................... 104
  Proofreading finale: a fresh pair of eyes ................................................................................................. 104
TIPS IF ENGLISH IS YOUR OTHER LANGUAGE ..................................................................................... 105
  Language confidence ............................................................................................................................. 105
ANSWERS to General Guide Activities ......................................................................................................... 148
Academic language ................................................................................................................................... 148
Activity 1: Avoiding personal language ................................................................................................... 148
Activity 2: Avoiding biased language ...................................................................................................... 148
Activity 3: Avoiding emotive language .................................................................................................... 148
Activity 4: Avoiding colloquialisms .......................................................................................................... 149
Assessment ............................................................................................................................................... 149
Bad review excerpt ................................................................................................................................ 149
Better review excerpt ............................................................................................................................. 149
Editing and proofreading ........................................................................................................................... 150
Activity: Clean up your writing ................................................................................................................ 150
Punctuation ............................................................................................................................................... 150
Activity: Apostrophe of ownership .......................................................................................................... 150
Activity: Apostrophe of omission (missing letters) ................................................................................... 150
Activity: To apostrophe or not to apostrophe .......................................................................................... 150
Reading effectively .................................................................................................................................... 151
Topic and question analysis ...................................................................................................................... 151
Writing construction ................................................................................................................................... 151
Activity: Fixing fragments ....................................................................................................................... 151
Activity: Fixing run-on sentences ............................................................................................................ 152
Activity: Active versus passive voice ...................................................................................................... 152
Activity: Tense ....................................................................................................................................... 152
Activity: Paragraph structure .................................................................................................................. 153
Activity: Paraphrasing ................................................................................................................................ 153
REFERENCE LIST and additional resources ................................................................................................ 154
Academic language ................................................................................................................................... 154
Assessment ............................................................................................................................................... 154
Critical thinking .......................................................................................................................................... 154
How to research ........................................................................................................................................ 155
Learning styles .......................................................................................................................................... 155
Note-taking ................................................................................................................................................ 155
Reading effectively .................................................................................................................................... 155
Writing construction ................................................................................................................................... 155
EXPANDED TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................................ 156