Massey University
STUDENT LIFE PALMERSTON NORTH

Student Learning Development Services

Academic Writing

Academic Writing:
A Guide to Tertiary Level Writing

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Welcome to Academic Writing!

This resource has been designed for Massey University students who are new to the conventions of academic writing. Many students, including extramural, internal, and both domestic and international, may find this book useful, especially as the examples provided are not limited to a specific discipline. The book offers advice and guidance on how to write university assignments, including a section on the writing process with particular reference to essays. Another section deals with the basics of report writing, incorporating sub-sections on business report writing as well as lab report writing. When writing university assignments, referencing the work of others is integral, hence there are sections on integrating the opinions of authors into your assignments, as well as how to construct a Reference List at the end of your assignment.

As a student for many years, as well as an academic author of research publications, I have designed the book to help new students with their journey into academic writing. Rather than becoming aware of the features of academic writing through trial and error, as I have done, it is hoped that this resource will fast track you through to many of the key requisites underlying academic assignments. Indeed, that is why there are sections introducing you to marking guides, and lecturers and course co-ordinators' expectations surrounding university assessments. Further, having personally experienced the paralysing effects of procrastination and perfectionism, I have added some advice and guidance, towards the end of the book, for managing these commonly encountered obstacles to successful writing. A final section provides a range of resources focusing on grammar skills and the spelling of difficult words.

While I have compiled, edited, and revised the book, in addition to contributing many sections, other staff, past and present, from the Palmerston North Student Learning Centre deserve acknowledgement. Sections of this book derive from Anne-Marie Tokley's (2002) Academic Writing booklet, and Heather Kavan's (2003) revised edition. Several pages of this book have been reproduced from the Student Learning Centre's resource handouts (prepared by Lisa Emerson, Grant Harris, Emmanuel Manalo, Yumiko Olliver, and others whose names do not appear), in addition to Christopher Van der Krogt's (2001) Academic Writing Study Guide.

Please forward any comments or suggestions on improvements for future editions to the Student Learning Centre, Massey University, Private Bag 11-222, Palmerston North, ph. (06) 350-2251, fax (06) 350-5760, or email SLC-PN@massey.ac.nz . For more information on planning, drafting, and revising academic assignments, Student Learning Centre staff from all three Massey University campuses are available for guidance and support.

Writing is a difficult process. Hopefully, though, if you are able to read and reflect on the ideas and suggestions offered in this book, the process will develop into a more manageable and rewarding experience. Best wishes on your journey into academic writing. It can be a life changing experience, as mine has been.

Dr Natilene Bowker

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Academic Writing

Some Differences between Academic Writing & Other Writing Contexts

Writing is a skill that is required in many contexts throughout life. For instance, you can write an email to a friend or reflect on what happened during the day in your personal diary.

- In these kinds of interpersonal settings (or intrapersonal in the case of a diary record), the aim may be to communicate the events that have happened in your life to someone close to you, or to yourself.
- Opportunities abound for personal reflection.
- It is expected that in writing about these life events, you will include your personal judgements and evaluations, which may be measured by your feelings and thoughts.
- The personal stories you write in a diary or email to friends can be written down at the moment they enter your mind.
- There is no need to follow a structure, as prose on the page or the computer screen appears through freely associated ideas.

Similarly, another quality of writing in personal contexts is that it is typically informal, so there is no need to adhere to structures of punctuation or grammar (although your reader may be quite appreciative if you do so).

- In these settings, it is perfectly acceptable to deploy colloquialisms, casual expressions, and abbreviations, like "that's cool", "by the way…", "slacker", "Palmy", "b4", and "thru".

In contrast, academic writing does many of the things that personal writing does not. *Firstly, some kind of structure is required, such as a beginning, middle, and end.* This simple structure is typical of an essay format, as well as other assignment writing tasks, which may not have a clearly articulated structure.

- In the case of an essay, the introductory paragraph informs the reader about the nature of the topic, which is discussed and evaluated in the middle of the essay, also referred to as the body.
- The introduction may also summarise very succinctly, in a sentence or two, your position on the issue, which is then elaborated on at length in the series of paragraphs that make up the essay's body.
- Lastly, the end paragraph constitutes a conclusion in which you may summarise the overall points made, but obviously not every single one, as there is often never the word space to do so.
- The concluding paragraph is also a good point at which to move the essay forward to touch on implications or future advancements surrounding the issues addressed.
- Another type of structure, common in university assignments is that of a report, often organised around the identification of problems or difficulties and corresponding solutions.
  - Unlike most essays, a report is divided according to clearly labelled sections, such as "Introduction", "Discussion", "Conclusions", and "Recommendations".
  - Further, unlike an essay, reports allow for bulleted points with respect to the Conclusions and Recommendations sections.

Consequently, in briefly considering the formats expected of typical university assignments, it is clear that they do follow a formal structure, which is often less clearly demarcated, if at all, in personal writing contexts.

A second difference between academic writing and other writing genres is based on the citation of published authors.

- If you make judgements about something in academic writing, there is an expectation that you will support your opinion by linking it to what a published author has previously written about the issue.
- Indeed, citing the work of other authors is central to academic writing because it shows you have read the literature, understood the ideas, and have integrated these issues and varying perspectives into the assignment task.

- The importance placed on referring to other authors in your work can be reflected in the elaborate referencing conventions that have been created within different disciplines, such as APA (American Psychological Association) referencing, which is used in psychology, education, some social sciences, as well as for business.

Thirdly, in academic writing you should always follow rules of punctuation and grammar, especially as the end-user or consumer of your writing, unlike a friend, is likely to be very different from you and will not always know to what you are referring. Hence, it is vital that you are clear. Punctuation as well as the conventions of grammar are universally known systems (within English speaking cultures) that maintain clarity and avoid ambiguity in expression.

Interestingly though, there are other situations where you may find yourself adhering to some of the principles underlying academic writing.

- One example is writing a covering letter for an employment position, or, even, taking minutes in a meeting. On the other hand, minute-taking may focus more on brief note-taking as opposed to fully constructed sentences furnished with marks of punctuation.
- Nevertheless, in a covering letter it would be unwise to use colloquialisms for a potential employer to read.
- Similarly, it would be to your advantage to write down your ideas using some kind of structure, even if it is ensuring that you have paragraphs that contain a distinct set of things to talk about, which then can be differentiated from another paragraph.

Yet, aside from all this, there are still some features of covering letters and meeting minutes that are distinct from other aspects of academic writing.

Traditionally, academic topics have focused on abstract things, like ideas and concepts, which cannot, necessarily, be given in a concrete or physical form. Hence, while minute-taking in meetings and covering letters for potential employers draw on physical, practical, and functional tasks, academic writing is often more likely to focus on abstract processes and relationships. Yet, despite the abstract, non-material structure of some academic topics, you may be able to borrow concrete and physically oriented words to explain these abstract ideas and the relationships between them.

- Typically, academic writing requires you to clearly describe abstract forms and their component parts, their links to other abstract forms, as well as where they are positioned in relation to a general, overall system.
- Even if you are dealing with a practically oriented topic like economics, computer science, rehabilitation, nursing, or teaching, the academic practice of learning about these things will likely require you to delve into theories, philosophies, concepts, and other abstract ideas that underlie the practical nature of the activities concerned.
- Therefore, the very nature of academic writing is also different from many practically-oriented or socially-oriented writing tasks. This is because academic writing tasks require you to look beneath the surface for underlying principles, theories, and concepts that can offer mainstream as well as alternative explanations for common practices, processes, and procedures.

To summarise this introductory section, academic writing is a special genre of writing that prescribes its own set of rules and practices.

1. These rules and practices may be organised around a formal order or structure in which to present ideas, in addition to ensuring that ideas are supported by author citations in the literature.
2. Further, academic writing adheres to traditional conventions of punctuation, grammar, and spelling.
3. Finally, in contrast to many other personal writing contexts, academic writing is different because it deals with the underlying theories and causes governing processes and practices in everyday life, as well as exploring alternative explanations for these events.

This book is designed to address each of these components in one way or another. There are sections on citing authors, referencing at the end of the assignment, planning and organising your assignment, to being critical and understanding marking guides. Some useful resources on parts of speech, and common errors in grammar and punctuation, among other helpful supplementary material, are also presented at the end. Before moving onto each of these components, I would like to take this moment to focus on why it is important to develop good academic writing skills.

Why Should You Develop Good Writing Skills?

Whatever subjects you are studying, the readers of your assignments – usually the markers – need to be able to understand exactly what you are trying to say.

- Hence, in order to persuade and convince them of your argument, in which you integrate ideas from the literature to help ground your argument, it is vital that you have good communication skills.
- Generally, the only way in which to demonstrate your skill in communicating to the marker is through your writing.
- Therefore, developing sound writing, as well as research skills, is an essential part of succeeding at university.
- Further, developing these skills is also a fundamental aim of course co-ordinators and lecturers, and accords with the principles underlying a university education.

Even though assignments may cause a lot of unexpected stress, they are a fact of university life. Therefore, it is worth your investment in time and commitment to develop good writing skills. In doing so, you will not only be rewarded by better grades, but also by more efficient and effective procedures in which to carry out writing tasks, both at university and in later life.

Remember …

- Assignments allow you to come to a better understanding of the subject.
- They provide you with the opportunity to explore something in a more in-depth and analytic way.
- They allow you to become more active in your learning as well as to become responsible for your own learning.
- They are a vehicle for demonstrating your knowledge and understanding to the marker, as well as displaying your ability to reason and write academically.

However …

- Assignments are not last minute tasks.
- They require thought and planning.
- They are activities that allow you to form your own opinions, often guided and based on the literature.
- They also require you to turn your opinions into a clearly presented argument.
- They require you to make sure your sentences are as clear as possible because written language can be easily misunderstood.

Finally, assignments are NOT just about grades – they allow you to develop and enhance your own thinking, writing, and evaluation skills, which can have spin-offs in many other aspects of your present and future life.

Do not be afraid to take your time in learning how to write good assignments.

It will be worth it!

The following sections in this book have been designed to address how you can do well on an assignment and conform to an accepted standard in academic writing and structure. The first section focuses on a key feature of academic writing: showing the marker you have integrated the ideas of published authors. Before looking at this topic in depth, it is important to clarify the kinds of sources recommended to be used in university assignments.

Citing & Referencing

Identifying Academic Sources

The sources of information you can document in university assignments are typically those from an authority. In an academic setting, an authority is usually someone who has been the author of published material. This material may come in the form of……

- Books
- Journal articles
- Published reports

This kind of information is useful in that it provides evidence, which may be in the form of –
theoretical ideas,
critical evaluations,
research findings, and
scholarly opinions

- to back up the points you are making. Sometimes, these sources can be grouped into two categories: primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources relate to publicly available data, like historical documents (e.g. a transcript of oral history, interview data), raw data from an experiment, or demographic records. Secondary sources draw on these primary sources of data, but have been produced for public consumption in the form of a journal article or a chapter in an edited book.

You are more likely to use secondary sources in your assignments. Secondary sources differ from secondary citations, which occur when you use a reference that was cited in another source and not the original. Secondary citations are dealt with in a later section (see page 10).

Academic sources of information, or evidence, differ from……

- Your own opinions.
- Conclusions or outcomes of discussions on the issue with friends or relatives.
- A celebrity's opinion.
- Articles in popular magazines, like the Women's Weekly.
- Opinion columns in newspapers (as opposed to newspaper articles).

You can certainly draw on these materials for ideas to be developed in your assignment, but do not use them as sources of evidence, unless requested to in the assignment instructions. Having identified acceptable academic sources, the next section considers how to integrate these sources into your writing.

Integrating the Ideas of Published Authors

One of the primary features of academic writing is using the literature to support your ideas. This requires you to read widely in order to seek out the different sides of a debate within a particular field of inquiry.

In a sense, university assignments can be considered as vehicles for exploring the literature and finding out points of difference, agreement, and variability amongst different authors.

What this means is that you need to demonstrate evidence of your literature exploration by including these authors in your writing and mentioning their points of view. This technique of referring to authors in your writing is often termed **citing, documenting, or in-text referencing.**

Citing Authors

Within academia, different disciplines have their own conventions for citing authors. One of the most common conventions at Massey is the American Psychological Association's referencing system, otherwise known as APA. Other referencing systems used to document authors in your assignments, namely MLA, Harvard, and Chicago, will be outlined in a later section.

APA follows an author-date pattern for citing authors. In the body of your assignment, this involves recording the author's surname (or family name) followed by the year in which their work was published. This author-date pattern can be used in the body of a sentence, or in brackets at the end of the sentence. It is worth noting that by using the former, the reference becomes part of the sentence, and, therefore, clarity of attribution is often increased in the mind of the reader.

Example

In the body of a sentence
According to Holmes and Smith (1986), gender is an important feature in language.

The full "and" is used.

Year is in brackets, immediately following authors.

In brackets
Gender is an important feature in language (Holmes & Smith, 1986).

The ampersand "&" is used.

A comma separates authors and year.

The full stop goes after the brackets.

You will notice that in the body version, the authors are embedded into the sentence, with the year of publication in brackets. In contrast, the brackets version involves all the author details placed in brackets. The full reference details for Holmes and Smith (1986) should be found in the reference list at the end of the assignment. How to construct reference lists is covered in a later section.

Author Citation Tips

- There is no rule concerning which citation method – whether citing authors in the body of a sentence or in brackets – is best. Either method is fine. However, it is always useful for the reader to provide variety when citing authors in your assignment. So, try to alternate between these two methods.

- To avoid relying on the same verbs when introducing authors into your sentence, as in the case of "McDonald (1992) says…" or "Anderson (2003) states…", a list of verbs is provided to add variety to your sentence-embedded citations.

  agrees
  asserts
  believes
  claims
  comments; concedes that
  challenges; concludes; compares
  defines; delves deeper
  describes
  examines; explains; explores; echoes
  feels; felt that
  focuses on
  goes further
  holds that
  insists; includes; identifies
  is clear that; was clear on
  maintains; mentions
  notes
  observes
  points out; points to
  prefers; poses
  provides evidence
  qualifies
  recalls; recounts
  refers to
  reminds; responds
  reports; reveals
  says; sees
  shows
  speaks of
  states; suggests
  summarises; supports
  tells; tells of
  touches on
  verifies
  writes that

- If there are two or more authors with the same surname, regardless of year of publication, include their first initials to distinguish the publications.

Example
In the body of a sentence
According to R. B. Holmes (1995) and J. S. Holmes (1995), management principles underlie many organisational practices.

In brackets
Management principles underlie many organisational practices (R. B. Holmes, 1995; J. S. Holmes, 1995).

NB: When listing two or more authors in brackets, use a semi-colon to separate each reference.

- If there are two or more publications written by the same author in the same year, then add the letter "a" immediately after the year of the first publication mentioned in the text, and add the letter "b" after the second, and so on. Ensure the same detail is reflected in your Reference List.

Example
McMillan (1992a) illustrates cross-cultural awareness in organisations, while
McMillan (1992b) argues for the significance of gender in cross-cultural awareness.

- When stating the same author twice in a single paragraph, the year only needs mentioning the first time in the paragraph (unless it could be confused with another reference, such as in the case of publications written by the same author in the same year).

Example
The notion of anger has been debated for centuries (Wilkinson, 1976). Indeed, Wilkinson points out that….

- For works with no identifiable date, include n.d. in brackets.

Example
The notion of anger has been debated for centuries (Wilkinson, n.d.).

- When citing a publication written by three to five authors, for the first text citation, include all names. On subsequent citations, state the first author followed by "et al.", which is a Latin abbreviation for "et als", meaning "and others".

Example
In the body of a sentence
According to Slater et al. (1978, p. 120), it is important to establish the grounds of the argument.

In brackets
It is important to establish the grounds of the argument (Slater et al. 1978, p. 120).

- For works of six or more authors, for all citations, including the first, include the first author's surname followed by "et al."

- In the case of secondary citations, that is when a source you are using cites someone else's work – which is the work you want to include, but you do not have access to the original document – it is important to acknowledge both the original source and the source you have access to. When documenting both sources in brackets, use "as cited in" before the secondary source.

Example
Riechter's (1984, as cited in Smith, 2003) study highlights how business models offer a framework for understanding commercial mechanisms.

In the reference list at the back of the assignment, only list details for the source that you have been able to access, which is the source by Smith in the example above.

- On occasion, you may be in a situation where an expert, such as a lecturer, or a consultant working within an organisation, communicates a point, which happens to be relevant to your assignment. This point may have been communicated in an email, in face-to-face communication, or via a telephone conversation. In such cases, the information can still be included in your assignment as a personal communication – although only include these in your assignments if absolutely necessary.

Example
The legal firm, Cole and More, also practise criminal law (R. J. More, personal communication, December 14, 2005), which...

It is important not to rely on personal communications in your writing, as these do not demonstrate your interpretation of the literature. Personal communications are mentioned in the body of an assignment only. Consequently, they are not included in your Reference List at the end of the assignment.

Having explained the techniques involved in citing authors in the body of your assignment, the following section illustrates two different approaches to embedding authors' ideas in your writing: putting their ideas into your own words, or quoting their ideas verbatim.

Putting Authors' Ideas into Your Own Words

It is important to be able to explain the ideas of authors in your own words because this shows you understand the concepts and opinions. It does take some skill to alter the form in which information appears without significantly changing the meaning of that information. You may find though that, with practice, it becomes easier. Dictionaries and thesauruses are useful starting points for putting authors' ideas into your words. Indeed, the more word resources you have at your fingertips, the greater flexibility you have in reshaping the words of others, while still retaining as much of the original meaning as possible. There are two approaches to putting authors' ideas into your own words: summarising and paraphrasing. Summarising will be dealt with first, followed by paraphrasing.

Summarising

Summarising involves selecting out some key features and then using those to create a shortened version of the author's prose. Of course, in your assignment, you need to ensure that there is enough difference in form between the original version and your own summarised version. This may be achieved by simplifying the ideas, as well as using a different sentence structure or sentence order to present those ideas.

Examples
"Children spend a very large proportion of their daily lives in school. They go there to learn, not only in a narrow academic sense, but in the widest possible interpretation of the word – about themselves, about being a person within a group of others, about the community in which they live, and about the world around them. Schools provide the setting in which such learning takes place."

Leyden, S. (1985). *Helping the child of exceptional ability.* London: Croom Helm, page 38.

Summaries
Author citation in the body of the sentence
As Leyden (1985) points out, schools are places for children to learn about life, themselves, other people, as well as academic information.

Author citation in brackets
Schools are places for children to learn about life, themselves, other people, as well as academic information (Leyden, 1985).

You will notice that in the examples above I have relied on some of the same key words that were used in the original version from Leyden, *such as schools, children, learn, other(s), themselves, and academic.* This is often the case when you are creating your own version of the author's words because many concepts and ideas cannot be broken down to a more basic level, without losing a sense of their original meaning. However, the difference between my summary and the author's version has been created through the arrangement of these key words in combination with other words which I have selected.

Secondly, the very selection of ideas from the total pool available within the original version has also contributed to the difference between my version and the author's version. For instance, you will notice that I have not focused on the meaning contained in the first sentence about children spending much of their "daily lives in school." Instead I have summarised the ideas contained in the last two sentences. Yet, at the same time, I have omitted specific details within the second sentence, such as "the community", and interpreting academic in the "widest possible" sense. Further, instead of allocating a whole sentence to the point that "schools provide the setting in which such learning takes place", I have condensed this idea and merged it with the ideas in the second sentence, as evident in "schools are places for children to…"

Thirdly, difference from the original version has also been created through the order in which the ideas are presented. For example, in Leyden's version, she mentions the academic focus of learning first, followed by a broader context of issues which children also learn about while they are at school. In contrast, my version presents the broader context of issues first followed by the academic focus of learning.

Consequently, when summarising the ideas of authors, you can use several techniques. Firstly, you can identify some key words and link these with other words to create a different combination. Secondly, you can be selective about the specific ideas you choose to adopt, while leaving out others. In this way, you are actively summarising the information. Finally, by reordering the ideas in your own framework, you are also creating a distinction between your version and the author's. All this can be achieved without significantly altering the meaning of the information. Many of these techniques can also be applied to the strategy of paraphrasing authors' ideas.

Paraphrasing

Before you begin to paraphrase, it is **REALLY IMPORTANT** to build-up your **OWN IDEA** of the information or try to develop a picture in your mind, and then use this as a model to help **FRAME** or **GUIDE** your paraphrase of the author's idea.

Paraphrasing means to restate information using different words. Unlike summarising though, paraphrasing focuses less on shortening and condensing the information. Paraphrasing aims to rewrite the information by drawing on different words and phrases.

Examples
"Children spend a very large proportion of their daily lives in school. They go there to learn, not only in a narrow academic sense, but in the widest possible interpretation of the word – about themselves, about being a person within a group of others, about the community in which they live, and about the world around them. Schools provide the setting in which such learning takes place."

Leyden, S. (1985). *Helping the child of exceptional ability.* London: Croom Helm, page 38.

Paraphrasing
Author citation in the body of the sentence
As Leyden (1985) points out, schools are places where children spend a significant amount of time. Beyond merely going to school to learn academic information, Leyden argues that learning occurs within a far wider context as children also learn about who they are, by being in groups, their local community, as well as the wider world which surrounds them. Hence, schools offer the settings to facilitate children's learning about a great many things.

Author citation in brackets
Schools are places where children spend a significant amount of time (Leyden, 1985). Beyond merely going to school to learn academic information, learning occurs within a far wider context as children also learn about who they are, by being in groups, their local community, as well as the wider world which surrounds them (Leyden). Hence, schools offer the settings to facilitate children's learning about a great many things.

You will notice that in the paraphrased examples above, the version I have created is very detailed, compared to the one-sentence, summarised version. The paraphrased version rewrites each of the three sentences that make up the original version from Leyden. Further**, it relies on a few more of the key words** Leyden uses, such as *schools, children, academic, learn, spend, groups, community, world, them, setting(s),* and *learning.*

A second difference between the summarised version and the paraphrased one is that the same order of ideas is retained in the paraphrased version. For instance, unlike the summarised version, the paraphrased one mentions the academic focus of learning first, followed by a broader context of issues which children also learn about while they are at school. Moreover, the paraphrased version also represents more closely the specific points addressed by Leyden. In contrast, the summarised version presents a very general representation of the ideas, while leaving out specific aspects.

However, the paraphrased version does have at least one thing in common with the summarised version. Indeed, **the paraphrased example integrates many other words and phrases not used by Leyden to get across Leyden's message.** Further, even though the order, in which these ideas are presented, is the same as Leyden's order, the choice of phrases is significantly different. For example, while Leyden refers to learning "not only in a narrow academic sense, but in the widest possible interpretation of the word – about themselves…", the paraphrased version refers to the same idea in terms of the following: "beyond merely going to school to learn academic information, learning occurs within a far wider context as children also learn about who they are…"

Copying and Changing a Few Words – Not Paraphrasing
As already highlighted, it is vital that you create enough distinction between your paraphrased version and the author's version. Commonly, however, many students do not make enough of a difference between their words and the author's. In some cases, for instance, they may copy large phrases from the original, and only change a few words.

Example
"**Capital** represents human creations that are used in the production of goods and services. We often distinguish between human capital and physical capital. *Human capital* consists of the knowledge and skills people develop (through education and formal or on-the-job training) that enhance their ability to produce, such as the taxi driver's knowledge of the city's streets or the surgeon's knowledge of the human body. *Physical capital* consists of buildings, machinery, tools, and other manufactured items that are used to produce goods and services. Physical capital includes the driver's cab, the surgeon's scalpel, the ten-ton press used to print Newsweek, and the building where your economics class meets."

McEachern, W.A. (1991). *Economics: A contemporary introduction* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western, page 3.

Copying and changing a few words – Unacceptable paraphrasing
Capital signifies human products that are utilised in the creation of goods and services (McEachern, 1991). Human capital comprises knowledge and skills that people develop (through education and on-the-job training) to enhance their capacity to produce. In contrast, physical capital comprises buildings, machinery, tools, and other manufactured items that are utilised to produce goods and services (McEachern).

The above example demonstrates what **NOT** to do when paraphrasing an author's ideas. Although acknowledgement of the author is made in the bracketed citations, this is not enough to distinguish the author's version from your own version. You also need to ensure that the phrasing is sufficiently different. The paraphrased version has only substituted individual words, as follows:

represents = signifies
creations = products
production = creation
ability = capacity
used = utilised
consist of = comprises

This leaves the structure of the original version intact. Although most of the examples have been excluded, the sentence structure is exactly the same as the author's. Including linking phrases, like "In contrast", on their own do not adequately restate the author's idea. The whole passage needs to be restated in different words to meet the requirements of paraphrasing. The example below demonstrates this.

Example
"**Capital** represents human creations that are used in the production of goods and services. We often distinguish between human capital and physical capital. *Human capital* consists of the knowledge and skills people develop (through education and formal or on-the-job training) that enhance their ability to produce, such as the taxi driver's knowledge of the city's streets or the surgeon's knowledge of the human body. Physical capital consists of buildings, machinery, tools, and other manufactured items that are used to produce goods and services. Physical capital includes the driver's cab, the surgeon's scalpel, the ten-ton press used to print Newsweek, and the building where your economics class meets."

McEachern, W.A. (1991). *Economics: A contemporary introduction* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western, page 3.

Acceptable Paraphrasing
Capital is an economic concept referring to the things humans make, which are then used "in the production of goods and services" (McEachern, 1991, p. 3). This broad concept can be divided into human as well as physical capital, as McEachern illsutrates. Indeed, human capital focuses on the products pertaining to individuals' skills and expertise, which function to improve individuals' production capacity. This type of capital can be gained through some form of education and/or training. In contrast, physical capital involves the kinds of tools and equipment, including buildings that are central to providing goods and services.

Things to Note about Acceptable Paraphrasing
You will notice that in the example above I have constructed a number of things to create some difference between the original and my paraphrased version.

1. I have crafted capital as "an economic concept". Hence – even at the basic word level – I have drawn on my own understanding to help guide the process of rewriting the author's idea.

2. Instead of distinguishing between two types of capital, as the original version does, I have talked about this in terms of dividing the "broad concept" of capital into two. Similarly, as in the point above, I have reframed the author's words within my own framework of understanding to help guide my rewriting of the author's idea.

3. Linking words at the beginning of sentences have been used to help with my flow of writing, such as "Indeed", and "In contrast".

4. Rather than defining human and physical capital in terms of "consists of…", "human capital focuses on…" and "physical capital involves…" have been applied. Similarly, instead of talking about human capital as enhancing people's ability, I have rephrased this as "function[ing] to improve…" Likewise, "central to the production of…" has replaced "used to produce". Hence, I have tried to draw on phrases I am more familiar with to express the author's ideas.

5. Individual words have also been replaced by other words, such as "things humans make" for "human creations", and "individuals" instead of "people". Again, at the level of individual words, I have repackaged the information within my own framework of understanding.

6. Acknowledgement of the author's ideas are made with two references provided in the paraphrase – one in brackets and another embedded in the body of a sentence.

When to Retain SOME of the Original Features
Sometimes with paraphrasing, there may be a need to retain **some** of the features of the original. For instance, you will notice that I relied on the author's phrasing for "in the production of goods and services" because it was difficult to restate this in different words. However, the author's words are acknowledged, as evident by the quotation marks around the quoted material, in addition to the author's name, year of publication, and page number where the quote is located. Specific details about quoting authors' ideas are provided in a later section (see page 23).

In addition to using a quotation, a few phrases have been retained from the original, including "physical capital" and "human capital". This is because these phrases are **recognised terms** used within the economics field, and are not specific to the author's usage. More importantly, "physical capital" and "human capital" are the names of concepts, which cannot be changed. Similarly, I have retained the phrase "goods and services" because it is a recognised term, commonly applied in many other contexts beyond an academic setting. Consequently, I felt it was not necessary to use quotation marks around such terms. However, if you are in doubt, it is always best to exercise caution by acknowledging the source and applying quotation marks. Better still, try to restate the idea in your own words.

Putting authors' ideas in **YOUR WORDS** is likely to be the **SKILL**
you will use **MOST** when writing university assignments.
It's worth investing time to develop this **SKILL.**

Techniques for Putting Authors' Ideas into Your Own Words

Verb List for Academic Writing
The key to developing the skill of restating other people's ideas in your own words is to develop your own repertoire of words that can be used in academic writing. What follows is a list of verbs organised in different groups, because of their similarity in meaning, which can be integrated into your writing. These words may assist when summarising authors' ideas. They may also be helpful when paraphrasing appropriately the words of other authors. There is room to add your own words to each group.

articulate, comment, mention, maintain, note, point out, say, state, suggest, indicate, refer,…
hypothesise, predict, theorise, conceptualise, understand, demonstrate, show, convey, portray, support, substantiate, corroborate, verify, confirm…..
investigate, research, experiment, conduct, administer, observe, ……..
acknowledge, assert, claim, …
argue, challenge, compare, contradict, contrast, counteract, debate, defend, refute, hold, ….
comprise, consist, constitute, embody, characterise, define, identify, recognise, diagnose, …
create, construct, develop, generate, produce, evolve, manufacture, ……..

synthesise, coordinate, cooperate, correspond, collaborate, contribute, share, …
reveal, conceal, ….
analyse, examine, evaluate, scrutinise, criticise, …
report, record, collect, collate, categorise, document, …
differentiate, deviate, distinguish, divide, separate, …
access, utilise, deploy, adopt, practise, …
strengthen, increase, expand, weaken, reduce, decrease, contract, condense, ….
convince, compel, justify, explain, clarify, reason, account, …
signify, highlight, specify, specialise, symbolise, …
accumulate, calculate, maximise, minimise, formulate, …
relate, connect, link, associate, correlate, …
exclude, include, situate, locate, place, …
condemn, deny, decline, negate, …
dominate, segregate, subordinate, …
affect, influence, transform, …
conclude, summarise, …

Changing the Sentence Structure and Form

In addition to building up your repertoire of academic words, another method for creating difference between the author's version and your version is by altering the structure in which information is presented. The following strategies identify a variety of techniques for altering sentence structures.

1. Restate the information by referring to the author. EG: McDonald (1992) highlights; According to McDonald (1992); As highlighted by McDonald (1992).

2. Embed the author at the beginning of the sentence, the middle, or at the end. EG: *As identified by Smith (1990), social dynamics involve…; Social dynamics, as identified by Smith (1990), involve…; Social dynamics involve…, as identified by Smith (1990).*

3. Try to repackage the idea using the following sentence starters:
   This concept is about…
   This idea is organised around…
   This issue focuses on / involves / integrates / highlights / illustrates….
   This means…
   It is comprised of… / constitutes…
   A central feature underlying this concept is…
   This functions to… / serves to… / works to…

4. Change the order in which the items or events are placed.

5. Consult with a thesaurus for ideas on how to say things differently. As an example, Collins Essential English Thesaurus may be a useful resource.

6. Draw on different linking words and phrases to begin sentences as well as to link different ideas within the same sentence, such as the following:

   Being specific

In particular….	Regarding…	With respect to…
In relation to…	More specifically…	In terms of…
Especially, …		

Giving an example

For instance, …	For example, …	This can be illustrated by…
…namely, …	…such as…	

Clarifying

In other words, …	Basically, …	…namely, …

Introducing parallels

Simultaneously, …	At the same time, …	Equally, …
Concurrently, …		

Mentioning a common point

Traditionally, …	Typically, …	Conventionally, …
Commonly, …	Often, …	

Acknowledging something and moving onto a different point

Although…	Even though…	Despite…
Notwithstanding…		

Following a line of reasoning

Therefore, …	Hence, …	Consequently, …
Subsequently, …	As a result, …	Accordingly, …
As a corollary, …	As a consequence, …	To this end, …

7. Can you expand and elaborate on what the author is saying?

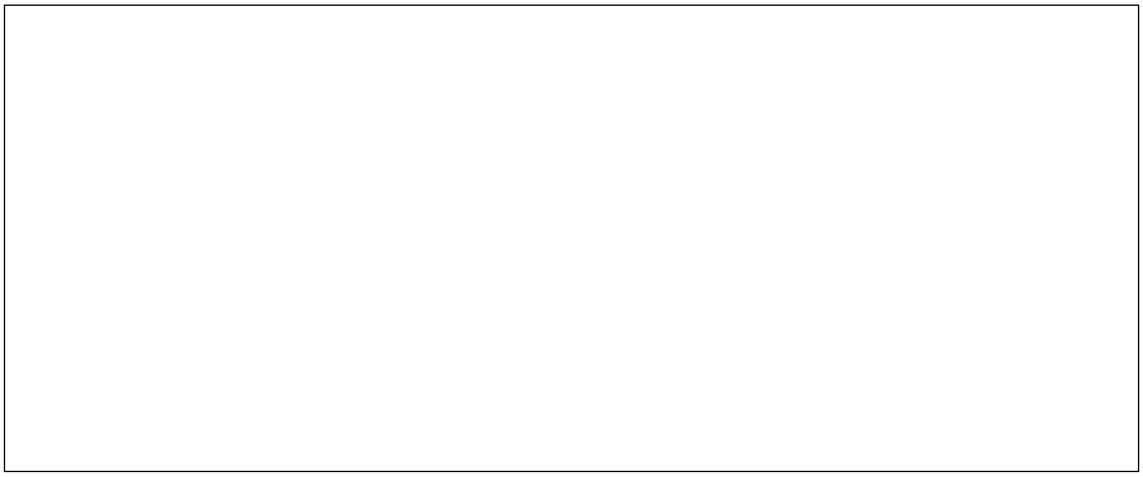
8. Alternatively, can you simplify and shorten what the author is saying?

9. Include a value judgement as you put the idea into your own words. EG: *Gibson's (1978) analysis about… is useful because it takes into account external factors.*

10. Can you summarise in one sentence the ideas from several authors. EG: *Based on the ideas of Johnson (1979), McDonald (1988), and Wright (1999), it can be argued that…* Similarly, when summarising the findings from different studies, the same structure can be applied. EG: *Based on the findings from Johnson (1979), McDonald (1988), and Wright (1999), it can be demonstrated / concluded that…*

Steps for Putting Authors' Ideas into Your Own Words

1. Write down or paste a photocopy of the passage you wish to put into your own words. Underline the author's main points.



2. List some key ideas, concepts, and phrases. Where possible, note down alternative phrases or synonyms for each of these.

3. Identify the author's main point(s) in your words.

4. Can you simplify your words further?
(This may not always be possible.)

5. Now, use your words and phrases in steps 3 and 4 to restate the author's main point, without looking at the original text.

This is your reconstructed version of the author's idea.

Steps for Putting Authors' Ideas into Your Own Words

1. Write down or paste a photocopy of the passage you wish to put into your own words. Underline the author's main points.

   Marriage was a greater influence on the course of many of the women's lives than choice of job or career, or even family background. Yet few women talked about choosing to get married (although choice may be a misnomer) in the same way they talked about career choices. Relationships are generally believed to belong to the realm of emotion, and 'we fell in love' or 'then I got married' suffices. The decision to marry is not usually something to be analysed or explained, nor is the choice of a particular man. Indeed, both getting married and marrying a particular man often appeared to be inevitabilities rather than choices. Women did talk about how they met their future husbands, however.

   Park, J. (Ed.). (1991). *Ladies a plate.* Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press, page 113. Key points have been underlined.

2. List some key ideas, concepts, and phrases. Where possible, note down alternative phrases or synonyms for each of these.
   marriage, getting married – selecting a life partner
   marriage was a great influence – significant impact, influential factor
   decision to marry – choice, marriage options, choice of partner
   not usually something to be analysed or explained – typically not talked about, not a topic of discussion
   getting married and marrying a particular man often appeared to be inevitabilities rather than choices – the process of marriage and choice of partner were more a matter of course, something inevitable, compared to individual choice.

3. Identify the author's main point(s) in your words.
   Marriage was an influential factor in the women's lives. This was more so than other factors. Yet, at the same time, marriage options, including choice of partner, were typically not a topic of discussion for most women. Few women actually discussed the subject. Indeed, the process of marriage and choice of partner were more a matter of course, something inevitable, compared to individual choice.

4. Can you simplify your words further?
   Although marriage impacted the women's lives significantly, it was not a decision that was analysed. Indeed, it was more a matter of course compared to individual choice.

5. Now, use your words and phrases in steps 3 and 4 to restate the author's main point, without looking at the original text.
   Park's (1991) interviews with women showed that although marriage impacted women's lives significantly, it was not typically a decision that was analysed. Few women discussed the topic of marriage, including choice of partner. Rather, marriage was seen as more a matter of course than individual choice.

Quoting Authors' Ideas

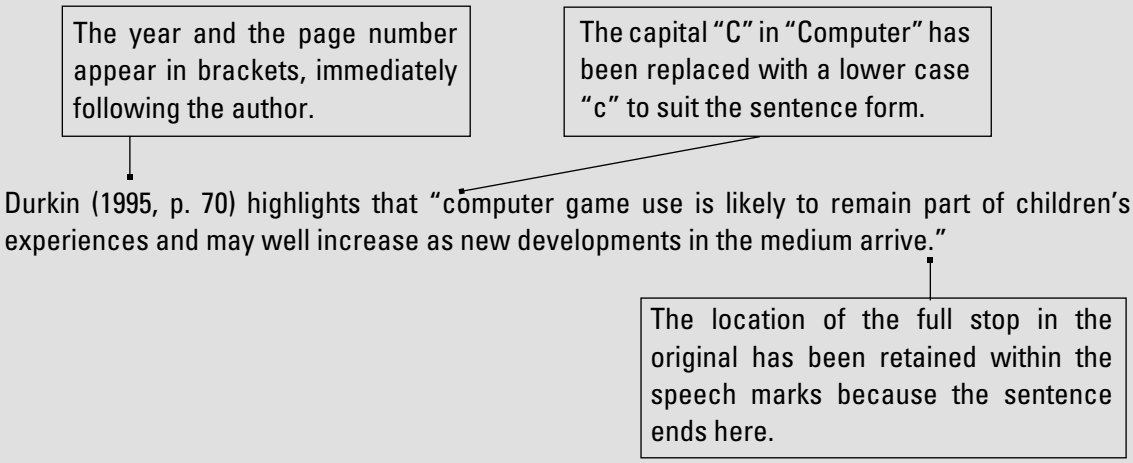
In addition to using authors' ideas in your writing by putting their ideas into your own words, via summarising and paraphrasing, you can also embed authors' ideas using quotations. A quotation is an exact copy of the words that someone else has written or said. These words are placed within quotation marks " ", which are also referred to as speech marks. In addition to documenting the author's surname and year of publication, as with all citations of others' work in accordance with APA referencing, you also need to include the page number where the quotation was located.

Example

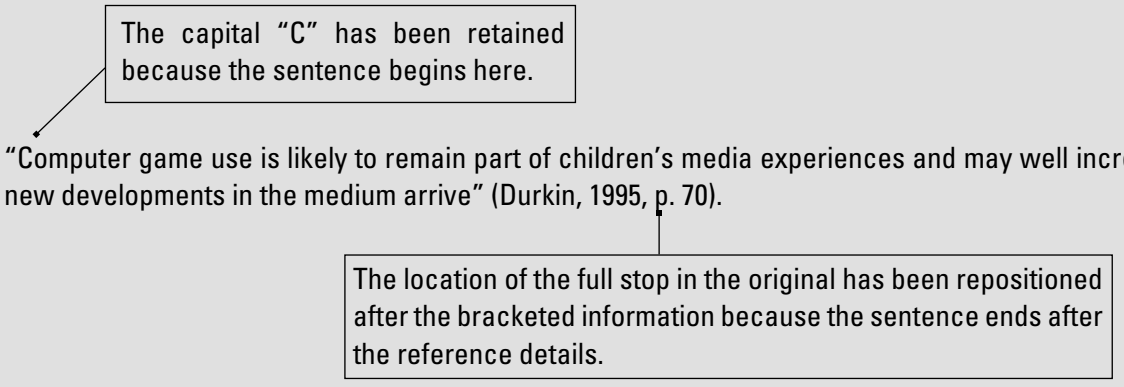
"Computer game use is likely to remain part of children's media experiences and may well increase as new developments in the medium arrive."

Durkin, K. (1995). *Computer games on young people: A review.* Sydney, NSW: Office of Film and Literature Classification, page 70.

Quoting authors
In the body of the sentence



In brackets



Quotation Tips

1. Type the exact wording, spelling, and punctuation of the original source, including American spelling.

2. If there are errors in the original, put the Latin word 'sic' after the errors in square brackets to indicate that this was how the words appeared in their original location.

Example
Braum (1999, p. 125) argues that "there is no way to determines [sic] moral laws."

3. For publications without page numbers, such as online documents (excluding those accessed through Acrobat Reader where page numbers are often specified as they appear on the printed page), use paragraph numbers, indicated by "para."

Example
As noted by Handleman and Brown (1995, para. 8), …

4. If you need to add words into a quotation for clarification, place the additional words in square brackets.

Example
"The PBRF [Performance Based Research Fund] ensures that tertiary institutions are able to deliver robust research portfolios within a team of professional, and internationally reputed, researchers" (Smith, 2004, p. 501).

5. If you need to remove details from a quotation, replace the words removed with three dots, referred to as ellipses. This is a useful tool to include when you want to incorporate a quotation into your sentence, but some of it is irrelevant or too detailed for your assignment.

Example
Jones (2001, p. 115) stated that "the 'placebo effect' … disappeared when all the relevant behaviours were studied."

6. For quotations of 40 or more words, indent the whole quotation (by about 5 spaces) as a block of text, and remove the quotation marks.

Example
In respect of social behaviour, there are interesting American findings that computer game play can promote high levels of family involvement, reviving patterns of family togetherness in leisure that, for many, seemed to have diminished or died out with the advent of television. (Durkin, 1995, p. 71)

For block quotes, the bracketed information appears outside the full stop.

7. For secondary quotations, or quotations that are cited in another source, providing that the original is not available, both sources must be mentioned. When documenting both sources in brackets, use "as cited in" before the secondary source.

Example
In the body of the sentence
Smith (2003, p. 111), in reporting a study conducted by Reichter (1984, p. 99), highlights how "commercialisation leads to four major outcomes."

In brackets
Riechter's (1984, p. 99, as cited in Smith, 2003, p. 111) study highlights how "commercialisation leads to four major outcomes."

In the Reference List at the back of the assignment, only list details for the source that you have been able to access, which is the source by Smith in the examples given above.

When to Use Quotations or Your Own Words?

While quotations indicate to the marker that you have read the literature and have identified points of interest, quotations can detract the marker's attention away from your own understanding of the topic. Hence, you are far better off to demonstrate to the marker, in the word length available, your understanding of the author's words, rather than relying on the words of others. The best way to do this is by restating or summarising, in your own words, the author's quotation - with acknowledgement of the author. Ensuring frequent use of your own words, as opposed to the words of others, also helps retain a consistent style of writing within your assignment. If you decide to use quotations, be selective.

> For an estimate of the number of quotations to use per assignment length, four quotations is a fair number for a 2000 word assignment. This allows enough space for your understanding to shine through beyond the words of others.

It is important to exercise good judgement when deciding on whether or not to use a quotation. Here are some criteria to help you judge the relevance of quotations in your assignment:

- Does the quotation express an important idea in a way that you could not write more simply in your own words?

- Does the quotation express an important idea in an authoritative way, that you could not construct more dramatically / powerfully?

- Is it necessary to make available the original words for a particular purpose? - such as in the case of literary analysis, or when displaying legislation.

Integrating Quotations into Your Assignment

Any quotation needs to be integrated into your text. It should never stand alone, unless it introduces the assignment itself. For instance, it is acceptable to use a quotation to begin your assignment, perhaps, because the quote is from a well-known author in the research area, or the quote may introduce the problem very clearly or poignantly. However, in all other cases, you need to show that the quotation relates to the assignment topic. This will often involve deciding whether the quote supports the points you want to make in some way, supports with some qualification, or disagrees with whatever points you are making in your assignment. Irrespective of the direction, you need to introduce and comment on the quotation by linking it back immediately to the assignment topic. The following examples demonstrate how quotations that support a particular point of view can be integrated into an assignment.

Example 1

"Social psychologists study **behavior** because it is behavior that can be observed."

Vaughan, G., & Hogg, M. (1995). *Introduction to social psychology*. Sydney, Australia: Prentice Hall, page 2.

Essay question: Discuss whether social psychology is a science or an art.

Integrating Quotation

The topic sentence introduces observable events, which provides a lead into the quotation on social psychologists studying observable behaviour.

One of the central characteristics of science is its method of demonstrating knowledge through clearly observable events. According to Vaughan and Hogg (1995, p. 2), "social psychologists study behavior [bold emphasis omitted] because it is behavior that can be observed." This gives strength to the claim that psychology is a science rather than an art because the scientific method constructs knowledge from observable data.

This sentence links the quotation back to the essay topic by including it within the essay context of psychology being a science versus an art.

Example 2

"Such…change cannot help but have a fundamental, permanent effect upon the world's industries and the people who work in them."

Davidow, W. H., & Malone, M. S. (1992). *The virtual corporation: Structuring and revitalizing the corporation for the 21st century.* New York: Harper Collins, page 2.

Essay question: Businesses should embrace the information age. Discuss.

Integrating Quotation

The topic sentence provides a general statement about the issue, which functions to help clarify the change referred to in the quotation.

The information age is a significant technological force. "Such…change cannot help but have a fundamental, permanent effect upon the world's industries and the people who work in them" (Davidow & Malone, 1992, p. 2). This suggests that if businesses fail to recognise the impact of this technological change, they may be left behind. Consequently, this gives credence to the view that businesses should embrace the information age.

These last two sentences link the quotation back to the essay topic. The first sentence connects the quote to the focus of businesses being left behind if they do not change. The second sentence takes this idea further and explicitly links it back to the essay topic with respect to the need for businesses to embrace the information age.

In other cases, you may use a quotation to highlight areas of contention or debate. When you bring in opposing points of view and then contest or refute them, this can make your essay more convincing and stronger to the reader. This is because not only have you provided supportive evidence, but you have also brought in disconfirming views and then argued against them by bringing in better and stronger evidence. Ultimately, this

shows you have read widely, and, more importantly, you have been able to integrate diverging points of view into your assignment. You may not agree with the quotation, but you can still use it to demonstrate that another piece of evidence from somewhere else, that you support, is more compelling than the opinion expressed in the quotation. The following examples demonstrate how contrasting quotations can be utilised to open up debate.

Examples

In contrast to demonstrating the advances in employment relations, "Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) in New Zealand is at a crossroads" (Sayers & Tremaine, 1994, p.11).

Snook's (1996, p. 55) contention, that "bulk funding, management models of school governance and the promotion of so-called 'choice' will do more to destroy decent education than any defective curricula", is open to debate.

The Importance of Acknowledging Authors' Ideas

Acknowledging, adequately, the information you use in your university assignments is an important part of all academic work. Failure to acknowledge a source of information (adequately), or using other people's ideas as your own is called plagiarism, and is a serious form of academic dishonesty. Any idea which is not your own, but which the reader might regard as yours, should have a citation. It is better to give too many citations to your sources than too few.

By acknowledging authors…….

- You support your own ideas.
- You make your argument convincing for the marker.
- You show the marker you have read widely.
- You show the marker you understand the literature.
- You follow the conventions of academia.
- You avoid being accused of plagiarism. By law, published information is copyright, which may mean you have the right to copy as long as you acknowledge the source.

When Don't You Need to Acknowledge Authors?

There are instances when it is acceptable to refer to information without locating a source for that information. Consequently, this forgoes the need to acknowledge the author of that information. Such instances relate to the common knowledge, which may also be thought of as general knowledge or taken-for-granted knowledge. This common knowledge is often culture bound, however. For instance, the common knowledge within New Zealand culture, may differ from the taken-for-granted knowledge in another geographical region of the world.

Examples of common knowledge within New Zealand

- Beijing is the capital of China.
- Wellington is the capital of New Zealand.
- The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840.
- Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.

Most university assignments do not require you to focus on common knowledge. Rather, their purpose is to enable you to read the ideas of published authors and debate the pros and cons of these ideas.

Reference Lists

Having referred to sources by author in the body of your assignment, you will also need to provide a detailed list of these sources at the end of your assignment. If you are using APA conventions, then this is referred to as a Reference List and is headed up References. In some disciplines, you may also be asked to include a Bibliography, which is a list of sources you used to develop ideas around the assignment topic, but which you did not actually cite or include in the body of your assignment. Occasionally, you may be asked to include only a Bibliography, which is likely to cover all sources, whether or not they were used in your assignment.

While the general procedure is presented on the following pages according to APA guidelines for listing references at the end of your assignment, **CHECK WITH YOUR STUDY GUIDE**, since lecturers and course co-ordinators may develop their individual preferences.

For further information, not provided here, you can always consult with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001), 5th edition, available in the Massey University library.

Details to Include in Your Reference List

1. APA follows an author-date style for listing references at the end of your assignment. This involves placing the authors surname first, followed by initials. With two or more authors, an ampersand, &, is required before the last author. The publication date appears in brackets, with a full stop after it.

Example
Smith, K., Swatson, D., McDonald, G. Y., & Butcher, J. (1999).

A comma separates each author unit from the next, while a full stop appears after each initial.

An ampersand is included before the last author.

A full stop is placed after the bracketed year.

2. When there are more than six authors, list the first six followed by et al. for the remaining authors.

Example
Bligh, T., Johnson, P., Quok, S. K., Smart, G., Masters, Y., Tressler, U., et al. (1999).

3. If there is no individual author, but an organisation has created the document, include the organisation as the author.

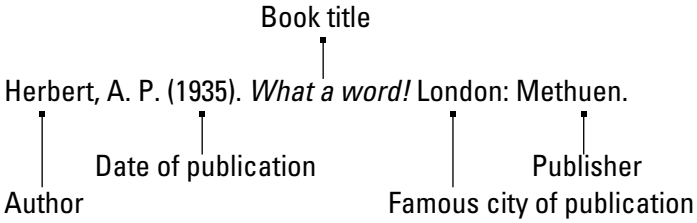
Example
Ministry of Consumer Affairs. (1999). *Pyramid schemes.* Wellington, New Zealand: Author.

When the author is also the publisher, avoid duplicating information by substituting the name of the publisher with "Author".

4. When no author information is available, place the publication title in the author position, followed by year of publication, location, and publisher's name. Retain formatting of the title, including italics.

Example
Significance of the Human Rights Act 1993. (2000). Wellington, New Zealand: Human Rights Commission.

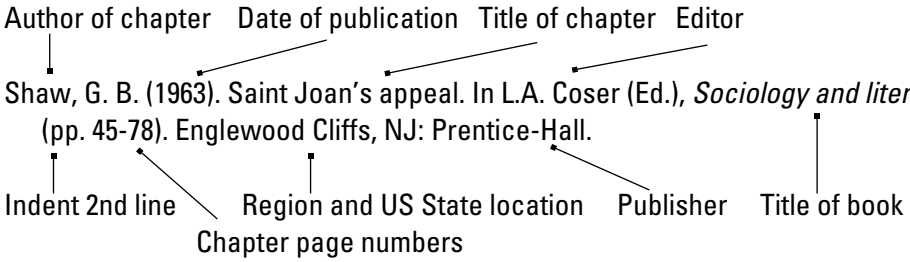
Referencing a Book



- When referencing a book, you need the book title, with only the first word of the title capitalised, and thereafter, the first word after a colon or dash in the title. Book titles are *italicised.*

- You also need the location in which the book was published, followed by the name of the publishing company. For well known cities, like London, Los Angeles, New York, Amsterdam, Milan, Moscow, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, this is all that is needed. Other places require city and state (if in US) or city and country. All US states have abbreviations, e.g. AL - Alabama, CA - California, DC - District of Columbia, TX - Texas.

Referencing a Chapter within an Edited Book



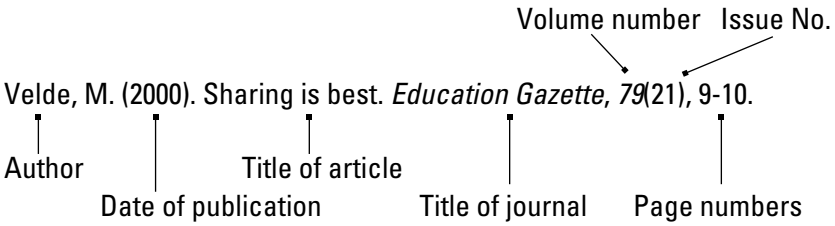
- When referencing chapters in edited books, include the authors of the chapter, year of book publication, and title of the chapter.

- List the names of the editors in the order of first initial followed by last name, and place the abbreviation (Ed.) or (Eds.) after the editor or editors' names.

- Italicise (or underline) the book title only.

- Include the page numbers of the chapter in brackets after the book title, but before the full stop.

Referencing a Journal Article



- When referencing journal articles, italicise or underline the journal title and its volume number.
- Capitalise all main words in the journal title.
- Put the issue or part number in brackets, immediately after the volume number.
- Page numbers are the last piece of information given, followed by a full stop.

Difficult References

Newspaper Articles (author and no author)

Brown, K. (1998, March 15). Health Ministry at loggerheads with Pharmac. *The Herald*, p. 2.
New drug appears to sharply cut risk of death from heart failure. (1993, July 15). *The Washington Post,* p. A12.

Conference Proceedings

Bowker, N., & Tuffin, K. (2002). Users with disabilities' social and economic development through online access. In M. Boumedine (Ed.), *Proceedings of the IASTED International Conference on Information and Knowledge Sharing* (pp. 122-127). Anaheim, CA: ACTA Press.

Book Reviews

Schatz, B. R. (2000). Learning by text or context? [Review of the book *The social life of information*]. *Science*, 290 (5498), 1910-1917.

Study Guides (author and no author)
(This type of reference has been adapted from the APA Publication Manual, 5th edition, 2001, because there is currently no category available for study guides.)

Hudson, J. M. (1994). *Second language learning: Study guide 2.* Palmerston North, New Zealand: School of Language Studies, Massey University.
School of Psychology, College of Social Science, Massey University. (1997). 175.100 *Introduction to industrial psychology.* Palmerston North, New Zealand: Author.

Online Documents

Article in Internet-Only Journal
Breen, M. (1997). Information does not equal knowledge: Theorizing the political economy of virtuality. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3(3).* Retrieved March 4, 2001, from http://209.130.1.169/jcmc/vol3/issue3/breen.html

- For online documents, always include the date of access, in terms of month, day, and year, and the full web address.

Entire Website
Te Papa. (2004). *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.* Retrieved June 23, 2005, from http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/

For a **site with multiple pages**, include a web address that links back to the homepage.

Webpage
Te Papa. (2004). *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa* (What's on). Retrieved June 23, 2005, from http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/WhatsOn/

- To indicate a particular page or section within a website, include the **chapter number or section title in brackets, without italics, after the website title.** Include a web address that links directly to the section within the website.

Formatting Your Reference List

- References are in alphabetical order according to the first author's surname.
- With two or more publications by the same author, list the earliest dated publication first.
- The second line of each reference (and thereafter) is indented by about 5 spaces. This can be formatted automatically by using the "Hanging" feature under "Indentation" within the "Indents and Spacing" section within the "Paragraph" option of the "Format" column of the menu bar, found in most Microsoft Word programmes.

Essays

The Writing Process

Writing is a long and winding process. In managing this process, there are certain steps that you can take every time you begin an assignment. These steps will help to maximise your efforts and make meaning out of the chaos and disorder that often appears when first embarking on any assignment.

One of the most comprehensive and sophisticated assignment tasks you will find at university is essay writing. What follows are some guidelines on how to go about essay writing. However, the steps outlined have general application for almost any other assignment that you will be given.

Think about topic

It is essential that you interpret the topic correctly. This can be achieved by brainstorming to generate ideas, and then formulating a point of view, even if it is a very rough one. Some people have found that reading around the assignment topic, by looking up some of the key words in their course materials and textbooks or glancing through relevant readings in their study guide, is helpful in familiarising themselves with the question.

Research topic

Start your research by reading your study guide, text book, and lecture notes (if lectures are available). Then look in the library, or access the online catalogue, to see if there are other useful materials, but only look at information relevant to the topic. However, to do well in an assignment, it is not always necessary to have references outside your course materials. For 100 level papers, 3-5 references may be enough to do well, as long as you explain the ideas thoroughly and relate them effectively to the essay topic. **Sometimes, course co-ordinators may specify the minimum number of references expected in the assignment instructions.** Also, remember that you will be marked on what you write, not what you read. So try to look at everything you read in terms of whether it is worthy of summarising on paper. Simply writing something down in your own words will help clarify your understanding of the topic.

Plan your essay

Now that you have made notes and summaries on the essay topic, you should be in a much better position to decide on the type of position or argument you are going to back up or argue in your essay. With your argument in mind, write down the main points that support it. Make sure they are in complete sentences, and arrange them in the order that best supports your stance. These sentences can function as an essay plan. Each sentence represents a paragraph in your essay.

Write your essay

Remember, writing often does not come easily. Be patient and start with getting your ideas down on paper. After the first draft, you can work on refining them. If you have already made summaries and notes, the process of writing your essay may be easier. However, if you are having difficulty, **try writing some headings** that are relevant to the essay topic – perhaps they summarise each of the main points you want to make – or perhaps they are just words that have some relevance to the topic. Under each heading start summarising information from one book or study guide reading.

Suspend the need to connect your writing to other readings or parts of the essay. Just write. Trying to control the way your essay will look and its structure early on can waste time because, as you write more and read more, you end up developing groups of information that you can link together due to similar features they have in common. However, doing this at the beginning is difficult as you cannot see the overall picture since you are just starting out and your knowledge of the essay topic has not had sufficient time to develop. Uncertainty at the beginning is perfectly acceptable and

normal. Once you are more familiar with the issues, it becomes easier to work out the main themes or sections and even the order to place them. What is important though is writing down information in your own words, so that you have something to show at the end of your reading and analysis.

Revise your essay

Look over your essay to make sure that you have answered the essay question.
Have you stuck to the topic?
Have you left out anything vital?
You may have to revise your essay several times before it effectively addresses the topic and question.

Try to leave yourself at least 24 hours between finishing your first draft and revisions. This will allow you time to distance yourself from the topic and reflect on it with a critical eye. It is also really useful if you can access someone independent who is not doing the course to have a read over your assignment to see if it makes sense. If they understand it, then your marker should understand it. Take note of anything this external person does not understand, because it may suggest that you need to clarify and explain details further. Providing such extra detail can only reinforce what you know and understand to the marker.

Edit your essay

You should check for errors (punctuation, spelling, grammar), bad sentence structure, jargon, slang etc.
Is your presentation OK? Can it be improved?
Is the referencing correct?

The Importance of Planning an Assignment

Overall, writing university assignments takes a lot of time. Often, people do not do as well as they would like because they have not allocated enough time to give justice to each of the stages outlined.

> Ideally, four weeks is a good amount of time to allocate for the preparation, planning, writing, and revising of an assignment.

In the first week, you may be just figuring out what the actual assignment topic means and then reading through some course material to get a broader view or a more in-depth view of the issues. During this first week, you may also evaluate what course materials are useful for answering the assignment and what you can leave out. You may also, of course, choose to look in Massey library's Kea catalogue to see whether there are any other useful materials.

> Remember, **if you are an extramural**, you have to **factor in extra time** for the delivery of library books, as well as the time it takes for the completed assignment to reach its destination. Hence, rather than the four weeks mentioned above, six weeks may be a more realistic time frame, so initial delay is unwise.

Once you have been able to prioritise the most useful resources for your assignment, Week Two may involve reading to make notes and summaries. By the end of Week Two, you may have half your summaries complete, allowing you to finish them in Week Three. During these weeks, you may also begin to develop a firmer idea of your argument or point of view in response to the assignment topic.

At the start of Week Four, you may be in a good position to write an introductory paragraph, a Conclusion, as well as construct a Reference List. The last few days before you submit it may give you time to check spelling and grammar as well as get someone you know to read it through to ensure that it is understood by someone independent. The next section provides advice on how to interpret assignment topics.

Interpreting the Topic

- In order to get good grades, you must be able to interpret an essay topic accurately.
- You also need to stay on track – essay writers often waste words on background or side issues instead of directing their entire essay to answering the question.
- There are 3 things you need to look for when interpreting an essay topic:

Command	- tells you what to do
Topic	- the general area of discussion
Focus	- the specific area of discussion

Universities *should not be* run like businesses. **Discuss**

topic focus topic command

For this essay topic, the general area of discussion is universities being run like businesses. The specific area of discussion is whether or not it is OK for universities to be run like businesses. The command word "discuss" means that you are to "investigate and present the different aspects of a problem or subject and come to some conclusion."

- You can also turn the statement into a question. This sometimes makes the topic easier to understand.

  Should universities be run like businesses?

All you need to remember when writing your essay is to answer the essay question directly.

- A list of the most commonly used command words or instructions and their meanings is presented on the next page.

  Essays are one of the hardest assignment tasks to get a handle on. They require more than presenting what has happened in a field of work. Typically, they involve you constructing a debate around the different arguments in favour of or not in favour of a particular issue. It is often a good idea to imagine yourself as a lawyer when thinking about how you are going to write your essay. As a lawyer, you have to be able to persuade and convince the jury of your point of view, while also acknowledging the opposition's arguments, but then downplaying them in some way by mentioning their weaknesses or disadvantages. By highlighting the weaknesses in arguments that oppose your point of view, this functions to strengthen the merits of your argument. It is always good to be aware of alternative views, interpretations, and evidence surrounding an assignment topic and to acknowledge them in your assignment. However, this does not necessarily mean that you have to agree with these views. At least, by mentioning them you show the marker that you have read widely, you are well informed on the issue, and you are not biased in your position.

Common Key Task Words in Assignments

Account for:	To give reasons, explain why something has happened.
Analyse:	To break the subject up into its main ideas, and evaluate them.
Assess:	To judge the value of a subject critically.
Comment on:	To discuss, explain, and give your opinion on the ideas expressed.
Compare:	To show the similarities and differences between two or more subjects.
Criticise:	To make your judgement about the views expressed and support your judgement with evidence.

Define: To give the meaning of a word term, distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes by examples and illustrations.

Describe: To give a detailed account of the characteristics of a subject.

Discuss: To investigate and present the different aspects of a problem or subject and come to some conclusion.

Evaluate: To appraise or estimate the worth of something, to some extent an explained personal opinion.

Examine: To inquire into, and consider a problem carefully.

Explain: To account for a subject's character, causes, results, implications, etc., by clearly stating and interpreting the relevant details.

Generate: To propose new ideas or new interpretations of available subjects.

Hypothesise: To propose a supposition which can be used as a basis for testing conclusions.

Illustrate: To explain or clarify a problem using concrete examples, diagrams, or figures.

Integrate: To draw together in a logical related way two or more subjects not previously related.

Interpret: To explain the meaning of something, to make it clear and explicit, and to evaluate it in terms of your own knowledge.

Justify: To provide the reasons for your conclusions or for the statement made in the question.

Outline: To give the main features or general principles of a subject leaving out minor details.

Prove: To show the truth of a statement by argument, experiment, or test.

Relate: To establish the connection between one thing and another.

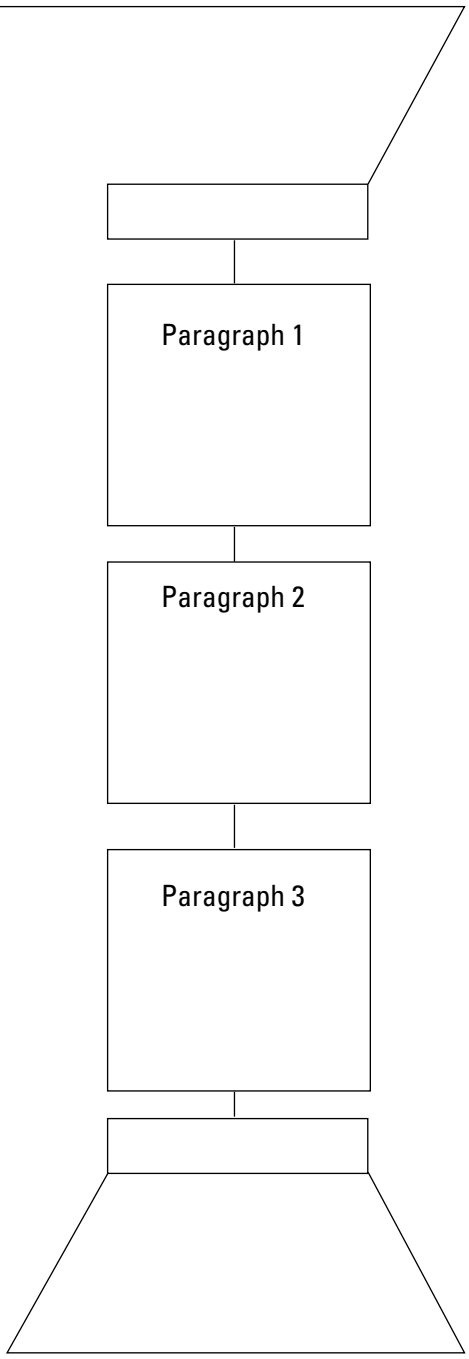
Review: To survey and critically examine a subject.

State: To describe the subject in precise terms, or set down an exact meaning.

Summarise: To make a concise account of the main ideas of a subject or argument, omitting explanatory details and examples.

Essay Structure

All essays share the same basic structure, although they may differ in content and style. The essence of an essay is an opinion, expressed as a thesis statement or proposition, and a logical sequence of arguments and information organised in support of the proposition.



Plans, Introductions and Thesis Statements

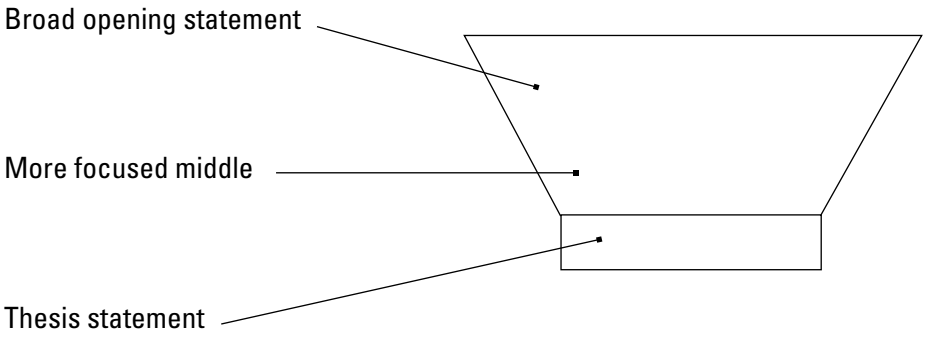
It is really important to plan your essay before you begin writing. Planning will save you time later. It is also essential that you have a starting point to plan from, even if it is in a very rough form. The thesis statement is the obvious place to start from as this is the answer to the essay question. From there you can decide what your essay's subtopics will be and what you want to say about them. After you have a basic idea of what you want to talk about, you can begin to write the essay.

However, when writing an essay, it can also be difficult to come up with a point of view early on, at least until you have surveyed most of the literature. So, instead of developing a thesis statement early on, you may choose to read up on the assignment question and make notes on the relevant concepts, theories, and studies that support different points of view. Once you have been able to make these notes and develop a summary of the issues, you may then be in a far better position to write a thesis statement that accurately summarises the issue and takes into account any divergences in opinion and evidence from the literature.

The notes you have already written will not go to waste because these can be the building blocks for your paragraphs that support your thesis statement. In fact, if you have made really good notes, you may only need a linking sentence between paragraphs to link your argument together in support of your thesis statement. Irrespective of the approach you use, it is important that you have a good structure to your essay. This begins with an introductory paragraph.

Introductions and thesis statements

- An introduction should begin with a broad opening statement that establishes the context of your essay.
- For a thorough introduction, you might want to ask yourself, "Who, What, When, Where, How, and/or Why?"
- It is often useful to think about the literature on the topic and indicate how your contribution is related to what others have written. You can include why the topic is important.
- It is really important that your introduction tells the reader where you will be going, so mention what is going to come up in the essay.
- By the end of the introduction, the focus is narrowed down to the thesis statement. (However, sometimes you may wish to begin your introduction with the thesis statement, or use a rhetorical question instead of a thesis statement.)



Guidelines for writing a thesis statement

Try to state the outcome of your analysis, rather than announcing your intention to investigate, as in the case of "this essay will," "this essay intends to," or "I will" statements.

- Make sure you are very specific.
- Make sure you are very clear.
- A thesis statement is brief, 1-2 sentences only.
- Make sure your claim is realistic so that your essay does not sound ridiculous, or fanciful.
- Ensure your thesis statement has some significance.
- A thesis statement generally does two things: it answers the essay question and provides a reason or explanation for the answer chosen.

Example

Essay topic:	Do the advertisements targeting speeding drivers work?
Thesis:	Although the number of speeding drivers will never be reduced to zero, the advertisements targeting them are having a positive effect because people are taking notice of the gruesome consequences of excessive speed.

Sample introduction

Every teenager is thrilled at the prospect of sitting behind the driver's wheel of a car. At some stage, though, the excitement turns into complacency and bad habits are often formed. Many of these bad habits have little effect on safety. A few, however, such as drunk driving and speeding, are dangerous and a great deal of time and effort is put into getting people out of these habits. Many campaigns, though, are not successful because they are easily ignored. This has not been the case with the campaign against speeding drivers. **Although the number of speeding drivers will never be reduced to zero, the advertisements targeting them are having a positive effect because people are taking notice of the gruesome consequences of excessive speed.**

Paragraphs

In order for your argument to come across clearly, it is essential that your paragraphs are well structured.

- Generally, each paragraph should develop one idea only – referred to as the *controlling idea.* This idea can be summarised in a topic sentence, which may be the first sentence, although it can also be the last sentence of the previous paragraph. The controlling idea should be developed in the rest of the paragraph with relevant factual details, examples, explanations, definitions, or research data.
- Try to ensure that you have n**o less than three sentences** per **paragraph.**
- Sentences within the paragraph should be well linked so connections between them are obvious. Be careful to avoid sentences that may be too long. Ideally, a **sentence** should be **no longer than three lines.**

However, there is no lower limit on how short a sentence should be – as long as there is a subject (e.g. it, the theory, she, Smith) and a verb phrase (run, speak, accept, agree, disagree, have disagreed, will accept), the sentence is complete.

- Paragraphs should be arranged in a logical sequence and should also be well linked.

- Connections can be made **between sentences** and **between paragraphs** by using *signposts* or transitional words and phrases to indicate change, comparison, or agreement.

Highlighting a point

Importantly, …	Indeed, …	In fact, …
More importantly, …	Furthermore, …	Moreover, …
It is also important to highlight…		

Changing direction and creating comparisons

However, …	In contrast, …	Conversely, …
Nevertheless, …	On the contrary, …	Unfortunately, …
Rather, …	On one hand, …	On the other hand, …
Compared to…	In comparison, …	Another perspective holds…

Adding another point

In addition, …	Further, …	Another point to consider is…
Secondly, …	Thirdly, …	Also, …

Adding a similar point

Similarly, …	Likewise, …	Again, …

Summarising

Finally, …	Lastly, …	In conclusion, …
To conclude this…,	To summarise, …	In summary, …
In sum, …	Overall, …	The three main points are…

- Signposts tell the reader
  - What is going to be said, what is being said, and what has been said.
  - How the main ideas support the thesis.
  - How each group of ideas follows from the one before.

- Signposts make your writing flow more smoothly and make it easier to follow.

- More signposts are provided within the section on Techniques for putting authors' ideas in your own words (see page 16).

Example

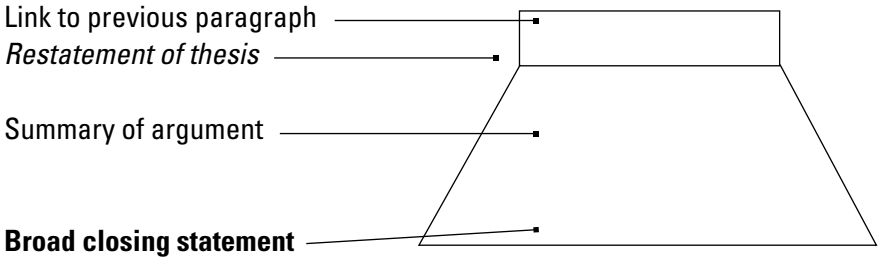
Incorporation offers several advantages to businesses and their owners. **For one thing**, ownership is easy to transfer. The business is able to maintain a continuous existence even when the original owners are no longer involved. **In addition,** the stockholders of a corporation are not held responsible for the business's debts. If the XYZ Corporation defaults on a $1 million loan, **for example**, its investors will not be held responsible for paying that liability. Incorporation also enables a business to obtain professional managers with centralised authority and responsibility; **therefore**, the business can be run more efficiently. **Finally,** incorporation gives a business certain legal rights. **For example,** it can enter into contracts, owning property, and borrowing money.

Conclusions

- Conclusions round off your essay. They remind the reader of all your main points and explain the significance of your argument.

- The concluding paragraph of an essay should include:
  - A narrow statement relating the conclusion to the preceding paragraph.
  - A restatement of the proposition or thesis statement.
  - A brief summary of the main points made in the essay.
  - A final, broad statement on the significance of the argument, and, if appropriate, its implications.

- Your conclusion should not just be a list of the points you have made.



Example
By promoting a caring atmosphere in schools, teachers can reduce the likelihood of bullying. *Above all, teachers need to inform themselves and the rest of the school community so that together they can develop a policy to discourage bullying.* By educating themselves about bullying, teachers and parents have the knowledge to set up effective programmes and structures both within the classroom and for the whole school. Furthermore, by removing the opportunity for children to bully, providing children with a stimulating environment, and giving them the tools to deal with conflict appropriately, teachers can reduce children's inclination to bully. **Although bullying will never be fully eradicated and must be dealt with as soon as it occurs, increasing awareness of the problem is making schools a safer and more enjoyable environment in which children can learn.**

Strategies for Organising Points in Assignments

In understanding how to organise and structure the points you want to make in an assignment, it is worthwhile demonstrating several different patterns to use for an essay, which could easily be adapted for other assignment forms.

Mock essay: Discuss the social effects surrounding an Act of Parliament.

Imagine you have chosen an Act of Parliament and have identified two main effects, with each effect incorporating several other sub-effects. Paragraphs could be structured around one or more sub-effects that comprise a main effect.

Introduction
Introduce effects A and B.

Effect A
1. Sub-effect (1st paragraph in body of assignment)
2. Sub-effect (2nd paragraph)
3. Sub-effect (3rd paragraph)

4. Sub-effect (joined onto 3rd paragraph)

Effect B
1. Sub-effect (4th and 5th paragraphs)
2. Sub-effect (6th paragraph)
3. Sub effect (7th paragraph)

Conclusion
Summarise, and highlight the three main sub-effects, as well as future implications of the Act.

Mock essay: Compare and contrast Smith and Brown's theories about human development.

This question is basically asking you to write about the similarities and differences between two things. Imagine you have read up on both theories, but have found that there are more differences than similarities. Further, within the similarities there are two main features and within the differences there are three main features.

Introduction
Introduce Similarities and Differences

Similarities
Feature A
1. Example from Smith's theory
2. Example from Brown's theory

Feature B
1. Example from Brown's theory
2. Example from Smith's theory
3. Another example from Smith's theory that replicates a part of Brown's theory.

Differences
Feature C
1. Examples of different processes of analysis from each theory.

Feature D
1. Example from Smith's theory that is not provided in Brown's.
2. Reason why Brown's theory does not include the stage in Smith's

Feature E
1. Example from Brown's theory that is not in Smith's.
2. Reason why Smith's theory does not include the stage in Brown's.

Conclusion
Summarise, and highlight overall there are more differences than similarities, which may derive from the structural differences between the theories.

Mock essay: Discuss cross-cultural communication issues in business organisations.

Imagine you have identified four main issues, their associated causes, and potential solutions.

Introduction
Introduce the topic of cross-cultural communication and its influence upon business environments. Then briefly introduce the four main issues surrounding cross-cultural communication to be discussed in the essay.

Issue 1
1. Identify and explain nature of problem or difficulty
2. Outline causal factors
3. Describe two possible solutions and briefly evaluate pros and cons of each solution.

Issue 2
1. Identify and explain nature of problem or difficulty
2. Outline causal factors
3. Describe two possible solutions and briefly evaluate pros and cons of each solution.

Issue 3
1. Identify and explain nature of problem or difficulty
2. Outline causal factors
3. Describe two possible solutions and briefly evaluate pros and cons of each solution.

Issue 4
1. Identify and explain nature of problem or difficulty
2. Outline causal factors
3. Describe two possible solutions and briefly evaluate pros and cons of each solution.

Conclusion

The Process of Revision

- Revising occurs when you have finished your draft. It is a good idea to take reasonable breaks in-between drafts, so you can look at your assignment with fresh eyes.
- Here is a revision checklist for essays, which can be adapted for other assignments.

Key question: Have I answered the question posed by my topic?

Introduction
Is my opening broad and interesting?
Have I followed the funnel shape?
Is my thesis statement clear?

Body
Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
Have I kept to one main idea per paragraph?
Are my ideas fully developed?

Conclusion
Have I summed up my argument effectively?
Is there a clear re-statement of my proposition?
Have I given the essay a sense of completion?

Referencing
Are quotations introduced smoothly?
Are quotations accurate?
Are quotations justified as relevant to the topic?
Is the formatting correct?

Presentation Is my essay professionally presented?

Content
Have I answered all parts of the essay question?
Is there any information in the wrong section?
Do the points I am making agree with each other?

Is there any irrelevant information?
Can I write anything more clearly?
Are the main ideas summed up briefly?

Editing

Editing is a crucial part of the revision process. Editing involves checking your assignment from the paragraph level right down to the word level, and, even, to individual punctuation marks.

Does your writing make sense?

- You must make sure that your sentences say what you meant them to say.
- Write as simply as possible. Try not to make things more complicated than they have to be.

  It has been posited that a high degree of curiosity proved lethal to a feline.
  This can be more simply expressed as……..
  Curiosity killed the cat.

- Make sure that your reader understands the jargon you use.
- Try to avoid clichés (a word or expression that has lost its impact because it has been used too much e.g. avoid clichés like the plague) because they are boring.
- It is best not to clutter your writing with unnecessary words.
- Try to keep your writing as active as possible…….

  The study was conducted by Smith and Jones (1987).
  This could be more simply and directly expressed as…….
  Smith and Jones (1987) conducted the study.

- Aim to vary your sentence length. Try not to use too many, very long or very short sentences.
- Make sure your writing is formal – avoid personal pronouns (I, we, you), unless assignment instructions advise otherwise.
- Do not try to make your writing overly complex by cramming in long or 'scholarly' phrases. **Keep it simple and clear.**

Proofreading

- You must proofread your essay – reading it aloud will help you find errors. You could even tape record yourself as you read and replay the tape to check for sentence and paragraph flow.
- Make sure you take your time when proofreading.
- Check spelling carefully. DO NOT TRUST THE SPELL-CHECKER. It cannot pick up where you have used an incorrect word.

I have a spelling checker,
It came with my PC.
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I cannot sea.

I've run this poem threw it,
I'm sure your please to no,
It's letter perfect in it's weigh,
My checker tolled me sew.

Layout

- Layout is important too. Your assignment should look good for your personal satisfaction, but your marker will be grateful if it is easy to read!

Hints:

- Check that spaces between words and lines are consistent.
- Line spacing should be at least 1.5. You need to leave space for the marker's comments. Hence, it's good to ensure you have a 4cm margin on the left hand side for markers to insert comments. Space also makes your essay easier to read.
- Try not to start a new sentence on a new line, unless it is a new paragraph.
- Mark new paragraphs consistently – preferably, leave a line between each paragraph.
- Make sure that your font size is at least 12 point.
- Ensure that your References page is formatted correctly.

Sample Essay I - 800 words

Question: How can schools make the best use of information technology in the classroom?

Topic – schools' use of information technology in the classroom.
Command – how can
Focus – the best use

Word limit: 800

Analysis: This question requires you to go beyond merely identifying schools' use of information technology in the classroom, in order to develop an argument around how schools can make the best use possible of such technology in the classroom. There may be many uses of information technology in the classroom, and you may wish to acknowledge this in the beginning of the essay. However, the focus of your essay needs to be based on examining and explaining the best usage of information technology. It may be that there are several best methods available. Hence, you could then proceed to explain each of these and how they can be implemented in the classroom. Alternatively, there may be one overall best method amongst a group of very good methods, in which case you will need to highlight why one method is better than the others, and how this method can be implemented in the classroom.

Keywords and phrases which may be useful in searching for information: computers and education, computers in schools, computers in classrooms, internet in classrooms, online technology and education, computer-mediated communication and classrooms, online classrooms, online schools, e-learning.

The following essay includes additional notes in the margin, which identify specific points in the development and structure of the argument, as well as paragraph structure, and APA referencing conventions.

Essay on how schools can make the best use of information technology in the classroom

Education means considerably more than just teaching a student to read, write, and manipulate numbers. Computers, the Internet, and advanced electronic devices are becoming essential in everyday life and have changed the way information is gathered. How this new technology is utilised in the curriculum and managed by teachers will have an important role to play in widening the resource and knowledge base for all students. Technology affects the way teachers teach and students learn. To make the best use of information technology (IT), schools need a workable plan to fully integrate it into all aspects of the curriculum so students are taught how, why and when to use technology to further enhance their learning.

If a school does not have a clear plan of how and why it wishes to implement IT, then it runs the risk of wasting money. In schools today, nearly all classrooms have access to a computer. However, many schools mistake this as incorporating information technology into

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: General lead into the broad topic by indicating the inadequacy of traditional teaching alone.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Narrowing the topic further by affirming the significance of IT for teachers and students.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Information technology is followed with its abbreviated form, i.e. IT, in brackets, indicating to the reader that the next time this phrase is mentioned, it will be abbreviated to IT.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Thesis statement. Notice how the beginning of the sentence is constructed in such a way as to answer the essay question: "To make the best use of information technology (IT), schools need…"

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Topic sentence indicating the paragraph is about how schools need a clear plan for implementing IT. This point follows-up on the first point made in the thesis statement: schools need a workable plan.

the curriculum. School staff need to research what IT is available and what would best serve the school's purpose, not simply purchase the latest equipment. There should be a policy stating how IT is going to assist pupils' development and what teachers want pupils to achieve (Reksten, 2000). Staff members need to be clear about what they want IT to do for them before they can start incorporating it into their lessons.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Example backing up the topic sentence.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Statement about what schools need to do in order to develop a plan.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: A citation from Reksten to provide additional evidence about how to develop a plan for implementing IT in schools.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: A summary sentence, which restates the idea in the topic sentence.

The only way information technology is going to be useful to schools is if all staff members are well-informed and fully supported. It is the principal's responsibility, and should be part of the school's plan, to ensure that all staff are consulted about the changes, and that the change is carefully organised. Some teachers may be resistant, especially if they have not had much experience with computers, so training teachers is essential in implementing IT into the school curriculum. Staff members must feel involved in the process of acquiring technology, and in learning how to operate it, in order for them to increase their confidence in using IT as a curriculum tool. Teachers are only going to be able to incorporate IT into their lessons if they are competent users themselves (Reksten, 2000).

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Another topic sentence. This may be seen to build on the idea of good planning by ensuring staff are well supported and informed about changes.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Backs up the topic sentence by identifying a range of points to be considered.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: The final sentence in the paragraph presents further support for the need to prepare teachers well for change by citing the literature.

In addition, teachers need to be aware that IT within the classroom is extremely flexible, but that they need to plan what purpose IT serves in each lesson. The skills a child learns are the important part of any lesson, and it is the same with technology. IT needs to be used and understood in all subjects in the same way as the ability to read

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: A useful linking word to start a new paragraph, which indicates another relevant point.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: A third topic sentence, which advances the point that teachers need to plan their use of IT in the classroom. More specifically, this topic sentence indicates that the paragraph will serve to support the point made in the thesis statement about fully integrating IT into all aspects of the curriculum, as mentioned in the third sentence.

is necessary for all subjects, and "must be used across the curriculum, in the same way that a pen and pencil are used in most subject areas" (Ager, 2000, p. 15). The best way to plan the use of IT in the classroom is to approach it as simply a learning tool that is more advanced (and more exciting) than the traditional pen and paper.

nbowker 19/1/06 4:05 PM
Comment: Rather than standing alone, the quotation is integrated into the sentence, with appropriate acknowledgement made, by including the author's name and year of publication, the page number, as well as speech marks around the quotation.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: This sentence brings the detail mentioned in the paragraph back to addressing the essay question by focusing on "the best way to…use…IT in the classroom".

It is vitally important for students to be taught the strategies for using IT. Children also need to be fully informed about the capabilities of IT before being asked to use it. Pupils should be aware that the contexts in which they use IT will change, and they need to know what is the appropriate use of IT and what is not. Whilst it is important that children learn to use IT effectively, teachers must emphasise that IT is not always suitable. For example, personal communication is a better option than an email when thanking someone. According to Apter (1968), the danger is that the "computer dehumanises people and inevitably leads them to act like machines themselves" (p. 58). Teachers must make sure they plan to use variety in their lessons. Too much IT instruction may be just as harmful to a child as not enough.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: This topic sentence deals with the final points made in the thesis statement, with respect to teaching students how, why, and when to use technology.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: Another author citation, followed by a quote. Notice that throughout the body of the essay, each paragraph includes one author citation – this is a good formula to use for 100 level papers because throughout each paragraph there is evidence that you have been engaging with the literature when writing the assignment.

The usefulness of IT in the classroom, as with any learning tool, depends on the innovation and imagination of the teacher. It is imperative, though, that the implementation of IT into a school is carefully planned. The current information explosion makes it essential that IT be used extensively within the classroom so

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: This sentence refocuses the essay towards the general theme of how to effectively use IT in the classroom. The sentence acknowledges that the teacher's skills are central to this.

children know how to use IT appropriately and effectively. Teachers must, therefore, be fully informed about what kinds of IT are available and whether or not they are appropriate for classroom use. School boards and teachers must therefore ensure that all staff have a clear plan about what they want their students to achieve through IT. The appropriate incorporation of IT into the classroom will broaden the minds and skills of students, allowing them to be better prepared for further technological advances.

nbowker 15/12/05 8:56 AM
Comment: The final paragraph functions to reaffirm the points made in the body of the essay, which, in turn, support the thesis statement.

References

Ager, R. (2000). *The art of information and communications technology for teachers.* London: David Fulton.
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Reksten, L. E. (2000). *Using technology to increase student learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Sample Essay II – 2000 words

Question: Discuss the extent to which online users alter their identity

Topic – online users alter their identity
Command – discuss
Focus – the extent to which

Analysis: This is quite a difficult question because it is asking you to examine how much people alter their identity online, rather than highlighting the fact that people can change their identity – a potential trap for first-time essay writers. Certainly, it is good at the beginning of the essay, whether in the introduction or the body, to acknowledge that people do alter their identity. However, to actually answer this question, you need to go beyond acknowledging the fact that people do change their identity, and discuss or debate the extent to which this happens and why. It may be that identity alteration occurs in different contexts. For instance, it may be that different groups are more likely to alter their identity than other groups, who do not alter their identity online. Alternatively, some groups may alter their identity to a greater degree than other groups. Answering this essay question requires a thorough analysis and examination of the different variables or factors influencing people's identity construction online.

> Keywords used in searching for information: identity, social identity, alter ego, persona, internet, online, chatrooms, IRC, multi-user dungeons, MUDs, computer-mediated communication.

In writing this essay, notes were constructed in my own words from the ideas in books, book chapters, and journal articles surrounding the topic. These notes were then grouped together according to similar ideas and points of view to create topic units, in which I was not concerned about their size as long as they were distinct. From there, it became possible to identify a position or argument on which to base the essay. The introductory paragraph was then written, with a thesis statement crafted which functioned to summarise the ideas in the essay. At this time, a concluding paragraph was also roughly put together. Then the paragraphs forming the body of the essay were polished up from their rough shape and were checked to ensure that they were in line with the thesis statement. Topic sentences were crafted for paragraphs in the body, along with summary sentences rounding off the paragraphs. Finally, the concluding paragraph was elaborated on from its original form, ensuring that it adequately summarised the whole essay, but also managed to move the essay forward to the future. In total, the essay (excluding the Reference List) came to 1895 words, which fits easily within a 2000 word limit.

Essay on the extent to which online users alter their identity

By Natilene Bowker

The online medium offers many opportunities for people to explore their identity. In particular, text-based communication enables users to present themselves in ways that may not be possible in face-to-face contexts because of the lack of physical appearance cues. Two such online communities, which operate textually, and in real-time, are Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs). IRC offers users access to hundreds of chatrooms on a vast range of topics. Users are identified by their choice of nickname, dissimilar to real life names, in which "users can appear to be, quite literally, whoever they wish" (Reid, 1993, p. 63). MUDs are virtual reality, role-playing environments where users create their own character by selecting a name, a gender including neuter and plural, and a description of their physical appearance (Curtis, 1997). Text-based communication forums offer users unprecedented freedoms for identity alteration through the anonymity of the online medium, which enables users to break free from social norms. However, online users' capacity to alter their identity is also constrained by gender norms, including gender socialisation differences in risk-taking online.

Research has reported the unprecedented freedom of identity exploration online. Turkle's (1995) observations on MUDs identified how role-playing allows users to explore various aspects of their identity, as well as the capacity to take on other identities. This included opportunities to explore a wider range of roles than those

nbowker 20/10/05 3:40 PM
Comment: Very general opening sentence about the broad topic area.

nbowker 20/10/05 3:43 PM
Comment: Begins narrowing the topic down to a closer focus for this essay. Here, the setting moves from "online" to more specific features, namely, "text-based communication".

nbowker 21/10/05 4:51 PM
Comment: These examples indicate to the reader that the essay question is being addressed within the scope of these kinds of online contexts. Hence, the writer is not having to cover all online contexts.

nbowker 21/10/05 4:53 PM
Comment: The full term followed immediately by the abbreviation is given for each online community. This means that the full term does not need to be repeated in the body of the essay. So, from here on in, IRC and MUDs are used.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:40 PM
Comment: These final two sentences in the introduction present the thesis statement for the essay. Instead of saying, "This essay will argue…", it cuts to the chase. Due to the number of aspects involved, the thesis statement has been broken into two sentences, which summarise two distinct positions.

nbowker 21/10/05 4:55 PM
Comment: Topic sentence for the first paragraph, focusing on the unprecedented freedom of identity exploration online, which was mentioned in the thesis statement.

available in real life, such as experimenting with radically different personae and transcending to a higher power, in addition to adopting multiple characters with different genders simultaneously. Similarly, on IRC users have the ability to take on multiple identities, signified through user nicknames, simultaneously (Reid, 1993). Such activities demonstrate the freedom users have in constructing identities online as the constraints of physical reality are suspended (Calvert, Mahler, Zehnder, Jenkins, & Lee, 2003). This evidence indicates that the capacity for identity alteration online is vast.

nbowker 21/10/05 4:56 PM
Comment: Evidence from a study is presented to back up the topic sentence.

nbowker 21/10/05 4:56 PM
Comment: A second piece of evidence is given.

nbowker 21/10/05 4:58 PM
Comment: A citation from a further author is used to reinforce the idea that the online medium has unprecedented opportunities for identity exploration compared to real life.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:40 PM
Comment: Words in the final sentence link back to the same/similar words used in the essay question: "identity alteration online". This helps to bring the reader back to the essay topic, as the essay has moved from specific examples to reaffirming the essay's first line of argument. This sentence confirms that there are opportunities, which also links back to the first part of the thesis statement.

Underlying users' capacity for identity alteration may be the anonymity of online communication. Researchers have argued that users alter their identity because of the anonymous features of the online medium, in which physical appearance cues are unavailable. This allows users to break free of social norms. For instance, Reid (1993) argues that the anonymity "and therefore invulnerability" (p. 403) surrounding one's real life identity enables users to experiment with gender identity norms online by letting go of their social and cultural inhibitions. Literature exists about men and women masquerading as the opposite gender online (Curtis, 1997; Reid, 1996; Turkle, 1995). Consequently, as Calvert (2002) confirms, the anonymity of online interactions enables participants to freely express themselves in ways that are not as constrained by real world expectations.

nbowker 21/10/05 5:03 PM
Comment: Topic sentence moves to a reason for identity alteration. Hence, this is dealing with the *why* in relation to answering the essay question.

nbowker 21/10/05 5:03 PM
Comment: Whenever authors are introduced into the sentence, the year follows in brackets.

nbowker 21/10/05 5:04 PM
Comment: Whenever a quote is used, a page number is also required.

nbowker 21/10/05 5:06 PM
Comment: A claim is made about the literature, which is then backed up with citations of the literature in brackets. When more than one citation is mentioned, these are added into the brackets after a semi-colon. Note that these references are in alphabetical order.

nbowker 21/10/05 5:07 PM
Comment: Statement at end of paragraph functions to summarise the points made, which also subtly acts to bring the reader back to the broader topic.

Further, the physical distance between IRC participants, combined with the anonymity surrounding users' real life identities, means few consequences exist for acting inappropriately and breaking social norms (Reid, 1993). According to Calvert (2002), the lack of consequences for breaching social norms permits users to explore more about

nbowker 22/10/05 11:26 AM
Comment: Another topic sentence elaborating on the rationale for identity construction online.

themselves, compared to real life. Indeed, the popularity of experimenting with sexual identity on IRC may be indicative of the proportion of adolescent and young adult users able to safely explore their sexuality without the behavioural taboos of real life (Reid). Also, Calvert suggests how assuming other identities online may offer users, particularly adolescents who are less popular in real life, the chance to gain social importance. Hence, removing the rigid identity boundaries of such factors as age, ethnicity, and gender, which circumscribe behaviour offline, enables the reconstruction of identity online, where the only limits are those created by the users (Reid).

nbowker 22/10/05 11:18 AM
Comment: As Reid has already been mentioned in the paragraph, further references to Reid do not need a year, likewise for Calvert.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:17 AM
Comment: An example is provided demonstrating the benefits of experimenting with identity online for a particular group, and likewise for the following sentence.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:26 AM
Comment: This final sentence rounds off the paragraph by looking at the situation from a broader and more inclusive perspective, which takes into account several variables – age, ethnicity, as well as gender. The word "hence" functions to create an explanation for the events that have occurred.

So far then, the research evidence indicates that text-based communication forums offer users unprecedented freedoms for identity alteration. This is made possible through the anonymity of the online medium, which enables users to break free from social norms constraining offline behaviour. Further, the lack of social consequences for breaking free of social norms, as a result of anonymity in conjunction with the geographic distance between online users, provides additional support for users' identity alteration online.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:28 AM
Comment: This paragraph serves a very specific function – to summarise the evidence presented so far. This brings the reader immediately back to the first part of the thesis statement, mentioned in the introductory paragraph. This summary paragraph is needed because the argument in this essay is complex as it is organised around two very distinct points of view: the unprecedented freedom surrounding identity alteration online, and the gender socialisation constraints influencing identity alteration online.

Nevertheless, while online users have the capacity to alter their identity and interact as other than themselves, Baym (1998) argues that, in reality, many probably create identities consistent with real life. In support of this, Baym points out how online norms develop out of pre-existing norms within contexts external to online environments. For instance, according to Reid (1993), IRC users consistently prefer being identified under

nbowker 22/10/05 11:33 AM
Comment: This sentence turns the essay towards a different path, which contrasts with the preceding argument. "Nevertheless" functions to emphasise this change of direction.

nbowker 19/1/06 4:06 PM
Comment: Including this author's idea serves to provide a justification for users' online behaviour, and, consequently, the proceeding examples, which function to support the influence of offline norms. "In support of this" is a useful phrase to tell the reader that back up for the position follows.

one nickname – which is consistent with identifying under one name in real life contexts – as opposed to multiple nicknames.

Other research reinforces the view that online users may also behave much as they do in real life and conform to identity norms common in face-to-face contexts. For instance, a posting to a discussion group about online personae highlighted equal numbers of participants acted the same as real life versus being different (Turkle, 1997). While MUD users can adopt a character as near or as distant from their real life self (Turkle), with neuter, plural, and hermaphrodite choices available, a number of MUDs have restricted gender to male and female only (Reid, 1996). Similarly, Curtis' (1997) observations from a 12-month longitudinal study of LambdaMOO, a highly populated MUD, indicated gender identity comprised the fewest choices available. Further, even when players identified under a non-traditional gender, other users still requested real life gender identity disclosure. This evidence suggests that despite the opportunities for identity alteration, some online users, at least, are choosing to retain offline identity conventions, which constrains their identity construction.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:38 AM
Comment: Another topic sentence, which summarises the evidence presented in this paragraph.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:41 AM
Comment: Another summary sentence, which rounds the paragraph off by acknowledging that while opportunities are available for identity alteration, online users are also following real life conventions.

Another study, conducted by Danet (1998), also offers further evidence in support of online users conforming to real life identity conventions. Danet's analysis of gender identities chosen on two MUDs (MediaMOO and LambdaMOO), constituting 1055 and 7308 players, revealed that a majority chose male or female, while only a minority adopted unconventional identities encompassing neuter and gender neutral. Further, far fewer players (3% and 4%) chose to create unique gender identities.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:44 AM
Comment: This paragraph is made up of only three sentences – the minimum number of sentences required for a paragraph. It is good to have variation in paragraph length. The first sentence functions to highlight the new evidence contained in the paragraph, and, thus, makes distinct the topic of the paragraph.

Although it was not possible to verify the real life gender identity of the players in Danet's (1998) study, Danet estimated, based on current internet user population statistics recording 70% male and 30% female participation, that many male players were likely to be identifying under a female or unconventional identity. In support of males' likelihood to explore identity boundaries, Reid's (1996) survey results of LambdaMOO showed a majority were male (76.6%). Similarly, Turkle's (1997) observations on the MUD, Habitat, revealed that while there was a 4:1 ratio of male versus female real life participants, the ratio of male to female presenting players was actually 3:1, indicating a greater proportion of males altering their gender identity. This evidence also suggests that while some users' may participate in identity alteration, male users may be more likely to do so than females.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:49 AM
Comment: While the evidence in this paragraph belongs to the study mentioned in the former paragraph, it highlights a different focus of attention: males may be more likely to alter their identity online than females. Consequently, the idea warrants a separate paragraph.

Researchers have proposed several reasons for males altering their gender identity online. For instance, according to Curtis (1997), males are the most common MUD participants, which leads to a lack of female (presenting) players. This scarcity heightens the novelty of interacting with females online, leading real life males to present as female to gain the same attention. Another prominent reason for males' altering their gender identity is to find out what it is like to be treated as a female. Males are also attracted to the fun in deceiving other males and enticing them into sexually explicit interactions by taking on a female gender identity (Curtis).

nbowker 22/10/05 11:54 AM
Comment: This sentence states that authors have presented justification. The next sentence backs this up by naming an author who provides such justification for males' gender identity alteration online.

nbowker 22/10/05 11:51 AM
Comment: This paragraph provides justification for males' identity alteration online.

However, females also alter their gender identity, but typically for a different reason. Due to the proportion of males gender-switching, many females have been required to

nbowker 22/10/05 11:56 AM
Comment: Topic sentence indicates a change in direction in that it acknowledges that females also alter identity online. This is qualified by the fact that they do so for a very different reason.

"prove" their real life gender. Consequently, many females alter their identity from female to neuter, gender-neutral, or male (Curtis, 1997). Similarly, other research indicates that females alter their identity to avoid harassment, including sexual harassment (Turkle, 1995).

nbowker 22/10/05 12:01 PM
Comment: "Other research" is backed up with the citation from Turkle in brackets at the end of the sentence.

Research investigations indicate that when it comes to identity alteration online, it is not a simple case of observing whether or not the behaviour occurs. Rather, researchers also need to consider the reasons for users engaging in identity alteration, to better understand the extent to which online users actually alter their identity. Indeed, the evidence indicates that males and females may alter their gender identity for very different reasons. While males may do so for a range of reasons, including general identity exploration, gaining attention, and deceiving others, the research suggests that females typically do so to avoid harassment. Furthermore, this contrast in reasons may reflect effects of gender socialisation differences in risk-taking behaviours, learnt in real life, face-to-face contexts.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:15 PM
Comment: This paragraph functions to summarise the ideas mentioned to date, which link into the second part of the thesis statement mentioned in the introductory paragraph.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:24 PM
Comment: This part of the sentence works to support the focus in the essay on explaining why users engage in identity alteration online – so that researchers attain a *better understanding* of the events taking place.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:19 PM
Comment: This clause has been specifically constructed to conform to the essay question – notice the overlap in phrasing in terms of "the extent to which online users [actually] alter their identity". This helps demonstrate to the reader that the essay question has been addressed.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:25 PM
Comment: This end sentence moves the focus forward by suggesting further justification, through theoretical evidence, to support the second position in the thesis statement.

In support of gender socialisation differences in risk-taking behaviour, underlying gender socialisation theory is the notion that males learn to engage in risk-taking activities by extending behavioural boundaries. In contrast, females learn to stay within appropriate behavioural conventions, maintaining their safety (Spender, 1995). The disorientation surrounding the adoption of masculine identities by real life females, evident in Bruckman (1996) and Reid's (1996) gender-switching encounter, in contrast to the liberation from the restrictions of gender appropriate behaviour experienced by a

male when gender-switching (Reid), together, may provide some support for the influence of gender socialisation differences in risk-taking online.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:51 PM
Comment: This paragraph functions to provide the link between gender socialisation differences in risk-taking between males and females off line, and males and females' risk-taking in identity alteration online.

Further, the anonymity created by textual communication forums online provides a protective mechanism, reducing social risk. If social errors occur, players can easily log on as another character without redress. Hence, the shield of anonymity relieves players of any accountability for their actions, eliminating the physical consequences of irresponsible and offensive acts (Curtis, 1997). Subsequently, it is argued that those more likely to engage in risk-taking, namely males (Coet & McDermott, 1979), may also be more likely to utilise online environments for identity exploration, including identity alteration, compared to females.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:28 PM
Comment: While this evidence repeats and elaborates earlier evidence mentioned in the first part of the essay supporting the first argument, it also functions here to support the second argument in the thesis statement.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:29 PM
Comment: This citation backs up the statement that males are more likely to engage in risk-taking.

Indeed, the evidence indicates that while males and females may alter their identity online, they do so to different extents. Males engage in identity alteration for a variety of reasons, not least of which includes identity exploration. This supports males' predisposition to engage in risk-taking behaviours as a consequence of their gender socialisation. In contrast, females engage in identity alteration to stay safe, by escaping harassment. In support of such normative behaviour practices online, Curtis (1997) argues that although MUD players may create a character vastly different from how they are in reality, many conform to their real life behaviours and personality.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:30 PM
Comment: This paragraph summarises the second argument in the thesis statement.

In conclusion, the extent to which online users alter their identity is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, evidence demonstrates the unprecedented freedom of identity exploration online. The anonymity of online communication forums enables

nbowker 19/1/06 4:06 PM
Comment: This topic sentence introduces the concluding paragraph. It manages to bring together the different points of view by highlighting the fact that it is a complex situation.

users to break free of social norms because of the lack of physical appearance cues, which may constrain behaviour in face-to-face contexts. Secondly, the physical distance between users, in conjunction with the anonymous nature of the online medium, means there are few social consequences for breaching social conventions, which offers further support for users to freely engage in identity alteration online. Yet, despite freedom from the constraints of social norms governing online behaviour, leading to increased opportunities for identity alteration online compared to real life, the extent to which online users freely alter their identity may be influenced by the reproduction of gender socialisation norms. Indeed, the literature suggests that males and females' identity alteration may be linked to their gender socialisation differences in risk-taking, leading males to be more likely to take risks in exploring their identity online. This finding has implications for research into cyberpsychology, in which gender socialisation differences may influence other behaviours of online users, beyond just identity alteration.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:32 PM
Comment: These sentences summarise the first argument in the thesis statement.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:32 PM
Comment: These sentences summarise the second argument in the thesis statement.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:34 PM
Comment: This last sentence works to bring the essay forward beyond the immediate essay context to consider the implications within a broader topic setting, namely, cyberpsychology. This movement forward from addressing the essay question is achieved without raising any new evidence.

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Bruckman, A. S. (1996). Gender swapping on the internet. In P. Ludlow (Ed.), *High noon on the electronic frontier: Conceptual issues in cyberspace* (pp. 317-325). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Calvert, S. L. (2002). Identity construction on the Internet. In S. L. Calvert, A. B. Jordan, & R.R. Cocking (Eds.), *Children in the digital age* (pp. 57-70). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Calvert, S. L., Mahler, B. A., Zehnder, S. M., Jenkins, A., & Lee, M. S. (2003). Gender differences in preadolescent children's online interactions: Symbolic modes of self-presentation and self-expression. *Journal of Applied Development Psychology, 24*, 627-644.

Coet, L. J., & McDermott, P. J. (1979). Sex, instructional set, and group make-up: Organismic and situational factors influencing risk-taking. *Psychological Reports, 44*(3), 1283-1294.

Curtis, P. (1997). Mudding: Social Phenomena in text-based virtual realities. In S. Keisler (Eds.), *Culture of the Internet* (pp. 121-142). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:45 PM
Comment: Notice that book chapters make up a significant proportion of the references. There is much less to read in a book chapter versus a whole book.

nbowker 19/1/06 4:08 PM
Comment: Within the references, two more recent (at the time this book was printed) publications have been sourced, which indicates that up-to-date ideas have been found.

Danet, B. (1998). Text as mask: Gender, play, and performance on the Internet. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated communication and community* (pp. 129-158). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Spender, D. (1995). *Nattering on the net: Women, power and cyberspace.* Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press.

Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the internet.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Turkle, S. (1997). Constructions and reconstructions of self in virtual reality: Playing in MUDs. In S. Kiesler (Ed.), *Culture of the internet* (pp. 143-155). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

nbowker 22/10/05 12:44 PM

Comment: Interestingly, while the essay topic focuses on the online medium, no references present online documents. Rather, they have all be sourced from traditional hard copy sources – which may add credibility to the research for the essay because the ideas identified have been peer-reviewed, which is not always the case with online sources.

Reports

Basic Report Writing

What Is a Report?

A report is a specific form of writing that is organised around concisely identifying and examining issues, events, or findings that have happened in a physical sense, such as events that have occurred within an organisation, or findings from a research investigation. These events can also pertain to events or issues that have been presented within a body of literature. The key to report writing is informing the reader simply and objectively about all relevant issues. There are three features that, together, characterise report writing at a very basic level: a pre-defined structure, independent sections, and reaching unbiased conclusions.

Having a Pre-Defined Structure

At a very basic level, a report can be distinguished from an essay by the creation of headings into which information is organised. Broadly, these headings may indicate sections within a report, such as an Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion. Within the main section(s) making up the body of the report (the Discussion in the example just given), there is often an opportunity to create your own structure according to the literature you have sourced, your development of ideas, and the task assigned. An example of a report structure is presented below. Two versions are provided in which the first version indicates main sections and sub-sections through indenting, and the second does so through a numbering system.

You may find that the headings provide a link between sections, without the necessity of a linking sentence, although including a linking sentence from time-to-time may assist the reader's understanding.

Introduction
Discussion
    Technological benefits
        Efficiency
        Access to monitoring
    Technological weaknesses
        Disconnections
        Lack of face-to-face support
Conclusion

1. Introduction
2. Discussion
2.1 Technological benefits
2.1.1 Efficiency
2.1.2 Access to monitoring
2.2 Technological weaknesses
2.2.1 Disconnections
2.2.2 Lack of face-to-face support
3. Conclusion

In the body of the report, the difference between main sections and sub-sections may be indicated through changes in heading font style. You may need to check the assignment instructions to see whether this is appropriate.

Overall, a report is a highly structured piece of work. Typically, the course coordinator or lecturer identifies the main sections required. Hence, you are often given more guidance on how to write the assignment, with respect to its structure, compared to an essay where you decide the order of information in the (essay's) body. While you may have more freedom in structuring an essay, there can also be more difficulties in deciding upon exactly what structure that freedom will take. In contrast, a report provides you with that structure before you begin to answer the question, while still allowing you some flexibility and freedom in deciding on the organisation of sub-sections comprising the report's main sections. The second element of report writing follows.

Having Independent Sections

Each section in a report is typically written as a stand alone piece, so the reader can selectively identify the report sections they are interested in, rather than reading the whole report through in one go from start to finish. It is important to keep this in mind when writing the report because your marker may in fact follow this practice when marking the actual report. Consequently, the marker may go through all the Introduction sections of students' assignments first, select a mark for that section, then proceed to all the Discussion sections and select a mark, and so forth. Hence, if you have not written each section as an independent unit, you may lose marks because you have missed information that may be in another section. This process of creating distinct units may lead to some instances of overlap in information across sections. This is often the case with reports. Avoiding these overlaps of information may require a restructuring of the order and themes within which the information is categorised.

Reaching Unbiased Conclusions

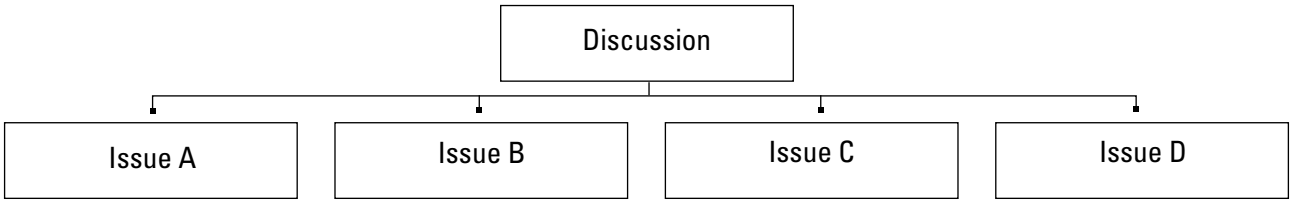
A third element of report writing is that it is an unbiased and objective form of writing. Certainly, all academic writing holds to this ideal, including essays. However, while essays put forward a particular position or argument at the very beginning, summarised in the thesis statement and then backed up in the body, a report's focus is slightly different. It sways more towards the process of identifying and overviewing the range of issues in the body of the report, and then reaching an objective conclusion or position at the end, as a consequence of the issues represented in the report's body. Of course, you can always have in mind a particular point of view when you begin your report, but try to give the impression that you have come to your conclusion via an objective and methodical review of the issues involved. The Introduction section of the report may force you to summarise the report's findings briefly, perhaps by drawing on the sub-headings within the report's body. Nevertheless, try to ensure that the conclusion is the space where you give emphasis to your findings and the decision(s) you have arrived at after a careful analysis of all the issues. Indeed, it should be clear to the reader that your conclusion is reasoned logically from the discussion of the issues and the evidence you have presented in the body of the report.

Deciding on the Report's Structure

When planning your report, it is often a good idea to select a structure that will most effectively demonstrate your organisation and examination of relevant issues. What follows is an illustration of different structural formats to choose from: flat, hierarchical, general-specific, and relationship-oriented structures.

Flat Structure

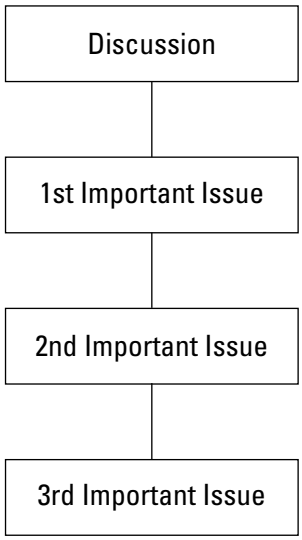
This involves organising issues of relatively equal importance, or when there is no need to consider how issues appear in relation to other issues in terms of whether they are more or less important.



Discussion
Issue A
Issue B
Issue C
Issue D

Hierarchical Structure

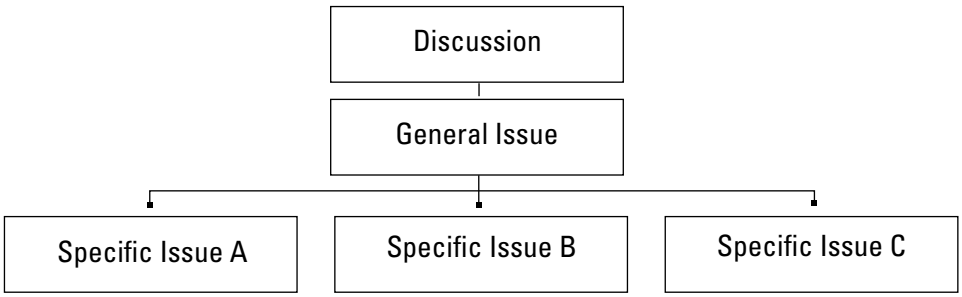
This is organised around issues in order of rank or importance, with the most significant issue first.



Discussion
Ist Important Issue
2nd Important Issue
3rd Important Issue

General – Specific Structure

In this structural pattern, a general issue is divided into several specific issues.

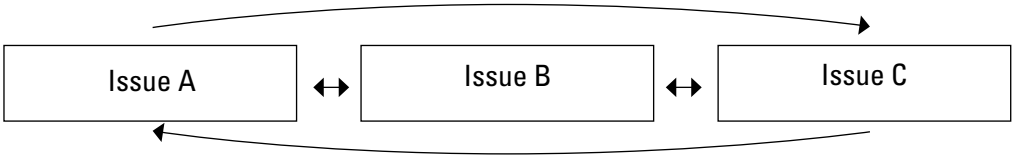


Discussion
General Issue
Specific Issue A
Specific Issue B
Specific Issue C

Relationship Structures

In this type of structure, each issue is related to another issue. These relationships or intersections comprise important components in the structure.

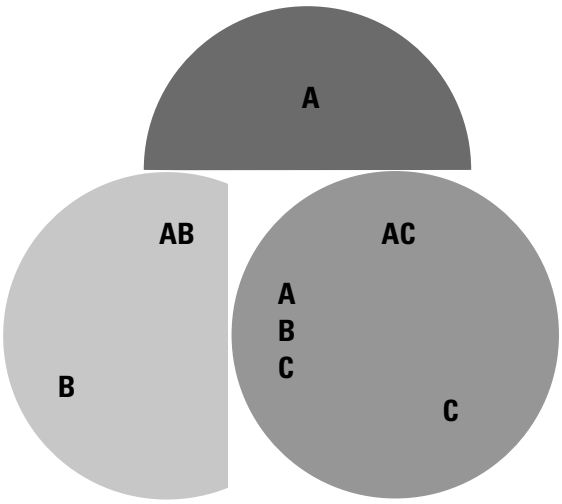
Relationship Structure A



Discussion
Main Issues
    Issue A
    Issue B
    Issue C
Relationships
    Relationship between A and B
    Relationship between B and C
    Relationship between C and A

Relationship Structure B

This structure of intersecting circles involves similar connections already identified in the previous structure. In contrast though, this pattern is focused more on the new structures and ideas emerging from the intersection points between two and three components (i.e. A, B, & C), rather than concentrating solely on the interconnections between existing components.



Discussion
Main Issues
    Issue A
    Issue B
    Issue C
New and Emerging Issues
    AB
    AC
    ABC

Techniques for Carrying Out Your Analysis of the Issues

Typically, reports will require you to engage in some kind of analysis of the issues or events that the report is based on. This analysis can vary from quite simple identification and description to a complex comparison of the factors involved as well as an evaluation of the value or effectiveness of particular events, processes, or policies. At a basic level, you may only need to

- identify the issues that are relevant to the report,
- escribe what they comprise or how they work, and
- explain why they are relevant and important, or why you have chosen them from a pool of available issues, or why these issues involve advantages or disadvantages.

Alternatively, you may wish to include a more evaluative focus to your analysis. A common technique, drawn from business studies' approaches to report writing, involves looking at the pros and cons surrounding a particular issue. This approach is conceptualised in terms of SWOT –

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

Each of these headings could form a separate section or a single paragraph within the body of your report's structure. Looking at the issue from different angles, especially pros and cons, will allow a more reflective and objective analysis of the topic. In cases where there are many issues at stake, you may also use SWOT as a method for analysing each individual issue involved in your report.

A similar technique to SWOT analysis has also been developed called Force Field analysis. This particular technique is drawn from a management arena. It identifies the process of comparing the pros and cons before arriving at a decision. Three steps are involved as follows:

- Identifying the driving forces in support of a decision
- Identifying the restraining forces or obstacles against a decision.
- Prioritising the most significant driving and restraining forces that will impact on the decision and writing these up in your report.

A further technique for managing your analysis, which is also drawn from the discipline of management, involves simply addressing the following issues, aspects, or influences in relation to your topic:

- Political
- Economic (or educational)
- Sociological (or social)
- Technological
- Legal
- Environmental

Each of these perspectives could form a single paragraph or a separate section of the body of your report. An easy way to remember these multiple perspectives is by using the acronym

PESTLE. In some cases, you may find that it is more beneficial to select three out of the six perspectives and discuss each of these in depth. Once you have addressed the issues in the body of your report, there may also be a requirement to look at ways to move forward with a particular issue or how to proceed with a particular decision. In such cases, considering the implications for the future or recommendations may be relevant.

Developing a Report Writing Style

With report writing, in particular, it is important that you present your points to the reader as efficiently as possible in the word space allowed. Often, a report can be assigned to a context involving several different kinds of issues, or a particularly complex issue, which needs to be broken down into smaller issues, or a combination of these two contexts. Therefore, if you are concise, yet direct and also detailed enough to demonstrate your level of understanding and evaluation, you will be more likely to cover a greater number of issues. While this seems an obvious point about the benefits of conciseness in your writing, it is very easy to lose sight of this when you are in the process of examining the issues. What follows is a list of points to help you to write concisely.

Tips on Being Concise in Your Writing

1. Get straight to the point in the first sentence

   The first issue is…/involves…/relates to…/ is organised around…
   A second issue focuses on…
   The … context presents another relevant issue because...

2. Explain the point more simply

   At the present time = Presently…
   In spite of the fact that = Although…
   In the event that = If…
   Portfolios can be developed **so as** to consider other options.. = Portfolios can be developed to consider other options…

3. Consider whether a phrase adds new meaning to the sentence?

   The point is that… – Just state the point without the build up.

   All things considered, the factors are… – It is assumed by your reader that you will have considered all the points in coming to your conclusion.

   As a matter of fact… – In a very general sense, it is often assumed in academic writing that you are dealing with factual evidence, so there may be no need to assert something as a fact.

   In a very real sense… – To an extent, everything can be real or you would not be writing about it.

4. Avoid **qualifying words** which are redundant. The following examples highlight the redundant words and phrases.

   Either **and**/or both… = either or both…
   Each **and every…**
   One and the same
   Equal to **one another**
   Exactly the same
   The **end** result = The result
   Earlier **in time**
   Past records
   Look back in retrospect = in retrospect
   Real truth
   True facts
   Established fact = fact
   Actual experience
   Past experience = experience
   Helpful assistance
   Perfect ideal
   Estimated **at about**
   Rough estimate
   Cost **the sum of…**= cost…
   Sum total
   Sufficient **enough**

The concept is important, **but, however** it is not crucial… = The concept is important, but it is not crucial…;
The concept is important, however it is not crucial…
Combine **together**
Separate **out**
Suddenly collapse = collapse
Continue **to remain**
Close proximity
Random chance
Inner feelings
I, **personally,** … = I…
My **personal** opinion
Consensus of **opinion**
Unexpected surprise = surprise
Unsolved mystery

New Zealand ATM **machines** have been in existence since…= New Zealand ATMs have been in existence since…
HIV **virus** is increasing exponentially. = HIV is increasing exponentially.

Tips on Being Objective in Your Writing

As well as being concise, it is also important to be objective in writing reports. Here are three strategies you can use to develop an objective writing style.

1. Express ideas accurately by including some sense of precision, which can be achieved by quantifying something or expressing it in measurement terms, as follows:

   a lot – a high proportion; a large proportion
   quite a few – five to six approximately
   a long time – three hours

2. Central to being objective in your writing is eliminating exaggeration and words for dramatic effect. The following examples highlight the words that may not be useful in your writing.

   It is extremely important to…
   Absolutely complete
   Absolutely essential
   Completely destroy
   Completely fill
   Over exaggerate
   Very unique
   Severely tormented
   Really effective

3. Refer to actions independently of yourself. This helps frame your writing within a more formal and distant context, incorporating an impersonal tone. So, instead of saying "I argue", "I recommend", or "I suggest", to position your work from an objective and independent stance, refer to the following:

   It is argued that…
   It can be argued…
   It is recommended that…
   It is suggested that…

However, in cases where you are referring to published authors, then it can be effective to present the author as the subject of the sentence as in the following examples:

Smith and Jones (2003) argue…
Hills (1987) recommends…
Abberley and Thompson (1976) suggest…

While you are referring to people in such instances, you are still referring to people independent of yourself. Moreover, they are people who have had their ideas scrutinised through a peer-review process, leading to academic publication.

Example of a Report

Question: Write a report on the extent to which online users alter their identity

Length: 2000 words

This assignment question is virtually the same as the essay question provided for the 2000 word mock essay on "discuss the extent to which online users alter their identity." Consequently, it follows the same process of searching for literature and analysing the assignment question. It also contains the same information and evidence. However, the main difference is the work of reconstructing the essay into a report format and style. This change is most clearly evident from the use of headings to signify distinct sections, as follows:

1. Introduction

2. Discussion

    2.1 Possibilities for altering identity online

        2.1.1 Anonymity of the medium

        2.1.2 Lack of social consequences

    2.2 Constraints on altering identity online

        2.2.1 Conforming to real life identity norms

        2.2.2 Gender differences

            2.2.2.1 Gender socialisation differences in risk-taking

3. Conclusion

In developing section headings, it was necessary to have a well-thought out structure, which allowed for main sections as well as specific sub-sections within this, and when required, sub-sections within sub-sections, as evident in 2.2.2.1. It was also important to phrase topic sentences effectively so they clearly and directly addressed the report's purpose, without the need to necessarily link back with the previous sentence.

In total, the report comes to 2026 words, which fits broadly within the margins of a 2000 word assignment, even though it is 26 words over the limit. Generally, it is acceptable to go over or under by 10% of the word limit. However, CHECK WITH THE ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS OR COURSE CO-ORDINATOR ABOUT THIS as some

choose to create their own rules. In contrast to the report's 2026 words, the essay came to 1895 words. The difference may occur because in defining each new section in the report, an additional sentence or two was required to establish and introduce the new sub-topic. While the content of the report repeats the content of the essay, specific sections, namely the introduction and conclusion, have been moulded to comply with the conventions of a report. Nevertheless, overall the information is the same. Therefore, if you want to find out how to effectively answer the assignment question, see the notes attached to the essay.

1. Introduction

This report examines the extent to which online users alter their identity. It draws on evidence from two online communities, which operate textually and in real time, namely, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs). IRC offers users access to hundreds of chatrooms on a vast range of topics. On IRC, users are identified by their choice of nickname, dissimilar to real life names, in which "users can appear to be, quite literally, whoever they wish" (Reid, 1993, p. 63). In contrast, MUDs are virtual reality, role-playing environments where users create their own character by selecting a name, a gender including neuter and plural, and a description of their physical appearance (Curtis, 1997). The findings from this report demonstrate that while there are many possibilities for altering identity online, due to the anonymity of the medium and the lack of social consequences, definite constraints exist. These constraints pertain to the practice of conforming to offline identity norms. Gender differences, especially gender socialisation differences in risk-taking, also influence users' capacity to alter their identity online.

nbowker 12/1/06 11:46 AM
Comment: The purpose of the report is made clear in the first sentence, as evident in the direct statement, "This report examines…"

nbowker 12/1/06 11:45 AM
Comment: Relevant background details about the two pieces of evidence used to address the report's purpose are offered. These details include an introduction to the communities, including distinguishing characteristics and features relevant to the report's focus.

nbowker 12/1/06 11:51 AM
Comment: A summary statement of the report's findings is presented, as evident in the direct phrase, "The findings from this report demonstrate…". Further major details pertaining to the report's findings are also summarised. Note here that it is much easier to write the Introduction section after the rest of the report is complete and you have summarised your findings in the Conclusion section.

2. Discussion

2.1 Possibilities for altering identity online

The online medium offers many possibilities for people to explore their identity. In particular, text-based communication enables users to present themselves in ways that may not be possible in face-to-face contexts. Indeed, research has reported the unprecedented freedom of identity exploration online within online communities that operate textually. Turkle's (1995) observations on MUDs identified how role-playing

nbowker 12/1/06 11:53 AM
Comment: This heading is broad enough to incorporate the sub-section topics covered under 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

nbowker 12/1/06 12:39 PM
Comment: You may notice that these sentences were actually used to begin the introductory paragraph of the essay. Similarly, in the report, they also function to introduce, but in this case, they introduce the first main section within the discussion, by leading from the general topic of possibilities for identity alteration online to specific examples from the literature. This, in itself, creates a convenient context for moving into the more specific issues addressed in 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

allows users to explore various aspects of their identity, as well as the capacity to take on other identities. This included opportunities to explore a wider range of roles than those available in real life, such as experimenting with radically different personae and transcending to a higher power, in addition to adopting multiple characters with different genders simultaneously. Similarly, on IRC users have the ability to take on multiple identities, signified through user nicknames, simultaneously (Reid, 1993). Such activities demonstrate the freedom users have in constructing identities online as the constraints of physical reality are suspended (Calvert, Mahler, Zehnder, Jenkins, & Lee, 2003). This evidence indicates that the capacity for identity alteration online is vast.

nbowker 12/1/06 12:40 PM
Comment: The remainder of this paragraph is the same as the second paragraph in the essay.

2.1.1 Anonymity of the medium

Underlying users' capacity for identity alteration may be the anonymity of online communication. Researchers have argued that users alter their identity because of the anonymous features of the online medium, in which physical appearance cues are unavailable. This allows users to break free of social norms. For instance, Reid (1993) argues that the anonymity "and therefore invulnerability" (p. 403) surrounding one's real life identity enables users to experiment with gender identity norms online by letting go of their social and cultural inhibitions. Literature exists about men and women masquerading as the opposite gender online (Curtis, 1997; Reid, 1996; Turkle, 1995). Consequently, as Calvert (2002) confirms, the anonymity of online interactions enables participants to freely express themselves in ways that are not as constrained by real world expectations. Hence, removing the rigid identity boundaries of such factors as age, ethnicity, and gender, which circumscribe behaviour offline, enables the

nbowker 19/1/06 4:09 PM
Comment: Topic sentence repeats the key word in the sub-section heading, "anonymity". Conveniently, the topic sentence manages to move from the broad topic of identity alteration to a possible reason for this behaviour brought about through the online medium – anonymity. This also functions to provide a link between the focus of the previous paragraph and the more specific focus of the current one. In this sense, although there is no linking sentence between paragraphs, this function can be carried out within the first sentence of a new section, even after the new sub-section heading is made available.

reconstruction of identity online, where the only limits are those created by the users (Reid, 1993).

nbowker 12/1/06 1:36 PM
Comment: Although the paragraph could have ended on the previous sentence, this sentence does function to round-off the paragraph effectively, while also gently moving the focus beyond anonymity towards a broader focus on identity (re)construction.

2.1.2 Lack of social consequences

Another relevant factor influencing users' capacity to alter their identity online is the lack of social consequences. Indeed, the physical distance between IRC participants, combined with the anonymity surrounding users' real life identities, means few consequences exist for acting inappropriately and breaking social norms (Reid, 1993). According to Calvert (2002), the lack of consequences for breaching social norms permits users to explore more about themselves, compared to real life. Following this line of argument then, the popularity of experimenting with sexual identity on IRC may be indicative of the proportion of adolescent and young adult users able to safely explore their sexuality without the behavioural taboos of real life (Reid).

nbowker 12/1/06 1:37 PM
Comment: This topic sentence clearly states the introduction of a further factor to be discussed in relation to the report's topic.

nbowker 12/1/06 1:40 PM
Comment: You will notice the lack of linking sentences between sections. This is because the headings provide the reader with a brief idea of the next topic, without having to read the topic sentence or entire paragraph.

2.2 Constraints on altering identity online

In addition to the unprecedented freedom online enabling users to alter their identity, the literature indicates a number of constraints limiting users' very ability to explore their identity online. These constraints are organised around conforming to real life identity norms, and gender differences. Central to gender differences are gender socialisation differences in risk-taking.

nbowker 12/1/06 1:48 PM
Comment: Interestingly, while there are no apparent linking sentences, this paragraph functions to deal with the change from focusing on the freedom surrounding identity construction online to the constraints, as indicated in the first sentence. The reader already knows about the change in direction from the topic heading – constraints on altering identity. The last two sentences are based on the sub-section headings, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.2.1.

2.2.1 Conforming to real life identity norms

While online users have the capacity to alter their identity and interact as other than themselves, Baym (1998) argues that, in reality, many probably create identities

consistent with real life. In support of this, Baym points out how online norms develop out of pre-existing norms within contexts external to online environments. For instance, according to Reid (1993), IRC users consistently prefer being identified under one nickname – which is consistent with identifying under one name in real life contexts – as opposed to multiple nicknames. Similarly, based on his 12-month observations of MUDs, Curtis' (1997) states that although MUD players may create a character vastly different from how they are in reality, many conform to their real life behaviours and personality.

Other research reinforces the view that online users may behave much as they do in real life and conform to identity norms common in face-to-face contexts. For instance, a posting to a discussion group about online personae highlighted equal numbers of participants acted the same as real life versus being different (Turkle, 1997). While MUD users can adopt a character as near or as distant from their real life self (Turkle), with neuter, plural, and hermaphrodite choices available, a number of MUDs have restricted gender to male and female only (Reid, 1996). Similarly, Curtis' (1997) observations from a 12-month longitudinal study of LambdaMOO, a highly populated MUD, indicated gender identity comprised the fewest choices available. Further, even when players identified under a non-traditional gender, other users still requested real life gender identity disclosure. This evidence suggests that despite the opportunities for identity alteration, some users, at least, are choosing to retain offline identity conventions, which constrains their possibilities for identity alteration online.

Another study, conducted by Danet (1998), offers further evidence in support of online users conforming to real life identity conventions. Danet's analysis of gender identities chosen on two MUDs (MediaMOO and LambdaMOO), constituting 1055 and 7308 players, revealed that a majority chose male or female, while only a minority adopted unconventional identities encompassing neuter and gender neutral. Moreover, far fewer players (3% and 4%) chose to create unique gender identities.

nbowker 19/1/06 4:09 PM
Comment: Although this paragraph is relatively short, it still complies with the three sentence minimum rule constituting a paragraph.

2.2.2 Gender differences

Interlinked with users' conformity to real life identity norms, a second factor identified in the literature that constrains the extent to which users alter their identity online relates to gender differences. The influence of gender differences can also be illustrated in Danet's (1998) study, which was described above. Although it was not possible to verify the real life gender identity of the players in Danet's study, he estimated, based on current internet user population statistics recording 70% male and 30% female participation, that many male players were likely to be identifying under a female or unconventional identity. In support of males' likelihood to explore identity boundaries, Reid's (1996) survey results of LambdaMOO showed a majority were male (76.6%). Similarly, Turkle's (1997) observations on the MUD, Habitat, revealed that while there was a 4:1 ratio of male versus female real life participants, the ratio of male to female presenting players was actually 3:1, indicating a greater proportion of males altering their gender identity. This evidence suggests that while some users' may participate in identity alteration, male users may be more likely to do so than females.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:02 PM
Comment: This topic sentence clearly establishes the introduction of a second relevant issue to be included within the discussion of constraining influences on identity alteration online, which is already signalled in the sub-section heading.

Researchers have proposed several reasons for males altering their gender identity online. For instance, according to Curtis (1997), males are the most common MUD participants, which leads to a lack of female (presenting) players. This scarcity heightens the novelty of interacting with females online, leading real life males to present as female to gain the same attention. Another prominent reason for males' altering their gender identity is to find out what it is like to be treated as a female. Males are also attracted to the fun in deceiving other males and enticing them into sexually explicit interactions by taking on a female gender identity (Curtis).

However, females also alter their gender identity, but typically for a different reason. Due to the proportion of males gender-switching, many females have been required to "prove" their real life gender. Consequently, many females alter their identity from female to neuter, gender-neutral, or male (Curtis, 1997). Similarly, other research indicates that females alter their identity to avoid harassment, including sexual harassment (Turkle, 1995).

Therefore, the research indicates that when it comes to identity alteration online, it is not a simple case of observing whether or not the behaviour occurs. Rather, researchers also need to consider the reasons for users engaging in identity alteration, to better understand the extent to which online users actually alter their identity. The evidence indicates that males and females may alter their gender identity for very different reasons. While males may do so for a range of reasons, including general identity exploration, gaining attention, and deceiving others, the research suggests that females typically do so to avoid harassment.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:22 PM
Comment: These two sentences offer some advice on what is at stake when examining identity alteration online. In particular, the second sentence could be seen to actually present some recommendations on the issue for researchers. If the assignment instructions had requested a recommendations section, such as in the case of business reports, it would be best to place this advice within such a section.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:12 PM
Comment: This paragraph functions to summarise the evidence put forward within the gender differences section. It also functions to link this sub-topic back to the overall report topic on examining identity alteration online.

2.2.2.1 Gender socialisation differences in risk-taking

Within the context of gender differences, gender socialisation differences in risk-taking, learnt in real life, face-to-face contexts, may further impact on the extent to which males and females alter their identity online. In support of gender socialisation differences in risk-taking, underlying gender socialisation theory is the notion that males learn to engage in risk-taking activities by extending behavioural boundaries. In contrast, females learn to stay within appropriate behavioural conventions, maintaining their safety (Spender, 1995). Disorientation surrounding the adoption of masculine identities by real life females, evident in Bruckman (1996) and Reid's (1996) gender-switching encounter, in contrast to liberation from the restrictions of gender appropriate behaviour experienced by a male when gender-switching (Reid) may provide support for the existence of gender socialisation differences in risk-taking online.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:24 PM
Comment: This topic sentence introduces a sub-section within gender differences.

Further, the anonymity created by textual communication forums online, which provides a protective mechanism for reducing social risk, may help facilitate opportunities for risk-taking online, thereby offering additional support for males' capacity to alter their identity online more so than females. As Curtis (1997) highlights, if social errors occur, users can easily log on as another character without redress. Hence, as already identified in this discussion with respect to the lack of social consequences, the shield of anonymity relieves users of any accountability for their actions, eliminating the physical consequences of irresponsible and offensive acts. Subsequently, it is argued that those more likely to engage in risk-taking, namely males

(Coet & McDermott, 1979), may also be more likely to utilise online environments for identity exploration, including identity alteration, compared to females.

3. Conclusion

The findings in this report clearly show that the extent to which online users alter their identity is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, evidence demonstrates the unprecedented freedom of identity exploration online. The anonymous features of the online medium made available through the lack of physical appearance cues, combined with the lack of social consequences for one's actions as a result of physical distance and anonymity, lead to vast possibilities for users to alter their identity online.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:33 PM
Comment: This sentence directly affirms that the report does present clear findings. Secondly, the sentence manages to summarise the competing viewpoints, with respect to the liberating versus constraining factors influencing identity alteration online, by referring to the complexity of the situation.

On the other hand, research evidence demonstrates how, despite freedom from the constraints of social norms governing online behaviour, users do engage in practices, which function to constrain their very capacity to take full advantage of the medium to alter their identity. These practices involve users' choice to conform to real life identity norms, such as in the case of preferring one nickname identity, and retaining the male and female gender dichotomy. In addition, there are clear gender differences surrounding users' choices to alter their gender identity. Moreover, the literature suggests that males and females' identity alteration may be linked to their gender socialisation differences in risk-taking, leading males to be more likely to take risks in exploring their identity online compared to females.

nbowker 12/1/06 2:31 PM
Comment: These two paragraphs provide a thorough summary of the competing arguments surrounding identity construction online, which were covered in the body of the report.

The findings in this report may have implications for research within the field of cyberpsychology. In particular, gender socialisation differences per se as well as gender socialisation differences in risk-taking may impact on behaviours of online users, beyond identity alteration. Future research needs to investigate this issue.

nbowker 12/1/06 3:19 PM
Comment: This final paragraph serves an important function of reports – to move the issue forward by introducing a practical application for the outcome. This may include the identification of future implications/recommendations, and/or the need to do further research.

To avoid duplication of information, refer to the essay on the same topic for the list of references used on pages 62-63, which is formatted according to APA conventions.

Basics on Business Report Writing

There are many good resources available on how to write business reports, which are mentioned at the end of this section. Hence, to avoid duplication of information, this section provides a very brief overview of the typical requirements involved in business report writing. It addresses the following topics: purpose of business report writing, typical sections, the difference between inductive and deductive reports, as well as what to include in the main sections. It ends with a list of qualities for an effective business report.

What Is the Purpose of Writing a Business Report?

Business reports are typically assigned to enable you to

- examine available and potential solutions to a problem, situation, or issue
- apply business and management theory to a practical situation
- demonstrate your analytical, reasoning, and evaluation skills in identifying and weighing-up possible solutions and outcomes
- reach conclusions about a problem or issue
- provide recommendations for future action
- show concise and clear communication skills

Remember that with business reports, typically, there is no single correct answer but several solutions, each with their own costs and benefits to an organisation. It is these costs and benefits which you need to identify and weigh-up in your report. Further, when writing the report, you need to consider the audience you are writing for, whether it is the CEO or will the report be available to all staff concerned? Therefore it is vital that you ensure an appropriate level of formality, sensitivity, fairness, and objectivity.

What Are the Typical Sections of a Business Report?

Business reports typically adopt the following sections:

Introduction
Discussion
Conclusions
Recommendations

What Is the Difference between an Inductive and a Deductive Report?

The order of the report sections will depend on whether you are required to write an inductive or deductive report. An inductive report involves moving from the specific issues, as outlined in the discussion, to the more general, summarised information, as displayed in the conclusions and recommendations. The list above provides an example of an inductive report, where the discussion appears first (after the introduction), followed by conclusions and recommendations. Such reports are ideal for an audience who has the time to read the report from cover to cover, and also in instances where the findings may be somewhat controversial, hence, the need to demonstrate your reasoning and evidence, as laid out in the discussion, for the recommendations decided upon. In contrast, a deductive report is one where you move from the general then to the specific. Hence, the conclusions and recommendations appear first, followed by the discussion. This type of order is effective when faced with an audience who does not have time to read the whole document, but can access the conclusions and recommendations. Consequently, such an order is also appropriate for reports which are not contentious or unexpected in their decision outcomes and recommendations.

Managing the Introduction section

This is the first section of the report and is easiest to write after you have written the other report sections, as then you know what your outcomes will be, which you can briefly summarise in the introduction. The purpose of the introduction is to

- State the purpose or aim of the report, which may include who has commissioned it, if relevant.
- Provide background details relevant to the situation, such as a brief overview of historical developments, as well as definitions of any terms that are unlikely to be recognised by the audience.
- Summarise the problems and recommended solutions.
- Clarify any limitations, restrictions, and/or assumptions made in undertaking your investigation of the situation, such as restrictions on time, lack of money, limited access to information and people, and/or assumptions made about the organisation because of the lack of information available.

In general, one page is more than adequate to address the issues typically required in an introduction.

Managing the Discussion section

This section is traditionally allocated the most marks, so it is well worth your investment in time to do it thoroughly. The Discussion section is generally the only section where you are able to support your analysis and reasoning with theoretical ideas, concepts, and models available within the course. Secondly, it is the only place where you can actually provide evidence to back up your conclusions and recommendations. Therefore, ensure that you draw on evidence from the literature, course materials, as well as your own observations from the actual case or organisation, where applicable.

A key task of the discussion is for you to be able to identify the problem(s) and then consider a range of possible solutions. Consequently, it may be useful in preparing this section to identify your conclusions and recommendations first, before proceeding to support these outcomes in the Discussion. Once you have planned the points you need to cover in your Discussion, it is very appropriate to look at creating different sub-sections within the Discussion that encompass and frame each of the issues, with meaningful headings for each sub-section. When writing each sub-section within the Discussion, the following structure may be useful for demonstrating the process you used to carry out your analysis and evaluation.

1. Identify the problem
Example: The problem involves a lack of coordination at top-level management.

2. Identify the causes
*Example:*This is caused by a lack of organisational skills and a lack of assistance from support people.

3. Identify the symptoms
Example: As a result, the department is constantly in a state of flux, with no knowledge of where it should be heading.

4. Identify possible solutions
This can be achieved by explaining advantages and disadvantages of Option A and Option B, which may involve describing short-term and long-term benefits.

Managing the Conclusions section

1.1 This is arranged as a numbered, bulleted-list.
1.2 Arrange each point in order of importance, rather than necessarily in the order found in your Discussion.
1.3 Match each point in sequence with the list of recommendations.
1.4 Each point provides a brief summary of one of the problems outlined in detail in the report.
1.5 Ensure each point links with the report's objectives.
1.6 Write each conclusion in the present tense.
1.7 Each point needs to be specific and clear.

Managing the Recommendations section

1.1 This is also arranged as a numbered, bulleted-list.
1.2 Each recommendation should appear in sequence with the order of points in the list of conclusions.
1.3 Each recommendation should provide a response to each problem identified in the list of conclusions.
1.4 Each recommendation should be action-oriented, concise, and clear.
1.5 Each recommendation should also be realistic and feasible within the social, economic, and political climate.
1.6 Write each recommendation in the future tense, as appropriate.

Qualities of an Effective Business Report

(Sourced from Ruch & Crawford, 1999, p. 40.)

- A management tool, usually assigned, for decision-making.
- Read for business gain, rather than entertainment.
- Provides an accurate way of obtaining information.
- Answers a question or solves a problem.
- Meets the needs of the situation.
- Usually written in a formal style, compared to other types of business writing.
- Reflects good, clear thinking and thorough planning.
- Organises the material in a natural sequence.
- Presents information from the reader's perspective.
- Stresses the value of the report in the title or first paragraph.

Resources on Business Report Writing

Bowden, J. (1997). *Writing a report: A step-by-step guide to effective report writing* (4th ed.). Plymouth, England: How to Books.

Emerson, L. (Ed.). (2005). *Writing guidelines for business students* (3rd ed.). Southbank, Victoria: Thomson Dunmore Press. **See chapter 6 on reports.**

Eunson, B. (1994). *Writing and presenting reports*. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons.

Manalo, E., Wong-Toi, G., & Trafford, J. (2004). T*he business of writing: Written communication skills for business students* (2nd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Longman.
Excellent resource, see chapter 2 on writing reports.

Ruch, W.V., & Crawford, M.L. (1988). *Business reports: Written and oral.* Boston: PWS-Kent.

Websites

There are also useful websites on business report writing, two of which are presented here. They were current at the time of publishing this book.

Skills Unit Pack, University of Surrey. (1999). *Communications: Report writing*. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from http://www.surrey.ac.uk/Skills/pack/report.html

Merchant, S. (2003). *Business report writing.* Technical Vocational Institute, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from http://planet.tvi.cc.nm.us/ba122/Reports/Report%20Writing.htm

Basics on Lab Report Writing

This section offers a brief overview of the traditional requirements involved in writing a lab report, typical for psychology students. However, this section may also have some use to science students who are required to write scientific reports. For more detailed information on lab report writing, a list of useful resources is available at the end of this section.

What Is the Purpose of Writing a Lab Report?

Lab reports are typically assigned to enable you to

- conduct scientific research
- formulate a hypothesis(es) about a particular stimulus, event, and/or behaviour.
- review relevant literature to justify your hypothesis
- allow someone to replicate your study by providing precise details
- apply statistics to test your hypothesis
- explore theoretical explanations
- evaluate research objectively and methodically
- communicate concisely and precisely

Remember that with lab reports, it may be impossible to rely on a single explanation for your findings. Therefore, it is vital that you provide as many potential and relevant interpretations as possible. Even if your findings do not support your hypothesis, they are still valuable because you can then demonstrate that within the contextual constraints of your study, your argument was not reliable, and you can then move on to consider other areas for research, without having to do down the same path. Further, this may open up avenues for others to investigate your hypothesis under different conditions. Nevertheless, there may have been unforeseen circumstances or conditions that were not possible to isolate and control, which you can use to help justify your results.

It is also important to be clear about the voice or grammatical style in which you write your report. For instance, traditionally, lab reports have been written in the passive voice, and used the third person pronoun, as in "The study was conducted by Smith and Jones (1996)" and "It was hypothesised that…". However, more recently, it has become acceptable to use the active voice, as in "Smith and Jones (1996) conducted the study", as well as make reference to yourself where relevant, as in "I hypothesised that…". CHECK YOUR ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS for clarification or CONTACT THE COURSE CO-ORDINATOR. Further, you will also need to ensure a consistency in tense throughout the report, typically, the past tense, except when first referring to your hypothesis in the Introduction, which is likely to require the future tense.

What Are the Typical Sections of a Lab Report?

Lab reports typically adopt the sections listed below, which should appear in a bold font and centred on the page, with the exception of the Introduction, which may or may not follow the other heading formats. Check your assignment instructions for clarification.

Abstract
Introduction
Method
Results
Discussion

Managing the Abstract

The Abstract functions as a short, yet detailed, summary of the whole report. Hence, it is far easier to write at the very end, once you have completed the report. Ideally, you may be able to extract a sentence or two from each main section of the report to build your abstract. In creating your summary, it is important to include a sentence or two about each of the following:

- A statement about the topic, which demonstrates some reasoning for formulating the hypothesis.
- The hypothesis
- Brief details about how the study was conducted, including
  – number of participants.
  – participant characteristics, such as, for example, gender, undergraduate psychology students.
  – how they were recruited, and assigned to experimental conditions where appropriate.
  – any special equipment used to carry out the research.
- The main findings and whether they supported or disconfirmed the hypothesis.
- Identify theoretical explanations for the findings, as well as any major inconsistencies and/or alternative explanations, where word space permits.
- Research avenues for the future or implications of the research.

The Abstract can vary in word length from a minimum of 120 words through to 250 words. However, always check the assignment instructions to be sure of the limit required for your report.

Managing the Introduction section

This is the first main section of the report and may be easiest to write in conjunction with the Discussion section because it is often important to follow-up, in your discussion, on at least one or two of the studies you mentioned in your introduction. The central purpose of the introduction is to justify your hypothesis. However, to begin the Introduction, you need to start back at a more general area of interest that is relevant to your study. From there, you move rapidly into any major theories or models, as well as studies that have been conducted, which relate to the focus of your hypothesis.

When considering what studies to include, it is always useful to mention an original, pioneering study that may have been carried out many years ago, in the 60s or 70s, which led the research path. In some instances, the topic area may be an emerging one, and the original study or several pioneering works may have occurred in more recent times. Then from here, you have a range of options. It may be the case that the research findings in the topic area have been fairly consistent, except for one or two outcomes. In which case, it would probably be helpful to include the inconsistent studies to at least highlight the lack of consistency and hence the need to continue the investigation. In other cases, it may be more difficult, in that there may be a range of studies which all highlight diverse aspects of the study you have conducted. Here, you will need to prioritise which studies are most relevant to the current one – whether it be the particular technique used or the actual findings and type of research question.

From my own experience, as well as those of other students, the Introduction can be one of the most difficult sections of a report to write because it is difficult to develop a sense of direction about where to start and how much to include at the beginning. My best advice is to write the Introduction in pieces by summarising one study at a time, or one theoretical framework at a time. Then return as appropriate to shaping these pieces together to get a sense of the order in which these items can be best placed to most convincingly lead up to the reasoning for your hypothesis. Do not forget to also include definitions of any relevant terms and concepts, including the use of acronyms throughout your report.

In terms of how much word space to allocate to the Introduction, it is probably the second most important section, so assign words accordingly. For a 2000 word lab report, about 500 words would be a fair figure to aim

for, depending on how many words are required to adequately describe the Method and Results sections. If these take substantially less words, you may be able to increase the Introduction accordingly.

Managing the Method section

This is a relatively formulaic section in that there is a clearly marked out structure to follow, namely, three sub-sections: participants, materials or apparatus, procedure.

Participants
In this section, give enough details about the participants so that someone could repeat the study using people with the same characteristics. Hence, you will need to mention the number of participants, their gender, whether they are students, as well as how they were recruited. It's also important to mention whether participants volunteered and whether they were randomly assigned to experimental conditions.

Materials or Apparatus
Here you need to give details about the equipment required to carry out the study. This may include a particular type of technology, in which case you may need a model number and brand name. If you used a paper-pencil survey, which was designed specifically for the study, then you need to provide enough details so that someone could replicate it, if they wanted to repeat the study. In such cases, it may be appropriate to attach a copy of the survey in an Appendix at the end of the report, and give general details in this section, but refer readers to the Appendix for a full copy. If a paper-pencil test is well-known, you may only need to mention its name.

Procedure
In this section, you need to repeat the exact instructions that were given to the participants. If it is important in conducting the study to express instructions to participants using particular words and phrases, then mention these exactly as they were stated in the study. You may also need to include activities and tasks undertaken by the researcher.

The Method section can be the easiest to write because it follows a straight forward structure. Therefore, it is often the best section to start with when writing-up your report.

Managing the Results section

The Results section is often a good section to write-up after the Method because it can provide clarity on the findings, before you embark on thinking about possible explanations for the findings in your Discussion. The results provide the reader with information about what you found. Consequently, one of the key features of the Results section is to ensure that you only mention the findings, and not what they mean in relation to the study.

It may be useful to begin by naming the type of analysis carried out on the data, and if the data had been changed in any way from its raw form before you undertook the analysis. Then mention the difference or lack of difference between groups with respect to the activity they participated in during the study. If relevant, you can express this difference (or lack of) by including each group's score numerically in brackets. This then needs to be backed up with statistical evidence to support the difference (or lack of). In this case, you will need to mention the name of the statistical test using appropriate statistical symbols, such as t, F, M. With each test, include the degrees of freedom, the value of the statistic, and the level of probability. For some tests, you may also need to provide the N value or number of participants. Most importantly, you also need to state whether the difference was "significant" or "not significant".

When you have a lot of data, it may be convenient to display this in a table or graph and then summarise the main features or patterns in words. However, remember not to duplicate information. So, if you have a table with data contained within it, and then go on to repeat much of this data in the form of sentences, the written

expression of the data will be redundant. When using tables, the title appears at the top of the table; when using graphs, the title appears below.

Managing the Discussion section

This section is allocated the most marks, so it is well worth your investment in time to do it thoroughly. You typically begin with a sentence or paragraph, summarising the results, including whether they support or disconfirm the hypothesis. You can then choose to highlight the similarities in findings with the current study and previous ones. It is then relevant to move on to the most challenging part of the Discussion: explaining your findings.

A good proportion of your Discussion should be devoted to explaining, interpreting, and where relevant, justifying your findings. This can involve repeating some of the theoretical frameworks or models mentioned in the Introduction, but with a greater focus towards making sense of the outcomes in the current study. Beyond affirming the theory, you should also consider any alternative explanations for the findings. These may be drawn from studies that presented inconsistent findings with the theory. Additionally, you may also be able to draw on aspects of the study which may have been left to chance, rather than being experimentally controlled.

In the last part of the Discussion, it is beneficial to mention any flaws in the study, such as a lack of diversity amongst participants, sample size, and other characteristics of the sample population. If you can think of other disadvantages associated with the design of the study, this will most certainly add bonus marks. In the final part, before your concluding paragraph, it is a good idea to consider the future application of the findings in some way, and even the need for further investigations to ascertain unexplained aspects of the research outcomes. This particular part can also be included in the concluding paragraph, but will depend on your assignment instructions. In closing the report, finish by reaffirming the findings and their significance to the research area.

Resources on Lab Report Writing

Findlay, B. (2006). *How to write psychology research reports and essays* (4th ed.). Frenchs Forest, New South Wales: Pearson Education. **See chapters 3 and 4 on research reports – how do you start and sections of a research report, respectively.**

Harris, P. (2002). *Designing and reporting experiments in psychology.* Buckingham, England: Open University.

O'Shea, R.P. (2002). *Writing for psychology* (4th ed.). Southbank, Victoria: Thomson Learning Australia. **See chapter 3 on a quick start for reports.**

Smyth, T.R. (2004). *The principles of writing in psychology.* Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan. **See part 5 on quantitative research.**

Rosnow, R.L., & Rosnow, M. (2006). *Writing papers in psychology: A student guide to research reports, literature reviews, proposals, posters, and handouts.* Australia: Thomson/Wadsworth. **See chapter 4 on planning the research report, includes a good section on communicating statistical information.**

Resources on Scientific Report Writing

Emerson, L., & Hampton, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Writing guidelines for science and applied science students* (2nd ed.). Southbank, Victoria: Thomson/Dunmore Press. **See chapter 5 on research reports.**

Eunson, B. (2005). *Communicating in the 21st century for science and technology.* Milton, Queensland: John Wiley & Sons.

Lobban, C. S., & Schefter, M. (1992). *Successful lab reports: A manual for science students.* Cambridge: University Press.

Silyn-Roberts, H. (1996). *Writing for science: A practical handbook for science, engineering and technology students.* Auckland, New Zealand: Addison Wesley Longman. **See section 2 on writing a report.**

Van Emden, J. (2001). *Effective communication for science and technology.* Basingstoke, England: Palgrave.

Websites

There are also useful websites on scientific laboratory reports, two of which are presented here. They were current at the time of publishing this book.

Engineering Communication Centre. (2002). Laboratory reports. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from http://www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/handbook-lab.html

The Trustees of Hamilton College. (2006). Lab reports for biology. Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/resource/wc/bio_lab.html

Critical Thinking

Being Critical

Another defining feature of academic writing is evidence of some critical thinking. Although being critical is one of the most difficult and elusive aspects of academic writing, it is a feature that can gain high rewards. Indeed, critiquing theories, arguments, and evidence often gains significant marks in assignments. It is important to be able to develop some critical thinking skills and to communicate these in your writing.

What Does "Being Critical" Really Mean?

Firstly, I would like to identify some concerns surrounding the practice of being critical.

1. It is common for those beginning their journey into academic writing to take the view that being critical is all about picking out the negative or weak aspects of a process or theory. This may lead to unnecessary feelings of tension when being assigned the task of criticising a system that may have many useful attributes.

2. Secondly, the practice of criticising something that has already been decided upon and implemented may seem futile because of the lack of short and long-term application.

3. Thirdly, being assigned the task of criticising the work of an esteemed author may appear to be an unreasonable demand because of the lack of knowledge and experience encountered by someone entering a discipline for the first time.

4. Finally, the fact that the author has had their work published means that whatever information they have written has already undergone a rigid process of change and evaluation, thereby rendering the student's own criticisms as unnecessary and without substance, or application.

However, all of these criticisms fail to take into account the fundamental purpose of academic writing. The central task of academic writing is to demonstrate to the marker that you have thoroughly engaged with the ideas and interpretations of academic experts. This process is not (always) about reaching a definitive or absolute answer or conclusion to an issue. Rather, it is about joining in a broader academic debate about the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, or strengths and weaknesses surrounding a particular issue. In demonstrating that you have engaged with the literature, using a level of analysis that incorporates some degree of evaluation is an effective method for presenting your engagement with the literature. Being critical is at the heart of this high-powered analysis or evaluation. Indeed, evaluation is a useful way of understanding the work involved in being critical in your writing, even to the point of providing an apt synonym for the word "critical".

In terms of addressing the original criticisms involved in being critical, mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, I would like to respond with the following points.

1. Firstly, even when you agree with a process, in which you are required to carry out some critical analysis on, you can still highlight how it could be improved upon, and in so doing, identify areas of weakness. Furthermore, being critical encompasses not only the identification of weaknesses, but also strengths. Indeed, pointing out the benefits and particular advantages of a system also demonstrates a level of evaluation and critical thinking because you are having to make a judgement about the usefulness of a system. This is likely to involve comparing the strengths of one system with another, thereby, contributing to a more in-depth level of analysis.

2. Secondly, the practice of being critical is about showing the marker that you have read widely and understood different interpretations and points of view, even if there will never be any application of your discussion and findings.

3. Thirdly, despite being a potential novice within a discipline, reading widely and drawing on the criticisms of other authors (with acknowledgement of your sources) will provide you with the skills and knowledge to competently evaluate the workings and ideas of experts.

4. Finally, try not to overestimate the value and certainty of any one theory or point of view, because it is highly unlikely that a single organisation or person can ever totally account for the entire conglomeration of circumstances, positions, and interpretations within their belief system, which has been shaped at a particular point in time.

Included within the practice of being critical, I have already highlighted the concept of evaluation. However, in addition to this, the notions of refutation and justification are also worthy of mention. When you participate in the practice of evaluation, you may also enter the domain of refutation, which is about raising counter-evidence for the purpose of highlighting its weaknesses. This is a powerful strategy in arguing because it shows that you are mindful of the opposition's point of view, but you are also astute enough to evaluate the evidence on its merits, thereby conceding to its strengths as well as confirming weaknesses. In other words, if you provide both sides of a debate, this functions to demonstrate balance and lack of bias, leading to a carefully considered evaluation and outcome. In the process of carrying out this evaluation, you are also working to justify your overall position more persuasively. By presenting counter points of view and then minimising them, your position is strengthened. This whole procedure offers a more solid and thorough analytic foundation on which to base and therefore, justify, your point of view. Consequently, being critical also functions as a means of justifying your overall position and conclusion(s). Ultimately, this practice of being critical offers the marker a scholarly context in which to make an informed opinion.

What is Available for Critique

Nothing goes untouched when it comes to carrying out a critique. For instance, you can start with the very topic addressed by the authors and whether or not it appropriately deals with the concerns and issues that need to be discussed within a wider social, cultural, and/or political context. It may be that the authors have developed their topic of focus from a particular position, which neglects other, more pressing issues. In fact, the authors may have failed to consider an important component because of the potential difficulties surrounding access or measurement. Nevertheless, they still could have negotiated these difficulties or, at least, justified why they chose not to pursue them.

In addition to critiquing the nature of the topic chosen, you can also consider alternative ways of analysing the issue. In particular, the authors may have decided to adopt a quantitative approach to their investigation. This in itself upholds particular beliefs and assumptions, which may function to neglect other ways of understanding an issue. Alternatively, the authors may have chosen a qualitative approach, which may present limitations in areas such as measurement, validity, and reliability, depending on the particular philosophical position you choose to support.

Beyond the method of analysis and topic, you can consider how accurately the data has been interpreted. There may have been broad generalisations which have little bearing on what actually happens in real life. Secondly, alternative explanations could have been drawn from some aspects of the data, yet these were not mentioned by the authors. Thirdly, interpretations may not fit well with the theoretical underpinnings explained at the beginning. Moreover, problems with interpretation may result from poorly designed and inaccurate data collection where potential for misrepresentation and carelessness are high.

The type of argument used to support the author's philosophical position may present another area for critique. For instance, the argument may not be rigorous enough to dissuade you from alternative explanations. Further, you may have identified better arguments in support of the same idea in other readings.

Finally, the type of philosophical approach underlying the work can be made available for critique. In this I mean you can focus on the weaknesses or gaps that the philosophical approach does not address. This can be achieved by identifying the points addressed in other relevant philosophical positions, and then demonstrating how these points are not covered by the author's philosophical approach, followed by the potential outcomes gained if another philosophical approach had been utilised.

Steps for Developing Critical Thought

- Make up a list of the strengths and weaknesses or limitations surrounding a topic.
- Consider the advantages and disadvantages pertaining to an issue.
- Write down the costs and benefits of a solution or outcome.
- Carry out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.
- Carry out a PESTLE (political, economic, sociological, technological, legal, environmental) analysis. For example, consider the political implications at local, national, and international borders; evaluate the economic impact of a system globally and locally; identify the system's effect(s) on society; overview the impact of technological change; highlight the legal consequences nationally and internationally; and identify the issue's environmental impact globally and locally.
- Question…….Is the argument based on factual evidence that can be proven, or is it merely constructed around biased opinion?
- Does the theory come from only one perspective?
- Look at the topic from different angles. Imagine yourself in the role of someone occupying a different social identity (a woman, man, elderly citizen, greenie, artist, activist, chief executive, politician), and ponder the pros and cons surrounding the topic from this other perspective, as well as the gaps in the topic which neglect your needs and concerns.
- What are the issues at stake for the author? What political motivations are involved? Are there political motivations?
- Does the author provide an inclusive range of options?
- Is the evidence convincing?
- Is the theory logically presented? Does the theory explain all of the outcomes and processes?
- How old is the study/investigation/research? Has any other research disproved or disagreed with the conclusions drawn?
- How many participants were included? Were they students? Did participants come from different cultural backgrounds or did they reflect one cultural group? How old were participants? Were there equal numbers of males and females?
- Could another researcher repeat the methods used and have a reasonable chance of getting the same or similar results?
- Are limitations of the research or theory acknowledged?
- Are there competing theories which offer better explanations?
- Are there more effective, more scientific, more reliable, more cultural sensitive, more ecologically valid, or more practical methods that the researchers could have used?

Organising Your Critique

Once you have researched and gathered together relevant points to support your critique, it is timely to give some thought to the way this material will be organised and packaged in your writing. The key at this stage is to consider the most convincing order in which to present your material. For instance, if you have 4 points that support your critique and 3 points that dispute your critique, would it be better to present your supporting points first or last? Here are some suggestions for different ways to order your argument.

Supporting points first followed by opposition's points
The advantage with this strategy is that your points are given primacy, and you begin your argument on a strong footing. This structure also allows you to mention the strength of your point of view twice: once at the beginning, and a second time when you minimise the criticisms against your points, thereby reinforcing the strengths of your own position. The disadvantage of this approach is that you may come across with a weak argument, because you end your writing with a defence of your position against opposing points. Secondly, when mentioning the opposition's points, this may function to in turn undermine your own points, which leads to your argument coming off less persuasively.

Opposition's points first followed by supporting points
Although there may be less opportunity to reinforce the strength of your position twice, your argument may come across more strongly because first mention of your position occurs for the direct purpose of undermining the opposition's point of view. The final information accessed by the reader constitutes the strength of your position.

Individual points debated
In this structure, each point from the opposition is responded to separately. The advantage of this structure is that it removes any back-tracking in details because each for and against issue is dealt with at the same time.

Most central to least central
Within this structure, the focus is on the particular order in which to present each of your supporting points. In this case, the most central of your supporting points is mentioned first. The advantage is that this makes your argument convincing and persuasive from the beginning.

Least central to most central
Within this structure, the focus is on the particular order in which to present each of your supporting points. In this case, the least central of your supporting points is mentioned first. The advantage is that the last point accessed by the reader is the strongest of all the points made. Due to the fact that this is the final piece of information that the reader is likely to receive, such information is likely to remain in the reader's mind for a longer period, which may, therefore, lead to greater recall and greater primacy in the reader's thoughts.

In summary, …

Being critical in your writing is about not just accepting what others argue for and conclude. It is about a carefully considered evaluation. It should be justifiable, that is, you should be able to support your critique with evidence, and it should also be balanced – so you can mention the pros as well as the cons. Often, it is difficult to feel experienced enough to be able to provide a critique of someone's work. A useful tip is to locate a (literature) review of the issue you have to critique and draw on the criticisms mentioned in the review, of course with acknowledgement of your source(s).

An Introduction to Marking Guides

The kinds of marking guides used at university can vary according to discipline, department, and course co-ordinator. Further, the individual preferences of the marker, who may be the course co-ordinator / lecturer, or a postgraduate student who has been given guidance from the course co-ordinator, will have a significant bearing on your grade. Generally, however, the marking criterion for assignments at university is likely to be divided into two broad areas – content and form.

Content is about the quality of the discussion you raise. This includes the depth and coverage of your explanations and descriptions, the type of evidence you use to support your points, and how well you are able to evaluate the issues you have been assigned. In contrast, form relates to technical aspects of writing, such as whether you have followed grammatical rules and correct spelling, and how clearly you have documented your evidence in the body of the assignment and in the Reference List at the back of your assignment. Form also extends to the physical presentation of the assignment, which involves conforming to the instructions given for formatting, such as page margins and word limits.

Here is a broad list of criteria that markers may be looking for in your assignment, which have been adapted from Holmes (1995):

Content
Coverage: Have you carried out all the requirements of the assignment thoroughly?
Relevance: Is what you have written relevant to the requirements of the assignment?
Overall structure: Is the overall structure of your assignment clear?
Understanding: Do you show understanding of the content of the topic selected and relevant concepts for evaluating it?
Use of terms: Do you use technical terms accurately and appropriately?
Clarity of explanation: Are your explanations clear, logical, and understandable?
Reading: Do you show evidence of having read widely in the relevant area?
Critical viewpoint: Can you see flaws in the theories/frameworks used in the topic being discussed?

Form
Written expression: Grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
Documentation: What references have you used to support your ideas? Are they correctly listed at the end and correctly cited in the text of your assignment?
Word limits: Did you keep to the word limit?
Presentation: Is your assignment clearly presented and readable?

Content					
	Rating Scale For Each Criterion				
	Unsatisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Good**	**Very Good**	**Outstanding**
Coverage	1	2	3	4	5
Relevance	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Structure	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding	1	2	3	4	5
Use of terms	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity of explanation	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Critical Viewpoint	1	2	3	4	5

Form					
Written expression	1	2	3	4	5
Documentation	1	2	3	4	5
Word limits	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation	1	2	3	4	5

Here is a different example of a marking schedule available to Massey course coordinators and lecturers. Although this guide is not used by all markers, some may adopt the same or similar evaluation criteria.

Scope of assignment:	50%
Evidence of Reading:	10%
Structure and Organisation:	30%
Presentation:	10%
TOTAL	**100%**

Getting an A on Your Assignment

To get a grade within the A range (A- /A /A+), you need to fulfil more than the necessary requirements to pass. In other words, you need to produce a piece of work that is over and above an accepted standard. Below is a list of details expanding on each of the four marking criterion displayed on the previous page for an acceptable and competently carried out assignment. Such an assignment may receive a grade within the B range (B- / B / B+), however this will very much depend on the style and preferences of individual markers.

Scope of Assignment
You have provided an acceptable interpretation of the topic, which may mean that you have developed a logical response to the assignment task. "Acceptable" is likely to involve a subjective judgement, unique to the individual course requirements and marker preferences. Nevertheless, if your response to the assignment differs from mainstream views, you should still be able to attain a grade of value by ensuring that you have referred to examples, explanations, and research evidence from the literature.

It is also important to ensure that you have covered several different aspects relevant to the topic, and not just one. In particular, a balance in views may be useful here where you have considered and acknowledged different or opposing points of view from different authors. This demonstrates to the reader, who is also your marker, that you have thought widely about the topic and are less likely to take a biased position.

Evidence of Reading
This is entwined with scope in that it expects you to have read and referred to relevant literature, typically in the form of the readings and/or textbook chapters as part of the materials for your course. This criterion also requires you to have accurately constructed a list of references at the end of your assignment, which meets the standards of the referencing convention used in your discipline/course, such as APA, MLA, or Harvard.

Structure
The structure of an assignment relates to how you present your ideas. This covers having a logical sequence in which to order your points, ideally, with each paragraph indicating a separate main point. It also means that you need to create additional structure through an introductory section, which may take the form of a paragraph or a few sentences. Likewise, you should also have an ending section where you summarise your ideas and briefly restate your argument in a few sentences or a whole paragraph.

Finally, structure may also entail clarity in expression. Hence, it is useful to consider explaining definitions and terms where relevant. Remember that while the reader is likely to be knowledgeable in the topic you are writing about, they want to see that you have understood the issues and ideas. So it is often good to imagine yourself writing for your peers, rather than the expert marker, which allows you plenty of room to elaborate and highlight your comprehension of the topic.

Presentation

This is usually allocated the least amount of marks in any assignment. However, it is also an area where you can gain the most marks out of the total allocated for this section because it typically requires you to follow instructions, which, hopefully, have been clearly laid out. It is expected that you will present your work clearly. Ideally, typed printing is easier to read than handwritten assignments. Keep in mind other formatting conventions to follow, like a 4cm margin for the markers comments, and one and a half or double spacing of lines so that it is easier to read, as well as grammar and spelling. Overall, to pass an assignment it is expected that you will have met most of these standards.

Now, to get an A requires you to go that extra mile (or kilometre), beyond a competent and acceptable standard. The following list demonstrates some of the extra features that may be included in an assignment awarded a grade within the A range.

- Integrating additional references beyond those assigned in the course, which are included in your assignment to demonstrate new points, or extend and reinforce other points.

- Including some critical reflection and evaluation of the topic and/or the points used to support your argument.

- Including some original analysis of the issue or integrating the ideas in an original way by, for instance, adopting a broader framework in which to position your points.

- Providing two or three pieces of evidence from the literature to back up all or almost all your points.

- Integrating many points that are relevant to the topic, including sub-themes and further sub-themes and / or points from alternative angles that may not necessarily be mainstream.

Overall, getting a grade within the A range is difficult and involves a lot of hard work.
Nevertheless, achieving a grade close to an A, such as grades within the B range demonstrates that you have also done well to achieve a competent standard, with potential and promise for even greater work in the future.

What follows is a list of some of the common errors made in assignments, which may contribute towards the lowering of a grade.

- Relying too much on quotations and not using your own words to explain others' ideas. Remember, when you explain information in your own words, this demonstrates to the marker that you have clearly understood the topic.

- Providing too little support from your readings and/or textbook to back up your points.

- Covering only a few points related to the topic, rather than the full scope of issues and sub-issues.

- Including details about the topic which are too brief, and, which require more explanation through examples, details of events, and / or evidence from theories or studies.

- Providing too little explanation of the ideas in your readings and / or textbook that relate to the assignment topic.

- Failing to follow accepted standards in acknowledging the work and/or ideas of other authors in your text and in the Reference List at the back of the assignment.

- Providing a structure to your assignment that is very difficult and / or uninteresting to follow, such as not having a very clear introduction telling the reader what you are going to focus on, having points that do not lead logically on from one to another, and having a conclusion that merely restates what you said in the Introduction.

- Having too many presentation errors.

The following section goes on to consider the particular levels of educational tasks embedded in many assessment questions (including those for written assignments) by looking at Bloom and others' (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives.

Hierarchy in Assessment Tasks

Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956) conducted an in-depth analysis of the types of educational objectives embedded in tests and exams that are constructed by academics. Their analysis revealed a series of categories that different test questions may fall into for testing students' competence as follows: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. While the categories are central to tests and exams, they can also be useful to keep in mind when answering assignments.

- **Knowledge** – this represents a basic level of competence expected in assessment through the recalling, naming, and identifying of facts, theories, and concepts.

- **Comprehension** – this is fundamental to answering any test, exam, and written assessment because it is about the demonstration of understanding, which goes beyond mere recall and identification. Comprehension is likely to involve the following:

  – Thoroughly explaining the subtle and not so subtle features.

  – Making links with other ideas and concepts.

  – Summarising main points/features.

  – Suggesting reasons or causal factors.

  – Interpreting information may also be involved. This may be achieved by comparing and contrasting with other similar and different information to highlight the significance or insignificance of the information in question.

- **Application** – this level requires –

  – In-depth knowledge and understanding of information to the point that the knowledge can then be transported and incorporated into a new context outside of the current contexts in which the information has been presented in the course.

  – The ability to show how academic concepts have real world value and utility.

Application may be awarded more marks, than say the previous level, because it involves having a good grasp of the concepts and details beyond an academic context to the point of being able to understand and apply information to innovative and real world situations.

- **Analysis** – this integrates many of the levels already covered in terms of identifying relevant and applicable knowledge, and providing a thorough explanation of how this knowledge operates within a particular context. Analysis is central to any substantial piece of academic work because it involves

  – breaking something down
  – examining its component parts separately as well as how these parts operate within a whole, and
  – generally looking at an issue from different angles.

  Analysis has similarities with comprehension as –

  – a thorough explanation of features,
  – making links with other ideas and concepts,
  – summarising main points/features, and
  – suggesting reasons or causal factors

  are all activities required in carrying out an in-depth investigation, or, in other words, an analysis of a topic. The application of a particular procedure or process to be used in the analysis may also be relevant. Due to the fact that the analysis category includes so many of the features mentioned under the previous educational levels, it is likely that this category will be worth more marks than the other levels mentioned so far.

- **Synthesis** – this is one of the most difficult educational objectives or levels, and, as such, is likely to be awarded more marks than earlier objectives. Synthesis involves the creation of new ideas from old ones. This can be achieved by

  – combining and integrating different concepts, theories, and research under a new focus.

  Typically, synthesis may consist of finding ways to link diverse ideas or developing a broader, overarching theme to group together distinct pieces of information. The reformulation involved in synthesis leads to drawing conclusions about what has come before.

- **Evaluation** – this is the highest educational objective identified by Bloom et al. (1956). More than any other objective, evaluation involves making a judgement about the value of something and backing up that decision with evidence. Such a process is likely to incorporate

  – each of the previous objectives, and

  – perhaps an emphasis on analysis, and

  – comparing and contrasting with other similar and different information to highlight the significance or insignificance of the information in question.

Other Useful Tips

Dealing with Feedback on Assignments

Receiving feedback is often one of the most difficult aspects of being a student because it involves elements of vulnerability and judgement.

After labouring over an assignment that incorporates much of yourself in respect to

- your own organisation and integration of points into the assignment,
- as well as your own choice of words and phrases,

you are then required to hand over your creation to someone else who pronounces judgement. This involves detaching yourself from the project, and, in many instances, doing so at a stage where there may be a feeling of incompleteness because not enough time has been available to fully finish the project, perhaps leading to feelings of regret and possibly guilt over not meeting personal and internal standards. At the same time, however, it is often a time of relief and excitement where you are no longer burdened by the task and can stand back and reflect in the achievement of relative completion.

After a delay of many weeks, the assignment is returned with a grade or mark, which may not meet expectations. This may lead to frustration, disappointment, regret, and sometimes confusion after having spent many hours of hard work on the project. In managing the process of dealing with feedback, some tips and strategies are suggested to help you gain the most from the experience. So, before reading assignment feedback, try to keep the following in mind:

- Being a student is a learning experience, which offers its own unique lessons of personal discovery for each individual participant.

- Mistakes are not mistakes, in the conventional sense, but opportunities to learn.

- Constructive criticism leads to opportunities for improvement. (Without feedback, how can anyone progress and improve?)

- Each person enters university from a different cultural background, with different expectations, and with varying and diverse levels of prior participation in education.

- The mark or grade awarded is the judgement of one individual, within a specific cultural and historical context.

- The mark or grade is based on one piece of work within the entirety of a person's life, which does not reflect or acknowledge the management of all other tasks and commitments achieved.

When receiving feedback, try to always allow some time to reflect deeply about the comments made so improvement can be gained the next time round. If you think your assignment feedback is inadequate or unfair, contact your course co-ordinator for clarification.

Procrastination

Procrastination can be defined as the avoidance of doing things that need to be done, and is commonly encountered by students when undertaking a course of study, including the writing of assignments. The act of procrastinating may arise from any one or a combination of beliefs as follows:

- having excessively high standards.
- not seeing the relevance of the assignment.
- lacking clarity in how to manage the assignment.
- fearing the unknown process surrounding assignment writing.
- imagining catastrophes you will encounter while doing the assignment that function to prevent you from starting.
- feeling less than sufficiently skilled to complete the assignment.

To limit the effects of procrastination, several strategies are offered:

- Break your assignment into small, manageable tasks. This will allow you to use small sections of time instead of waiting for complete days, which may not eventuate.
- Set realistic timeframes with flexibility to deal with life crises.
- Look at the purpose of what you are doing and remind yourself of the end goal as a way into seeing the relevance of your study to your life.
- Reward yourself after small tasks. This will help retain the motivation.

Remember that great writers always have to start somewhere. It is rare for complete products of writing to develop in a short period of time. Rather, the process of writing takes time and involves transitions and transformations in thinking, understanding, and creating. To give justice to these stages in academic development, it is vital that adequate time is given to each stage. To achieve this, you REALLY do need to start an assignment as SOON as YOU CAN!

Perfectionism

This is an equally paralysing activity and has associations with procrastination. Perfectionism may also arise from excessively high standards involving absolutist, all-or-nothing attitudes, such as "anything less than an A is not worth it". Pursuing the need to follow a routine perfectly to get a perfect result, such as waiting for the perfect moment to start writing, may be a further factor driving perfectionist ideals. The following strategies are offered to manage perfectionism.

- Value the process, not just the outcome.
- If you break goals into smaller ones, it is easier to get an on-going sense of achievement.
- Put your efforts into those things that will gain the most return - writing.
- See mistakes as opportunities to learn.

Remember, nothing can ever be perfect because it is impossible to produce something that takes into account every angle / argument / perspective, since everyone brings to an assignment their own situated perspective. The remaining pages of this book now cover a series of supplementary resources that deal with the micro elements of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Parts of Speech

Nouns Nouns name something. A proper noun names a particular person, place, or thing. A common noun names a general class of things.
Examples
stone, tree, house, George, America, California, committee, herd, navy

Pronouns Pronouns stand in for nouns. The noun a pronoun represents is called its antecedent.
Examples
I, you, he, she, it, we, they, you, who, which, that, what, this, these, those, such, one, any, each, few, some, anyone, everyone, somebody, each, another.

Verbs Verbs express actions or a state of being.
Examples
hit, run, walk, meditate, is, are, sing

Adjectives Adjectives describe nouns or pronouns.
Examples
green, beautiful, fat

Adverbs Adverbs describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.
Examples
slightly, after

Prepositions Prepositions link nouns or pronouns to another word in the sentence.
Examples
by, from, for

Conjunctions Conjunctions join words, phrases, and clauses.
Examples
and, but, or, yet, since, because

Interjections Interjections interrupt the usual flow of the sentence to emphasise feelings.
Examples
oh, ouch, alas

Common Errors in Grammar and Punctuation: A Checklist for Proofreading

Before you hand in any piece of writing, use this list to make any necessary corrections.
Remember that the grammar checker on your computer may help you, but it can mislead you.

Incomplete sentences

1. **Using the *-ing* for a verb as a complete verb.**
   x He being the most capable student in the class.
   Correction: either change *being* to *is* or use a comma to attach the whole phrase to a complete sentence.

2. **Punctuating a dependent clause as though it were a complete sentence.**
   x Even if it has a capital letter and a full stop.
   x Which is why I always carry an umbrella.
   Correction: Join the whole phrase onto a complete sentence; commas may be needed, depending on which part of the sentence the phrase is attached to.

Lack of agreement

3. **Using a plural verb for a singular subject (or vice versa).**
   x One of the most widespread trends have been increased advertising by tertiary institutions.
   Correction: change *have* to *has* (*one….has*, not *one……have*).
   x The College of Education are located on the Hokowhitu site in Palmerston North.
   Correction: even though the college is made up of a large number of people, the college itself is singular ("The College of Education is….")

4. **Using a pronoun that does not agree in number or gender with the noun to which it refers (its antecedent).**
   x Each university has to keep within their budget.
   Correction: change the pronoun *their* to *its* because *each university* (the antecedent) is singular (as the verb *has* indicates).

Inconsistency

5. **Inconsistent tenses.**
   x The sun was shining brightly, but the temperature is quite cold.
   Correction: put both verbs (*was shining* and *is*) in the present or the past tense.

6. **Faulty parallels.**
   x Children enjoy painting, drawing, and to make things.
   Correction: change to *make* to *making* so that it matches *painting* and *drawing.* This mistake is often made in bulleted lists.

Joining sentences incorrectly

7. **Running two sentences together (a run-on sentence).**
   x This is my last assignment I only have to sit the exam now.
   Correction: put a semicolon or a full stop after *assignment.*

8. **Joining ("splicing") two complete sentences with only a comma (a comma splice)**
   x My first essay was not very good, this one is much better.
   Correction: either put in a conjunction like but after the comma, or place a semicolon or full stop after *good*.

9. **Using an adverb** (Such as *consequently, hence, however, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, otherwise,* or *therefore*) **instead of a conjunction** (such as *and, although, as because, but, if, unless, until, when, whereas,* or *while*) **to join two sentences (also a comma splice).**
   x Some students earn high marks for internal assessment, however they do not always do so well in exams .
   Correction: change the comma before however to a semicolon or a full stop.

10. **Omitting the comma when two sentences are joined by a co-ordinating conjunction** (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, or yet*).
    x The academic year used to be only two semesters long but it is increasingly extended to three.
    Correction: insert a comma before a co-ordinating conjunction like but when it links two complete sentences (the comma is sometimes omitted in a short sentence).

Inaccurate embedding

11. **Omitting the comma after an introductory word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence.**
    x However appropriate commas make meaning clearer.
    Correction: add a comma after *However.*

12. **Omitting one on the commas when a pair of commas is needed.**
    x At the end of the semester, when the lectures are over students have to sit exams.
    Correction: the phrase *when the lectures are over* needs a comma at each end because it is an embedding and not a part of the main sentence structure.

Adding unnecessary commas

13. **Placing a single comma between the subject and the verb of a sentence.**
    x All the trees that have lost their leaves, will grow new ones in the spring.
    Correction: remove the comma between the subject (All the trees that have lost their leaves) and the verb phrase (will grow).

14. **Placing a comma before a final dependent clause.**
    x Punctuation matters, because is helps readers to understand a written text.
    Correction: no comma is needed before a final dependent clause (such as one beginning with *although, because, if, since, unless,* or *when*) unless there is a strong contrast between the main clause and the dependent clause.

15. **Placing a comma before a restrictive clause.**
    x The Pohutukawa is a New Zealand tree, that flowers at Christmas time.
    Correction: the words *that flowers at Christmas time* make up a defining or restrictive clause, one that limits the meaning of *tree.* This clause does not present extra information, but is an essential part of the sentence and therefore should not be separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

Inappropriate colons and semicolons

16. **Using an unnecessary colon.**
    x Some of the main reasons for going to university are: to learn about interesting subjects, to meet new people, and to prepare for employment.
    Correction: either omit the colon or make sure there is a complete sentence before it, for example by adding the words *the following after are.*

17 **Using a semicolon instead of a colon.**
    x These items were on the breakfast menu; cereal, toast, tea, and coffee.
    Correction: use a colon, not a semicolon, to introduce the list after menu.

Misplaced or omitted apostrophes

18. **Unnecessary apostrophes**

    x talk's, sleep's, avocado's, banana's, serie's, business'

    Correction: present-tense, third person singular verbs ending in/s/ (she *talks*, he *sleeps*) do not need apostrophes; plural nouns (avocados, bananas) do not need apostrophes just because they are plural; no noun requires an apostrophe just because it happens to end in /*s*/ (*series; business*).

19. **Confusing its for it's and whose for who's.**

    x Its for the person who's birthday is today. Does the dog recognise it's name?

    Correction: *its* means *belonging to it; i*t's means *it is* or *it has*; whose means *belonging to who; who's* means *who is* or *who has.*

20. **Apostrophes on the wrong side of the /s/.**

    X one boy's toy truck; two boy's toy trucks

    Correction: to use an apostrophe with a possessive noun or indefinite pronoun (*anyone, everyone, each other, one, others, or someone else*), write the name of the possessor (*one boy; two boys*), add an apostrophe after it (one boy'; two boys'), and add an /a/ after the apostrophe if you pronounce one (*one boy's; two boys'*).

Missing errors

21. **Question marks with indirect questions.**

    x There was a question in everyone's mind about how stable the bridge was?

    Correction: this is a statement not a question, so it should end with a full stop, not a question mark.

Spelling errors

22. **Confusion over the plural forms of classical words** (such as *data, criteria, media,* and *phenomena*).

    x there were no objective criterias for showing that the data was inaccurate.

    Correction: the plural of *criterion in criteria;* the word *data* is always plural (*the data were……..*).

23. **American spelling.**

    x color, labor, theatre, center, traveller, fulfil, defense, encyclopedia, program

    Correction: colour, labour, theatre, centre, traveller, fulfil, defence, encyclopaedia, programme (but *computer program*).

24. **Confusing words that are similar in sound or meaning.**

    x The main affect of the scandal was that the principle had to resign.

    Correction: *affect* is a verb meaning *to influence*; a *principle* is a rule or idea. The sentence should read, "The main *effect* of the scandal was that the *principal* had to resign". If necessary, consult a dictionary to be sure you can distinguish between the words in each pair: accept/except; affect/effect; principle/principal; practice/practise; advice/advise; between/among; fewer/less.

A word of advice: make your own list of words that you often misspell
or the meaning of which you find confusing.

Tricky Words

Certain word pairs seem to confuse beginner writers and they may choose the wrong word. A list of the most commonly confused pairs follows:

Affect / Effect
Affect as a verb; use it when you mean that one thing influences another thing.
e.g. The wind will affect TV reception.
e.g. Rheumatic fever affected his heart.

Affected as an adjective
e.g. The affected parts of the plant were pruned.
e.g. An "affected" person behaves in a snobbish or artificial way.

Effect as a verb; use it when you mean one thing caused something else.
e.g. The storm effected a change to the appearance of the village.
e.g. He effected a political coup by sending in a private army.

Effect is usually used as a noun.
e.g. The yen has an effect on the Kiwi dollar.
e.g. The effects of the earthquake were felt in several countries.

Accept / Except
Accept is always a verb meaning "to take or receive", "to believe or approve", "to agree to" or "to take on".
e.g. He accepts the Treasurer's job.
e.g. Will you accept this proposal.
e.g. We all accept the principle of freedom of thought.

Except can be a verb, meaning "to leave out" or it can be a preposition meaning "apart from" or "excluding".
e.g. Citizens older than 50 are excepted from military duties.
e.g. Everyone must pay taxes, except (for) those without any income.

Advice / Advise
Advice is the noun form; check by seeing if you could put "some" in front of the word. eg The bank manager gave me (some) advice about my mortgage.
e.g. I advise you to reconsider.

Practice / Practise
Practice is the noun form and practise is the verb form.
e.g. She has a very successful dental practice.
e.g. You must practise your scales every day; Pianists need such regular practice.

To / Too
To is used as part of the infinitive verb.
e.g. to search and (to) find.

To is also a preposition used to show direction.
e.g. They travelled to Turkey; Please fax it to me.

Too is an adverb meaning "also", "as well as".
e.g. Cut up the onions, and the garlic too.

Too can also be used to express an excessive degree.
e.g. The soil is too dry for planting.

Were / We're / Where

Were is the plural past tense form of the verb "to be" and is used with "we", "you" and "they".
e.g. They were involved in an accident; Were you born in Australia?

We're is the contracted form of "we are" and is used informally.
e.g. We're having a barbecue after work this afternoon.

Where relates to place, point or position. Often, it forms part of a question.
e.g. Where did you buy that book?

It may also form part of a statement
e.g. Auckland is the place where I grew up; Where they live is a very new part of the town.

Strategies for Improving Spelling

(Adapted from Newby, M. (1989). Writing: A guide for students. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, cited in Van der Krogt, C. (2001). Academic writing: Study guide. Palmerston North, New Zealand: College of Education, Massey University, pages 42-43.)

One way to improve your spelling is to analyse where you seem to be going wrong. There are different types of spelling errors. Understanding some of the different types of errors, and the reasons behind them, will help you to identify the types of spelling errors you make. This will help you to avoid them in the future.

Words that get confused because they sound like each other

too to two
hear here
feet feat
there their they're
through threw
know no
weather whether
won one
for four fore
your you're
paw pour pore
discrete discreet
licence license
practice practise
current currant
principle principal
effect affect
dependent dependant
accept except
who's whose

Words that have been put together into one
(the correct spellings are on the left in bold)

at least	atleast
such as	suchas
in spite	inspite
in front	infront
a lot	a lot
all right	alright

Words which have been split in two

instead	in stead
together	to gether
without	with out
already	all ready
although	all though
altogether	all together

Words where pronunciation gets in the way

favourite	favrit
perhaps	prehaps
miniature	minature
ancillary	ancilliary
would have	would of
sentence	sentance
involve	envolve
imaginary	imaginry
attract	attrac
comparison	conparison
input	imput

Words in which the endings are misspelled

appearance	appearence
available	availiable
attendant	attendent
responsible	responsable
formidable	formidible
definitely	definately
applies	applys
existence	existance
independence	independance
dispensable	dispensible
absolutely	absolutly

Words with doubled-up letters

beginning	begining
committee	commitee / comittee
getting	geting
written	writen
too	to
innate	inate
accommodated	accomodated
aggression	agression

Words without doubled-up letters

fulfil	fulfill
fulfilment	fullfillment
commitment	committment
always	allways

Problems with ‘e’ and ‘ing’

coming	comeing
taking	takeing
using	useing

More problems with ‘e’

department	departement
considering	considereing
excitement	excitment
precisely	precisley
immediately	immediatley
truly	truely
address	addresse
statement	statment
lovely	lovley

Words with a missing sound

created	crated
literature	litrature
interesting	intresting

Words with letters swapped round

friend	freind
their	thier
strength	strentgh
height	hieght

Vowel sounds

retrieve	retreave
speech	speach

Problems with ‘s’ and ‘c’

necessary	nescessary
dissociate	disociate
occasion	ocassion
conscious	concious / consious

Differences between British and American Spelling

(Adapted from Marriot, S., & Farrell, B. (1992). Common errors in written English. Edinburgh: Chambers, cited in Van der Krogt, C. (2001). Academic writing: Study guide. Palmerston North, New Zealand: College of Education, Massey University, page 44.)

Always write your assignment using British spelling, unless you know that your marker accepts American spelling. The main differences between British and American spelling are as follows:

1. Most words ending in –our in British English are spelt –or in American English.

British	colour	flavour	labour
American	color	flavor	labor

2. Words ending in –re in British English are usually written –er in American English.

British	theatre	centre	fibre
American	theater	center	fiber

3. With verbs which may end in –se or –ize, British spelling often uses –ise, and American always uses –ize.

British	specialise	realise	equalise
American	specialize	realize	equalize

4. Most words spelt –ogue in British English are spelt –og in American English.

British	analogue	catalogue	dialogue
American	analog	catalog	dialog

5. In British English some words double their consonants before -er or -ed and -ing (e.g. those ending in l or p). This is not the case in American English.

British	equalling	kidnapping	traveller
American	equaling	kidnaping	traveler

6. Words derived from Greek and Latin which have ae or oe in the middle, usually have e in American English.

British	encyclopaedia	gynaecologist	anaesthesia
American	encyclopedia	gynecologist	nesthesia

7. Other common words which are spelt differently.

British	American
programme	program
bank cheque	bank check
defence	defense
pretence	pretense
speciality	specialty

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