Study SMART

BUILD THE SKILLS FOR YOUR SUCCESS

Reading and Writing

PDF resources included in this booklet

CONTENTS – READING AND WRITING

Reading and Writing

How can you enhance your reading and writing skills to get through your assignments?

Reading and Writing

Unlock the power of words with Reading and Writing events and resources! Whether you are a beginner wanting to refresh your grammar basics or someone keen to push the limits of your creative writing, learn the art and skill of reading and writing for an academic context to discover a future brimming with opportunity.

Read this guide for a quick overview of the key writing genres you will encounter at uni and reading strategies to help you with your research.

STUDY SMART WEBSITE

Find this section on the Study Smart website here:

http://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/reading_and_writing

Reading Techniques

Effective reading strategies will ensure you read efficiently. It's a 3-step process:

**PRE-READING** → **READING** → **POST-READING**

Pre-reading

The pre-reading stage is about getting familiar with the text and setting out any goals. There are three methods you can use while pre-reading: survey, skim, and scan. Ask yourself "why am I reading this?" and let that guide whether you survey, skim, or scan the text, or do all three.

survey
- general overview
- look at title, author, date
- contents, indexes
- introduction and conclusion
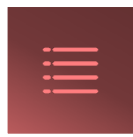
skim
- note the outline of the argument
- look at chapter titles and section headings

scan
- find the most relevant sections
- look for keywords or phrases
- use 'Find' on electronic texts

Survey

A survey gives you a general overview of the work. Take a sweeping look at the introduction, conclusion, and any contents or indices. Note the title, the author, and the publication details (record these right away in the necessary citation style, just so you have it). You might ask yourself:

→ What is the text about?
→ Who wrote it, and why?
→ How recent is it?
→ Is it useful for my purpose?

Skim

Skimming the work helps you get an idea of the outline of the argument. Do this by looking at chapter titles or section headings. This helps you figure out where the information you need most might be located.

After a survey and/or skim read, you might decide that the book or article isn't relevant to your purpose after all. That's fine. Cross it off your list and move on to the next item. You've saved a lot more time than you would have if you had read the whole thing before realising it wasn't useful.

Scan

Scanning the text helps you determine which of the sections are most relevant to your topic or purpose. Do this by looking for specific keywords or phrases in chapter titles, section headings, or paragraphs themselves. With electronic texts you can search for particular words by using ctrl + f (or command + f when using a Mac). What's relevant depends on why you are reading – if you are getting background information before a lecture then you may need to read the whole text, but if you are answering a pre-tutorial question you might need to find just one bit of information.

Remember, you don't have to read the whole book or the whole article if you're looking for something specific. Pre-reading will help you work out which parts you need to read. However, be alert – if you can't find what you're looking for, or you can't follow the logic of the text or the author's argument, you may need to pause and take the time to read more thoroughly.

Reading

Whoohoo, this is the bit everyone knows how to do, right? Read away!

Not so fast. Have you ever found yourself reading the same sentence over and over, unable to figure out what it means? Have you ever felt your eyes glaze over as you read yet another unfamiliar word? To combat these inefficiencies you need to be an effective reader.

Effective readers are selective, active, and critical.

EFFECTIVE READING

SELECTIVE READING

ACTIVE READING

CRITICAL READING

Selective reading means you read only the parts that are particularly relevant to your purpose. That's right, you don't always have to read every single word, especially if your eyes are glazing over. If you've done your pre-reading, then you should be able to find the information you need pretty quickly. If not, take another scan of the text and look for keywords relating to your topic (remember you can use the search function to search electronic text quickly and easily). Not sure what you're looking for? Go back to *why* you are reading what you're reading. Is it for a lecture, tutorial, or assignment? Is there a question you need to answer, or a concept you need to understand? Let this be your guide.

Active reading means doing something with the text, either physically or intellectually. The physical options include highlighting, underlining, or writing notes in the margin, but ONLY – we can't stress this enough – ONLY if the book belongs to you or you've printed the article out. Do not ever write in or on someone else's book, especially a library book! If it's not yours, don't worry, you can still be an active reader – you just need to make notes on another piece of paper or on your device, and/or think over issues in your mind.

Being active intellectually might include:

→ asking questions in response to things you read
→ practising paraphrasing ideas or passages from the text
→ writing summaries of the key points
→ looking up unfamiliar words or phrases
→ practising critical thinking.

Remember, if you make any notes on an electronic textbook you should download or save those notes to your own computer or USB storage, as you won't always have access to the online version.

Critical reading means using your critical thinking skills (PDF) on the text you are reading. Some of the things you might think about include:

→ the writer's purpose (are they trying to persuade you of something?)
→ the writer's stance and any biases
→ the language the writer is using to make their case
→ the evidence being cited
→ how what you're reading fits with or challenges your own views and ideas.

Post-reading

You've finished reading! Yay! Now what?

Well, you might want to read it again. Sometimes the first read-through helps you get a general sense of the topic, and then the second read-through is where you really get to grips with the main ideas and work your effective reading magic. What you do next depends, as always, on why you're reading, but here are some options for general reading:

→ Test your memory and write down all the main ideas you remember from the text

→ Read over your notes and double-check you understand all the key concepts

→ Draw a mind map of the main ideas and how they relate to each other

→ Note any gaps in your knowledge for further reading, or things to ask your lecturer or tutor about

→ Answer any pre-class questions or complete assigned activities relating to the reading

Essays

Need help writing essays? Follow the steps below.

Purpose of Essays

The purpose of an essay is to **present a coherent argument in response to a stimulus or question**, and to **persuade the reader that your position is credible** (i.e. believable and reasonable). You need to **think about the task, research the topic, decide on your position**, and then **convince the reader by presenting a reasoned response** supported by evidence from the research you have done.

Although your essay is a one-way argument as far as your reader is concerned, **your marker will still be looking to see whether you have tried to enter into a dialogue with the ideas of other scholars**. They want to see that you have understood the important arguments going on in the discipline, that you can relate to these appropriately, and that you can express your own voice on the topic (Brick, 2011, p. 148).

Understanding the Question

The keywords in a writing task will help you decide what kind of approach you should take in your response. The keywords will tell you:

→ whether you should write a description or an analysis (Task)

→ what the topic of the assignment task is (Topic)

→ what particular aspect of the topic you should focus on (Focus)

Refer to the video <u>Analysing your Essay Question</u> for more information.

Essay Tone

The tone of an essay in an academic context should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. We can plot these dimensions for an essay as follows:

formal ← → informal

impersonal ← → personal

technical ← → non-technical/everyday
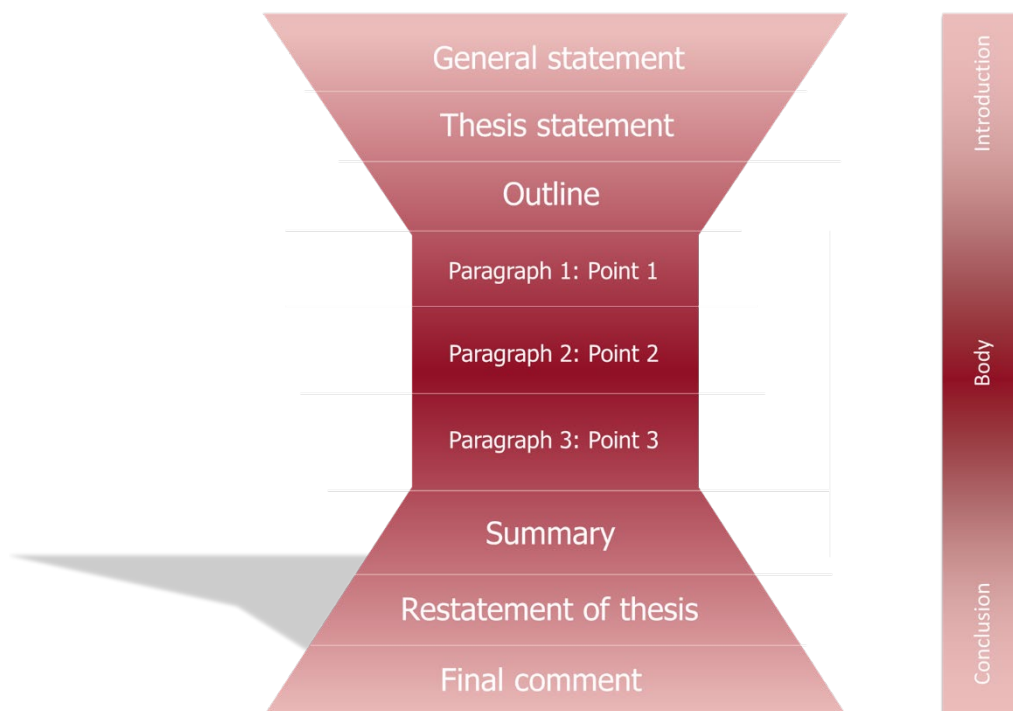
abstract ← → concrete

Essay Structure

The key elements of an essay are the **argument** and the **reasoning**. The argument is what you're trying to convince the reader about. The reasoning is how you show that your argument is worth believing. It could include **evidence**, **explanations**, or **examples**.

You structure your argument and reasoning in a particular way:

→ The **introduction** presents the argument and outlines the reasons that will be presented

→ The **body** section presents the different points of reasoning, one per paragraph, with evidence included and cited

→ The **conclusion** summarises the reasoning and restates the argument

→ The **reference list** includes all the sources of evidence and ideas that you have referred to in your essay

Use this diagram to help you remember the structure of an essay:

General statement
Thesis statement
Outline

Paragraph 1: Point 1

Paragraph 2: Point 2

Paragraph 3: Point 3

Summary
Restatement of thesis
Final comment

Introduction

Body

Conclusion

Reports

Need help writing reports? Follow the steps below.

Purpose of Reports

Unlike essays, where you're expected to argue a position, when you write a report you're generally required to define a situation or problem, analyse it, and make recommendations based on your analysis.

The reader of your report is looking for a clear account of the situation or problem, a thorough analysis of it, and sensible recommendations.

In the professional world, such as in business or accounting, someone will be relying on your report to inform their financial decisions, e.g. whether to invest in a particular company, or whether to spend money on a particular project.

In the research world, e.g. in science or engineering, your report on an experiment or research project will be crucial for informing future research or setting the framework for designing something that people will actually use.

With this in mind, your report must be:

→ clear and easy to understand
→ concise, i.e. not cluttered with unnecessary information
→ well organised
→ accurate
→ thorough in its analysis
→ logical

Structure of Reports

A report should be as easy to read as possible, so you need to take some care with how you present it on the page. Follow any formatting guidelines given in your Subject Outline or by your lecturer/tutor, and also keep the following points in mind:

→ Keep section headings short and informative
→ Make sure section headings stand out so the reader can easily skim the report to find the information they most want to know
→ Leave at least one line of white space between sections and elements
→ Number all the pages

Example Report Structure

Element	Explanation
Title page	Subject code and title, tutor's name, report title and purpose, your name and student number. Check your Subject Outline to find out what information you need to include here.
Table of contents	A list of sections and subsections indicating which page each section begins on (usually only needed for longer reports of 10 pages or more). Each section and subsection is numbered in a cascading way, e.g. Section 2 has three subsections, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3. Use a numbered list in your word processing program to create the Table of Contents.
List of abbreviations and/or glossary	A list of any abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms you use in your report. This should be on a separate page in your report.
Executive summary	A brief overview of the whole report that stands alone and does not refer to the report the way an abstract would. The purpose of the executive summary is so a reader who doesn't have time to read the whole report can find all the important information 'at a glance'. You should summarise each section of the report in one or two sentences, with any recommendations often given in full (see Brick 2011, p. 165 for an example). Check your assignment instructions for word length.
Introduction	Introduces the topic and its background and significance, identifies the specific problem within that topic area that you are investigating, previews the sections of the report, and defines any important terms used.
Body	Treatment of the problem is divided up into different aspects (e.g. definition of the problem, analysis of its features, stages, and/or causes, and proposals for different ways of approaching or managing the problem or situation)
Conclusion	Summarises the report's main points. There is no new information here, since each idea or piece of information should already have been introduced in the body of the report.
Recommendations	Presents specific suggestions for action that arise from the analysis and findings of the report.
Bibliography or reference list	Any sources you have referred to should be listed here in alphabetical order. Use the referencing system indicated in your Subject Online.
Appendices (singular: appendix; plural: appendices)	If you have any large tables, figures, or other material that is too long for your report but is necessary for the reader to be able to refer to while reading your report, you should include these as appendices at the end of the report. Each one should be numbered and given a title to tell the reader what it contains. They should be included in the Table of Contents as well.

Adapted from Brick (2011, pp. 162-166).

Case Studies

Need help writing case studies? Follow the steps below.

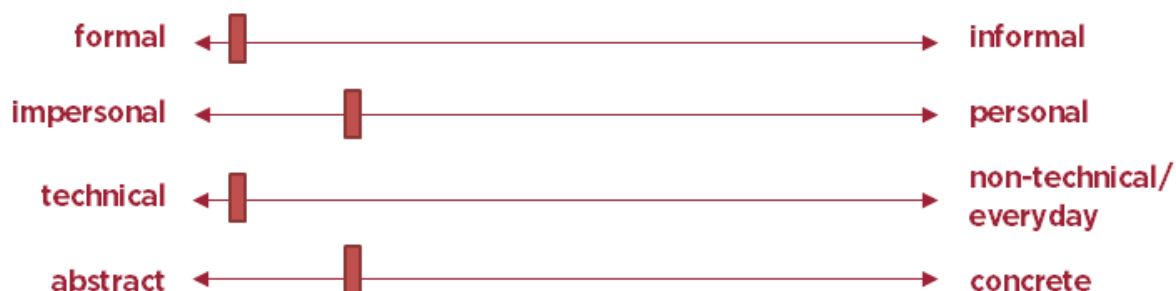## Purpose of Case Studies

The general purpose of a case study is to:

→ describe an individual situation (case), e.g. a person, business, organisation, or institution, in detail;
→ identify the key issues of the case (your assignment question should tell you what to focus on);
→ analyse the case using relevant theoretical concepts from your subject or discipline;
→ recommend a course of action for that particular case (particularly for problem-solving case studies).

As with reports, there are two major kinds of case studies: problem-solving case studies and descriptive case studies. Problem-solving case studies are used to investigate a problem or situation in a particular individual or group, and recommend a solution to the problem based on analysis and theory. Descriptive case studies are used to understand a situation better. For example, identifying what happened and why by describing particular aspects of that situation and analysing it in terms of theoretical categories. A descriptive study might then be used to help people make a decision about how to do things in another case that has similar features.

Tone of Case Studies

As with other reports, case studies are formal pieces of academic (or professional) writing. They should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract.

However, because a case study often has practical outcomes in terms of actions that might be taken in that particular situation, certain sections may use more concrete language (see below). Also, if the report is about your experience in a workplace or professional placement, it will be more personal, but it should still remain formal, technical, and reasonably abstract (see below).

Structure of Case Studies

A case study is usually presented as a kind of report, where sections within the body of the report deal with specific aspects of the case. Your Subject Outline should give you information about how to structure your case study assignment. For example, you may be asked to focus on certain questions about the case and organise your writing around those questions (see Nursing example in Case Study Purpose (PDF, 68 kB).

A case study report *may* have the elements shown in the following table. But you **MUST** check your Subject Outline or ask your tutor how to structure your case study report for that particular subject, as expectations can be different.

Element	Explanation
Introduction	Introduces the case, including the background and any previous studies of the issue.
Aims	Describes the purpose of the study and the specific questions you are trying to answer.
Method	Explains how the study was carried out, e.g. what research methods did you use to collect data: interviews, observations, questionnaires, etc.? What were the circumstances of your data collection?
Results	Describes what you found through your investigations, e.g. the main themes that came out in interviews, responses to questionnaires, significant observations.
Discussion	Explains the significance of the study and what can be learnt from it. Note that a case study is a study of a particular situation so you can't generalise the results to all other situations. That means your discussion should focus on what can be learnt about that particular situation and the individuals involved.
Recommendations	Provides proposals for future action to solve the problem or improve the situation, e.g. by applying a particular kind of treatment or intervention.

Reflective Writing

Need help with your reflective writing? Follow the steps below.

Purpose of Reflective Writing

Reflection is...

... a type of critical thinking.

... a way of keeping track of the skills you are learning and the knowledge you acquire, as well as the gaps you are finding in your skills and knowledge.

... a learning process that helps you find connections between topics and between theories.

... a professional tool to help you grow and improve.

... a way to make sense of your own thoughts and feelings.

Tone of Reflective Writing

The tone of reflective writing can be quite different to other forms of academic writing. Although it should still be a formal piece of academic writing, it will be more personal and may be slightly less technical and abstract than other kinds of academic writing such as Essays and Reports.

formal	⟷	informal
impersonal	⟷	personal
technical	⟷	non-technical/ everyday
abstract	⟷	concrete
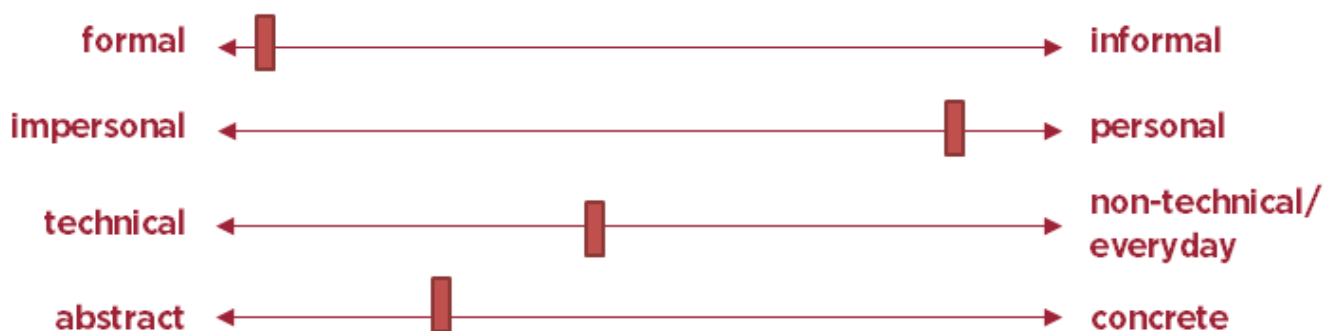
Reflective Writing Structure

The structure of a piece of reflective writing varies greatly. If you have a reflective writing task, read the instructions carefully to see if a structure is provided.

A **reflective essay** should follow the classic essay format of introduction, body, and conclusion. Some other common formats include journaling or using a reflective model for only part of an essay or assignment.

A **journal** is a collection of entries made on a regular basis (e.g. daily or weekly). For example, you might be asked to keep a reflective journal during a practicum or placement in which you write each day about the tasks you performed, things you observed, and questions that you had. Even if a reflective task is not set, it's a good idea to keep a personal journal during a placement so you can keep track of what you've learnt and note any questions or observations you want to talk to fellow students or teachers about later.

Other types of reflection might be performed as the need arises, or in response to particular events. You might reflect on the weekly tutorial readings, or after experiencing a difficult assignment. Reflective models can be especially helpful when something has gone wrong and you know you need to think about it, but you're not sure how.

Regardless of the structure used, reflective writing is more than a descriptive activity. You might start by describing what happened or how you feel, but true reflection goes beyond this step and might include things like why you think something happened, why you feel the way you do, how your feelings or thoughts have changed, and what you might do differently in a similar situation in the future.

Models for reflective writing

One common model is the **Gibbs Reflective Cycle**, which has 6 parts:

Describe	Describe what happened
Feelings	How did it make you feel?
Evaluate	What was good or bad?
Analyse	What sense can you make of the situation? (Include external issues)
Conclude	What general and specific conclusions can you draw?
Action	What next, or what will you do next time?

Adapted from Western Sydney University School of Nursing and Midwifery (2016, pp. 70-72).

Literature Reviews

Need help writing essays? Follow the steps below.

Purpose of Literature Reviews

Apart from the usual steps required to complete a written assignment (see Assignment Calculator for details - use the Essay template), there are three main steps that comprise a literature review:

→ Finding the literature
→ Understanding and evaluating the literature
→ Writing the literature review

Tone of Literature Reviews

As with an essay or report, your tone in a literature review should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. We can plot these dimensions for a literature review as follows:

formal	←	→	informal
impersonal	←	→	personal
technical	←	→	non-technical/everyday
abstract	←	→	concrete

Structure of Literature Reviews

→ Your literature review should have an introduction, body, and conclusion, like an essay.
→ Your ideas about the sources should be organised in a way that shows how the sources relate to each other and contribute to knowledge about the topic. Don't just write a new paragraph for each source. You could organise your ideas in one of the following ways, or another way that matches well with your assessment task:
  o by time period, especially if different ways of thinking about the topic emerged during different periods of time;
  o by theoretical perspective, i.e. discussing all the sources that use the same theoretical perspective in the same paragraph or section of your review;
  o from most important to least important, i.e. discussing the most influential sources first; or

- by issue or theme, i.e. grouping the sources according to what aspect of the topic their research tries to address (University of Melbourne, 2013).

Below is an example of the kind of matrix that you could use to analyse the sources and organise your ideas about the sources. Note that the column headings you use will depend on the details of your assessment task and the topic area itself. For example, if you are reviewing literature on a topic that is specifically Australian, it would probably not be relevant to include the 'country' column, since all the literature you find is likely to come from Australian researchers.

Literature review topic: Elder abuse					
Year	Country	Publishing channel	Discipline/ theoretical background/main focus	Reference	Summary
2008	Australia	Journal article	Health care, social work, social policy	Kurrle, S. & Naughtin, G. (2008). An Overview of Elder Abuse and Neglect in Australia, *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 20:2, 108-125, DOI: 10.1080/08946560801974521	Brief orientation and definition of elder abuse, mainly discusses responses to elder abuse in policy and programmes
2013	USA	Report published by USA National Institute of Justice	Social policy and social welfare	Jackson, S. L. & Hafemeister, T. L. (2013). *Understanding Elder Abuse: new directions for developing theories of elder abuse occurring in domestic settings.* Washington: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/241731.pdf	Proposes that there should be a stronger theoretical approach to understanding elder abuse, using two studies as evidence

There are many language tools you can use to express evaluation of the literature in a formal and impersonal way. You could use the examples in the following table as a starting point.

What are you evaluating?	Positive adjectives	Negative adjectives
Evaluating the overall contribution or quality of the source	significant, noteworthy important seminal classic fundamental	marginal obscure
Evaluating the claims or conclusions of the research	reasonable strong, robust insightful clear fundamental, key, crucial profound, complex	unreasonable weak questionable unclear peripheral, marginal simplistic, oversimplified, superficial
Evaluating the method used in the research	reliable careful, thorough insightful, perceptive innovative well designed	unreliable unclear questionable
Evaluating the evidence used in the research	conclusive impartial	inconclusive biased, one-sided

Annotated Bibliographies

Need help writing annotated bibliographies? Follow the steps below.

Purpose of Annotated Bibliographies

An annotated bibliography is a list of relevant scholarly research on a related topic with a summary of each source. You could think of it as an informative reference list: a reference list with a concise description and evaluation of each entry. There are some similarities between an annotated bibliography and a literature review, but they differ in purpose and structure.

Tone of Annotated Bibliographies

As with an essay or report, your tone in an annotated bibliography should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. We can plot these dimensions for an annotated bibliography as follows:

formal	informal
impersonal	personal
technical	non-technical/everyday
abstract	concrete

Structure of Annotated Bibliographies

Your annotated bibliography may or may not need an introduction and conclusion. Check your assignment instructions to find out what is required.

Each source has its own distinct entry, starting with the full citation using the required referencing style. After the citation, you write a coherent paragraph summarising and evaluating the source. See the table below for the content to include in each paragraph.

Arrange the sources in alphabetical order (by surname of lead author) under the overall heading, just like a reference list.

For more information on referencing and citation styles, see the Library Referencing and Citation guides.

Element	Comments	
Heading	Use a heading that indicates the subject of the entries.	
	Centre the heading at the top of the page.	
Introduction	Optional – check your assignment instructions.	
Source entry A **(100-200 words, depending on assignment instructions)**	Full citation	Use the required referencing style as specified in your assignment instructions.
	Summary	Concise description of the source, including a summary of the key points and findings (check assignment instructions for level of detail required).
	Evaluation	Briefly comment on the strengths and limitations of the source and the research it describes.
	Reflection	Comment on the relevance of the source to your topic or field of study.
	Subheadings	Optional (check assignment instructions).
Source entry B	as above	
Source entry C	as above	
Source entry D	as above	
Source entry E	as above	
etc...		
Conclusion	Optional – check your assignment instructions.	

Contact Information

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