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ASSIGNMENT HELP  
WRITING



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# Writing

Essays, reports, case studies, reflective writing - these are some of the most common writing tasks at Western. You can find support for these as well as general writing help and using sources in your writing.

## **Writing**

Now that you've done your research and gathered all the information you need, it's time to write a response to the assignment question.

Here you'll find help with writing some of the most common assignment types. You can also find general writing help for things like structure, grammar, tone and vocabulary, as well as using sources.

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## **STUDY SMART WEBSITE**

Find this section on the Study Smart website here:

[https://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assignment\\_help/writing](https://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assignment_help/writing)

## ESSAY

FOR STUDENTS IN MOST DISCIPLINES, ESSAYS ARE ONE OF THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF ASSESSMENT.

No matter what the essay question or topic is, and no matter how long or short it has to be, there are some basic things that all essays have in common: their purpose, structure and tone or register. These are things you can learn, and once you master them, you'll feel much more confident to tackle any essay that comes your way!

## MORE INFORMATION

- [Essay Drafting Tool](#) (PDF, 711 kB) from School of Humanities and Communication Arts
- [Argument Mapping](#) (PDF, 156 kB) diagram from Jamel Ostwal
- [University of Hong Kong: The Writing Machine](#) - information and activities to develop your essay writing skills
- Chapter 14 'Writing essays: general-specific texts' in Brick, J. (2011). *Academic Culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2nd ed.). South Yarra: Macmillan.



## Essay purpose

### Presenting an argument

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).

In other words, you're given a question or task description (see [Analysing the assignment question](#) (PDF, 72 kB) and [Common task words](#) (PDF, 107 kB) and 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.

### A one-way argument

Unlike a spoken argument, where two speakers might argue back and forth presenting their various points and pieces of evidence, an essay is, in a sense, a one-way argument. Your reader doesn't have the opportunity to ask you to clarify your points, nor to present their own points against yours.

Because the reader can't ask for clarification, you have a responsibility to present your argument clearly. Because the reader can't argue back face-to-face, you have the opportunity to anticipate their possible counter-arguments and address them in your essay.

### A dialogue

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).

### Description and analysis

Most essays will require you to do some description of the way things are or were, and some analysis of why things happened, how they could be done better, how different factors relate to each other, etc.

In [Analysing the assignment question](#) (PDF, 72kB) you can find out more about descriptive and analytical writing and what they involve.

### References

Brick, J. (2011). *Academic Culture: A student's guide to studying at university*. South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan Publishers.



## Essay structure

You need to present a clear argument in your essay, and if you organise your ideas in a structured way, that will help to present your argument clearly. You're trying to convince your reader of your position on the topic, so you need to make it as easy as possible for them to follow your argument. You can't convince someone of something they can't understand!

The time-honoured structure for an essay sounds simple – introduction, body, conclusion. But what does each of those mean? What do you need to write in those sections?

### Introduction

(around 10% of the word count)

It may sound basic, but this is where you introduce the topic, the particular aspect of the topic you are focusing on, and the position you are going to argue in your essay. By the end of the introduction, your reader should be able to predict what kinds of points you are going to make. The reader should also be able to see clearly that you are addressing the assessment question or task.

Your introduction acts a bit like a train announcement (when you can hear them!). When you get on the train, you should hear an announcement of all the stations that train will stop at. If you get on at Strathfield to go to Penrith, you might hear:

*'This train is a Western Line service, stopping at Parramatta, Blacktown, Penrith, and Emu Plains.'*

That means it's an express and won't stop at all the stations in between. So you won't be surprised when the train stops at Blacktown, but doesn't stop at Mt DrUITT. In your introduction, you should prepare your reader for the rest of your essay so they don't get any big surprises.

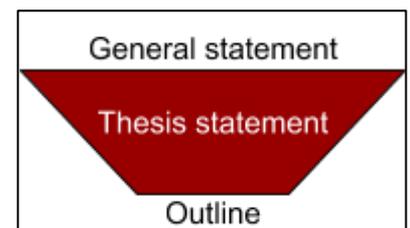
The three essential elements of an introduction are a general statement, a thesis statement, and an outline.

The **general statement** is usually the first sentence, and you use this to ease the reader into thinking about the topic. You've been researching the topic for a few weeks, but the reader is coming to it fresh. Out of all the possible topics that are out there, you need to help the reader get oriented to this particular topic and how it relates to the world in general.

The **thesis statement** is a statement of your argument. That means it will be more specific than the general statement, and it will narrow the scope of the essay. Out of all the different aspects of the topic that you could write about, this is the position you are taking and the aspects you will consider.

The **outline** gives the reader a preview of what points you will make as you argue your position. It's helpful if you put them in the same order as they appear in the body of your essay. Think of the confusion if the train announcement told people the stations all out of order!

You can think of these elements like a funnel or filter, working from broadest information to narrowest information; from the general to the specific. The outline then provides the launch pad for you to begin presenting your points in the body of your essay.



### Example

In the following example of an introduction, the *General Statement* is in italic font, the **Thesis Statement** is in bold font, and the Outline is in underlined font.

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### Essay task: Identify and discuss the most serious occupational hazards of nurses.

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*While patient safety has long been a nursing priority, the occupational safety of nurses has only recently received serious attention.* These occupational health hazards include the risk of back injuries, stress, and the dangers of radiation and infection. Apart from these kinds of risks, hospitals were thought to be safe places to work. **This paper argues that violence against nurses is a serious problem for hospitals and thus a serious occupational hazard.** It reviews the literature on the incidence of violence and the effects of violence on nurses, and suggests strategies to manage violent situations.

*General statement* introduces the topic in general terms and indicates the relevance of the issue ('long' vs. 'recently'). The following sentences give some definition and background to the topic of occupational health hazards in hospitals. **Thesis Statement** outlines the writer's position. Outline indicates the stages of the essay (literature review, recommendation of risk management strategies).

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Example adapted from University of Western Sydney (2014).

### Body

(around 80% of the word count)

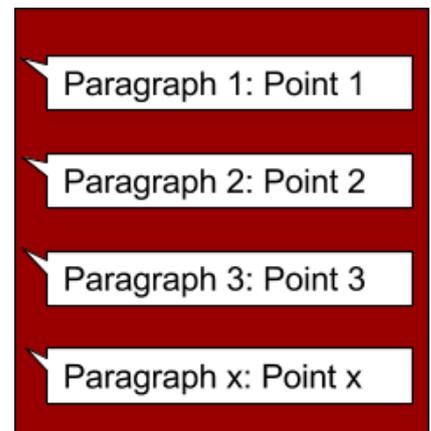
In the body of your essay, you present each point in your argument in its own paragraph (or set of paragraphs, if it's a longer point). Each paragraph should begin with a sentence signalling to your reader which point you are making in that paragraph. We call this a **topic sentence**.

Think back to the train example. When the train is approaching the next station (e.g. Parramatta), you get an announcement: *'This train will stop at Parramatta.'* This is the signal for passengers to know where they are up to on the train journey. The topic sentence makes a similar signal to your reader: 'This is where we are up to in my overall argument'.

It's also good if you can link the point to the overall argument in your topic sentence. If you've done your introduction well, the reader should be able to look at the topic sentence of each paragraph and match them up to the points you signalled in your introduction. You should present the points in your essay in the same order you gave them in the outline in your introduction.

After the topic sentence, your paragraph should then have a sentence or two explaining the point in more detail, and at least one piece of evidence supporting the point. Your evidence might be a reference to scholarly sources or some research data.

The basic structure of a paragraph is described in the following table:



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Element	Function
Topic sentence	Introduce the main point of the paragraph, linking it with the topic of the overall argument.
Explanation and elaboration	Support the point by clearly explaining it with reference to the concepts of the field. If you need to define important terms in your point, do that here.
Evidence	Support the point with relevant examples from research or scholarly literature.
(Concluding sentence)	Optional. Finish your point with a summary statement.

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Adapted from University of Western Sydney (2009, p. 32)

## Example

### Essay task: Do you agree with the Forestry Commission's policy to phase out major logging operations in NSW? Give reasons for your answer.

#### Thesis Statement and Outline from Introduction

Despite arguments to the contrary, there is strong evidence that these logging practices not only cause significant and often irreparable damage to the environment but ultimately to the timber industry itself. The Forestry Commission's policy of phasing out major logging operations by 1996 must, therefore, be considered essential to preserve what is left of the NSW rainforests.

Paragraph 1: **The most important reason for phasing out logging is its destructive impact on the environment.** Logging affects the rainforest ecosystem in a number of ways. Firstly, the loss of rainforest means the loss of large quantities of unique plant and animal species. *Despite their diminishing area, the rainforests of eastern Australia still retain the greatest number of flowering plant species in the world (Stacey, 1995:45).* The rainforests also provide a habitat for many species of rare and/or endangered animals, some of which are found only in rainforests. These plants and animals evolve to suit the specific environmental conditions of the rainforest. If these conditions are modified by removing trees, many of these species will become extinct. *It is estimated, in fact, that if rainforest destruction occurs at the present rate, by the end of the century nearly half of the world's plant and animal species will be wiped out (Lucas, 1998:36).*

**Topic sentence** signals the writer's first point in the argument: an environmental reason for the argument that logging should be phased out.

Explanation & elaboration supports the point with further detail and reasoning.

*Evidence* from research and scholarly literature supports the point.

Paragraph 2: **A second reason for phasing out rainforest logging is that continuing present logging practices will ultimately have a negative effect on the timber industry itself.** *While the timber lobby argues that continued logging will protect the industry (Jarvis, 1998:56),* this argument ignores the long term effects of continuing present practices. Many timber mills in NSW are still operating occurring to quotas which were set in 1953. These quotas were determined on the basis of each mill's log intake and were set well beyond the capacity of the State's rainforest areas to sustain them. Although some quotas have been changed since then, these unsustainable logging practices have led to diminishing supplies of timber. If present logging practices are continued the supply of timber will soon run out and many workers will lose their jobs.

**Topic sentence** signals the writer's second main point in the argument: an industrial reason for the argument that logging should be phased out.

In this paragraph, the writer brings in an *opposing view* from the literature, and then presents a counter-argument. This is another way of elaborating and arguing your point.

Example adapted from University of Western Sydney (2014).

## Conclusion

(around 10% of the word count)

Once you've covered each of your points in its own paragraph, you then conclude your essay by summarising the points you've made, reinforcing your overall argument. You shouldn't introduce any new information here, and in general you shouldn't need to quote or cite any references, as you are only summarising the content of your own essay.

The content of the conclusion will be similar to your introduction, but it has a different purpose – rather than introducing the reader to your argument, you now have the opportunity to make a final convincing summary of what you have just said and why it's valid. This means your conclusion should NOT just be your introduction restated.

When the reader reaches your conclusion, it should be very clear to them that this is the end of your argument. They've been reminded of all the good points you made and what your overall argument was. They haven't encountered any new information that would make them expect there is another paragraph to read.

Going back to the train announcement analogy, this is where the announcement says, 'This train will terminate here. All out, all change!' Although you won't use these words in your essay (or anything similar like 'the end'), you still need to use words in a way that signals closure.

## Example

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### Essay task: Do you agree with the Forestry Commission's policy to phase out major logging operations in NSW? Give reasons for your answer.

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#### Thesis Statement and Outline from Introduction

Despite arguments to the contrary, there is strong evidence that these logging practices not only cause significant and often irreparable damage to the environment but ultimately to the timber industry itself. The Forestry Commission's policy of phasing out major logging operations by 1996 must, therefore, be considered essential to preserve what is left of the NSW rainforests.

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*The arguments presented above make it clear that continuing current practices of rainforest logging in NSW would be irresponsible. Therefore, **phasing out rainforest logging as proposed by the Forestry Commission is the only viable alternative** because it allows for time to find environmentally sustainable alternatives to rainforest timbers and to provide alternative employment to the workers.*

*Essay recap* refers back to the essay as a whole and reminds the reader of what its purpose was.

**Restatement of Thesis** reiterates the argument made in the Thesis Statement in the introduction.

Summary of main points refers back to the two main arguments made: environmental and industrial impact of phasing out logging

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Example adapted from University of Western Sydney (2014).

## Reference list

Because you will have referred to sources to support the points in your argument (see [Using sources](#)), you need to provide a reference list that includes all the sources you referred to.

Your reference list should normally be organised in alphabetical order and formatted according to the referencing style required in your unit. Check your unit's Learning Guide and the assignment instructions to make sure you use the right referencing style.

Then go to the Library's [Referencing and Citation Guide](#) for help with correctly formatting your citations and references. There you will also find the [iCite](#) tool, which is a quick way of getting an example of the referencing format for a particular kind of sources in a particular referencing style.

## More information

- [Argument mapping](#) (PDF, 155 kB) diagram from Jamel Ostwald
- [Essay Drafting Tool](#) (PDF, 711 kB) from School of Humanities and Communication Arts
- [The Writing Machine](#) from University of Hong Kong - information and activities to develop your essay writing skills
- Chapter 14 'Writing essays: general-specific texts' in Brick, J. (2011). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2nd ed.). South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.

## References

University of Western Sydney. (2009). *Preparing students for learning through written assessment: A toolkit for Learning Guides*. Student Learning Unit. Sydney, Australia.

University of Western Sydney. (2014). *102080 'Academic Writing' Reader and Workbook*. Sydney, Australia.



## 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

Being formal doesn't necessarily mean being complicated or hard to read, but you do need to take care with your word choice and expression.

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids')
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't')
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max')
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments (find out more in the Sentence Structure section of [General writing help](#)).

### Impersonal

Even though your essay is *your* argument, it's not appropriate to present it as your personal opinion. You have to express it in an objective way for the academic context. This means presenting ideas directly as claims that are supported by evidence.

In general, you should avoid referring to yourself and your reader directly using the pronouns 'I', 'me', and 'you'. Although some academics allow you to use personal pronouns, you should be cautious about using them and aim for a more impersonal tone. The thing that is at stake in your essay is your ideas, not you or your reader's personal identity, so your sentences should be oriented to the claims you are making.

For example, you may feel tempted to say something like 'I believe...' or 'I think...' to introduce an idea or claim. But in this context you can just present the idea as it is. The reader will know it's your idea if it's not attributed to any other source. For example:

*'I believe that adults should restrict their mobile phone use at night because, as Exelmans and Van den Bulck's (2016) research shows, mobile phone use after lights out can adversely affect sleep and increase fatigue.'*

becomes:

*'Adults should restrict their mobile phone use at night because, as Exelmans and Van den Bulck's (2016) research shows, mobile phone use after lights out can adversely affect sleep and increase fatigue.'*

Your claim: that adults should restrict their mobile phone use before bedtime

Your evidence: research that links mobile phone after lights out to sleep problems (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2016)

## Technical

You're writing your essay about a specific topic in a specific academic discipline, so you should use technical terms associated with that topic and that discipline. This shows that you're developing an understanding of the special categories and terminology used in your discipline. It also helps you to communicate more precisely about the particular discipline-specific concepts that are important in your argument.

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the [Library Search Box](#), or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

## Abstract

You're presenting an argument about ideas rather than concrete things. Your argument may have a practical impact on the real world, but you still need to present the argument in abstract, conceptual terms.

The nouns you use should mostly be abstract nouns: qualities and concepts, things that you can't see or touch, e.g. sustainability, economic growth, anxiety, motivation, design. Many of these are related to verbs (e.g. growth comes from the verb 'grow', 'motivation' comes from the verb 'motivate'). You can find out more in YourDictionary's article on [Abstract Nouns](#).

## References

Exelmans, L. & Van den Bulck, J. (2016). Bedtime mobile phone use and sleep in adults. *Social Science & Medicine*, 148, 93-101.

## REPORTS

IN SOME DISCIPLINES YOU MAY BE ASKED TO WRITE A REPORT. YOU MIGHT NEED TO WRITE A REPORT ON INFORMATION YOU HAVE GATHERED ON A PARTICULAR TOPIC, OR ON A PRACTICAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE YOU HAD, OR ON A RESEARCH PROJECT YOU HAVE DONE EITHER ON YOUR OWN OR AS PART OF A GROUP. YOU MIGHT ALSO BE ASKED TO WRITE IT FOR A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE, E.G. A MARKET REPORT FOR A COMMERCIAL CLIENT.

Reports are also very common in many professional areas, including business, management, accounting, engineering, information technology, education, health, and social sciences. So learning to write reports at university is a really important part of developing your skills for your future career.

In this section you'll find resources to help you understand the report genre in general terms. Help for more specific types of reports is available from your School and will be available here in the near future.



## Report purpose

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.

### Reporting for your reader

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

### More information

- Chapter 15 'Writing Reports: Problem-solution texts' in Brick, J. (2011). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.
- Deakin University's page on [Report writing](#).
- University of Wollongong's UniLearning page on [Report Writing](#).



## Report structure

We can describe the structure of a report in a similar way to that of an essay: introduction, body, and conclusion. However, since the **purpose** (PDF, 46 kB) of a report is different from the purpose of an essay, the introduction, body, and conclusion of a report will also have a slightly different purpose and will look different from the sections of an essay.

You may also be asked to include specific elements in your report, such as a title page, table of contents, glossary, executive summary, recommendations, or appendices. The following table shows the possible elements of a report in the order they would usually occur.

The essential elements (introduction, body, conclusion, and reference list) are shown in red and bold in the table on the next page. The other elements are optional.

If you are asked to include any of the optional elements in your report, find where they occur relative to the introduction, body, and conclusion and insert them in the correct place. Always check what is required in a report before you begin, as different people have different expectations. Ask your tutor or manager, or check if a report template has been provided.



<b>Element</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Title page	Unit code and title, tutor's name, report title and purpose, your name and student number. Check your Learning Guide 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.
<b>Introduction</b>	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.
<b>Body</b>	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)
<b>Conclusion</b>	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.
<b>Bibliography or reference list</b>	Any sources you have referred to should be listed here in alphabetical order. Use the referencing system indicated in your Learning Guide.
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).

## Example Introduction

**Report task: identify the major stormwater issues facing Sydney catchments, examine how they affect rivers, streams and waterways, and cite specific examples of how (SMP) are being employed to improve the quality of runoff. (3<sup>rd</sup> year Engineering)**

Structural element	Example	Comments
Numbered section heading	<b>1. Introduction</b>	Identifies the section of the report, allowing for skim reading. Use Headings styles in Word.
General statement	The term stormwater is defined as the water that flows into drains and waterways after rainfall in urban areas.	Identifies the topic, in this case by defining the term.
Background information	Rainwater that cannot infiltrate into the soil is directed into stormwater drains, which comprise of a series of pipes, detention storages and open channels that flow into streams, creeks, rivers and bays. The diagram below shows how the flow occurs from rainfall to urban runoff and pollution processes.	Elaborates on the topic of stormwater, describing what happens to stormwater in more detail.
Diagram label	Fig 1. Flow diagram of urban stormwater runoff and pollution processes	Gives the diagram, figure or table a brief caption so the reader knows what they're supposed to see in it.
Diagram/figure	[Figure 1]	Offers extra clarity to point made.
Identification of problem	The major concern facing stormwater flow in Sydney is the pollution of urban runoff. Stormwater pollution comes from <b>point</b> and <b>non-point</b> sources.	Identifies problem clearly: pollution of urban runoff
Technical terms and their definitions included in the explanation of the problem	<b>Point sources</b> are those in which polluted water is discharged at a single location such as a factory or sewerage treatment plant. <b>Non-point</b> sources are those in which water pollution is generated from a large area and flows into the drainage system at more than one point. Urban development has a major impact on the type of pollution collected in stormwater flow.	The <b>technical terms</b> used here are defined because in this report, it's important to recognise the difference between them.
Further specification of problem	The impact on the environment ranges from issues of air pollution, water quality, increased <b>surface runoff</b> and impacts on <b>stream morphology</b> from changes in stream flow.	Further specifies the problem: environmental impact
Technical terms introduced without definition		The <b>technical terms</b> used here are introduced without definition - they are probably terms used routinely in the unit for which this assignment was written, so they don't need to be defined here.
Report preview	The aims and objective of this report are to identify the major stormwater issues facing Sydney catchments, examine how they affect rivers, streams and waterways, and cite specific examples of how (SMP) are being employed to improve the quality of runoff.	Outlines the things that will be covered in the report.

Example adapted from University of Western Sydney (n.d.).

## Formatting

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 Learning Guide 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

## More information

- The [Clarity English](#) module 'Core Skills for Business Writing' has online tutorials on 'Reports: organising information' and 'Key sections of a report' that you can work through at your own pace, with practice examples and quizzes. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's [eResources](#), and [log in](#) (PDF, 45 kB) using your Western ID.

## References

Brick, J. (2011). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2nd ed.). South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.

University of Western Sydney. (n.d.). 'Critical Practice: Perspectives from students and lecturers in Engineering' in *Field of Study: Engineering*.



## Report tone

As with an essay, a report is a formal piece of academic (or professional) writing. It should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. However, because a report often has practical outcomes in terms of decisions the reader might make, certain sections may use more concrete language (see below). Also, if the report is about your experience during a practical unit or similar, it will be more personal, but it should still remain formal, technical, and reasonably abstract (see below).



### Formal

Being formal doesn't necessarily mean being complicated or hard to read, but you do need to take care with your word choice and expression. Because a report is often written with a professional audience in mind (even in an academic setting), you need to make it sound professional. Imagine you are writing for a business manager or other professional who wears a suit and tie every day!

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids')
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't')
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max')
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments (find out more in [General writing help](#)).

### Impersonal

Your report is all about the information, not about you. Your reader just wants to know what the situation is, how they should think about it, and what they should do about it. Even your analysis of the situation/problem and your recommendations need to be presented in impersonal terms.

### Technical

You're writing your report about a specific topic in a specific academic discipline, and/or for a professional audience familiar with the concepts of the industry. So you should use technical terms associated with that topic and that discipline. This shows that you're developing an understanding of the special categories and terminology used in your discipline and industry. It also helps you to communicate more precisely about the particular discipline-specific concepts that are important in your treatment of the issues (see example of Introduction in [Report structure](#) (PDF, 109kB)).

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the Library Search Box, or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

## Abstract

Your report may be about real-world problems, but most of it should be expressed in conceptual terms. The recommendations section is where it might get a bit more concrete, as you apply your analysis to suggest future actions.

The nouns you use should mostly be abstract nouns: qualities and concepts, things that you can't see or touch, e.g. sustainability, economic growth, pollution, anxiety, design. Many of these are related to verbs (e.g. growth comes from the verb 'grow', 'pollution' comes from the verb 'pollute'). You can find out more about abstract language in [General writing help](#).

## More information

- Chapter 15 'Writing Reports: Problem-solution texts' in Brick, J. (2011). *Academic culture: A student's guide to studying at university* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) South Yarra, VIC: Macmillan.
- Deakin University's page on [Report writing](#).
- University of Wollongong's UniLearning page on [Report Writing](#).
- The [Clarity English](#) module 'Core Skills for Business Writing' has online tutorials on 'Reports: organising information' and 'Key sections of a report' that you can work through at your own pace, with practice examples and quizzes. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's [eResources](#), and [log in](#) (PDF) using your Western ID.

## CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDIES COME UP IN MOST DISCIPLINES, BUT ARE PARTICULARLY USED FOR STUDYING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR (E.G. SOCIAL SCIENCES & PSYCHOLOGY), HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (E.G. EDUCATION), OR PROFESSIONAL SITUATIONS (E.G. BUSINESS, NURSING & MIDWIFERY, SCEM).

Case studies get you to make the connections between the theory you're learning and a real world situation. In some cases, they allow you to see how a certain organisation puts theory into practice. Download our PDF resources below to help you get the purpose, structure, and tone of your case study right.

## MORE INFORMATION

- [UNSW's page on Writing the Case Study](#)
- [Monash University's page Case study report](#), which includes an example of a business-style problem-solving case study report with comments
- [Monash University's handout \(PDF\) on How to write the case study](#), which focuses on problem-solving case studies
- [Griffith University's handout \(PDF\) on Writing a Case Study](#), which explains different kinds of case studies



## Case study purpose

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 unit or discipline;
- recommend a course of action for that particular case (particularly for problem-solving case studies).

As with reports (see [Writing](#)), there are two major kinds of case studies: problem-solving case studies and descriptive case studies.

### Problem-solving 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. An example of this kind from Nursing is shown below:

---

#### 401006 Bioscience 2: Case Study (40%, 1200 words)

---

“Brian (88 years old) is a resident at a high dependency aged care facility (nursing home). He has developed infectious conjunctivitis in his right eye. On examination, his eye was found to be red and swollen with a purulent and sticky discharge. His vision was unaffected; however he did complain that his eye was painful. The doctor prescribed gentamicin eye drops which were to be administered to both eyes.”

Using the **supplied template** (to be accessed from the Assessment tab in the Unit’s vUWS site), answer the following questions [NB: specific questions are asked under each of these headings but have been omitted here for space reasons]:

- Q1. Background of the case study (Total: 5 marks)
- Q2. Mechanism of action of drug and adverse reactions (Total: 5 marks)
- Q3. Mediators of signs and symptoms (Total: 10 marks).
- Q4. Infection control issues (Total 5 marks)
- Q5. Transmission of infection (Total: 5 marks)
- Q6. Breaking the chain of infection (Total: 5 marks)
- 6.1 Describe two procedures nurses will need to undertake to prevent the infection from Brian’s eye being transmitted to another individual. Clearly explain how each procedure will effectively break the chain of infection (5 marks).

---

Example adapted from 401006 Bioscience 2, Spring 2015 Learning Guide.

In the above example, question areas 1-5 involve mainly description (e.g. the background, symptoms, infection control issues, and chain of infection), but question 6 asks the student to recommend procedures to prevent the spread of infection. So there is an element of problem-solving in this case study. The structure of this case study is also very specific: a template is mentioned and there are specific questions to answer.

## Descriptive case studies

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. An example from Business is shown below:

---

### 200855 Leadership in a Complex World: Leadership Analysis – Case Study Report (50%, 1500 words)

---

For this assignment, you are to select an organisation of your choice that addresses an issue that you are passionate about (e.g. environmental protection, social justice). The selected organisation will be your case study, to which you will apply what you have learnt so far about leadership. You will apply the relevant theories of leadership discussed in Workshop 2, and critically examine the different dimensions of leadership at play within your organisation... While you may use your creativity to structure the case study, a template with suggested headings will be made available in the Assessments folder.

---

Example adapted from 200855 Leadership in a Complex World, Autumn 2016 Learning Guide.

In the Business example above, the student has to choose their own case to investigate, with two criteria: it has to be an organisation, and it has to be one that addresses an issue the student is passionate about. The case study focuses on theories of leadership discussed in the unit, so the student should investigate the organisation in terms of its leadership. Unlike the nursing example above, the structure of this case study isn't tightly prescribed. The instructions specifically state that students can use their creativity, but there is also a template with suggested headings that they can choose to use.

## References

School of Business. (2016). *200855 Leadership in a Complex World* [Learning Guide, Autumn 2016]. Western Sydney University.

School of Nursing and Midwifery. (2015). *401006 Bioscience 2* [Learning Guide, Spring 2015]. Western Sydney University.



## Case study structure

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 Learning Guide 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)).

Make sure you check the Learning Guide first, both the assignment instructions and the marking rubric/criteria, to find out what structure you should use.

A case study report *may* have the elements shown in the following table. But you **MUST** check your Learning Guide or ask your tutor how to structure your case study report for that particular Unit, 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.

### More information

- UNSW's page on [Writing the Case Study](#).
- Monash University's page [Case study report](#), which includes an example of a business-style problem-solving case study report with comments.
- Monash University's handout on [How to write the case study](#) (PDF, 47 kB), which focuses on problem-solving case studies.
- Griffith University's handout on [Writing a Case Study](#) (PDF, 60 kB), which explains different kinds of case studies.



## Case study tone

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).



### Formal

Being formal doesn't necessarily mean being complicated or hard to read, but you do need to take care with your word choice and expression. Because a case study report is often written with a professional audience in mind (even in an academic setting), you need to make it sound professional. Imagine you are a professional writing for a business manager, your placement supervisor, or another professional.

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids');
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't');
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max');
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments (find out more in the 'Sentence structure' section of [General writing help](#)).

### Impersonal

Sometimes you, as the researcher, are also part of the situation that you are researching, e.g. in a workplace situation or professional placement. That means you may have to refer to yourself in your report. You should still do this in a formal way, keeping the report factual by describing what you did or said rather than how you felt (unless you're specifically asked to include a reflective component).

## Technical

One of the purposes of a case study is to apply theory to a practical situation, so you need to show that you know how to use the relevant technical terms to discuss the theoretical issues of the case.

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the Library Search Box, or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

## Abstract

Your case study report is about a real-world situation or problem, so you will use some concrete terms to refer to the people involved and what they do. This is especially the case if you are describing an individual's behaviour or health situation. In the Nursing example in the [Case Study Purpose](#) PDF (68 kB), you would have to refer to concrete things like Brian's eye, eye drops, etc.

However, your discipline has developed technical ways of discussing these things so that everyone can be more precise and be sure they're talking about the same thing. So you do need to use those technical and abstract terms as well. For example, in discussing the conditions of Brian's eye in the Nursing example, you would use the more technical and abstract term 'discharge' rather than 'sticky stuff', and 'administered to both eyes' instead of 'dropped in' or 'put in'. If you have to give recommendations, that's where it might get a bit more concrete as you apply your analysis to suggest future actions.

The nouns you use should mostly be abstract nouns: qualities and concepts, things that you can't see or touch, e.g. sustainability, economic growth, pollution, anxiety, design. Many of these are related to verbs (e.g. growth comes from the verb 'grow', 'pollution' comes from the verb 'pollute'). You can find out more in YourDictionary's article on [Abstract Nouns](#).

## More information

- UNSW's page on [Writing the Case Study](#).
- Monash University's page [Case study report](#), which includes an example of a business-style problem-solving case study report with comments.
- Monash University's handout on [How to write the case study](#) (PDF, 47 kB), which focuses on problem-solving case studies.
- Griffith University's handout on [Writing a Case Study](#) (PDF, 60 kB), which explains different kinds of case studies.

## REFLECTIVE WRITING

IT'S IMPORTANT TO STATE FROM THE OUTSET THAT THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO REFLECT.

Reflection is an internal process, and no one can tell you how to do it. We can, however, tell you a little about the purpose of reflection, and how to write reflectively in terms of both structure and tone.

If you're asked to submit a piece of reflective writing at university, make sure you meet all the requirements of the task. While there is no right or wrong way to reflect, there can be right or wrong ways to write about it!



## Purpose of reflective writing

Reflection is always a worthwhile activity, and should be a regular part of your life.

### 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.

Sometimes at university you'll be asked to write reflectively to demonstrate what you've learned about a topic, or you might have to keep a journal during a prac (practicum or practical experience placement), or build a learning portfolio of the skills you're acquiring.

Successful people learn from their mistakes, and reflection helps you do that. Reflection makes you an active learner, in control of your life, your actions, and your emotions.

### When can or should you reflect?

- When asked or prompted by assessment
- When something goes wrong
- When something goes right
- When you have a question or a conundrum
- When you encounter something that challenges your assumptions
- After a major life event
- During or after prac placement or a new experience
- After completion of a project e.g. a group work task
- Anytime you feel like it

You don't have to write your reflections down (unless for assessment) but a lot of people find doing so helps. For some reflective prompts, see [Reflective writing Structure](#) (PDF, 152 kB) as well as [Activities to aid reflection](#) (PDF, 97 kB). And if you do have a reflective writing task at uni, look at some information on [Reflective writing Tone](#) (PDF, 60 kB).

We also talk about reflecting on progress in the [Successful Study Skills](#) section of the Library Study Smart website.



## Structure of reflective writing

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:

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

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

Another model is the 4Rs model of reflective thinking:

Level	Stage	Questions to get you started
1	<b>Reporting and Responding</b>	Report what happened or what the issue or incident involved. Why is it relevant? Respond to the incident or issue by making observations, expressing your opinion, or asking questions.
2	<b>Relating</b>	Relate or make a connection between the incident or issue and your own skills, professional experience, or discipline knowledge. Have I seen this before? Were the conditions the same or different? Do I have the skills and knowledge to deal with this? Explain.
3	<b>Reasoning</b>	Highlight in detail significant factors underlying the incident or issue. Explain and show why they are important to an understanding of the incident or issue. Refer to relevant theory and literature to support your reasoning. Consider different perspectives. How would a knowledgeable person perceive/handle this? What are the ethics involved?
4	<b>Reconstructing</b>	Reframe or reconstruct future practice or professional understanding. How would I deal with this next time? What might work and why? Are there different options? What might happen if...? Are my ideas supported by theory? Can I make changes to benefit others?

Figure 1: The 4 Rs of reflective thinking, from Ryan & Ryan (2012, p. 18, Appendix A).

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Still not sure where to start? You might like to review some [activities to aid reflection](#) (PDF, 97 kB).

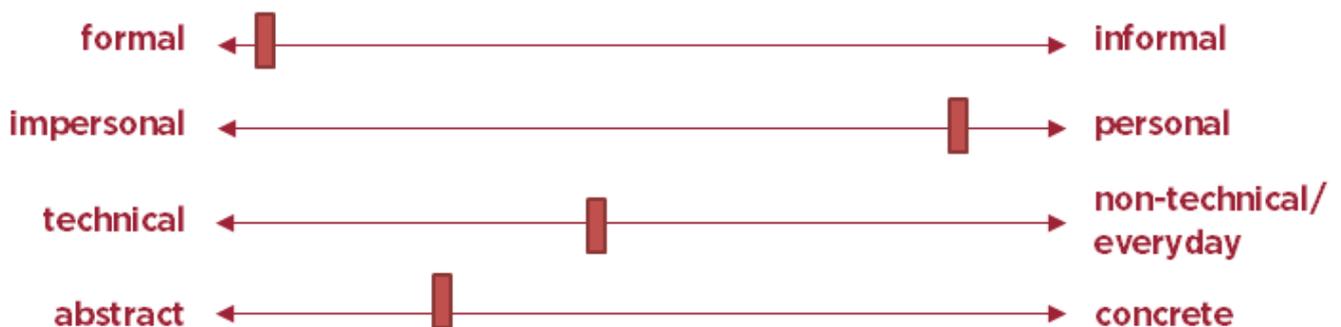
## References

- Ryan, M., & Ryan, M. (2012). *ALTC Project: Developing a systematic, cross-faculty approach to teaching and assessing reflection in higher education: Final report*. Retrieved from <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-developing-systematic-cross-disciplinary-approach-teaching-and-assessing-reflective-writing>
- Western Sydney University School of Nursing and Midwifery. (2016). *Professional communication academic literacy (PCAL) skills resource book for nursing and midwifery*. Retrieved from [http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/nursingandmidwifery/home/current-student-info/professional\\_communication\\_and\\_academic\\_literacy](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/nursingandmidwifery/home/current-student-info/professional_communication_and_academic_literacy)



## 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](#).



Check the instructions and marking criteria carefully, but if they do not say otherwise, the following probably apply:

**Formal:** Just because reflective writing is a personal exercise, it doesn't mean all the rules go out the window. You still need to write in complete, grammatically correct sentences with accurate spelling and punctuation. If it's for your eyes only, then do what you like, but if your reflection is going to be marked you need to make sure it's readable and abides by the marking standards.

To make your language sound as formal as possible, you should avoid using language features that are characteristic of spoken casual conversation, such as:

- colloquial or slang words (e.g. use 'children' instead of 'kids')
- contractions (e.g. use 'is not' instead of 'isn't')
- abbreviations (e.g. use the word 'maximum' instead of 'max')
- spoken-like grammatical structures such as run-on sentences or sentence fragments (find out more in [General writing help](#)). If you are discussing a conversation you had, you may need to write in spoken-like language to represent what was said. But you can use quotation marks to show which parts were originally spoken and set it apart from your formal written reflection.

**Personal:** Reflection is subjective, whereas academic essays usually need to be objective. In reflective writing, you are expected to reflect on your personal experience and how you felt about things you did. So your writing should be personal, while still formal. Different text types come with different conventions, so for more on the conventions of other types of writing see [Assignment Help](#).

Use first-person pronouns, i.e. I, me, we, and our. You are reflecting on yourself, your thoughts, and your understanding, so you really do need to use the first person. We know, this goes against everything you've been taught so far that says 'I' has no place in academic essays. We promise it's OK in a reflection, because you are talking about your own experiences.

Be honest and say what you think and feel. There's no point in lying to yourself or your marker. Take some time to really think through your perspective, and don't feel that you need to make things up to provide a more interesting experience for the reader. Your authentic experience is enough in itself.

**Technical:** You are reflecting on your experience in relation to a specific topic in a specific academic discipline, so you should use technical terms associated with that topic and that discipline. However, because you are also reflecting on your experience in a real-world situation, you may also refer to more everyday concepts in your reflective writing than you would in an essay.

Part of the purpose of reflective writing is to connect theory with practice, so using technical and theoretical terms shows that you're developing an understanding of the special categories and terminology used in your discipline.

Tips for learning to use the technical terms of your discipline:

- When you read your course readings, highlight terms that are not familiar to you. Do they seem to be specific to the discipline? Or are they just new words for you? You can check this by reading other sources in the same discipline, using the Library Search Box, or asking your tutor or fellow students.
- Note down key terms from your lectures and tutorials.
- Keep a glossary of the new terms you are learning.
- Take note of how scholars in your discipline use the terms, e.g. do they define the term for the reader or do they assume the reader knows what it means? Do they format it in a special way, e.g. using a capital letter(s) or an acronym? Do they contrast the term with other terms that have a similar meaning to clarify its scope?

**Abstract:** Because you are reflecting on your experience in a real-world situation, you will probably use some concrete terms to refer to the people involved and what they did. So your reflective writing will probably be a bit less abstract and conceptual than an essay. For example, if you are reflecting on an experience in a teaching placement, you may need to refer to the children in the class, the classroom equipment and materials (furniture, books, pencils, electronic whiteboard, etc.), and the physical actions of the people in the class.

However, your discipline has developed technical ways of discussing things so that everyone can be more precise and be sure they're talking about the same thing. So you do need to use those technical and abstract terms as well.

You can find out more about abstract language in [General writing help](#).

### More information

- [UNSW: Reflective Writing](#)
- [Monash University Language and Learning Online: Reflective Writing in Education](#)
- [Monash University Language and Learning Online: Reflective Writing in Medicine](#)
- [Griffith University: Reflective Writing \(PDF, 169 kB\)](#)
- [Southern Cross University: Reflective Writing Quick Guide available here](#)
- [Canterbury Christ Church University: Benefits and Problems of Reflection](#)



## Activities to aid reflection

### Questions

Ask yourself questions like ‘what was good about the experience?’ and ‘what was bad about the experience?’. Asking (and answering) questions can help you get started, and provide a basis for drawing out your own opinions and ideas.

### Stepping stones

Here, the idea is to think of a topic and list several experiences related to the topic chronologically. This helps you to generate other ideas. The topic could be a person, a place or an object (Progoff, 1975, as cited in Moon, 1999).



### Dialogues

The writer composes a dialogue between himself/herself and another person or part of self. This could start with a greeting and then develop into a conversation, putting forward a different viewpoint or exploring a problem. One speaker could give ‘guidance from wisdom’, i.e. represent someone in the writer’s life who has been a source of wisdom and influences his/her thoughts (Progoff, 1975, as cited in Moon, 1999).

### Double entry techniques

One part of this is descriptive and the other part consists of reflection on this description (Elbow, 1973, as cited in Moon, 1999). Holly (1984) suggests using a double page: on the left, description, and on the right, analysis and reflection. This format lends itself to a series of dated entries.

### Free writing

This is when you write for a set amount of time (e.g. 5 minutes) without planning what you will write or thinking about your spelling or grammar. The idea is to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, and simply write. This is a good technique for times when you feel there is a barrier to writing, because it helps your ideas to flow.

### Highlights of the day

Describe and analyse either a high point in your day (Field, 1951, as cited in Moon, 1999), e.g. a pleasant or rewarding experience, or a negative experience (Miller, 1979, as cited in Moon, 1999).

### Course handouts and readings

Take a look at a piece of material or a short reading from your unit. Read it closely and use it as a prompt to reflect on how you feel and what you think about as you read the text. Material such as questionnaires on learning styles and learning cycles can also be useful to prompt reflection.

### Rehearsal

Write about a problem or dilemma which has been worrying you, and visualise and reflect on possible ways to deal with it (Moon, 1999).

## Concept maps

Graphic techniques are a powerful way of exploring ideas (Moon, 1999). Concept maps/Mind maps generate ideas and contribute to understanding.

## References

Holly, M. (1984). *Keeping a personal, professional journal*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Moon, J. (1999). *Learning journals: A handbook for academics, students and professional development*. London, England: Kogan Page.

## GENERAL WRITING HELP

EVERYONE HAS LANGUAGE SKILLS. MAYBE YOU CAN SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH. MAYBE YOU'RE VERY GOOD AT ARGUING OR DEBATING. MAYBE YOU'RE GOOD AT EXPLAINING THINGS TO OTHERS. MAYBE YOU'RE GOOD AT BEING CREATIVE WITH LANGUAGE, SUCH AS RAPPING, OR WRITING SONG LYRICS, POEMS, OR STORIES.

A lot of what we do with language every day is spoken. While speaking is important at university, most of your assignments will require writing, so developing your writing skills for the academic setting is essential. If you can get good at writing at university, you'll also be more attractive to future employers.

In the sections on Essays, Reports, Case studies, and Reflective writing, we've introduced the conventions for structuring and writing whole texts. In this section, you'll find PDF guides to help you with the smaller elements of texts: paragraphs, sentences, grammar, and vocabulary.

The University also offers free workshops on academic writing, referencing, and grammar. These are open to all students enrolled at Western Sydney University. You can find out more information via **Student Services and Facilities**.

## MORE INFORMATION

Try one of these apps to help you with your sentences and punctuation:

- Apostrophe Power
- Sentence Hero for iOS
- Sentence Hero for Android

Clarity English offers interactive learning programs for reading, grammar and academic writing. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's eResources, and [log in](#) (instructions, PDF, 54 kb) using your Western ID.



## Paragraph structure

When you're writing for a university assignment, you need to organise your ideas as clearly and logically as possible. Paragraphs are an essential part of the organisation of your ideas.

This PDF includes information about:

- organising your ideas in paragraphs
- paragraph organisation principles

A paragraph is made up of sentences that are all related to the same point. Each paragraph in a piece of academic writing should have one main point or function, e.g. introducing the argument or purpose of the writing, making a point in the argument, proposing a course of action, or concluding the argument.

Before you can write a paragraph, you need to know what the main points in your essay should be. Prepare for writing by using the resources in the [Getting started](#) and [Researching and reading](#) sections of the Study Smart website.

### Organising your ideas in paragraphs

There are different ways of organising your ideas in paragraphs, depending on the purpose of the paragraph and the kind of text you're writing. But all paragraphs should start with a sentence that signals to the reader what the paragraph is about, and shows a relationship between the paragraph and the text as a whole. This sentence is sometimes called a 'topic sentence'.

The example paragraph below is taken from an essay on second language acquisition in adults and children. It's the first body paragraph after the introduction. The **topic sentence** is in bold, and the right hand column of the table provides an explanation of what each sentence contributes to the paragraph.

Paragraph 1	Comments
<p>(1) <b>Pronunciation is one area of second language acquisition where children seem to have an advantage over adults.</b> (2) Whereas adults normally retain an accent long after they have reached fluency, children usually manage to speak a second language with little or no accent (McLaughlin, 1984, p. 53). (3) This difference has been attributed to biological causes. (4) For example, Lenneberg (1967, cited in McLaughlin, 1984, p. 46) claims that after puberty 'the brain has lost its plasticity'. (5) The result is that children possess a capacity for excellent phonological representation, which adults have lost.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Topic sentence</b> introduces the topic of the paragraph: pronunciation. It also links the point to the essay's overall argument about differences between adults and children in learning a second language.</p> <p>(2) Explanation of the advantage/difference introduced in (1).</p> <p>(3) Summary of (2) and link to (4), which gives an example of evidence from biological research.</p> <p>(5) Summary/conclusion of whole paragraph.</p>

(Example adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 247).

## Try it yourself



The following paragraphs do not have topic sentences. After reading each paragraph, select the most appropriate topic sentence from the options given. The answers can be found at the end of this document.

### Paragraph 2

*The Federal Government deals with matters such as defence and immigration. State governments deal with matters such as public transport and public education. Local government deals with matters such as provision of garbage services and maintenance of local roads and parks.*

Which of the following sentences could function as a topic sentence for this paragraph? Why?

- The Federal government is the most important level of government.
- Australia has a unique system of government.
- There are three levels of government in Australia, with different responsibilities.

### Paragraph 3

*On the one hand, there are those who believe that soil erosion is linked to ‘...exploitation by national and international elites, rich landowners, large companies and so on [which] push the poor below subsistence level. They are then forced to mine the soil – extracting fertility without restoring it – simply to survive’ (Blaikie, in Harrison, 1996, p. 265). On the other hand are the Neo-Malthusians, who argue that it is population growth that leads to soil erosion in West and Central Africa and South Asia, where increased numbers of people place pressure on marginal areas (Harrison, 1996, p. 265). In this situation, technology is a factor that can help reduce erosion, rather than contribute to it, through the use of conservation techniques.*

Which of the following sentences could function as a topic sentence for this paragraph? Why?

- There is debate as to the factors which contribute to soil erosion, with arguments being split down ideological lines.
- It has been confirmed that population growth contributes to soil erosion and not technology which can actually help reduce erosion.
- In many countries population growth has resulted in soil erosion.

(Activity adapted from Inglis, 2007, pp. 247-8).

## Paragraph organisation principles

Different ways of organising ideas in a paragraph include:

### General to specific

Start with the most general idea in your topic sentence and then use the following sentences to bring in specific examples. Paragraphs 1 and 2 above are both examples of this organising principle.

### Problem and solution

Start by stating a problem in the topic sentence and then use the following sentences to explain how the problem might be solved.

### Claim and evidence

Present a claim in your topic sentence and then provide evidence in the following sentences.

### Claim and counter-claim or counter-argument

Present a claim in your topic sentence that you don't agree with and then present an opposing claim or argument against that claim. This is used when you are trying to argue against an objection that your reader might make to your argument.

### Chronological order (time)

Start with the topic or main point in your topic sentence, then introduce events relating to that topic or point in time sequence in the following sentences. This is especially useful when you need to present a historical overview of something.

### Most important to least important

Start with the topic or main point in your topic sentence, then introduce supporting points in order of importance in the following sentences.

(Adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 256).

### Examples

The paragraphs below provide further examples of how the sentences in a paragraph relate to each other and contribute to the purpose of the paragraph.

---

#### Paragraph 4

**(1) In research on approaches to learning, a distinction is often made between deep learning and surface learning.** (2) The basic difference in approaches is that deep learning is an active process whereas surface learning is passive. (3) Active learning involves skills such as planning and relating new information to previously learned information. (4) Surface or passive learners tend to be dependent on teachers and lack organisational skills. (5) The learning strategies of deep learners include looking for main ideas, and reading critically. (6) Surface learners, on the other hand, adopt strategies such as focusing on 'facts' and learning by rote. (7) Although surface learning strategies can be important in some subjects or in some stages of learning, deep learning is more likely to lead to understanding and success in university studies.

#### Comments

**(1) Topic sentence** signals that the paragraph is going to compare and contrast two kinds of learning: deep and surface learning. The terms 'distinction' and 'between' signal the comparison/contrast purpose of the paragraph.  
(2) Identification of the main point of contrast: whether the process involved in learning is active or passive.  
(3) Explanation of active learning.  
(4) Explanation of passive learning.  
(5) Description of learning strategies in deep learning.  
(6) Description of learning strategies in surface learning. Note use of 'On the other hand' to signal contrast.  
(7) Conclusion acknowledging that both learning approaches can be useful.

Note how the writer alternates between deep/active and surface/passive learning in the explanation (sentences 3-6). Note also that no references are used – you should refer to the sources of information to support your point and to maintain academic integrity.

---

(Example adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 253).

---

## Paragraph 5

## Comments

(1) To understand why some countries have higher birth rates than others it is necessary to appreciate some economic and cultural factors peculiar to those countries. (2) Levels of education and affluence, for example, are known to have an impact because birth rates are usually lower in developed countries than they are in less developed countries. (3) Birth rates are higher in countries where children are a necessary part of the family labour force. (4) Families are more likely to have children if the children are needed to work the farm. (5) This factor may be relevant also to the observation that countries which have higher levels of urbanisation tend to have lower birth rates. (6) Another factor relevant in developed countries seems to be the high cost of educating and raising children. (7) In countries where education is valued and costs are high, families tend to restrict the number of children that they have.

(1) Topic sentence signals that the paragraph is going to explain some of the causes of higher birth rates in some countries than others. The focus will be on economic and cultural factors in those countries.  
(2) Identification of cause 1: levels of education and affluence.  
(3) Identification of cause 2: children needed to work for the family.  
(4) Expansion of (3): more information about cause 2.  
(5) Identification of cause 3: levels of urbanisation.  
(6) Identification of cause 4: cost of education and raising children.  
(7) Expansion of (6): more information about cause 4.

Note the use of terms such as 'impact' and 'factor', which help describe the cause and effect relationships.

---

(Example adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 255).

### Solution to Topic Sentence activity

**Paragraph 2:** The answer is (c) because the paragraph identifies the three different levels of government in Australia (federal, state, local) and the matters they deal with, i.e. their different responsibilities.

**Paragraph 3:** The answer is (a) because the paragraph describes the different arguments in the debate about causes of soil erosion. The use of the phrases 'On the one hand' and 'On the other hand' is a clue that two different ways of thinking are being introduced. The writer also uses the term 'Neo-Malthusians', which relates to the 'ideological lines' mentioned in the topic sentence.

### More information

→ The PDF [Learning Guides from Adelaide University's Writing Centre](#) include help for introductions and conclusions, and paragraph writing.

### References

Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide*. (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.



## Sentence structure

**Paragraphs** (PDF, 85 kB) are made up of sentences that relate to each other, so you'll need well-formed sentences to make sure your paragraphs are strong. In this section we'll look at some of the most common problems students have with forming sentences.

In this PDF you'll find:

- introduction to basic sentences
- sentence fragments
- 'run-on' sentences
- connecting words and phrases

### Introduction to basic sentences

The simplest sentences tell you about something happening or some relationship between things. Let's take an example sentence (in bold):

**The Federal Government deals with matters such as defence and immigration.**

(Example from Inglis, 2007, p. 247).

This is a simple sentence that tells us about one relationship or happening: X deals with Y. 'Deals with' is the most important word group because it represents the process or relationship in the sentence. It's the verb (or verbal group) in the sentence. Every other word group is related to the verb in some way:

- **Who or what** deals with matters such as defence and immigration? The Federal Government.
- The Federal Government deals with **what**? Matters such as defence and immigration.

So there are three main word groups in this sentence:

1. The Federal Government (X)
2. deals with (verb)
3. matters such as defence and immigration. (Y)

#### Tip!

The verb is the most important word in the clause, so make sure every clause has a verb that represents the process or relationship you are describing. Every sentence must have at least one verb!

Let's take another sentence:

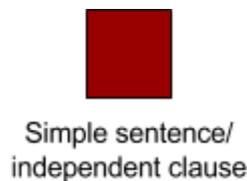
**Active learning involves skills such as planning and relating new information to previously learned information.**

(Example from Inglis, 2007, p. 253)

Although the verb (involves) is different this time, the structure is still the same: X involves Y. In this case, the Y part is a bit longer and includes some verbs in it such as 'planning' and 'relating'. But the basic structure is the same, and the extra verbs are just part of a description of 'skills'. We can represent this structure in a table:

X	Verb (group)	Y
Active learning	<i>involves</i>	<i>skills such as planning and relating new information to previously learned information.</i>

Simple sentences like these that can stand by themselves become the building blocks for more complex sentences. Let's represent it as a square block – it stands firmly on the ground:



In the following two sentences there are two parts (or clauses) that each have their own verb. The clause in bold is the basic claim that can stand by itself. You could put a full stop after it, and it would still be a well-formed sentence, e.g. 'Deep learning is an active process'.

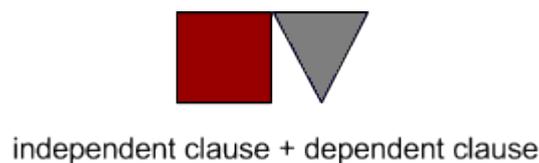
The second clause in each example elaborates on the first clause. These clauses can't stand by themselves because each has a particular connecting word (conjunction, in *italics*) that means it has to stay attached to a standalone (or independent) clause. These clauses are called dependent clauses.

**Deep learning is an active process** *whereas* surface learning is passive.

**Families are more likely to have children** *if* the children are needed to work the farm.

Independent clause	Dependent clause
Families <u>are</u> more likely to have children	<i>if</i> the children <u>are needed to work</u> the farm.
Deep learning <u>is</u> an active process	<i>whereas</i> surface learning <u>is</u> passive.

We could represent these sentences as a square block (standalone clause) followed by an upside down triangle (dependent clause). The upside down triangle is unstable, but the square block holds it up. But if the square block (standalone clause) isn't there to support it, the triangle (dependent clause) will fall over. The next section on sentence fragments explains this in more detail.



## Sentence fragments

When you look at feedback on your writing, you might find a comment from the marker such as 'sentence fragment'. That means that the sentence is somehow incomplete and doesn't convey a complete idea.

As we saw above, if you use a dependent clause, you also need an independent clause in the same sentence to complete the idea. If you don't have that independent clause, you'll end up with a sentence fragment.

But how can you tell if you have sentence fragments or stray dependent clauses? There are a few main features that make clauses dependent and unable to stand alone.

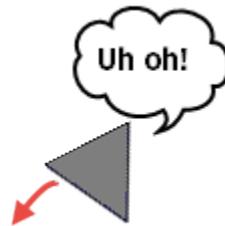
### Some conjunctions (joining words) make a clause dependent

Some examples of conjunctions that make a clause dependent and unable to stand alone are shown below. In case you're interested and want to explore them further, the technical term for these is 'subordinating conjunctions', because they make one clause subordinate to another.

after	because	in order to, in order that
since	unless	whereas
although (or even though)	before	instead of
so that	until	wherever
as, as long as, as soon as	if	once
though	when	while

Whenever you use these conjunctions, make sure that the sentence also has a standalone clause to complete the idea:

'Whereas surface learning is passive.' – incomplete, can't stand alone, like the triangle below.



'Whereas surface learning is passive, **deep learning is active.**' – complete.



The first clause presents contrasting information ('whereas'), and it needs the second clause to have something to add its contrasting information to.

Learn more about these kinds of conjunctions with the Grammarly article on [Subordinating conjunctions](#).

#### Tip!

When proofreading your work, look at the conjunctions and verb forms you have used. If you have used any of the conjunctions in the list above, or 'ing' or 'to' form verbs, check carefully to see whether you have completed the idea properly. If in doubt, ask another person to read the sentence for you and give you their feedback.

### Some verb forms make a clause dependent

Even if a clause doesn't have one of the conjunctions above, it can still be dependent and unable to stand alone. If you use the 'to' form of the verb or the 'ing' form, that will also make your clause unable to stand alone. To illustrate:

A person may experience many difficulties during the transition period from layperson to the newly acquired role of nurse. **Requiring a whole change of lifestyle so many adaptations must be made in order to fulfil the requirements of that role.**

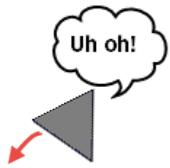
(Example adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 165)

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#### The sentence in bold has three clauses, as shown in the following table:

---

(1) Requiring a whole change of lifestyle **Dependent:** the verb is in the 'ing' form, which means it can't stand alone. This sentence relies on the previous sentence to complete the idea. Clause 2 in this sentence doesn't help it stand up because it's a new idea.

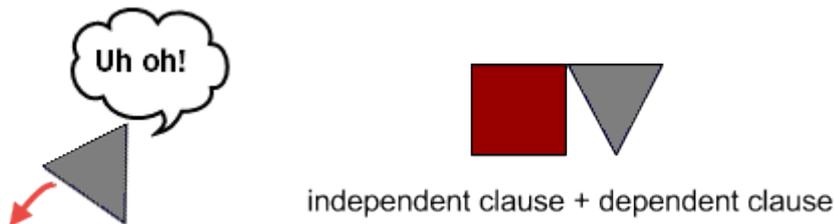


(2) so many adaptations must be made **Independent:** 'so' is a conjunction that does NOT make a clause dependent. This clause completes the idea of clause 3.

(3) in order to fulfil the requirements of that role. **Dependent:** the conjunction 'in order (to)' makes a clause dependent. Also, the verb 'to fulfil' is the 'to' form of the verb, which makes the clause unable to stand alone. This clause relies on clause 2 to stand up.

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We could represent this sentence as follows:

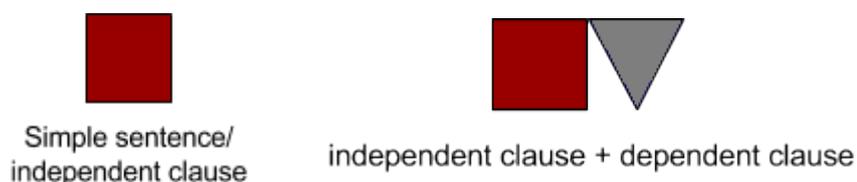


A better way of writing this sentence would be:

This **requires** a whole change of lifestyle, so many adaptations must be made in order to fulfil the requirements of that role.

The verb is changed from the 'ing' form, 'requiring', to the present tense (see 'Tense' below), 'requires'. Now the clause can stand alone.

The whole sentence now looks like this:



## 'Run-on' sentences

Sometimes the marker might write a comment like 'run-on sentence'. That means that the sentence contains too many ideas! You might need to break up the ideas into more than one sentence, or you might need to use a conjunction to show the logical connection between the ideas.

Here's an example from a piece of reflective writing:

**Learning grammar and translation skills seems to me to be like a linguistic security blanket of sorts, these skills are something students can practise by themselves, and there is little danger of embarrassment in doing drills and exercises.**

(Example adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 191)

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### This sentence has three clauses, each with its own main verb, as shown in the table below:

---

(1) Learning grammar and translation skills <u>seems</u> to me <u>to be</u> like a linguistic security blanket of sorts,	Independent clause: the verb is in present tense and the clause doesn't have a conjunction that would make it dependent.
(2) these skills <u>are</u> something students can practise by themselves,	Independent clause: again, the verb is in present tense and the clause doesn't have a conjunction that would make it dependent. This idea is not joined to clause (1) with a conjunction that shows how it relates to the idea in that clause.
(3) and there <u>is</u> little danger of embarrassment in doing drills and exercises.	Independent clause: again, the verb is in present tense and the clause doesn't have a conjunction that would make it dependent. It has the conjunction 'and' which joins it to clause (2) as an additional idea.

---

When you have independent clauses all in a row like this, it's important to show how each one is related to the others, otherwise you need to make a new sentence. This group of clauses would be better written as two sentences:

**(1) Learning grammar and translation skills seems to me to be like a linguistic security blanket of sorts. (2) These skills are something students can practise by themselves, and there is little danger of embarrassment in doing drills and exercises.**

This way, clause/sentence (1) becomes a kind of topic sentence, and sentence (2) explains the metaphor of the 'security blanket' by giving more detail about the skills.

#### Tip!

When proofreading your work, read each sentence carefully and try to count how many main ideas are in each one. Are the ideas logically connected? Do you need to break the sentence up or clarify the relationship between ideas with a conjunction?

## Connecting words and phrases

The following table gives examples of different kinds of connecting words and phrases that you can use to join ideas together. Each row shows a particular kind of meaning relationship that you might want to show between ideas.

Please note that even if two words or phrases appear in the same category, it doesn't mean they have exactly the same meaning or usage. So please choose carefully and make sure you ask someone to proofread your writing to make sure that your meaning is clear. You could also use the [Grammatically Handbook on Conjunctions](#).

Meaning relationship	Examples of connecting words and phrases		
Ordering information in a time sequence	initially at first first of all first(ly)/second(ly)/third(ly) next/then meanwhile while up to now before/before that	previously prior to after/afterwards thereafter subsequently ultimately lastly/finally presently soon	formerly concurrently since since then when eventually gradually simultaneously
Adding information	also in addition moreover or	and/and then furthermore additionally besides (this)	again indeed in fact
Showing cause/effect or reasoning	therefore consequently as as a consequence as a result accordingly	because because of this so/so that for this reason in that case hence	since thus now that for then
Generalising information	in most cases usually frequently	mainly for the most part	in most cases typically
Concluding information	in conclusion/to conclude in summary on the whole finally	conversely therefore ultimately	thus so in short
Contrasting information (showing difference)	however nevertheless yet/and yet on the one hand... on the other hand though/although even though otherwise	in spite of while instead in contrast alternatively either... or neither... nor	but on the contrary a different view despite whereas by comparison
Comparing information (showing similarity)	similarly/similar to also as like	likewise correspondingly equal/equally in the same way	in this case similar to both... and
Example/analogy	in other words for example for instance	such as as follows to demonstrate	to illustrate that is
Highlighting information	in particular particularly	especially notably	
Showing conditional information	if/even if unless whether	provided on condition (that)	in case otherwise

(Adapted from HALL, 2015; Inglis, 2007, pp. 260, 262)

### More information

- [Grammarly Handbook](#) section on [Sentences](#) has short, simple articles to help you understand different ways of constructing sentences.
- [Grammarly Handbook](#) on [Conjunctions](#) has short, simple articles explaining different kinds of conjunctions and how to use them.

### References

Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning (HALL). (2015). Connectors to unify your text.

Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide*. (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.



## Grammar

Grammar is what helps us make meaning that others in the community can understand. We all use grammar, even if we don't know what all the various grammatical concepts are called. But it can be tricky to recognise and fix your own grammatical mistakes if you haven't been taught formal grammar and don't have an explicit knowledge of the grammatical conventions of English.

This PDF is about some of the most common grammatical issues that come up in student writing:

- tense
- Subject/verb agreement
- use of articles

### Tense

A simple sentence represents a process or relationship, and a verb is the most important word group (see '[Sentence structure](#)' PDF, 150 kB). When you represent a process or relationship in a sentence, you can choose to describe it as being in the present, past, or future by using a particular form of the verb. We call this feature of the verb its 'tense'. For example:

Example	Tense
Nurses in many hospitals <u>were required</u> to perform the jobs of more than one person due to understaffing.	<b>Past tense:</b> you could use this form to report on what you found in investigating the effects of understaffing on how nursing work is distributed in hospitals.
Nurses in many hospitals are required to perform the jobs of more than one person due to understaffing.	<b>Present tense:</b> you could use this form to make a claim about what is generally true about staffing in hospitals.
Nurses in many hospitals will be required to perform the jobs of more than one person due to understaffing.	<b>Future tense:</b> you could use this form to predict how understaffing in hospitals might affect nursing work distribution in the future.

(Examples adapted from Inglis, 2007, p.263)

You can use the different tenses for different purposes in your writing. You should consider the purpose of the sentence or paragraph you are writing when selecting what tense to use.

Here are some general guidelines about using tense:

### Past tense

- Use past tense when reporting on a procedure you carried out (e.g. the Method section of a research report or in reflective writing), the results of your research (e.g. the Results section), or when explaining/describing a historical event, e.g.
  - Method: 'A dilution series **was performed**...'
  - Results: 'It **was found** that 46% of children in the school catchment area spoke a language other than English at home.'
  - Historical event: 'News reports from East Timor initially **brought** "the audience into the story" (Sheridan Burns, 2002: 53) by giving graphic accounts of the killing of the five Australian journalists who, in 1975, were reporting on the political unrest in the tiny Indonesian province.'
- If you are reviewing old literature and want to explicitly comment on the validity of the writer's claim, it may be appropriate to use past tense for the reporting verb (said, argued, claimed), etc., and then switch to present tense to evaluate it. For example:
  - 'A study carried out between 1979 and 1983 (Sydney Water) **identified** sewage effluent as a major source of pollution that affects the water quality in the Hawkesbury Nepean River, a river that supplies up to 65% of Sydney's drinking water... Although sewage treatment has improved significantly, sewage effluent **is** an ongoing concern with pollution that enters waterways.' (Adapted from HALL, n.d. Engineering Critical Writing, p. 138)

### Present tense

- Use present tense in essays and other text types when discussing theory and general principles (e.g. 'These occupational health hazards include the risk of back injuries, stress, and the dangers of radiation and infection.') or when previewing the content of your essay or report (e.g. 'This paper argues that violence against nurses is a serious problem for hospitals and thus a serious occupational hazard.').
- When reporting on what the literature says, it's generally appropriate to use present tense, e.g.
  - 'Cone (2001) argues that the challenge for educators in a complex, global society is to provide active learning environments that build the relevant skills of independent learning, problem solving, communication and team work.'

### Future tense

- Use future tense sometimes in the introduction when previewing the content of an essay or report, e.g.
  - 'The work of two prominent adult educators, Malcolm Knowles and Paulo Freire, will be explored to develop this understanding.'
- Use future tense sometimes in the introduction to present the background to a problem where it involves predictions of an increasing trend, e.g.
  - 'There has been a massive increase in the use of personal mobile phones over the past five years and this will most likely continue. According to Black (2002) by 2008 almost 100% of working people in Australia will carry personal mobile phones.'

(Example adapted from RMIT Learning Skills Unit, n.d., p.1)

### In general

- Be consistent. If you use present tense in one sentence, you should probably use present tense in the rest of the paragraph. You need to have a good reason to change tense.

## Subject-verb agreement

As well as having tense, verbs also relate to the other words in the sentence, especially the Subject. The Subject and verb are in a very close relationship, and in English we see this in the way the verb form changes depending on certain characteristics of the subject.

Person	Singular	Plural
1st person	I say	we say
2nd person	you say	you say
3rd person	he/she/it says	they say

You can see that there are two forms of these verbs in the present tense: say and says. Most of the time, the form is 'say'. But when the Subject is the 3rd person (not me or you, but something else) and singular, the form 'says' or 'has' is used.

This pattern works for almost every other verb as well. Here is another example:

Person	Singular	Plural
1st person	I have	we have
2nd person	you have	you(se) have
3rd person	he/she/it has	they have

In most types of academic writing, you'll mainly only need the third person forms anyway, because it's usually best to avoid using first and second person (I and you). Third person covers most of the Subjects you will use in academic writing, e.g. singular 'Smith says', 'the article says', and plural 'researchers have found'.

A major exception is the irregular verb 'to be', which is used frequently in academic writing, so it's worth writing out the paradigm for that one.

Person	Singular	Plural
1st person	I am	we are
2nd person	you are	you(se) are
3rd person	he/she/it is	they are

The pattern is almost the same as the one above (same form 'are' for everything except third person singular 'is'), but there is also a different form for 1st person singular, 'am'.

For past and future tense, the forms are all the same.

#### Past Tense

Person	Singular	Plural
1st person	I said	we said
2nd person	you said	you(se) said
3rd person	he/she/it said	they said

#### Future tense

Person	Singular	Plural
1st person	I will say	we will say
2nd person	you will say	you(se) will say
3rd person	he/she/it will say	they will say

That doesn't seem too hard, right? But the tricky part is making sure the Subject and verb 'agree'. That means getting the right verb form for the Subject of the clause. Sometimes it's hard to work out what the Subject is, and whether it's singular or plural. This is especially the case when you have long noun groups, which are quite common in academic writing. Here are some examples:

*Fox's argument seems valid.*

Subject: Fox's argument (singular)

*Fox's arguments seem valid.*

Subject: Fox's arguments (plural)

*Nurses in many hospitals are required to perform the jobs of more than one person due to understaffing.*

Subject: Nurses (plural); 'in many hospitals' is a description of 'nurses'.

*Nurses in the emergency department are required to perform the jobs of more than one person due to understaffing.*

Subject: Nurses (plural); 'in the emergency department' is a description of 'nurses'.

(Examples adapted from Inglis, 2007, p.263)

In the last example, even though the word immediately before the verb is singular ('department'), that word is not the Subject so it doesn't affect the verb form.

It can help to ask the question: 'who or what are required to perform the jobs of more than one person?' You should get the answer 'nurses' rather than 'departments' here. That tells you that 'nurses' is the subject of the verb.

#### Tip!

When proofreading, check the verb in each clause and ask the 'who or what' question above. When you find the answer to the question, which is the Subject, check whether it's singular or plural, and then check whether the verb form you've used 'agrees' with the form of the verb. If it doesn't, all you need to do is make a minor change, and it will make a major improvement to your writing!

## Articles

If you're a native speaker of English, you probably haven't ever thought much about the little words like 'a', 'an', and 'the' that we call 'articles'. If you've learnt English as a second or other language, you've probably struggled with them!

Whether you're a native speaker of English or a speaker of another language, there are things you can learn about articles to improve your academic writing.

### The basics

**Articles** are little words that go before nouns in English and some other languages. They help with cohesion, because they show whether or not the speaker is introducing something new or referring to a specific item that they have already mentioned.

Nouns have lots of different features, but the ones that are important for choosing the right article are: countability and definiteness.

### Countable vs. uncountable

Countability refers to whether the noun is something that can be counted by numbers, e.g. one person/7 billion people, one mouse/three mice, one bottle/99 bottles; one idea/7 ideas; one day/365 days. You can use the articles 'a/an', 'the', and the counters 'some', 'many', and 'a few' with these words. You **MUST** use an article with a countable noun. Choose the right one depending on whether or not the noun is definite (see below).

Words like 'water', 'sugar', 'sunshine', 'poverty', and 'wisdom' are uncountable. You can't use numbers to count these: 'three waters' (unless 'a water' stands for 'a bottle of water' e.g. at a shop), 'five sunshines', '25 poverties'. Normally, these words are not used in plural form. You can use the article 'the', and the counters 'some', 'any', and 'much' with these words. You don't have to use an article with an uncountable noun. Check whether or not the noun is definite (see below) in order to decide whether it needs an article.

If you're not sure whether a word is countable or not, check it in a dictionary, e.g. the [Oxford Learner's Dictionaries](#). The dictionary will show you all the meanings of that word and whether each one is treated as countable or not.

### Definite vs. indefinite

Definiteness refers to whether or not the writer is referring to a specific instance of that noun that both the writer and reader already know about. This relies on the context of the writing and what has already been introduced. If the specific instance is known to both writer and reader, then it is definite. If the specific instance hasn't been introduced yet and the writer is mentioning it for the first time, then it's indefinite. Here are some examples:

'According to a 2015 study...' - 'study' is countable, so it has to have an article. It is indefinite, because the writer is introducing it for the first time.

The next time the writer mentions the same study, they will say:

'**The** study found that...' because the writer and reader both know which study is being referred to.

'Research has found...' - 'research' is uncountable, so it doesn't need an article. The amount of research is unspecified here, and the research hasn't been mentioned before so it is indefinite and doesn't need an article at all.

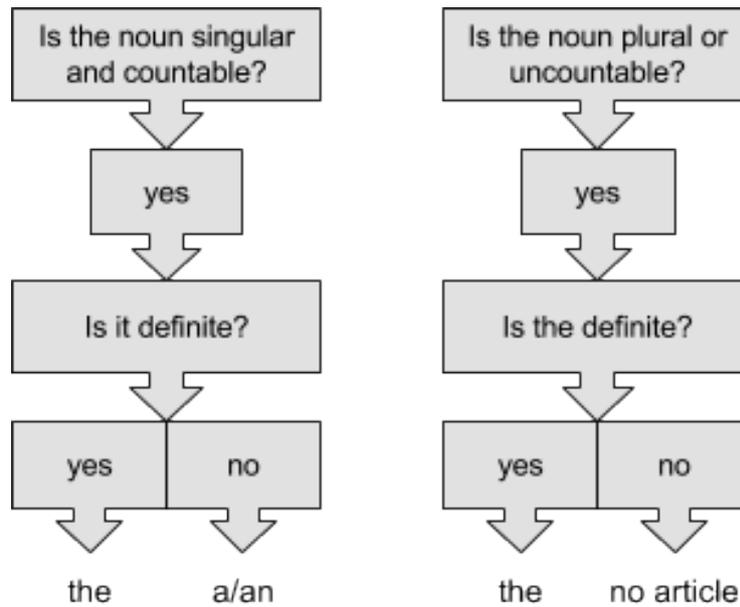
The next time the writer mentions the same research, they will say:

'The research showed...' - 'research' is uncountable, so it doesn't need an article. But the writer has already introduced it so they use the definite article 'the'.

'**Much** research has been conducted recently to investigate...' - 'research' is uncountable, so it doesn't have to have an article. If you want to indicate the extent of the research, use the counter 'much' because that can be used with uncountable nouns.

## Flow Chart

Here is a helpful flow chart to help you work out whether you need an article or not:



(Adapted from University of Adelaide Writing Centre, n.d., p.1)

## Try it yourself

The **Clarity English** module 'Study Skills for Success' has an online tutorial on 'Grammar' that you can work through at your own pace, with practice examples and quizzes. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's **e-Resources**, and log in using your Western ID ([login instructions PDF](#), 45 kB).

## More Information

- **Academic Literacy Pod 1** from the School of Humanities and Communication Arts introduces some of the language skills needed for academic communication.
- The **PDF Learning Guides from Adelaide University's Writing Centre** include Articles in English Grammar, Objective Language, and Verbs for Reporting.
- **Grammarly Handbook** section on **Verb Tenses** has short, simple articles explaining the different verb tenses in English.
- **Grammarly Handbook** section on **Punctuation** has short, simple articles to help you use different punctuation marks appropriately.

## References

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University of Adelaide Writing Centre. (n.d.). Articles. Retrieved from [www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/)



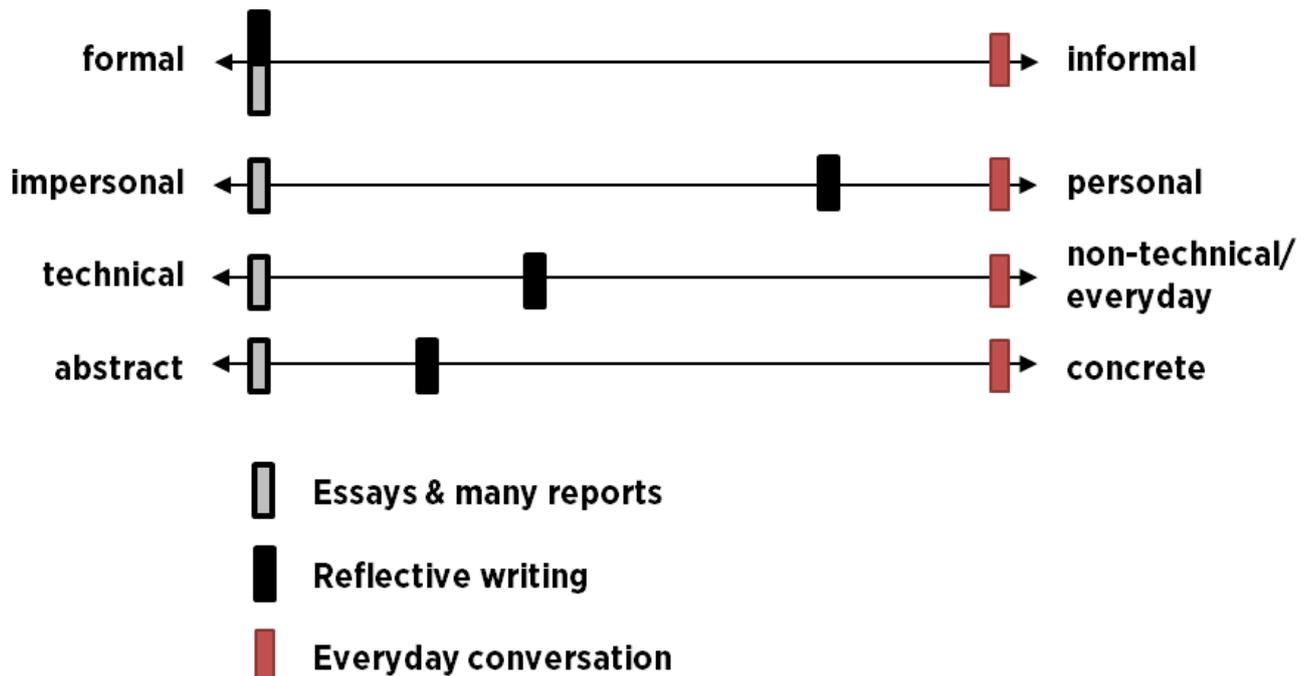
## Tone / register

Tone or register refers to the way grammar, words, and expressions are selected for a piece of writing to make it appropriate for its intended context.

Think of the language choices you might make if you were trying to explain to a child how a car works, or why people get sick. Then think of how you might explain the same thing to a fellow student, or to your lecturer. You would most likely make very different choices in the different contexts.

The tone or register of a piece of academic writing will therefore depend on what kind of writing you're being asked to do. Check out our [Writing section](#) on essays, reports, case studies and reflective writing for specific details about the kind of tone you should aim for.

In general, you can think of the tone of a piece of academic writing in terms of four features: formality, impersonality (or objectivity), technicality, and abstractness. You could imagine these as sliding scales, like the ones on a sound mixing desk where you change the levels depending on what inputs you have and what space you're in.



Each kind of text has its own 'setting'. Essays and reports tend to be more formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. At the other end of the spectrum, everyday conversation tends to be more informal, personal, non-technical, and concrete. Reflective writing sits somewhere in between: it still needs to be formal and reasonably technical and abstract, but should be more personal than an essay because you're reflecting on your personal experience.



## Vocabulary

*“When biophrased into a cartogenian ormascapia, it is consistently found that a myospha ordinate ledepramactorially enslomiates into parquenforial dimensions, due to the fact that sepentengual misconsonment can only ever be absomented in a thristorial and elephantuan manner.”*

What do you think of the sentence above? The vocabulary looks impressive, and the sentence structure is appropriate for English, but the sentence is impossible to understand. This is partly because most of the long words are made up, but also because there are so many long words, one after the other, that are not explained. It’s as if the reader is meant to know what they mean.

Choosing the right words for an academic essay can be difficult. You need to sound like you know what you’re talking about and show that you are developing your knowledge in your field of study. But you also need to be clear and use words that you know the meaning of; otherwise you risk making your writing unclear or even sounding like you don’t understand what you’re talking about.

### Tips:

- **DO** use technical terms from your discipline - this shows that you’re developing an understanding of the major concepts and terms in your field.
- **DON’T** use words that you couldn’t explain to someone in simple terms. If a friend asked you ‘what does that word mean’ and you couldn’t explain it to them, avoid using it. It is better to use simpler words that you understand. If you don’t know what a word means or how to use it, you probably won’t be able to use it well in a sentence and then you end up sounding like you don’t know what you’re talking about! But...
- **DO** look up keywords and technical terms from your field in a dictionary and try to understand what they mean, so that you could explain the meaning to someone else. Look for how the word is used in the unit readings. If you want to use a technical term, make sure you use it in a similar way to how scholars in your field use it in their writing. Consider the following example:

---

### Example from a scholarly text

‘Another factor to consider is whether the ESP class is made up of a **homogeneous** group from one discipline or profession, or a **heterogeneous** group of learners from different discipline, professions, or levels of management. Even a group from one company, or even one department of a company, is unlikely to be homogeneous if it contains senior managers, junior managers and secretaries, as each sub-group will have different needs.’ (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 152)

### Comment

The terms ‘homogeneous’ and ‘heterogeneous’ are used in contrast with each other here. A group can be either homogeneous OR heterogeneous, but not both. From the text, we can work out that a ‘homogeneous’ group is one that contains similar kinds of people, whereas a ‘heterogeneous’ group is one where the people are of different kinds. It sounds like both are used as describing words (adjectives). Macquarie Dictionary definitions:

Homogeneous (adjective): composed of parts all of the same kind; not heterogeneous.

Heterogeneous (adjective): different in kind; unlike; incongruous.

---

## Expressions to introduce quotations

The tables below show some examples of common verbs and expressions used to introduce quotations and ideas from other sources (see also the [Using sources](#) section on the Study Smart website). The first table includes ‘that’ in brackets - i.e. (that) - to show when the verb can project speech, i.e. you can use it to introduce the speech or ideas of someone else. If the verb doesn’t have ‘that’ after it in the table, you can’t use it to introduce speech or ideas. For example:

Brown (1985: 176) **describes that** children who watch a great deal of televised violence could be affected for many years.

This sentence doesn’t make grammatical sense because the verb ‘describes’ can’t project speech or ideas using ‘that’. The meaning would be better expressed by one of the following revised sentences:

Brown (1985: 176) **says that** children who watch a great deal of televised violence could be affected for many years.

OR

Brown (1985: 176) **describes** the long-term impact of televised violence on children who are exposed to it in high levels.

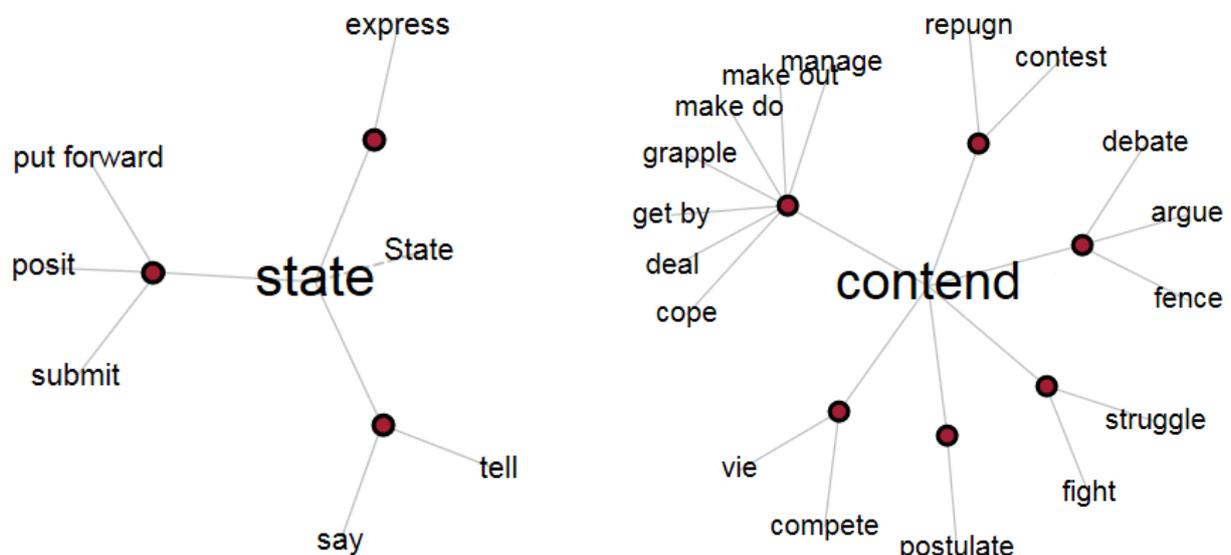
### Common verbs to introduce quotations or ideas

adds (that)	contends (that)	elaborates (on X)	predicts (that)
affirms (that)	contests (that)	emphasises (that)	puts forward (the claim/idea that)
agrees (that)	counters (that)	highlights (that)	questions (the claim/idea that)
argues (that)	demonstrates (that)	illustrates (X)	reasons (that)
claims (that)	describes (X as)	implies (that)	rejects (the claim/idea that)
clarifies (that)	disagrees (that)	justifies (X)	remarks (that)
confirms (that)	disputes (that)	observes (that)	theorises (that)

(Adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 231)

Please note that the words in the table above don’t all mean the same thing, so this list shouldn’t be treated like a ‘lucky dip’ where you choose one for the first quotation, and the next one for the next quotation, and so on.

If you’re not sure what the exact meaning of the term is, use a dictionary to check before using it. The [visual thesaurus](#) (free for limited use) can also be helpful for this because it displays the word’s relationships to other words. You can get a feel for the kind of company the word keeps, as shown below for the verbs ‘state’ and ‘contend’.



There are also many phrases that you can use to introduce quotations or paraphrased ideas, as shown in the table below.

As with the verbs listed before, don't treat this list like a 'lucky dip'. Be thoughtful about choosing an appropriate expression that fits into your argument.

---

### Common phrases to introduce quotations:

---

According to X ...	X has expressed a similar view ...
X comments that ...	X feels/believes/maintains that ...
Reference to x reveals that ...	X claims/insists that ...
As X has indicated ...	The work of X asserts that ...
X notes/stresses/emphasises that ...	X warns/challenges that ...
As X points out ...	X criticises Y ...
X has drawn attention to the fact that ...	X is convinced that ...
Research by X suggests that...	In a study, X found that...
X's study into Y recommends that...	A study by X indicates/shows that...
X proposes/advises/urges that...	In his/her analysis, X reveals that...

(Adapted from Inglis, 2007, p. 231)

### Try it yourself



The **Clarity English** module 'Study Skills for Success' has an online tutorial on 'Vocabulary' that you can work through at your own pace, with practice examples and quizzes. You can find Clarity English under 'C' in the Library's **e-Resources**, and **log in** (PDF, 45 Kb) using your Western ID.

### References

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multidisciplinary approach*.

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## USING SOURCES

OTHER SECTIONS OF THIS WEBSITE CONTAIN INFORMATION ON **TYPES OF SOURCES** (PDF) AND **THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT SOURCES** (PDF).

Once you've done your research, found your sources, and made some notes, how do you use all this in your essay or assignment? The main reason to use sources is to give evidence to support your claims.

When you use information from a source, you have three options for incorporating that information into your own writing. You can:

1. Quote the material directly, with attribution;
2. Summarise the material, with attribution; or
3. Paraphrase the material, with attribution.

Note that attribution is non-negotiable. Any time you refer to an idea that is not your own, you must give credit to the source. See **Referencing and citation** (PDF) for more information.

Note that, however you choose to incorporate information from sources, it must be integrated with your own writing. You can't just drop a quotation or a paraphrase into a paragraph and expect your reader to work out the connection between it and the rest of your writing.

Stuck on the right words to use to integrate evidence? See 'Expressions to introduce quotations' in our **Vocabulary** (PDF).

Read on for more information about referencing, quoting, summarising, and paraphrasing.



## Referencing and citation

Referencing and citation are sometimes used interchangeably but actually they refer to different components of the ways academic writers give attribution to the work of others.

Attribution (acknowledging the source) is a key aspect of **Academic Integrity**; a lack of appropriate attribution could lead to accusations of plagiarism, so it's a wise move to become familiar with requirements in your area of study. It's important to consult your Learning Guide to find out the preferred citation style for each unit you study.

Many different referencing styles are used across academic disciplines, but the purpose is always to give the reader all the information they need to find and review the sources you have used in your work.

Wherever you have included a direct quotation or have paraphrased, summarised, or referred to the work of other(s), you must include an in-text citation and full reference details, laid out in the referencing style preferred by your School or discipline.

In-text citations are included within your writing to provide information to the reader about a source you have referred to. The idea is that the reader should be able to see which ideas come from which particular source. The detailed references for these citations are then listed at the end of your paper in the reference list (sometimes called a bibliography). If you choose to refer to a source that is itself referred to in the source you are reading, it is called a **secondary citation**. In your reference list, you should include the source that you have read, not the one you haven't.

**Example:** If you are reading Jones and it includes something about Smith's ideas that you want to refer to, cite in-text as follows: (Smith, as cited in Jones, 2012, p. 5) and include the full reference to Jones in your reference list.

In some styles, in-text citations will consist of numbers which lead the reader to footnotes at the bottom of each page. In other styles, known as author-date styles, in-text citations provide the author(s) and year of publication in parentheses within the text.

**Example:** Research by Smith<sup>1</sup> has shown that.... or: Research has shown that ... (Smith, 2005).

There are **detailed guides to the citation styles used at this University** on the Library website under the Guides menu. You'll find short video demonstrations about referencing different types of information (e.g. books, journal articles, and websites) and PDF guides with lots of examples. There is also a cool tool called I:Cite which generates referencing examples for you on the spot.

It's vital to learn how to reference properly; often there are marks allocated in the assignment for referencing, so you can make the most of this and get those marks every time if you get your referencing sorted.

Once you're familiar with the process, you might want to use software such as EndNote and RefWorks to manage your references, or use the I:Cite tool to give you examples. Check the Library's **Referencing and Citation Guide** for details on accessing these programs.



## Quoting

Imagine that you're writing an essay. The topic is:

*'Describe some of the challenges faced by student nurses, and ways that these challenges can be overcome.'*

You have decided to discuss the essay topic in two parts: clinical challenges and personal challenges.

This is a paragraph from one of the sources you found in your research:

*The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.*

This paragraph is from a textbook by Lewis & Foley. The full citation (APA style) for a reference list is as follows:

Lewis, P., & Foley, D. (2014). *Health assessment in nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

### How will you use this source as evidence for your claims?

Your first paragraph on clinical challenges begins as follows:

*Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. Lewis and Foley (2014) said nurses can learn to improve their clinical judgement skills.*

What's wrong with the above use of the source? Is it:

- A. using the same words as the original
- B. presented without context
- C. taken out of context of the original source
- D. all of the above

OK, all of the above are true, so let's rewrite. The topic sentence is still appropriate, so it's only the use of the source that we need to change:

*Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. One such challenge is inexperience, especially when compared to their more experienced colleagues. However, Lewis and Foley (2014, p. 61) note that nurses "can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills".*

Now the evidence from the source has been clearly identified in its context, it has context in the paragraph, and quotation marks are used to show that the words have come straight from the source.

When using direct quotations, bear in mind the following tips:

- Quote accurately, and double-check with the original source.
- Do not quote out of context.
- Cut down lengthy quotes if not all of the information is relevant.
- Take care to note where you have omitted information.
- Use a combination of short and long quotations as appropriate.
- Include the page number where the quotation can be found in the source.
- Follow the formatting rules of the citation style you are using, especially for long quotations. See the University Library's [Referencing and Citation guide](#) for assistance with different styles.
- Ensure smooth integration with your own writing so that you maintain the sense and grammar of the quote.

### **More information**

- [UNSW: Selecting information for assignments](#)
- [UniLearning: Notetaking: Direct and indirect quotes](#)
- [University of Adelaide: To paraphrase or to quote? \(PDF, 354 kB\)](#)
- [Royal Literary Fund: Direct quotation, paraphrasing and referencing](#)
- [The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Quotations](#)
- [Deakin University: Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting](#)



## Summarising

The words 'paraphrasing' and 'summarising' are sometimes used interchangeably, but usually they are used to mean two different techniques. If you're not sure if you're required to summarise or paraphrase, check with your tutor.

A **summary** is a description of the main ideas of a text, so it is shorter than the original text. A journal article might be summarised in a single paragraph, for example, or a whole book summarised in a few paragraphs. To summarise something – like a TV show or an article – is to condense it down to the 'bare bones'.

A **paraphrase**, in contrast, is rewriting a piece of text in your own words, while retaining the meaning. It is usually similar in length to the original text.

Both paraphrasing and summarising are important techniques in academic writing.

You'll use paraphrasing and summarising both when you take notes during your research and when you incorporate evidence from sources into your own work.

In this PDF we cover:

- summary vs paraphrase
- writing a summary
- using a summary

### Summary vs paraphrase

Summary	Paraphrase
Can be very short	Should be about the same length as the original text
Communicates only the main ideas, leaving out supporting ideas and examples	More detailed than summary and can include supporting ideas and examples
Uses different words to the original text	Uses different words to the original text

The technique of summarising is when you describe the main idea of a text in concise terms.

It's a bit like describing a movie or TV show to a friend – you concentrate on only the most important information. You can write summaries of sources to use in your writing to support your claims in broad terms.

## Writing a summary

Sample text from source:

*The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.*

From Lewis and Foley (2014, p. 61).

How would you summarise this paragraph? Start with what's the main idea or message, or ask yourself, what is the writer trying to do? Is the writer describing something, explaining a process, or a persuading someone?

Some examples:

*Lewis and Foley (2014) explain the importance of clinical placement in the development of clinical judgement skills.*

OR

*Student nurses face many challenges, especially when it comes to making clinical judgements, but they can overcome these with appropriate support (Lewis & Foley, 2014).*

OR

*New nurses often have difficulty making clinical judgements, but they can improve their skills in this area through experience and support, particularly during clinical placement (Lewis & Foley, 2014).*

OR

.... Fill in your own

## Using a summary

Imagine that you're writing an essay. The topic is:

*'Describe some of the challenges faced by student nurses, and ways that these challenges can be overcome.'*

You have decided to discuss the essay topic in two parts: clinical challenges and personal challenges.

Here are some examples of integrating a summary of Lewis and Foley (2014) into a paragraph on clinical challenges.

*Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. One of these is difficulty making clinical judgements, but with appropriate support students nurses can overcome this obstacle (Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61).*

OR

*Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment. According to Lewis and Foley (2014, p. 61), one of these is difficulty making clinical judgements, but with appropriate support students nurses can overcome this obstacle.*

Note the citation difference here – in the first example the citation is fully in parentheses at the end of the sentence, whereas in the second example the author names are used in the sentence itself, with the phrase ‘according to...’, and the year of publication in parentheses as per APA style. Both are correct uses of in-text citations in APA style.

However, you might want to use a more specific idea or example from this text, in which case you should consider writing a paraphrase instead of a summary.

Note: Under APA guidelines you are not required to give a page number unless you are directly quoting from the source, however if you paraphrase or summarise a specific section of the text you should consider including the page number.

See the University Library’s [Referencing and Citation guides](#) for assistance with different styles.

### More information

- UNSW: Selecting information for assignments
- UniLearning: Notetaking: Direct and indirect quotes
- University of Adelaide: To paraphrase or to quote? (PDF, 354 kB)
- Royal Literary Fund: Direct quotation, paraphrasing and referencing
- The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Quotations
- Deakin University: Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting

### References

Lewis, P., & Foley, D. (2014). *Health assessment in nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.



## Paraphrasing

The words 'paraphrasing' and 'summarising' are sometimes used interchangeably, but usually they are used to mean two different techniques. If you're not sure if you are required to summarise or paraphrase, check with your tutor.

A **paraphrase** is rewriting a piece of text in your own words, while retaining the meaning. It is usually similar in length to the original text.

A **summary**, in contrast, is a description of the main ideas of a text, and so it is shorter than the original text. A journal article might be summarised in a single paragraph, for example, or a whole book summarised in a few paragraphs. To summarise something – like a TV show or an article – is to condense it down to the 'bare bones'.

Both paraphrasing and summarising are important techniques in academic writing.

You'll use paraphrasing and summarising both when you take notes during your research and when you incorporate evidence from sources into your own work.

In this PDF we cover:

- paraphrase vs summary
- steps in the paraphrase process
- an example of the process of paraphrasing
- integrating paraphrases into your writing

### Paraphrase vs Summary

Paraphrase	Summary
Should be about the same length as the original text	Can be very short
More detailed than summary and can include supporting ideas and examples	Communicates only the main ideas, leaving out supporting ideas and examples
Uses different words to the original text	Uses different words to the original text

Paraphrasing is both a technique for using evidence and an academic skill in itself. Sometimes paraphrasing tasks are set for assessment to see how you are going in developing your skill.

### Steps in the paraphrase process

1. First, make sure you understand the source itself. Check the definitions of any keywords if you are unsure.
2. Next, put the reading aside and make some notes from memory.
3. Then compare your notes with the reading to make sure you have included all the key information. Redraft your paraphrase if necessary.
4. Place quotation marks around any unique phrases you have borrowed directly from the source. Note that it is OK not to change technical words, as there often will not be appropriate synonyms for these.
5. Make sure to note down the full details of the source so you can properly cite the material.

## Examples of some paraphrasing techniques

- Changing positive statements to negative statements and vice versa
- Changing the words and word order
- Leaving out unnecessary words and information
- Changing the sentence structure
- Preserving technical terms that don't have appropriate synonyms

Note that paraphrasing is **NOT** just changing the words around or substituting one or two words for synonyms.

Also, you cannot just look up each word individually in a dictionary or thesaurus and replace it with a similar word. You need to choose appropriate vocabulary and integrate your changes across the sentence or paragraph. Sometimes it might be tempting to use an online translation tool to produce a new version of a sentence or paragraph, but the result will usually not make sense.

## The process of paraphrasing: an example

Sample text from Lewis & Foley (2014, p. 61):

*The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.*

## Following the paraphrasing process

1. Check personal understanding. Are there any words you don't understand? Look them up.
2. Put the text aside and make some notes from memory. My notes, for example, might read:
  - student nurse data -> analysis
  - priorities
  - lack of knowledge and expertise
  - learning to think like a nurse
  - develop confidence
  - var. pts
  - clinical placement opportunities on placement
3. Compare notes with the text. A lot of key information is missing, so I need to go through the text carefully and note the important parts, in particular the direct quotes.
4. Redraft paraphrase.

Let's do this redrafting one sentence at a time:

### Sentence 1 from source

*The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities.*

### First identify the technical words and language features:

- nurse (there is no word that means exactly the same thing as nurse)
- data collection
- This text uses the second person to appeal to the reader on a personal level. Usually we don't use 'I' or 'you' in academic writing, so we need to change this to the third person.

## What is the key idea of this sentence?

*Student nurses need to progress from collecting data to being confident in analysing data to find abnormalities and prioritise tasks.*



**Assess:** This is both the key idea and a pretty good paraphrase. We'll keep it.

### Changes made:

- 'move beyond' changed to 'progress'
- 'data collection' changed to 'collecting data'
- 'develop your confidence' to 'being confident'
- Second person (you) changed to third (student nurses)
- Singular 'a student nurse' changed to plural 'student nurses'
- Structural change: The second part of the sentence was condensed into analysing data, finding abnormalities, and prioritising tasks.

### Sentence 2 from source

*Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills.*

### Technical words:

- nurse
- clinical judgement

## What is the key idea of this sentence?

*New nurses don't have much knowledge or experience but they can learn to improve.*



**Assess:** Contractions are informal, so expand 'don't' to 'do not'. The sentence doesn't specify **what** it is that nurses can learn to improve, so we should add more information.

*New nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement.*

### Changes made:

- 'beginning nurses' to 'new nurses'
- 'lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have' rewritten as 'do not have much knowledge or experience'
- 'although' replaced with 'but' and moved to second clause
- 'learn to improve' changed to 'develop'
- 'skills' omitted (but sense retained)

### Sentence 3 from source

*Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers.*

### Technical words:

- nurse
- clinical judgement
- patients

Note that this sentence contains a citation that you need to incorporate into your paraphrase.

## What is the key idea of this sentence?

*Etheridge learned that new nurses could 'think like a nurse' and enhance their confidence by gaining experience with patients, being supported by others, and discussing things that happened with their fellow nurses.*



**Assess:** This is a little informal. We need to add the year and make it a complete secondary citation, and change words such as 'things that happened'. We can keep the quotation 'think like a nurse' as long as we retain the quotation marks.

*According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses.*

### Changes made:

- Added 'according to Etheridge' and formatted this as a secondary citation
- 'new nurses' to 'novice nurses'
- 'develop confidence' to 'gain confidence'
- omitted 'in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experience'
- added conditional 'if' clause
- 'a wide variety of patients' replaced with 'different patients'
- 'support from educators and experienced nurses' changed to 'help from colleagues'
- 'sharing experiences with their peers' replaced with 'discuss experiences with their fellow nurses'

### Sentence 4 from source

*Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.*

### Technical words:

- clinical
- nurse

## What is the key idea of this sentence?

*It's important to seek opportunities to improve skills during placement to transition from student nurse to novice health professional.*



**Assess:** This is a good summary of the key idea but too many words are similar to the original text. We can also restructure the sentence so the student nurse is at the beginning.

*Student nurses should look to improve their clinical skills during placement to assist in the passage to starting work.*

### Changes made:

- The sentence structure: 'making the most of clinical placements...' does not have a direct subject, only an implied subject. We have rewritten this as an active construction with 'student nurses' as the subject.
- 'Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills' changed to 'look to improve their clinical skills during placement'.
- 'the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner' changed to 'the passage to starting work'.
- the concept that 'making the most' is 'essential' has been changed to improving skills being able 'to assist' in the transition to work. This is an alteration in meaning but only a small one; the key idea of the sentence has still been preserved.

Now let's compare the original text and our paraphrase:

Original text	Paraphrase
<p>The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.</p>	<p>Student nurses need to progress from collecting data to being confident in analysing data to find abnormalities and prioritise tasks. New nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement. According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis &amp; Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses. Student nurses should look to improve their clinical skills during placement to assist in the passage to starting work.</p>



### Assess:

- Have technical words been preserved?
- Are the key ideas of the original text communicated in the paraphrase?
- Is the paraphrase too close to the original or using too many of the same words?
- Have direct quotes been appropriately referenced?
- Is the paraphrase a cohesive and clear piece of writing?
- Would you make any changes?

### Integrating paraphrases into your writing

Now that we've made a paraphrase of the source, how do we use it?

Imagine that you're writing an essay. The topic is:

*'Describe some of the challenges faced by student nurses, and ways that these challenges can be overcome.'*

You have decided to discuss the essay topic in two parts: clinical challenges and personal challenges.

This is an example of how we can use our paraphrase of the paragraph in Lewis & Foley (2014) to discuss clinical challenges:

*Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment, but they are not impossible to overcome. Lewis and Foley (2014) note that new nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement. Improvement can come from many avenues. According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses.*

Here we have integrated our paraphrases of sentences 2 and 3 into a coherent paragraph, with a topic sentence and context for the evidence from sources.

## More information

- [Western Sydney University Library Referencing and Citation guide](#)
- [UNSW: Selecting information for assignments](#)
- [UniLearning: Notetaking: Direct and indirect quotes](#)
- [University of Adelaide: To paraphrase or to quote? \(PDF, 354 kB\)](#)
- [Royal Literary Fund: Direct quotation, paraphrasing and referencing](#)
- [The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Quotations](#)
- [Deakin University: Summarising, paraphrasing and quoting](#)

## References

Lewis, P., & Foley, D. (2014). *Health assessment in nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

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