Additional Resources for the Extended Essay

SEMIAHMOO SECONDARY SCHOOL (0159)

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMME

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General extended essay

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For grade boundary information, please refer to the Grade boundaries for Diploma programme coordinators document available on the PRC.

Extended essay

General guidance

This general extended essay (EE) report is to be read in conjunction with the May 2021 subject reports for specific EE subjects. Where specific EE subject reports do not exist (for example, for subjects where cohort sizes are too small to provide constructive feedback without identifying single schools or students), then this report acts as guidance that summarizes the key points made, and issues encountered, by EE principal examiners across all subjects.

As stated in the *Assessment Procedures* document, the nature of the EE task does not change and as such subject reports are not produced each session unless new problems arise or new subjects are added. The May 2021 EE subject reports remain wholly applicable until the next set of EE subject reports are produced (May 2024).

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: focus and method

A number of students omit either the research question or the title. While this is not penalised explicitly, both the research question and title are requirements to sufficiently focus the investigation, and as such the omission of one or both would be considered on balance with the other criterion requirements. Supervisors should ensure that students understand the function of the research question, title and topic which is clearly outlined in the EE guide.

A good number of students successfully formulated research questions that helped them to retain focus throughout the essay. However, there are still students who select broad research questions that are not appropriate for a 4000-word task, and that do not allow them to deal with the criteria to the depth required. There were good examples of effective introductions that served to outline the topic, title, research question, methods to be used and sources to consult. While the focus and method need also to be sustained throughout the essay, the introduction is a good place for a student to state their aims.

Students must ensure that the topic for investigation is academically worthy. The availability of enough and appropriate, reliable secondary sources should be part of the student's considerations in the very early stages.

The selection of sources must consider what the student needs to do with the sources – they need to be appropriate for the research question, but they must also be appropriate to use to support knowledge and understanding, and argument, analysis and evaluation.

As a student reaches the end of their EE, it is worthwhile critically revisiting the research question to ensure that the wording of the question remains appropriate. If the essay has answered a slightly different research question, students should be encouraged to revisit the question and make amendments as necessary. The research question should therefore be considered provisional until the EE is complete. It is not advisable however to leave the research question to the end of the process completely, as this results in an unfocused and usually narrative, general essay.

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Criterion B: knowledge and understanding

Most students had a reasonable understanding of their topic, though this was not always supported by sources, and as such they often read as generalizations without academic underpinnings. Students must remember to use and apply their selected sources to support their knowledge and understanding. Unsubstantiated claims can lead to lower marks for this criterion.

Subject specific terminology is often well-used, but students should also think about incorporating subject specific concepts and theories too.

Criterion C: critical thinking

Students who did not produce a sufficiently focused research question struggled here, as they tried to answer too broad a question in terms of analysis and evaluation to the depth required by this criterion. Those who did not incorporate sources effectively would likely have received low marks against this criterion. Argument, analysis and evaluation are all speculative and unsubstantiated unless they are effectively supported by selected sources. Schools must help students understand the transition from reporting and description to analysis and evaluation. Too often, students did not evidence these higher order skills, and as such their performance against criterion C would often be impacted. More guidance is available in the EE guide and TSM including guiding questions to help students understand the demands of the criterion, and an unpacking of the criterion requirements.

Criterion D: presentation

A number of students submit work which is lacking in terms of formal presentation requirements. It is vital that the requirements are shared with students, and these are clearly stated in the EE guide.

Success in terms of presentation consists of producing an essay which is visually appealing, this means properly formatted and neatly set out, fulfilling the requirements of producing a cover page which consists of a title, a research question (phrased as a question) and a word count. Students are also required to make sure an accurately numbered table of contents and pagination are provided as well as a formal conclusion and a bibliography.

Students should note that the provision of a table of contents which goes beyond a very basic structure of 'introduction, main body, conclusion' is strongly recommended. The table of contents should set out the main areas being investigated in the essay (indicated by subheadings) along with accurate page numbers for these sections. Subheadings that are noted on the contents page should also appear in the main body of the essay. This approach facilitates the reading and coherence of the essay.

Criterion E: engagement

Criterion E is applied to the student's reflections only. The essay itself and supervisor comment serve as context attesting to authenticity of the reflections, but do not impact the mark awarded. The three reflections combined must be no longer than 500 words. Examiners will not read beyond 500 words, so students should be given the opportunity to edit the reflections at the end of the process to meet the word count, however, the substance of the reflections must not be changed so that they remain authentic reflective summaries.

It is really important that students and supervisors are aware of the protocols for submitting the RPPF, as a mark of 0 is automatically awarded for criterion E whereby:

- The RPPF is not submitted
- The RPPF is written in a different language than the essay

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Where a student changes registration language during the EE process, they must ensure that all their preceding reflections are translated into the final language of submission. This applies to retake candidates too where some of their reflections may still be valid and applicable.

Students should be encouraged, through the questions asked by the supervisor during the reflection sessions, to think critically about the process that they have been through, rather than putting forward a simple description of the actions that have been taken, or summarizing the conclusions of their essay. **Reflections must be based on the student's experience, rather than a simple summary of the guidance that** has been given to them by their supervisor.

Important reminders

Extended essay website

Schools are reminded that the EE website is updated with clarifications periodically. Therefore, if schools **decide to download and save as PDF, sections of the guide, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that** they are working with the latest version. Schools are recommended to use the html guide for reference, so that they are always viewing the correct and current content.

Anonymizing work

Personal identifiers must not be included in the student's submission. The candidate's personal code (*eg* sj340) **can be used, and this is indecipherable beyond the student's school staff. Supervisors should take** care to refer to the student by name in their comment – **instead, they should use "the student" or initials.** Similarly, students should not refer to their supervisor (or other staff member) by name in their reflections or in any acknowledgments. Any acknowledgements made by the student should withhold information that could identify the school, or its location.

Response language

All parts of the student's EE submission (essay and RPPF) must be in the same language – that of EE registration. For example, a History EE in French would be written fully (essay and RPPF) in French. Similarly, a Spanish A EE would be written fully in Spanish, while an Arabic B EE would be written fully in Arabic. This is in keeping with condition 10.3 of the General Regulations. An RPPF written in another language would be awarded a mark of 0 for criterion E. Schools are reminded that it is their responsibility to check that the correct essay and supporting RPPF is uploaded for each candidate, and that both documents are appropriate and clearly visible. Amendments to uploads based on school-identified errors will only be accepted prior to issue of results for the session in question. Instances of maladministration caused by upload errors and identified after issue of results cannot be rectified and taken into consideration in any remark.

Predicted grades

Coordinators are required to submit a predicted grade for each candidate. These grades must be entered on IBIS by 20 April/20 October. For the EE, the grades are on a scale of A to E, with A being the highest grade. The EE is externally assessed, so supervisors must not mark the essays and arrive at a number to translate into a grade. Predicted grades for all subjects must be based on the qualitative grade descriptors for the subject in question, which are available on the EE website. Grade boundaries are subject to change, even for fixed tasks. Predicted grade *versus* actual grade accuracy is improved when predictions are correctly based on the descriptors.

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Academic honesty and the EE

Referencing and bibliographies are only assessed against criterion D based on their visual lay-out (*eg* consistent presentation of referencing footnotes) and presence (*eg* bibliography as a structural requirement). The content and completeness of a reference or bibliography is not assessed, but, **insufficient or incomplete references or bibliographies will be raised by examiners as "suspected malpractice" for** further investigation by the IB. If there is no attempt at an attribution in the body of an essay, or if the minimum bibliographic requirements are not met then the IB will record the details and monitor schools accordingly.

Students must be reminded of the importance of academic honesty and the proper referencing of sources. The minimum information requirements for the IB (superseding any reference-style specifics) are outlined on the final page of the *Effective Citing and Referencing* document, available on the Programme Resources Centre. Insufficient references are escalated to the IB to check for authenticity of work, and could cause a delay in issuing marks and grades. Schools that permit insufficient referencing practices are recorded and monitored.

Reliance on external resources

Irrespective of the subject, the extended essay must be a complete piece of independent research, modelled on an academic journal/research paper, which can exist and be understood on its own, without the need to access external links, such as hyperlinks, or accompanying material such as DVDs.

Examiners will not access any material contained in an external source when assessing an essay. Material that is pertinent to the argument being made must be contained in the essay itself to be considered by examiners in their assessment of it.

As with appendices, if information central to the argument is included in the external link, it is treated as though the point has not been made and as such could affect different criteria, for example, criterion C (critical thinking), depending on the quality of the other analyses.

Referencing sources not in the language of submission

An extended essay can use sources in languages other than that of submission where appropriate. In these situations, the IB advises that the sources be used as necessary, and that

- When referred to in the body of the extended essay as a quotation, the translation is given and the original quotation is placed as a footnote.
- When a source is acknowledged in the bibliography, it should be referenced in its original language. Where there is no official published translation, the student should write a brief summary alongside the source in the language of submission of a) the title, b) name of the author, c) the focus of the work and d) any other relevant details. This way, the examiner can assess the relevance and suitability of the source as required.
- The translation of the text should be done by the student if there is no official translation. The supervisor should help ensure as best as possible that the translation is accurate and representative of the original text. If the student finds the translation task beyond their capabilities, then it is advisable not to include that source in his/her research. In selecting sources, the nature of the subject in question needs to be considered—for example, in a language acquisition essay, it is vital that students work mostly with authentic materials in the target language.

Language A essays

Effective first submission for assessment May 2021, EEs submitted in studies in language and literature (language A registrations) cannot be based on a text studied as part of a student's course. Students can base their essays on different texts by the same author.

Please note that the regulation applies to all students without exception, including those retaking the EE from earlier sessions. It is the school's responsibility to develop internal processes to ensure adherence to this rule for each of their students. A coordinator or supervisor attests to the adherence to this regulation via the authentication of work via the eCoursework portal. Work should not be authenticated and submitted if the rule has not been followed; doing so would constitute school malpractice.

If a school discovers that a student has overlooked the requirement, then the student must redo their essay regardless of where they are in the process, revisiting any reflection entries as necessary. Please contact IB Answers if an extension is required to facilitate the rewriting.

Language B essays

While students are permitted to blend categories, what will always remain "inappropriate" for the subject and therefore subject to the caps for criteria A, B and C are the use of artifacts listed in the language acquisition chapter as "not appropriate". For example, "how does social media affect X culture?" "how does unemployment affect X culture?" without anything concrete and tangible that will be the focus of the investigation. Such essays are inappropriate - they will generally be descriptive, speculative essays, and it is a self-penalizing approach from the outset.

RPPFs for language acquisition/language B subjects

As stated earlier in this report, the essay and RPPF must be written in the same language. As with the requirement for a student to have a sufficient grasp of language before embarking on an EE in that response language, the same applies for the RPPF. Schools must bear in mind the requirements and demands of the RPPF when advising students on response languages. As with the essay itself, the quality of the language is not explicitly assessed, that said, where linguistic ability impedes coherence then this could impact assessment of criteria A, B, C and E.

Fieldwork and secondary research

The document entitled *Managing Sciences and Geography Extended Essays without lab work or fieldwork* is available on the EE page of the programme resource centre. This document contains advice on research methods that use secondary data and suggestions of useful web resources.

Retake candidates

Students retaking the EE must ensure that their work is significantly changed. Without significant change, the new session mark is likely to remain the same.

Retake candidates must include an EE/RPPF. Failure to submit the form will result in criterion E being awarded a mark of 0. To permit a six-month or twelve-month retake in a completely different subject, the school must be sure that the process can be followed correctly, including reflection sessions, and that it is not detrimental to the candidate. Depending on the nature of the changes to the EE, the EE/RPPF may still be largely appropriate or may need revisiting. If the EE is improved only, the student should be given the opportunity to have a new final reflection session. If the changes are substantial, then they may need to revisit earlier reflections and retake the sessions again with their supervisor. Changes in registration are

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permitted, but it is at the school's discretion whether they should be supported in the light of the process requirements.

Change of subject

It is the school's responsibility to ensure that each EE is submitted against the correct subject. If a discrepancy between the registration and the actual subject of the EE is identified, the coordinator must contact the IB and request a change to the subject for which the EE is registered. The EE for a candidate should not be uploaded until the registration change is authorized and the IBIS "eCoursework upload" screen is updated. Failure to do this will result in the EE being assessed as the original subject for which it was registered.

Advice for students

The table below is designed to help you think about the assessment criteria and whether you have addressed the expectations within your essay. You do not need to address all of the questions posed, but they do provide some guidance in terms of what to consider.

Criterion	Unpacking the criteria
A: Focus and method	**This criterion focuses on the topic, the research question and the methodology. It assesses the explanation of the focus of the research (this includes the topic and the research question), how the research will be undertaken, and how the focus is maintained throughout the essay.** • Does this essay meet the requirements for the subject for which you are registering it? • Is your research question stated as a question? • Have you explained how your research question relates to the subject that you selected for the extended essay? • Have you given an insight into why your area of study is important? • Is your research question feasible within the scope of the task? Could your research question be "answered" or it is too vague? • Did you refer to your research question throughout the essay (not only in the introduction and conclusion)? • Did you explain why you selected your methodology? • Are there other possible methods that could be used or applied to answer your research question? How might this change the direction of your research? • If you stated a particular methodology in the introduction of your essay, or specific sources, have you used them? • Are there any references listed in the bibliography that were not directly cited in the text?
B: Knowledge and understanding	**This criterion assesses the extent to which the research relates to the subject area/discipline used to explore the research question; or in the case of the world studies extended essay, the issue addressed and the two disciplinary perspectives applied; and additionally, the way in which this knowledge and understanding is demonstrated through the use of appropriate terminology and concepts.** • Have you explained how your research question relates to a specific subject you selected for the extended essay? • Have you used relevant terminology and concepts throughout your essay as they relate to your particular area of research?

	• Is it clear that the sources you are using are relevant and appropriate to your research question? • Do you have a range of sources, or have you only relied on one particular type, for example internet sources? • Is there a reason why you might not have a range? Is this justified?
C: Critical thinking	**This criterion assesses the extent to which critical thinking skills have been used to analyse and evaluate the research undertaken.** • Have you made links between your results and data collected and your research question? • If you included data or information that is not directly related to your research question have you explained its importance? • Are your conclusions supported by your data? • If you found unexpected information or data have you discussed its importance? • Have you provided a critical evaluation of the methods you selected? • Have you considered the reliability of your sources (peer-reviewed journals, internet, and so on)? • Have you mentioned and evaluated the significance of possible errors that may have occurred in your research? • Are all your suggestions of errors or improvements relevant? • Have you evaluated your research question? • Have you compared your results or findings with any other sources? • Is there an argument that is clear and easy to follow and directly linked to answering your research question, and which is supported by evidence?
D: Presentation	**This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication.** • Have you read and understood the presentation requirements of the extended essay? • Have you chosen a font that will be easy for examiners to read on-screen? • Is your essay double-spaced and size 12 font? • Are the title and research question mentioned on the cover page? • Are all pages numbered?

	• Have you prepared a correct table of contents?
	• Do the page numbers in the table of contents match the page numbers in the text?
	• Is your essay subdivided into correct sub-sections, if this is applicable to the subject?
	• Are all figures and tables properly numbered and labelled?
	• Does your bibliography contain only the sources cited in the text?
	• Did you use the same reference system throughout the essay?
	• Does the essay have less than 4,000 words?
	• Is all the material presented in the appendices relevant and necessary?
	• Have you proofread the text for spelling or grammar errors?
E: Engagement	**This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's RPPF.** • Have you demonstrated your engagement with your research topic and the research process? • Have you highlighted challenges you faced and how you overcame them? • Will the examiner get a sense of your intellectual and skills development? • Will the examiner get a sense of your creativity and intellectual initiative? • Will the examiner get a sense of how you responded to actions and ideas in the research process?

The assessment criteria

Criterion A: Focus and method

This criterion focuses on the topic, the research question and the methodology. It assesses the explanation of the focus of the research (this includes the topic and the research question), how the research will be undertaken, and how the focus is maintained throughout the essay.

Level	Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard outlined by the descriptors below.
1–2	The topic is communicated unclearly and incompletely. • Identification and explanation of the topic is limited; the purpose and focus of the research is unclear, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered. The research question is stated but not clearly expressed or too broad. • The research question is too broad in scope to be treated effectively within the word limit and requirements of the task, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered. • The intent of the research question is understood but has not been clearly expressed and/or the discussion of the essay is not focused on the research question. Methodology of the research is limited. • The source(s) and/or method(s) to be used are limited in range given the topic and research question. • There is limited evidence that their selection was informed.
3–4	The topic is communicated. • Identification and explanation of the research topic is communicated; the purpose and focus of the research is adequately clear, but only partially appropriate. The research question is clearly stated but only partially focused. • The research question is clear but the discussion in the essay is only partially focused and connected to the research question. Methodology of the research is mostly complete. • Source(s) and/or method(s) to be used are generally relevant and appropriate given the topic and research question. • There is some evidence that their selection(s) was informed. If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion.
5–6	The topic is communicated accurately and effectively.

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Level	Descriptor
	• Identification and explanation of the research topic is effectively communicated; the purpose and focus of the research is clear and appropriate. The research question is clearly stated and focused. • The research question is clear and addresses an issue of research that is appropriately connected to the discussion in the essay. Methodology of the research is complete. • An appropriate range of relevant source(s) and/or method(s) have been applied in relation to the topic and research question. • There is evidence of effective and informed selection of sources and/or methods.

Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

This criterion assesses the extent to which the research relates to the subject area/discipline used to explore the research question, or in the case of the world studies extended essay, the issue addressed and the two disciplinary perspectives applied, and additionally the way in which this knowledge and understanding is demonstrated through the use of appropriate terminology and concepts.

Level	Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard outlined by the descriptors below.
1–2	Knowledge and understanding is limited. • The selection of source material has limited relevance and is only partially appropriate to the research question. • Knowledge of the topic/discipline(s)/issue is anecdotal, unstructured and mostly descriptive with sources not effectively being used. Use of terminology and concepts is unclear and limited. • Subject-specific terminology and/or concepts are either missing or inaccurate, demonstrating limited knowledge and understanding.
3–4	Knowledge and understanding is good. • The selection of source material is mostly relevant and appropriate to the research question. • Knowledge of the topic/discipline(s)/issue is clear; there is an understanding of the sources used but their application is only partially effective. Use of terminology and concepts is adequate. • The use of subject-specific terminology and concepts is mostly accurate, demonstrating an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding. If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion.
5–6	Knowledge and understanding is excellent. • The selection of source materials is clearly relevant and appropriate to the research question. • Knowledge of the topic/discipline(s)/issue is clear and coherent and sources are used effectively and with understanding. Use of terminology and concepts is good. • The use of subject-specific terminology and concepts is accurate and consistent, demonstrating effective knowledge and understanding.

Criterion C: Critical thinking

This criterion assesses the extent to which critical-thinking skills have been used to analyse and evaluate the research undertaken.

Level	Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard outlined by the descriptors below.
1–3	The research is limited. • The research presented is limited and its application is not clearly relevant to the RQ. Analysis is limited. • There is limited analysis. • Where there are conclusions to individual points of analysis these are limited and not consistent with the evidence. Discussion/evaluation is limited. • An argument is outlined **but** this is limited, incomplete, descriptive or narrative in nature. • The construction of an argument is unclear and/or incoherent in structure hindering understanding. • Where there is a final conclusion, it is limited and not consistent with the arguments/evidence presented. • There is an attempt to evaluate the research, but this is superficial. If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered no more than three marks can be awarded for this criterion.
4–6	The research is adequate. • Some research presented is appropriate and its application is partially relevant to the Research question. Analysis is adequate. • There is analysis **but** this is only partially relevant to the research question; the inclusion of irrelevant research detracts from the quality of the argument. • Any conclusions to individual points of analysis are only partially supported by the evidence. Discussion/evaluation is adequate. • An argument explains the research **but** the reasoning contains inconsistencies. • The argument may lack clarity and coherence but this does not significantly hinder understanding. • Where there is a final or summative conclusion, this is only partially consistent with the arguments/evidence presented. • The research has been evaluated but not critically.

Level	Descriptor
7–9	The research is good. • The majority of the research is appropriate and its application is clearly relevant to the research question. Analysis is good. • The research is analysed in a way that is clearly relevant to the research question; the inclusion of less relevant research rarely detracts from the quality of the overall analysis **.** • Conclusions to individual points of analysis are supported by the evidence but there are some minor inconsistencies. Discussion/evaluation is good. • An effective reasoned argument is developed from the research, with a conclusion supported by the evidence presented. • This reasoned argument is clearly structured and coherent and supported by a final or summative conclusion; minor inconsistencies may hinder the strength of the overall argument. • The research has been evaluated, and this is partially critical.
10–12	The research is excellent. • The research is appropriate to the research question and its application is consistently relevant. Analysis is excellent. • The research is analysed effectively and clearly focused on the research question; the inclusion of less relevant research does not significantly detract from the quality of the overall analysis. • Conclusions to individual points of analysis are effectively supported by the evidence. Discussion/evaluation is excellent. • An effective and focused reasoned argument is developed from the research with a conclusion reflective of the evidence presented. • This reasoned argument is well structured and coherent; any minor inconsistencies do not hinder the strength of the overall argument or the final or summative conclusion. • The research has been critically evaluated.

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Criterion D: Presentation

This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication.

Level	Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard outlined by the descriptors below.
1–2	Presentation is acceptable. • The structure of the essay is generally appropriate in terms of the expected conventions for the topic, argument and subject in which the essay is registered. • Some layout considerations may be missing or applied incorrectly. • Weaknesses in the structure and/or layout do not significantly impact the reading, understanding or evaluation of the extended essay.
3–4	Presentation is good. • The structure of the essay clearly is appropriate in terms of the expected conventions for the topic, the argument and subject in which the essay is registered. • Layout considerations are present and applied correctly. • The structure and layout support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the extended essay.

Criterion E: Engagement

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress form*.

Level	Descriptor
0	The work does not reach a standard outlined by the descriptors below.
1–2	Engagement is limited. • Reflections on decision-making and planning are mostly descriptive. • These reflections communicate a limited degree of personal engagement with the research focus and/or research process.
3–4	Engagement is good. • Reflections on decision-making and planning are analytical and include reference to conceptual understanding and skill development. • These reflections communicate a moderate degree of personal engagement with the research focus and process of research, demonstrating some intellectual initiative.
5–6	Engagement is excellent. • Reflections on decision-making and planning are evaluative and include reference to the student's capacity to consider actions and ideas in response to setbacks experienced in the research process. • These reflections communicate a high degree of intellectual and personal engagement with the research focus and process of research, demonstrating authenticity, intellectual initiative and/or creative approach in the student voice.

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Unpacking the criteria

The following is intended to help you understand each criterion in terms of what should be included in the extended essay to achieve the highest level.

Each criterion is organized at three levels of information. Firstly, the **markband**, which relates to the mark range available; secondly, **the strand**, which relates to what is being assessed; and, thirdly, **the indicators**, which are the demonstration of the strands within a markband. For example:

Markband 1–2	**(Strand)** The topic is communicated unclearly and incompletely.
	(Indicators of the strand)
	• Identification and explanation of the topic is limited; the purpose and focus of the research is unclear, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered.
	(Strand) The research question is stated but not clearly expressed or too broad.
	(Indicators of the strand)
	• The research question is too broad in scope to be treated effectively within the word limit and requirements of the task, or does not lend itself to a systematic investigation in the subject for which it is registered.
	• The intent of the research question is understood but has not been clearly expressed and/or the discussion of the essay is not focused on the research question.
	(Strand) Methodology of the research is limited.
	(Indicators of the strand)
	• The source(s) and/or method(s) to be used are limited in range given the topic and research question.
	• There is limited evidence that their selection was informed.
Criterion	**Unpacking the criterion**
A: Focus and method	This criterion focuses on the topic, the research question and the methodology. It assesses the explanation of the focus of the research (this includes the title and the research question), how the research will be undertaken, and how the focus is maintained throughout the essay.
	1. The topic chosen is identified and explained to readers in terms of contextualizing and justifying its worthiness.
	o How well does the research paper identify and communicate the chosen topic?

	2. The purpose and focus of the research to be addressed is within the scope of a 4,000-word extended essay, is outlined in the introduction and specified as a research question.
	
	     o Is the research question appropriate given the scope of the task? For example, is the topic sufficiently focused to be adequately addressed within the requirements of the task?
	
	     o Is the research question clearly stated, focused and based on/situated against background knowledge and understanding of the chosen subject/topic area?
	
	     o Is the focus of the research question maintained throughout the essay?
	
	 3. The research is planned and appropriate methods of data collection (methodology) are chosen and identified in order to address the research question.
	
	     o Is there evidence of effective and informed source/method selection with regard to the choice of appropriate sources and/or method(s) used to gather information, including narrowing of scope the range of sources/methods, in order to address the research question within the constraints of the word limit?
	
	 4. Sources/methods are considered relevant/appropriate or sufficient in so far as the academic standards for the discipline are concerned. For example, for an economics essay, it would not be sufficient to only use textbooks but rather include reports and data. The quality of the research question itself is not considered when assessing source selection on balance.

B: Knowledge and understanding	This criterion assesses the extent to which the research relates to the subject area/discipline used to explore the research question, or in the case of the world studies extended essay, the issue addressed and the two disciplinary perspectives applied, and additionally the way in which this knowledge and understanding is demonstrated through the use of appropriate terminology and concepts. 1. The research question being investigated is put into the context of the subject/discipline/issue. o Demonstration of the appropriate and relevant selection and application of the sources is identified. 2. Knowledge and understanding of the topic chosen and the research question posed is demonstrated with appropriate subject-specific terminology.

	o The use of subject-specific terminology and/or concepts is an indicator of knowledge and understanding of the discipline(s)/issue discussed. 3. Sources/methods are assessed here in terms of their appropriateness to the research question.
C: Critical thinking	This criterion assesses the extent to which critical thinking skills have been used to analyse and evaluate the research undertaken. 1. The selection and application of the research presented is relevant and appropriate to the research question. 2. The appropriateness of sources/methods in terms of how they have been used in the development of the argument presented. 3. The analysis of the research is effective and focused on the research question. 4. The discussion of the research develops a clear and coherent reasoned argument in relation to the research question. 5. There is a critical evaluation of the arguments presented in the essay. 6. Unlikely or unexpected outcomes can also demonstrate critical thinking.

D: Presentation	This criterion assesses the extent to which the presentation follows the standard format expected for academic writing and the extent to which this aids effective communication.
	
	1. **Structure:** the structure of the essay is compatible with the expected conventions of a research paper in the subject for which the essay has been submitted. (Examiners, supervisors and students are advised to check the guidance given in the *Extended essay guide* for the relevant subject.)
	
	2. **Layout:** title page, table of contents, page numbers, section headings (where appropriate), effective inclusion of illustrative materials (tables, graphs, illustrations, appropriately labelled) and quotations, bibliography and referencing.
	
	    o The referencing system should be correctly and consistently applied and should contain the minimum information as detailed in the Extended essay guide.*
	
	    o The extended essay has not exceeded the maximum word limit.**
	
	* If referencing does not meet this minimum standard work should be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct.
	
	** If the essay exceeds 4,000 words, examiners should not read or assess beyond the maximum 4,000-word limit. Students who exceed the word limit

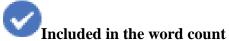|	will compromise the assessment of their extended essay across all criteria. For example, in criterion B, any knowledge and understanding demonstrated beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if it were not present; in criterion C, any analysis, discussion or evaluation made beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if the point had not been made. Given the holistic nature of the assessment criteria, students who write in excess of the word limit will self-penalize across all criteria.
E: Engagement	This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, after considering the student's *Reflections on planning and progress form*. 1. **Engagement with the process:** the student has engaged in discussions with their supervisor in the planning and progress of their research; the student is able to reflect on and refine the research process, and react to insights gained through the exploration of their research question; the student is able to evaluate decisions made throughout the research process and suggest improvements for their own working practices. 2. **Engagement with their research focus:** an insight into the student's thinking, intellectual initiative and creative approach through reflections on the thought and research process; the extent to which the student voice is present rather than that of the supervisor and academics; is the student's engagement reflected?

Word counts

The upper limit is 4,000 words for all extended essays.

Please note: Examiners are instructed not to read or assess any material in excess of the word limit. This means that essays containing more than 4,000 words will be compromised across all assessment criteria. Given the holistic nature of the assessment criteria, students who write in excess of the word limit will self-penalize across all criteria. For example, in criterion B, any knowledge and understanding demonstrated beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if it were not present; in criterion C, analysis, discussion or evaluation made beyond the 4,000-word limit will be treated as if the point had not been made.

Supervisors and students should be aware that the e-upload of extended essays will facilitate the automatic recognition of a cut-off point for assessment. Students should ensure that they remain within the word limit and should edit accordingly.

Please refer to the following guidance on what content should be included in the word count.

✅ **Included in the word count**	❌ **Not included in the word count**
The introduction	The contents page
The main body	Maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations
The conclusion	Tables
Quotations	Equations, formulas and calculations
Footnotes and/or endnotes that are not references	Citations/references (whether parenthetical, numbered, footnotes or endnotes)
	The bibliography
	The *Reflections on planning and progress form*
	Headers

Please refer to the document entitled *Assessment principles and practices—Quality assessments in a digital age* for further clarification of word count requirements.

A note about acknowledgments and dedications:

An acknowledgment/dedications page may be included in the EE if this is important to the student, but it must contain no "identifiers", for example, people should not be detailed in any way that makes the student's school identifiable. An acknowledgment/dedications page is not a formal requirement of the EE, so it does not contribute to either the word count or assessment.

Distinguishing between the title (topic) and the research question

Your extended essay needs a title and a research question. Both must appear on the cover page.

- **The title** is a clear, focused summative statement of the research which gives the reader an indication of the research topic.
- **The research question** indicates the specific topic of research and must be phrased as a question.

Practice exercise: Title (topic) and research question

To help you write a title and research question for your essay, try the following exercises:

1. **Suggest possible titles for these research questions:**

Research question	To what extent does the graffiti on the Western side of the Berlin wall reflect the feelings of the people in West Berlin before unification? (group 1)
Title	
Research question	To what extent do different light combinations affect the movement of the red-eared slider turtle (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) with respect to the position of the light sources? (biology)
Title	
Research question	To what extent was the American policy of containment successful in South Asia from 1947 to 1990? (history)
Title	

2. **Suggest a possible research question for these titles:**

Research question	
Title	Steven Spielberg's style in war films. (film)
Research question	
Title	Diversification and product development for computer companies. (business management)
Research question	
Title	English language in commercial aviation. (English B)

3. **Suggest a possible title and a research question in the subject that you would like to choose for your extended essay:**

Research question	
Title	

The Research Process
While researching for the extended essay, students should do the following:

1. Choose an approved Diploma Programme subject for the extended essay.
   - Select a subject that interests you. Consider investigating a subject that you are studying.
   - Read the assessment criteria and the relevant guidance for your selected subject. Pay attention to the:
     - Overview which provides a general outline of the subject
     - Choice of topic which defines requirements and other specific criteria that must be considered when writing an essay in a particular subject
     - Treatment of topic which discusses the suitability of topics within a subject and how they should be handled

2. Make a list of possible topics in the subjects. If necessary, do a background reading to help you choose a topic. Keep in mind the essay guidelines.

3. Choose a topic that is of interest to you.
   - Undertake sufficient preparatory reading in your chosen topic. Read scholarly articles and books that will help you determine the significance of your topic and formulate an arguable research question.
   - As you read, underline key words, phrases and ideas that can be used to further your search for information and narrow your topic.

4. Formulate a well-focused, arguable research question under the direction of your supervisor.
   - If you discover that it will not be possible to obtain the evidence needed in the time available, the research question should be changed. This should be done sooner rather than later. You should not lose time waiting and hoping something will turn up. Rather, start the research process over and develop a new research question that can be answered.

5. Plan your investigation and writing process.
   - Identify how and from which sources you will gather material.
   - Identify which system of academic referencing you will use
   - Set deadlines that will allow you to meet the school's requirements.

6. Plan a structure (outline headings) for the essay that is based on your research and logically supports your research question. The structure of your essay may change as you read more scholarly research, but it is useful to have a sense of direction.

7. Carry out the investigation
   - Access and read information from a wide variety of academic sources: scholarly journals, books, databases, and primary source documents when appropriate. You should not rely on the Internet search engines as your sole access point for locating information.
   - The material gathered should be assembled in a logical order, linked to the structure of the essay. Only then will you know whether you have enough evidence for each stage of the argument so that you can proceed to the next.
   - Be prepared to handle counterarguments. Your thoughtful analysis and commentary on an opposing viewpoint can actually serve to strengthen your own argument.

Guidelines for the use of animals in IB World Schools

Why have guidelines for use of animals in the classroom?

As respect for animals is a fundamental stepping stone in the development of respect for fellow human beings the IB animal guidelines seek to set out the parameters for the acceptable inclusion of animals in an IB World School.

What do the guidelines apply to?

These guidelines apply to the treatment of all animals in IB World Schools, to all students at all levels including PYP, MYP, DP and IBCC whether assessed or non- assessed, for extended essays, the group 4 project and the MYP project. The Guidelines cover any work, be it in classrooms or school laboratories, or in the general environment, that is anywhere where IB students may be working. The Guidelines apply to:

1. Keeping animals in schools
2. Animal Experimentation
3. The use of human subjects in investigations

The Guidelines

Keeping live animals in the classroom

Caring for classroom pets can provide a variety of authentic learning contexts for students at almost every level. It presents opportunities for students to develop compassion and empathy towards other living things and take action as a result of this learning. Ultimately the decision to care for a live animal lies with the classroom teacher and time should be taken to adequately research the animal and determine a suitable diet, housing, exercise and socialization for the animal as well as how its care fits into the curriculum. The following should be carefully considered before committing to the care of a classroom pet:

- Student sensitivity or allergies to particular species, their food or bedding materials
- Type of animal (domestic rather than wild, not venomous or vicious, diurnal rather than nocturnal etc)
- Arrangements for housing the animal safely, comfortably, cleanly and in a manner that is not disruptive to the classroom environment
- Arrangements for appropriate care of the animals over weekends and holidays
- Long term care of the animal in cases where a future student is allergic or the animal can no longer live in the classroom

Additionally, essential agreements should be established regarding when and how the animal is to interact with students. These should ensure the health and safety for both students and the animal (e.g. students wash their hands before and after handling).

The nature of the guidelines

IB animal experimentation guidelines may be more stringent than some local or national standards for experimentation in schools. Our standards for work in schools should also be more stringent than those of university and research and development committees as we are not carrying out essential, groundbreaking research. Practical work in schools has other purposes such as reinforcing concepts and teaching practical skills and techniques. Even in a practically based extended essay the work will not be fundamental, ground-breaking research.

Live animals in experimentation

Any planned and actual experimentation involving live animals must be subject to approval by the teacher following a discussion between teacher and student(s) based on the IB guidelines. This discussion should look at the 3Rs principle and the decision justified. The principles are:

- Replacement
- Refinement

- Reduction

Any investigation involving animals should initially consider the replacement of animals with cells or tissues, plants or computer simulations. If the animal is essential to the investigation refinements to the investigation to alleviate any distress to the animal and a reduction in the numbers of animals involved should be made.

Experiments involving animals must be based on observing and measuring aspects of natural animal behaviour. Any experimentation should not result in any cruelty to any animal, vertebrate or invertebrate. Therefore experiments that administer drugs or medicines or manipulate the environment or diet beyond that which can be regarded as humane is unacceptable in IB schools.

Animal dissection

There is no requirement in the PYP, MYP or in the DP group 4 sciences for students to witness or carry out a dissection of any animal, vertebrate or invertebrate. If teachers believe that it is an important educational experience and wish to include dissections in their scheme of work they must apply the following guidelines. The IB does not support animal dissection or the use of animal body parts in the PYP.

- Discuss reasons for dissections of whole animals with the students.
- Allow any student who wishes to opt out of the dissection to do so.
- Seek to reduce the number of dissections.
- Seek to replace animal dissection with computer simulations and/or use animal tissue, for example, hearts and lungs obtained from butchers, abattoirs or laboratory suppliers.
- Dissect animals obtained from an ethical source only, for example, no wild animals, animals killed on the road or endangered animals.

Experiments involving human subjects

Any experimentation involving human subjects must be with their direct, legally obtained written permission and must follow the above guidelines. In addition, the investigation must not use human subjects under the age of 16 without the written consent of the parents or guardians.

- Subjects must provide written consent
- The results of the investigation must be anonymous
- Subjects must participate of their own free will
- Subjects have the right to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

Investigations involving any body fluids must not be performed due to the risk of the transmission of blood-borne pathogens. An exception would be an investigator using their own saliva or sweat.

The use of secondary data

Secondary data acquired as a result of research that would not be in line with the above policy may be used under certain circumstances:

- Data acquired by professional researchers. In this case the data would be from research which is written up in academic journals and qualifies as ground breaking. Such research would have been presented to research committees for approval and be licensed.
- Research which was considered ethical at the time the research was conducted. Our view of animals and their welfare has moved on considerably in recent years. Much research conducted in a different culture would not be granted permission today even though at the time, it was considered acceptable. Data from such sources is acceptable.

Some secondary data exists that was considered unethical even within the cultural and historical context of the day. Such data is not acceptable under any circumstances.

What happens if the guidelines are not followed?

Internal assessment moderators or extended essay examiners who see evidence that the guidelines are not being followed at the school, in the sample work sent for moderation or in extended essays are required to complete a problem report form (PRF) to be submitted to IB Cardiff.

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Overview

An EE in world studies gives students an opportunity to undertake an interdisciplinary study of an issue of contemporary global significance.

Interdisciplinary in this context means research that draws on the methods, concepts and theories of two IB Diploma Programme subjects.

Students are required to

- identify an issue of global importance
- identify a local manifestation of the issue of global importance
- develop a clear rationale for taking an interdisciplinary approach and use the conceptual framework and vocabulary of two Diploma Programme subjects.

This provides an opportunity for students to conduct independent interdisciplinary research (not necessarily primary research) that draws on Diploma Programme subjects and integrates them to produce a coherent and insightful analysis of the global issue they choose to investigate.

It should be noted that law and education are not Diploma Programme subjects.

World studies EEs are registered in one of six areas of study: these are not the same as the Diploma Programme subjects. They are:

- Conflict, peace and security
- Culture, language and identity
- Environmental and/or economic sustainability
- Equality and inequality
- Health and development
- Science, technology and society.

The interdisciplinary essay is designed to provide students with the opportunity to:

- engage in, and pursue, a systematic process of research appropriate to the topic—a process that is informed by knowledge, concepts, theories, perspectives and methods from two chosen subjects
- develop research and communication skills—including the ability to communicate with readers who have a background in more than one subject or discipline
- develop the skills of creative and critical thinking—particularly those skills involved in integrating concepts, theories, perspectives, findings or examples from different subjects to develop new insights or understandings
- experience the excitement of intellectual discovery—including insights into how different subjects complement or challenge one another when used to address the same topic or issue.

Furthermore, in line with the *IB's mission*, the world studies EE seeks to advance students' emerging global consciousness. This comprises:

- a sensitivity to local phenomena as manifestations of broader developments on the planet

- the capacity to think in flexible and informed ways in understanding issues of global significance

- a developing perception of the student's own identity (self) as a global actor and member of humanity, capable of making a positive contribution to the world

1

Basic Conventions of Academic Writing

My aim in this chapter is to highlight the main, basic conventions of academic writing. A 'convention' is, in some cases, a rule to follow, or it can be a technique your tutors expect to see used in your assignments. Your lecturers, professors and other tutors have to follow these same rules when they publish books and journal articles.

If you are used to writing essays, you may find that you are familiar with much of this material, some of which I would consider 'basic'. If you're just starting at university, or haven't studied for a while, some of these ideas might be newer to you.

Read this section carefully. It's surprising how often students submit essays with these conventions ignored or misused. 'How' to write at university is just as important as 'what' to write. The two go together.

WHAT YOUR TUTORS SAY

'Correct grammar and referencing, indicates that you care about how you present yourself.' – Mariann, Biosciences lecturer

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Mariann makes this same point: your knowledge of a particular subject, and the content of your answer to an essay question, by themselves are not enough to satisfy the tutors marking your work. You are expected to engage with the academic debate in an academic way, and 'present yourself' accordingly.

Mariann mentions grammar and referencing; this also applies to academic conventions.

As you progress through your studies, this material will become more familiar. Most of these conventions apply to presentations too. Becoming comfortable with these basic rules is greatly helped by the *reading* we have to do as part of our time at university.

When you read a journal article for your next seminar, or learn how to perform a particular experiment from a textbook, or are simply picking relevant books from the library shelves, don't just focus on the *content*, as important as that is. Try and absorb the way these conventions come up again and again in all the academic writing you'll have to *read*.

It's really important to pay close attention to your reading, beyond its content. This is *the* best way of developing your own writing. Books like this, and the academic skills workshops your university runs, are important; but only if you are doing the reading expected of you, and then *more*. I have already mentioned this, and will continue to repeat this point throughout the book, because it is a vital, overlooked and very *simple* way of slowly developing and improving your own writing.

Why does academic writing have rules? Good academic writing has various qualities; it is clear, formal, objective and supported.

Additionally, because you are writing about potentially complex ideas, it should be as simple as possible, in order to make these ideas clear. So academic writing might end up being complex, but you should never *try* to write things in a complex way. Discuss your ideas at a high enough level, and the complexity is almost like the 'side effect' you get with medicines; it is not an actual objective of your writing. At university, you'll be discussing serious and important ideas a lot of the time, and complexity will naturally grow out of that.

More examples of some other academic techniques appear in the chapter, 'Common Mistakes and How to Deal With Them'. In that chapter I also provide more examples of how issues appear and how to resolve them. The aim of this chapter is to *introduce* you to the *basic* conventions. After that, we can look at grammatical issues and the process of actually putting an argument together. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but I have tried to cover the most important and common conventions.

Before we go on to discuss some conventions one-by-one, it's worth noting one final point. This book does not stick to all of them. I intended to write a friendly, easygoing guide. You already have plenty of reading to do as part of your course. I've explained how important it is that you take the time to learn from that too!

Although my writing is *relatively* formal, the level of formality is occasionally lower than would be expected of your essays – the exclamation mark I used in

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the previous sentence, for example, and the way I address my readers as 'you', are examples of features in my writing that would not be appropriate in an academic essay. Where this point is particularly important, I'll highlight it again.

Using acronyms

Acronyms are words grouped together then referred to by their first letters. You're likely to encounter many in an academic environment. Here are some examples: BBC, HEI, USA, IT.

These must be written in a particular way in academic writing. This is an excellent example of a simple convention that, followed properly, makes writing clearer. In a 'normal' length essay (anything less than, say, 8000 words), simply write the term out *in full* and indicate the acronym in brackets afterwards. After this, you can just use the acronym. Here's an example:

> ✓ The budget cuts proposed raised doubts among officials at the Ministry of Defence (MoD). A spokesman for the MoD confirmed discussions were ongoing.

After the example sentence, the acronym 'MoD' could be used.

If you a writing a longer piece of work, like a dissertation, it might be worth occasionally 'reminding' your readers of a particular acronym. You might use the full phrase the first time you use it in each chapter. Another option, particularly if a piece of work contains many different acronyms, is to have a glossary or appendix that lists them all in one place. Ask your tutor what kind of techniques they would like you to use.

> **Key Point**
>
> There are some acronyms which don't need to be given in full. It is unlikely, for example, that you'll need to write 'United Kingdom' instead of UK, because this is common knowledge. I'd also say the same about 'USA'. If in doubt, however, write the full term first, as I did in the example. You will need to exercise judgement as to which acronyms won't need to be written in full – but *most* of them will.

Establishing objectivity

'Objectivity' is a quality you need your assignments to have. What does it mean to be objective when you write?

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Objectivity refers to a deliberate distance between yourself as a writer and the subject matter of your assignment. Being objective is about creating this distance. Objectivity is established in various ways. I discuss some of these ways separately: for example, avoiding the first and second person (discussed later in the chapter) is a way of establishing objectivity by making your writing seem less 'familiar'.

Some students find it useful to think about the opposite of objectivity – 'subjectivity'. If you are writing in a *subjective* way, you seem very close to your subject. Another way to think about this difference is this: imagine objectivity as being on the outside looking in. Subjectivity is being on the inside looking out.

So, instead of writing about your own experiences, you write about the research and reading you've done. Instead of making points based on your *opinions*, write about the conclusion to which your research has led you. Instead of writing based on a chat, or argument, you had with your friends, use an interview you've conducted with an academic *expert* in the field.

There is an important exception to be aware of. Some subjects at university involve a kind of academic writing called 'reflective writing'. Reflective writing is about your reflections on experiences you've had; they will be experiences relevant to the topic, or to your course. Writing a report on a work placement you completed, for example, would involve reflection. Reflective assignments ask you to discuss what you've learned from certain experiences, in the context of the theory you've been taught and the academic texts you've read.

More examples include teaching-based courses: you might be asked to write about your week teaching at a school. If you are undertaking any kind of work placement on, for example, an engineering course, you might be assigned to write a diary or some kind of summary of what you did and what you learned. Similarly, if you complete a group project, writing up the way the group made decisions and worked together (which would clearly include you as a member of the group) might also involve recounting your own experiences.
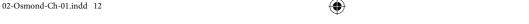
This section has made clear the importance of being objective. Following and understanding some of the other conventions in this chapter will actually help you achieve objectivity in your academic writing.

Using colloquial language or contractions, for example, makes writing seem subjective. This is because your reader will get the impression that you are less serious (and not thinking in an academic way) about your subject.

The first and second person (words like 'I', 'you', etc.) use very *personal* nouns that decrease the distance between writer and subject. Use the third person to create that distance. *Reference* the work of other academics, researchers and authors to show your engagement with the academic debate on a topic.

Below I provide two examples from an essay about the principles community workers need to be aware of during their work. Each sentence is making a similar, though not identical point. One is obviously *subjective*, with little or

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no distance between the writer and the topic. By contrast, the second is *objective*, and so has established this distance.

Compare:

> ✗ I would feel really hurt if someone passed on personal information about me without my knowledge.

with

> ✓ Community workers must follow ethical conventions so as not to undermine trust.

Both make a valid point. The first sentence, however, makes the point in a very personal way. The use of the first person 'I' reinforces the sense that the writer is discussing a situation from *their own* frame of reference. The second sentence takes the key point, about ethical conventions, and makes it in a calm, objective way.

Referencing correctly

This book doesn't go into great detail about how to reference (the conventions of which will vary from course to course and university to university), but any guide to academic writing must mention it. This is a brief summary; I go into more detail about referencing in a later chapter.

WHAT YOUR TUTORS SAY

'It is essential that your work provides linkages and examples from appropriate academic sources to evidence and provide scholarly context to your work.' – Fiona, Youth & Community Work lecturer

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Fiona uses the word 'essential': you will almost always be expected to reference other sources in your work. If you write an essay with no references, you will get very low marks. Think about the journals and books you've been reading on your course. They're likely to be full of references.

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There are various other words and techniques associated with referencing. Various referencing styles and systems exist (you might hear about 'citing', 'footnotes', the 'Harvard style', 'numeric referencing', and much more). However, *referencing* as a whole means making it clear when the ideas, concepts, quotations, diagrams, definitions, images or arguments in your work come from elsewhere. 'Elsewhere' might mean other books, conferences, journal articles, online sources, and so on.

This will be discussed later on, but a *crucial* part of writing essays and assignments is engaging with the body of research, writing and discussion on a particular topic or subject. There will be a wide selection of ideas at a subject level, and additional debate and discussion about specific parts of the subject or topics within it.

There will always be debate and discussion on a subject. Studying at university level is a way of entering that debate. This is why you'll be made to read books, research, conduct laboratory experiments, and so on.

Referencing, however you are expected to do it, is how you'll point out that a particular quote, for example, came from a specific page in a specific book; or that a particular painting is very important to the history of art.

In short, almost every essay or assignment you write at university should contain references. Be aware that not every essay question you are assigned will explicitly say 'reference other sources in your answer' (some might do, if there are specific texts that you have to include, for example). This does not mean you won't be expected to engage with your reading material and prove that you have done so in your essay. This is expected of students to such an extent that sometimes it is not even pointed out.

In the chapter on critical thinking and referencing, and the final chapter about common mistakes, referencing *effectively* will be examined more closely. Different referencing styles are outlined: you'll need to double-check which one your tutors want you to use.

It will take a long time before you can remember exactly how to reference a particular source, especially an obscure one. Even your lecturers will sometimes have to look up an example for their own work. Whether or not you can do it from memory, you *will* have to reference properly and consistently.

Avoiding slang/colloquial language

Academic writing is formal. This is commonly accepted by most students. What sometimes is not grasped properly is *why* it is formal. Formality in academic writing doesn't come from deliberately writing difficult, complex sentences, or using complex words where simple ones would serve the same purpose. It comes from making sure that no inappropriate informal language, like slang, is used. This also reinforces the sense of objectivity.

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If a writer uses familiar turns of phrase from their everyday colloquial language, the sense of distance from the content might be lost. An assignment written in this way would seem more like an informal, spoken 'chat' about a subject rather than an academic discussion.

Additionally, in most cases, academic writing should be *literal*. This means that words and phrases used should operate according to their actual dictionary definitions. Quite often, slang, and colloquial phrases from speech, are not literal. Here is an example of a common phrase that is not literal and, as such, would be inappropriate in an essay:

> ✗ It is widely accepted that election campaigns go the extra mile in their final weeks.

The phrase 'go the extra mile' means, in informal English, to make additional effort, to try harder. Taken literally, however, this sentence suggests that staff working on political campaigns travel an additional mile nearer election time! A simple, literal version of the sentence might look like this:

> ✓ It is widely accepted that election campaigns increase their efforts in the final weeks.

So what is slang? What is 'colloquial language'; what are 'colloquialisms'? You have just seen an example.

Although most students are aware that they should not use 'informal' language in essays, it is the definition of 'informal' or 'slang' that is more difficult. Unfortunately, this book can only help to a certain extent, and provide some guidelines.

In the following box are some examples, from essays on various subjects, of sentences that contain one or more colloquial words or phrases. Some of them are obviously informal, and might even make you laugh; others might surprise you. I will provide improved versions afterwards.

> ✗ Saddam Hussein was a bad dude.
>
> ✗ The company, in an attempt to cut costs, fired 5% of the workforce in 2004.
>
> ✗ Most of the research cited here concludes with the question how come only two hearings in Parliament have been held about this issue.
>
> *(Continued)*

(Continued)

- ✗ Analysing the tendency of pop music to borrow from dance-based genres from a postmodern standpoint limits conclusions. The scene has never really focused on that kind of stuff.

- ✗ Bradshaw (2009) decides that the conclusion is clear as crystal: sporting activity should be promoted more to kids at a young age.

In the first sentence, 'bad dude' is almost laughably informal. 'Dude' is outright slang, and the word 'bad' is just as informal; even worse, 'bad dude' is a subjective value judgement that does not make a point in an academic way. A better idea would be to give the reader actual evidence as to why the author deems Saddam to have been a 'bad dude':

- ✓ Saddam Hussein, after coming to power, embarked on a totalitarian rule of systematic terror; a rule catalogued by many, over the years (Makiya, 1989; Johnson, 2005; Hitchens, 2007).

The second sentence would be acceptable in an essay, except for one word: the verb 'fired', which is actually a slang term. As you've learned, academic writing should be *literal*. Clearly, terminating employment has nothing to do with fire, or flames! Here, then, is an example of a word common in speech, but not suitable for an academic essay. This can be easily corrected by replacing the word:

- ✓ The company, in an attempt to cut costs, terminated the contracts of 5% of the workforce in 2004.

In the third sentence, the informal phrase – one that comes directly from spoken English – is perhaps harder to spot. It is the forming of a question with the words 'how come'. Going back to our idea of literal English, we can see that the phrase 'how come' does not really mean anything.

Think about what the question is really asking. How would someone actually ask the question? 'Why have only two hearings been held?', most likely. I can use this to replace the phrase 'how come':

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> ✓ Most of the research cited here concludes by questioning why only two hearings in Parliament have been held about this issue.

The fourth example contains two colloquial words or phrases, both in the second sentence.

First, the word 'stuff' is inappropriate in academic writing. It is not literal, and is also vague and informal – three things you do not want your writing to be described as! The phrase 'kind of stuff' is even vaguer, and makes the problem worse.

It is common to describe a particular fanbase as a 'scene' in speech, but here it should be replaced. Imagine this sentence being read by someone for whom English was not a first language. Slang phrases like this will not have the same meaning for them; another reason we should be literal in our words and phrases.

As you'll learn later in the book, the word 'really' rarely adds anything to academic writing (the same goes for 'very'). It doesn't mean much or give the reader any real information. As such, it adds to the informality of the sentence, and should be removed.

Here, then, is a possible adapted version of the second sentence:

> ✓ Analysing the tendency of pop music to borrow from dance-based genres from a postmodern standpoint limits conclusions. The contemporary fanbase of popular music tends not to focus on concepts like these.

The final problem sentence contains one 'cliché', as well as an instance of informal language. In addition, there is another problem with it. It is a different kind of problem, one that this book discusses later, but I will point it out anyway.

The phrase 'clear as crystal' is a 'cliché'. Clichés are common or stock phrases unique to a particular language, and overused in that language. Most clichés, a long time ago, were interesting ways of describing something, and have been used so often so as to become popular, and to lose their original effect.

Most people know them, and they are frequently used in speech. Every language has its own clichéd phrases, almost all of them too informal for academic writing.

Many clichés in the English language are based around describing things in subjective ways, which you should avoid in academic writing. Other examples

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include 'a diamond in the rough'; 'frightened to death'; 'read between the lines'. You'd never have cause to use many of them in an essay, but there are a few that appear occasionally!

'Clear as crystal' can be replaced with one word; the most obvious and simple choice is shown below.

Another problem expression is 'kids'. Literal English is clear on this: 'kids' are juvenile goats (as people who disapprove of the word 'kids' often point out!). The word should be replaced with the most obvious alternative: children.

The last problem, of a different nature, is the final phrase in the sentence: 'at a young age'.

The word 'children', which replaces 'kids', has a definition: it means people at a young age; thus the phrase 'at a young age' is not needed. All it is doing is repeating an idea established by another word.

If the source writer mentions a *specific* age, or refers to children at primary school (or another specific group), then this should be made clear.

This allows two possible approaches:

> ✓ Bradshaw (2009) decides that the conclusion is clear: sporting activity should be promoted more to children.
>
> ✓ Bradshaw (2009) decides that the conclusion is clear: sporting activity should be promoted more to children at primary school age.

Everyone has some awareness of slang, and colloquial, informal language that they might use in speech. As the examples have shown, however, such language can be harder to detect than you might think.

In the examples, I deliberately ensured that, apart from the problematic phrases, the sentences were academically appropriate. It is quite easy to find, and to avoid writing, entirely colloquial sentences or paragraphs. The occasional informal phrase is more of a danger.

As you read through your work, ask yourself:

- Does each word or phrase mean what a dictionary says it means?
- Is this phrase commonly heard in speech?
- Would I expect to see this in the textbooks and journals I read as part of my course?
- Would someone not as familiar with English as I am translate this correctly?

Think about that last point: someone using an English dictionary to translate 'clear as crystal', from the last example we changed, would probably wonder why your essay was suddenly referring to jewels!

If any of your answers to these questions leaves you in doubt, take the approach we have just used. Replace the phrases you have concerns about with clear, effective, simple alternatives.

Avoiding emotive language

Avoiding emotive language is a skill similar to avoiding colloquial language. It is hard to define at first, but the more you write, the easier it will become.

Emotive language is not just language that could be described as 'emotional'. More than that, emotive language is used *deliberately* to evoke an emotion in the reader. This is common in some journalism, politics and fiction.

WHAT YOUR TUTORS SAY

'Rather than just arguing that, in your personal and/or professional opinion, young people are demonised by the media, provide examples, and cite scholarly work that further supports your observation. Such an approach will prevent tutors writing "evidence?" repeatedly in the margins of your assignments.' – Fiona, Youth & Community Work lecturer

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Fiona uses a specific example of a potentially emotive topic from her own area of expertise – the 'demonisation' of young people. She recommends using effective referencing from other sources to make it clear you are not just writing, in a subjective way, about your opinions. As you'll see, this is good advice about a very effective technique.

Academic writing involves making points based on evidence. Clearly, then, you do not want to use emotive language in assignments. You must avoid deliberately appealing to the emotions of your readers. Because you might be writing about a subject that has the potential to affect emotions, or provoke a powerful reaction, this can be difficult.

What *is* emotive language, though? Some words and phrases can be emotive in themselves. Others might be perfectly acceptable in an essay unless used as part of a particular phrase or in an emotive way. This is one of the conventions that you have to think carefully about.

Ultimately, you must use your common sense. Emotive language tends to be subjective, like colloquial language. The more you develop an objective writing style, the more naturally you will avoid emotive language.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to put every word in the dictionary into either a column titled 'emotive' or a column titled 'not emotive'! There are

some words and phrases in the box below. I'd argue that they could probably be considered emotive regardless of the context in which they're used. You should get an idea from this list of the kind of language associated with *emotional* rather than *logical* arguments.

- ✖ Horrible
- ✖ Disgraceful
- ✖ Disgusting
- ✖ Incredible
- ✖ Magnificent
- ✖ Dire
- ✖ Tragedy
- ✖ Wonderful
- ✖ Inflict

Key Point

The word 'tragedy', included in the above list, is commonly used in an emotive way in some journalism. However, it would be perfectly appropriate to use the term to refer to a play from the tragic genre (like many of Shakespeare's works). Understanding the vocabulary associated with your subject will help you differentiate between the appropriate and emotive use of certain words or phrases.

Here are some short example sentences, from a range of academic subjects, that could reasonably be described as emotive.

- ✖ Many studies (Hurford, 1982; Ryan, 1990; Jackson & Devon, 2002) reinforce the idea that environmental deregulation in Western states can leave parts of otherwise modern, thriving countries as treacherous, barren wasteland.
- ✖ The creation of the NHS by the wartime government of Britain was a towering, even dizzying, achievement.
- ✖ In the play, after the character's baby is born, the torment and turmoil that the family endures is sickening.

> ✖ Where policies like this have been implemented in secondary schools, the schools have raced up league tables.
>
> ✖ Recent coverage of women's sport in the UK has, sadly, paid almost no attention whatsoever to athletic ability, instead, focusing – in a puerile way – on the appearance of the sportswomen.

Two points are worth noting immediately: emotive language is not only associated with *negative* portrayal of a topic. Language can be used to evoke positive emotions; either way, it is not appropriate in academic writing.

Emily, below, points out a problem with any subjective language – her example word is a positive one.

WHAT YOUR TUTORS SAY

'Be wary of using emotive language in your work. Even a word like "good" is problematic as it is subjective and can't be tested or measured. Good according to whom?' – Emily, Academic Skills lecturer

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Second, many of these sentences might be making valid points. The first one, for example, references several studies. Just because a sentence contains emotive language does not mean it is 'wrong' – the point just has to be made in an objective way. See Emily's question: 'good according to whom'?

As you can see, most (though not all) emotive language appears as description. Descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs) are discussed in the next chapter – you'll learn that they don't contribute much to academic writing. In the case of emotive description, they can damage your writing. By avoiding descriptive language and only using it when absolutely necessary, you are reducing the risk of using emotive language.

In one example, however, the verb (action word – see the next chapter) is emotive. This is the verb 'raced' in the fourth example. The author is trying to use a *descriptive* verb that does not just describe an action, but gives a sense of *how* the action occurs. However, in this case, it is exaggerated to the point that it becomes an emotive sentence.

Avoiding exaggeration, and exaggerated description in particular, is the best tactic to avoid emotive language – and this is likely to reduce your use of colloquial language too.

Because these sentences are making points to provoke a strong reaction in the reader, simply rephrasing them is not sufficient. You, as the author, have

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to decide on the evidence you can use to highlight the conclusion you are going to make. This is why I am not going to provide improved examples of all of the above sentences; so much depends on context.

I will improve one of them, however, to demonstrate the process. Here is the original, analysing the relationship between gender and sport:

> ✖ Recent coverage of women's sport in the UK has, sadly, paid almost no attention whatsoever to athletic ability, instead, focusing – in a puerile way – on the appearance of the sportswomen.

First, I'll identify the emotive language in the sentence: the word 'sadly', which might be acceptable if the rest of the sentence did not take such an emotive approach; the word 'whatsoever', which makes the claim seem more exaggerated; and the word 'puerile', which is not supported by any evidence, and seems to be the author's view.

To improve this sentence, I'd recommend the following steps: incorporate evidence into the sentence; find examples of the reactions of others to the coverage being discussed – this will make the writing seem less subjective; remove description that cannot be supported by evidence; and make it clear *why* a situation is 'sad' and must be improved, using a combination of evidence and the author's own conclusions.

The result might be something like this:

> ✓ Recent coverage of women's sport in the UK has, a variety of research concludes (Darking, 2009; Christopher & Wilson, 2010; Henderson, 2011), not focused enough on the sporting ability of sportswomen. This has generated some fierce reaction; Henderson references an interview in which a female footballer accused commentary of being 'puerile' (p24). The research points to the seriousness of the situation, which, regrettably, impacts negatively on gender relationships in younger people (Howard, 2010); a different approach is needed to change this situation.

The second version still expresses the idea that the situation is bad, and even demonstrates the emotional reactions that some people have shown – without being emotional or emotive itself. The references prove that there is agreement that the situation should change, and that there are far-reaching consequences that will continue if it does not.

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Ultimately, emotive language, like colloquial language, tends to be subjective, descriptive and exaggerated. The more you base your ideas in evidence, and demonstrate that you are doing so, the more effective your work will be. If there are powerful emotions involved in a debate, demonstrate this by providing examples of them: but do not display your own, or deliberately try to provoke them in your readers.

Avoiding the first person

The 'first person' is a grammatical term for using the words 'I', 'we', 'us', 'ours', 'my', and so on. In the next section on basic grammar, you'll learn more about different types of words. The examples I've just provided, to show you what the first person consists of, are *pronouns*. They can be singular ('I' and 'me' – just referring to you as a single person) or plural ('ours' and 'us' – you are part of a group, perhaps).

The first person is common in many kinds of writing (especially fiction) and in speech. Academic writing is very different – its aim is not to entertain or inform in a popular way, but to make an argument that engages with the academic discussion on a subject.

In this book, I use both the first person and the second person, which I discuss below. Although my writing here is fairly formal, use of the first person was a *deliberate* decision on my part to make the text seem 'friendlier' (and, indeed, less objective).

Students often ask 'Can I use the first person in my essays?'. Unfortunately, the answer is more complex than just 'no', but not much more complex. If in doubt, do *not* use the first person. Avoid it completely. Sometimes your tutors, or your course handbook, will explicitly tell you not to write in the first person; this makes things easier for you!

Sometimes, however, you might come across use of the first person in your reading, and sometimes you might need to use it in your writing. Very experienced academic writers sometimes use the first person in various ways. The aim here, however, is to become comfortable with the *basic* conventions of academic writing. As such, we will ignore some of these ways in which the first person can be used for effect, and look at the *main* exception to the rule 'do not use the first person in academic writing'.

The main exception is the 'reflective' writing I have already mentioned.

Reflective writing involves reflection on things that have happened to *you*. You cannot pretend they happened to someone else, so you write about them in the first person. It will usually be clear if your assignment requires this kind of reflection. If you are in doubt, ask your tutor if he or she expects use of the first person (which is usually unavoidable in reflective writing).

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Avoiding the second person

The *second* person is, as you might have guessed, a way of directly addressing someone else. Second person pronouns include 'you', 'your' and 'yours'. Some languages have a different word for the plural 'you' (several people being addressed directly) and the singular 'you' (just one person), but English does not.

However, the second person in English has a very distinct purpose beyond allowing you to talk or write to people (imagine writing a text or email to a friend without using 'you'!). It is used, quite often, in a *general* way, meaning 'people'. This is very common in spoken English.

I'll give you some examples to show you what I mean:

> ✗ If you want a career in engineering, you will have to show dedication and focus.

Now, if this is a careers advisor speaking to a specific student or group of students, then the second person is entirely appropriate (though it wouldn't be an example of academic writing). However, if you write this in an essay about the engineering industry, you are talking *generally*. Substitute 'people' for 'you' and the sentence means the same thing. Substitute, then, 'people' for the first 'you', and the pronoun 'they' for the second 'you'. Using 'you' twice would result in an odd sentence. This leaves you with:

> ✓ If people want a career in engineering, they will have to show dedication and focus.

Here's an example from an English essay, discussing poetry:

> ✗ You really have to read Donne's poetry aloud to fully appreciate his use of language.

Again, what the student here means by 'you' is 'the reader'. While *you*, reading the essay, might technically be called the reader, it is reasonable to assume the student is not addressing *you*, because he or she is addressing *everyone* reading the assignment.

Unlike the use of the first person, the second person should simply be *completely avoided in all academic writing*. When students use the second person

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in an essay (this is, unfortunately, a *very* common issue) it is almost always in the general way. This makes writing very informal because it is an aspect of spoken English. Remember, to create objectivity and a sense of academic discussion, things we might *say* as part of a less formal conversation might not be appropriate in academic writing.

It is very easy to check if you have used the second person in a typed assignment. Almost all word processors have a 'find' tool – use it, and search for the word 'you'. It will highlight the word wherever it appears. It will also find 'your' because the first three letters are the same.

Then, simply ask yourself, '*who* do I actually mean?' and make this clear. If you are using it in the general way (which is likely), rephrase the sentence. Work out what key point you are making and write clearly and simply in the third person.

Take the example from the English essay, above. The sentence is making a basic, and potentially valid, point – that Donne's work is better appreciated, or understood, read aloud. The sentence can be rewritten in several ways to say that quite clearly, with no use of the second person 'you'. One way of doing this might be:

> ✓ Donne's work is best appreciated when spoken aloud.

An alternative sentence would be:

> ✓ Reading Donne's work aloud gives the reader a better sense of the poems.

Both are simple and clear and make the same point without using the second person. The important thing here is not to think too hard about how to remove the 'you'; just do it as *simply as you can*.

Here is another example:

> ✗ The financial crisis in 2008 showed that sometimes you can't rely on the opinions of experts because nobody predicted the crisis.

'You' is being used in the general way. The basic point of the sentence can easily be expressed without 'you'; here is just one possibility:

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> ✓ Most experts failed to predict the financial crisis in 2008, which highlights the problem of relying on expert opinion.

There is another important rule to remember when resolving this problem. Students, finding they've used the second person 'you', sometimes think it's appropriate to replace it with the first person 'we' instead.

This is not common in speech, but for some reason is intended to serve a similar purpose to 'you' in essays. I'm not sure why students do this, but I have read it so many times I wanted to warn you here *not* to simply replace the second person 'you' with 'we'. For example:

Do *not* change

> ✗ You can't understand the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 without an awareness of the region's history.

to

> ✗ We can't understand the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 without an awareness of the region's history.

but instead to something like:

> ✓ An awareness of the region's history is needed to understand the conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008.

In short: do not use the second person, and when removing it, do not simply replace it with the first person. Use the more objective third person instead.

Avoiding contractions

A 'contraction' is one word, made up of two or more words that have been joined together. Some letters from the words are left out and replaced with an apostrophe.

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The apostrophe is a piece of punctuation that is misused in many ways. Some of these are discussed in the chapter on basic grammar, and in the chapter on common mistakes. Here, I focus exclusively on contractions – specifically, *not* using them in academic writing. This is another convention I have *not* rigidly followed in this book.

Examples are not hard to find, particularly in speech, or popular writing:

- 'Cannot' in its contracted form is 'can't'
- 'Will not' becomes 'won't'
- 'He is' or 'he has' become 'he's'
- 'Should not' becomes 'shouldn't'
- 'There will' becomes 'there'll'

The rule is simple: do not use contractions in academic writing.

Luckily, as with some of the other conventions, contractions are quite easy to find during your proofreading process. Just type an apostrophe into the 'find' tool of your word processor and you can examine the apostrophes you have used, one-by-one.

This will, of course, mean checking apostrophes used for other reasons (like possessives, or when quoting other sources; both will be mentioned later in the book). However, as soon as you see an apostrophe used in a contraction, you can just type the words out in full. It is certainly not worth losing marks because of an issue so easily fixed.

Simplicity, clarity and conciseness

This is not a single convention, but a broader issue of writing style. The example discussed below is longer than the previous examples in this chapter, and it involves more complex issues.

The later chapter called, unsurprisingly, 'Conciseness and Clarity', looks in more detail at specific techniques to make your writing effective. However, the sooner you start thinking about this issue, the better you will be at putting it into practice.

The three ideas are so intertwined I will not separate them. Essentially, you should use as few words as possible to make a point (conciseness); these *individual* words should be as straightforward as they can be without being informal or inappropriate (simplicity); and they should be put together in a way that makes your point effective and easy-to-understand (clarity).

This is a key theme of the book in a way that the other subsections of this chapter are not (this book is not, for example, all about acronyms). Writing simply, concisely and clearly is, however, a key *convention* of academic writing.

In fact, it is a key theme of the book *because* it is an essential convention of academic writing.

For now, I'm going to take one example and discuss it in some detail. In the same way that many of these conventions reinforce objectivity in writing, many also reinforce *clarity*. Conciseness is a feature of our writing that we have to learn to perfect ourselves. It is difficult!

Take a look at the two extracts below. Then you can read my explanation of the changes.

> ✖ To succeed in obtaining and achieving the highest possible marks in assignments, students must engage in a genuine and concerted attempt to conduct extensive research, devote much time to the planning process, and finally ensure they are entirely comfortable and confident with the rules of English grammar.

> ✓ To receive the highest possible marks in assignments, students must research effectively, spend enough time planning, and make sure they are confident with grammar.

Would you agree that the two extracts say very similar things? I'd argue that they say practically identical things. The first is over-the-top, unnecessarily formal and repetitive, and overlong. We do not need to labour our points. The second is clearly much shorter, which will give you valuable space to make more points, or support this one with references.

What follows is an outline of my thought process and reasoning behind the changes I've made; as you can see, I've rephrased/reworded large parts of the first version, as well as deleting sections. Everyone will do this kind of thing differently, and there are many different ways I could have altered the first example. So rather than seeing my explanation as a 'solution' to a specific problem, try and see it as an example of one approach to the convention of writing clearly and concisely. Try and view it, also, as showing you the kind of state of mind you should be in when you edit what you've written.

This following section is quite detailed. You might need to return to this part of the book. For now, read over this a few times – you'll see how many techniques and approaches to writing there are, and how many choices you have to make. The more you read, and the more you write and adopt these conventions, the more naturally you will think about the following kinds of points.

With all that in mind, let's take a look at why I changed the extract:

To begin with, the sentence is too long. Even if I hadn't managed to shorten it as much as I have, I would have broken it down into several shorter sentences.

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Read it aloud and you will probably end up breathless. This is a sure sign a sentence is too long. Sentences that make you breathless are also likely to be too complex.

I thought that 'To succeed in obtaining and achieving the highest possible marks' could be reduced to 'to get the highest possible marks'. Surely using the verbs 'obtaining' *and* 'achieving' is unnecessary. These two words are doing the same thing in the sentence. The student is doing the same thing with the marks – receiving them.

I *could* have used the verb 'to get', but 'get' can often seem informal. 'Get' can be a troublesome verb. Many languages that are similar to English do not have a direct equivalent.

Key Point

Here is another quick example that illustrates potential problems with the word 'get'. Compare 'the patient got better' and 'the patient recovered'. The second is more formal, and shorter too.

Moving on, I've shortened 'students must engage in a genuine and concerted attempt to conduct extensive research'. In the second sentence I replace this with 'students must research effectively'.

Ask yourself: if you go into the library, eager to write your best essay yet, and you 'engage in a genuine and concerted attempt to conduct extensive research', what are you actually doing? You are researching *well*. That wasn't formal enough, so I went with *effectively*, which means a similar thing. You are researching in a way that provides you with lots of great points to go into your essay. I could also have used 'thoroughly'.

Key Point

The other difference here, which this book discusses further later on, is that I have used a stronger verb. 'Research', a key academic concept, is used as a verb, an action word – 'to research'. In the original, 'research' was a noun. There were two verbs – 'engage' and 'conduct'. Neither mean anything without the nouns 'attempt' and 'research' attached to them.

It is better to use effective, strong verbs. Again, think of the difference between 'I conduct research into endangered animals' and 'I research endangered animals'. The verb in the second sentence is stronger, carries more meaning on its own, and because of this the sentence is shorter without losing any of its message.

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My updated version of the first extract is certainly not the best or only reworking possible. I could have written, 'students must research extensively and effectively', but I decided that if you are researching effectively, your research is probably extensive too.

My second version has, perhaps, lost the sense of a student trying hard. This can be seen in the first version in the phrase 'a genuine and concerted attempt'. To emphasise that idea of *trying* as well as 'effectiveness', I might write the sentence differently. An example might be: 'students must make the effort to research effectively'.

Next, I changed 'devote much time to the planning process' to 'spend enough time planning'. I thought 'devote' sounded a bit over-the-top, while 'spending' time is perfectly fine. That said, I have, as above, perhaps lost the sense of intense effort.

My worry, though, was that the first extract was not only unnecessarily formal, but seemed too hyperbolic. 'Hyperbole' means deliberately writing or speaking with exaggeration to have a specific effect. This is a technique commonly used in political speeches or opinion-writing. Academic writing should make arguments reinforced by evidence, research and reason.

You'll notice that I also removed the word 'much' from 'much time planning'. The phrases 'a lot of' or 'lots of' are often too vague and informal for academic writing. So you might find yourself writing 'much' or 'many' most of the time instead.

Here though, the word 'enough' is better, because it is more specific. Spending 'much' time is great, but how much is 'much'? A student needs to do the *right* amount of planning. That is, *enough* planning to form the structure of their work. Using 'enough' makes the meaning of the phrase clearer.

Is 'the planning process' all that different from just 'planning'? I'd argue that there is no difference. The 'planning' put into an assignment will include some specific processes. Because of this I used the simpler 'planning' and not 'the planning process'.

I also managed to considerably shorten the last phrase – 'finally ensure they are entirely comfortable and confident with the rules of English grammar'.

I removed the word 'finally' because the reader has come to the last point in the sentence – they *know* it is the 'final' point. My reader will see that a new paragraph begins after this sentence. They will understand from this that the subject is changing, or that I am making a different point. For these reasons I do not think it is necessary to label this 'finally'.

I replaced the verb 'ensure' with 'make sure'. I did not *have* to do this. Making this change has actually turned one word into two; as such, it has not made my work more concise. However, 'ensure' sounded a little too forced and formal to me. I don't think it makes a huge difference, but this is the approach I chose

to take. Readers might disagree with me, and the sentence certainly makes sense without this change being made.

This in particular demonstrates quite effectively how writing is about making *choices* as an author. There are certain conventions to follow, but you will always have ultimate control over what goes onto the page.

I made a change to the last part of the sentence. I replaced 'entirely comfortable and confident with the rules of English grammar' with 'confident with grammar'. I removed 'entirely comfortable and confident' simply because I don't think this is true. Not many people ever become 'entirely' confident with English grammar, whether they are studying at university or not.

In fact, a key aim of this book is to help you develop an understanding of the *main* and most important aspects of grammar; the ones you need to write a decent essay or assignment. A fully comprehensive awareness of grammar is not necessary to do this.

Using both 'comfortable' *and* 'confident' is not necessary. It is likely that someone comfortable with a set of rules is confident with them too. There is no benefit, I'd argue, in using both words. I preferred confident, so left that in the sentence.

I removed the word 'English' from 'English grammar'. By getting rid of the reference to a specific language, I made the sentence more versatile. Its key point is broader and more accessible. Surely a writer should be confident with the grammar of whatever language they are working in?

This might seem like a great deal of work to go through to change a short paragraph. In reality, editing the paragraph won't take long – especially as you get used to thinking like this. You'll realise just how quickly you can make meaningful, effective adjustments to your work. One of the aims of this book is to help you develop your skills in this area.

Further reading

Copus, J (2009) *Brilliant Writing Tips for Students*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

RULES AND CONVENTIONS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

The details in this hand-out are based on material first developed by Hazel Hall at Queen Margaret University College in November 1998.

This hand-out probably merits consideration for the world's top ten of boring documents. However, if you want to do well in your assignments you need to get the basics right. If you don't get these "little" things correct, then the perceived integrity of your work as a whole is at risk. Always proof read your work to remove the surface glitches so that the value of your hard work shines through.

Part I: Basic grammar rules for academic writing

The rules

Rule 1: You must write in sentences
Rule 2: Subjects and verbs in sentences must agree with each other
Rule 3: You must use appropriate punctuation
Rule 4: You must use the right vocabulary
Rule 5: You must use the apostrophe correctly and with care

Rule 1: You must write in sentences

Sentences have the following characteristics: they start with a capital letter; end with a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark; and contain a verb (doing word).

Students commonly make the mistake of not writing in full sentences (they fail to provide a main clause in their "sentence") or write very long, rambling sentences that would be better chopped into smaller ones. Short, clear sentences are usually more effective than those which are long and complex. If you are in any doubt, split up any longer sentences into two or three shorter ones. This advice is especially important if you find writing difficult, or English is not your first language. Short sentences will help you avoid grammatical mistakes and make it easy for the reader to follow your line of argument. Each sentence that you write should make sense if it were read out independently of the sentence before and after it.

Rule 2: Subjects and verbs in sentences must agree with one another

If the subject of a sentence is singular, then the verb form must be singular as well:

> The student passes the exam.

In this example the student is the subject. There is just one student, so the subject is singular. The verb is "to pass" and agrees with the singular subject. If this sentence described the

activity of several students the subject would be plural, so the verb agreement would reflect this:

> The students pass the exam.

Problems can occur with case agreement in two circumstances:

1. A statement begins in the singular, but drifts into the plural. The following sentence is incorrect:

    > *An information manager needs to know whether they are doing their job properly.*

    The easiest solution to this problem is to make both the subject and verb plural:

    > Information managers need to know whether they are doing their jobs properly.

2. Collective nouns cause confusion. The following sentence is incorrect:

    > The government are passing new legislation.

    Since there is just one government in the example given above, the sentence should read:

    > The government is passing new legislation.

    Once you know this rule for written work, you will notice that in spoken English it is often broken. For example, would you say "There's four of them here" or "There are four of them here"? Whilst this is acceptable in spoken English, it is not for formal written work. Make sure that you get this right in your written assignments. (Similarly students should watch out for other instances where the influence of speech may have an adverse effect on writing. Consider, for example, how someone might say "I should *of* done it", when the grammatically correct construction is "I should have done it".)

Rule 3: You must use appropriate punctuation

If you have any doubt about punctuation, use as little as possible and write short, direct sentences. It is perfectly possible to write a good piece of work using only the comma and the full stop.

3.1 Commas

Commas are used to denote a weak pause in a sentence. If you find that you write in long sentences, check whether it might be better create several short sentences replacing commas with full stops. (If you do this you must also check that the verb forms make sense.)

3.2 Dashes and hyphens

Try to minimise the use of dashes in your formal work. They can give the impression of a style that is too chatty. They may be used in pairs to insert an explanatory comment or a short list:

> Each member of staff - from the most junior to the Chief Executive - is invited to comment on the plans.

Dashes should not be used as a substitute for parentheses - or mixed with them.

Hyphens are used to connect prefixes to words (for example, CD-ROM drives) or when forming compounds such as "second-in-command".

3.3 Exclamation marks

Use exclamation marks as little as possible in formal work. They give the work a juvenile and over-excited tone.

3.4 Full stops

Full stops are not needed after titles such as Dr, Mrs or Co, nor are they required for well-known company titles such as IBM.

3.5 Question marks

It is unlikely that you should use the question mark in the work you submit. After all, you are meant to be answering the question, not posing any new ones!

3.6 Colons

The colon is used to introduce a strong pause within a sentence. It separates two clauses which could stand alone as separate sentences but are linked by some relationship in their meaning. There are four instances in which you might use a colon.

1. A colon can introduce a list:

   > The job placement entails various duties: setting up a database, liaising with customers, ordering supplies and taking minutes at meetings.

2. A colon can precede a long quotation:

   > The Computing Officer explains the reason for this decision: "Java can enable searching on any kind of platform. Time and money has been wasted by developing 35 different versions, each requiring different programmers. With a joint effort we knew we'd have an amazing product."

3. A colon can be used before a clause which explains (often by way of illustration) the previous statement:

The Business Information Systems degree course is highly regarded: academic standards are high, the lecturers are pleasant and the students enjoy the modules taught.

4. A colon can be used to indicate a sharp contrast:

   She enjoys keeping up to date with friends on Facebook: her friend thinks it is too time-consuming.

3.7 Semi-colons

You should only use the semi-colon if you know how to use it properly. It is difficult to identify when to use it, since it represents a pause that is longer than a comma, but shorter than a full stop. There are four main uses:

1. A semi-colon is used when a second clause expands or explains the first:

   Neither system matched the requirements exactly; this had to be checked with the supplier.

2. A semi-colon is used to describe a sequence of actions or different aspects of the same topic:

   There was funding for the project; a member of staff was keen to implement the system; the work could be achieved within the time scale set.

3. A semi-colon is used before clauses which begin with "nevertheless", "therefore", "even so" and "for instance":

   She left the house early; even so she missed the bus.

4. A semi-colon is used to mark off a series of phrases or clauses which contain commas:

   Those involved in information work hold memberships with organisations such as: CILIP; UKeIG; ASIST; BCS: and the European chapter of SLA.

Rule 4: You must use the right vocabulary

It is important that you use the right vocabulary in your work. The mistakes that crop up regularly in students' work are usually due to confusion between two words such as:

- affect/effect, quote/quotation, practise/practice, license/licence (the first is the verb, the second is the noun);
- dependent and dependant (the first is an adjective, the second is a noun);
- alternate and alternative, principal and principle (these words have different meanings);
- less and fewer (less means less in quantity: there is less water than before. Fewer means smaller in number: there are fewer people than before).

Bear in mind that a spelling checker can identify spelling errors in your work, but will not pick up misused vocabulary.

Rule 5: You must use the apostrophe correctly (and with care)

The apostrophe has two functions: it indicates the possessive case and contractions.

5.1 Possessive case

The possessive case refers to ownership. You can say "the work of the information manager" or "the information manager's work." The use of the apostrophe depends on whether the possessor is singular or plural.

> When the possessor is singular, possession is indicated by using an apostrophe followed by the letter s added to the noun:
> > the student's assignment

> When the possessors are plural, possession is indicated by placing the apostrophe after the final s of the noun:
>
> > the students' assignments

Note that some organisations omit the apostrophe in their name, for example Barclays Bank. In academic writing, however, you must use the apostrophe to denote possession.

5.2 Contraction

In written English words that have been contracted (i.e. shortened) use apostrophes to show where the missing letters would normally appear. This has two main purposes: to avoid confusion with other words and to indicate a different pronunciation for example "we're" is a shortened version of "we are". The apostrophe distinguishes the word "we're" from "were", which has both a different meaning and different pronunciation.

Examples of the use of apostrophes to denote missing letters:

1. They don't employ staff in Wales. [do not]
2. I can't come on Monday. [cannot]
3. It's likely that the company will grow by 10% in the next financial year. [It is]

NB Possessive adjectives do not use apostrophes.

Adjectives are describing words. There are many of these in English, for example blue, happy, distinguished.

Possessive adjectives are words that describe possession. There are seven of these in English: my, your, his, her, its, our, their. Note that *none* of these takes an apostrophe. This includes "its". So, if the use of the word "its" appears in your work to denote ownership, remember that it does *not* take the apostrophe.

Examples of the use of possessive adjectives:

1. The information manager has been in her job for ten months. [The job belongs to her].
2. The organisation prepared its information strategy in 2013. [The information strategy belongs to it].
3. Their market sector is in decline. [The market sector belongs to them].

Check every instance of the words "its" and "it's", "there" and "their", "you're" and "your" in your finished work.

Part II: Conventions in academic writing

1. <u>Style conventions</u>: numbers and dates; capitals; print enhancements; abbreviations; typing and spelling
2. <u>Tone conventions</u>: formal, jargon and cliché-free, impersonal writing
3. <u>Forming arguments</u>: how to turn your information into a well-written essay or report

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1. Style conventions

1.1 Numbers and dates

Numbers below one hundred are usually written in full:

Ten students came to the lecture.

Numbers above one hundred may be presented by digits:

There are 400 databases available.

Dates are usually given in the conventional combinations of numbered day, named month and numbered year. Punctuation is not required:

The service was set up on 11 April 2012.

References to centuries are spelt out, without capitals:

During the twentieth century many communication technologies were developed.

Decades may be referred to by name or number. The numbered form is not followed by an apostrophe:

In the 1990s the term "Internet" became a media buzz word.

1.2 Capitals

Capital letters are used for:

proper nouns: Hazel Hall, Professor, Edinburgh Napier University.
names of civic holidays: Christmas Day
geographical names: Central Belt
public thoroughfares: Princes Street
important events: Graduation Day
trade names: Windows, Java
journal titles: *International Journal of Information Management*
the first letter (only) of book titles: *Navigating business information sources: a practical guide for information managers*

1.3 Print enhancements

Print enhancements should be used sparingly. If you over-use them in an essay your work can end up looking like a ransom note. Bear in mind that you should follow the conventions of the referencing system that you are using if you quote book or journal titles in your work. For example, APA referencing requires you to denote book and journal titles by using italics.

1.4 Abbreviations

Abbreviations are not used in formal English. They give the impression of a style that is chatty and too informal. So, for instance, when you want to introduce an example into your work you should use, in full, the phrase "for example".

When you are taking notes in class you may like to use the abbreviation for "for example". The abbreviation is for the Latin term "exempli gratia" and is written as "e.g."

Do not confuse "e.g." with "i.e."

"i.e." is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase "id est" and means "that is to say" or "in other words".

1.5 Typing and spelling

Even if you are good at spelling you can make typing errors. All work for submission should be spell checked before it is printed out. (Make sure that the spell checker you use is set to UK English.) All print-outs should then be proof read. If there are still mistakes in your work you should correct, spell check and proof read again until you are satisfied that all mistakes are eradicated. <u>Don't be lazy about proof-reading</u>. Your lecturers expect you to hand in your best work. If you hand in work that is below the standard of what you could achieve with more care and attention, you are doing yourself a big disfavour. This may be perpetuated when lecturers are asked to comment on your progress in formal situations, for example when writing references.

There are some words that students regularly misspell. It is worth learning the spelling of these, bearing in mind the hints on how to remember the correct spelling:

- accommodation (think - plenty of room for 2 x C and 2 x M)
- apparent (think - parent)
- definite (think - infinity)
- liaise (think - 2 x i, liaising with one another)

- necessary (think - it's necessary to wear 1 collar, 2 socks)
- occasionally (think - it would be rare to wear 2 collars, 1 sock)

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2. Tone conventions

2.1 Write formally

A report or essay is a formal piece of work. The tone of your work should be formal, and not chatty. For example, rather than beginning sentences with the work "Also" or "Besides", which gives the impression that what you are about to write is an after-thought, use an alternative such as "In addition". Similarly the word "However" is more appropriate to start a sentence in a formal piece of work than the word "But".

The use of brackets should be kept to a minimum. They are used to indicate a supplementary remark, an authorial aside, or a qualification of some sort. Use them too frequently and you end up with a choppy effect.

Square brackets are used to indicate additions or changes that the author has made to the text. For example, if you want to illustrate a point with a quotation it may be necessary to add a couple of words by way of explanation:

The new legislation means that they [software companies] may be liable for mistakes.

2.2 Avoid clichés

A cliché is an expression that has been so overused that it has lost its force of meaning. Phrases such as "at the touch of a button" and "at their fingertips" should not appear in your work. (To use a cliché, they should be "avoided like the plague"!) If you feel tempted to write with a cliché, you are probably about to state the obvious, which is not worthwhile given the word limits on your work.

2.3 Avoid "journalese"

Make sure that you have not written work in an exaggerated or sensational style: you are not a journalist! Your work should read as a measured set of rational arguments. If you say anything bold, this should be backed up with a reference from the literature you have consulted in preparing your work, or by an example that proves your point.

2.4 Avoid jargon

Use the jargon of your subject area with precision, accuracy and constraint. Take special care with terms that have specialised meanings in your subject area. For example the terms "tacit" and "explicit" have specific meanings in the context of knowledge management.

2.5 The impersonal writer

It is rare that you would be expected to write in the first person singular (using the word "I") when preparing essays and reports in the subject area of Computing. Some people get round

this by using the third person singular, but this can be very clumsy. You should aim to write impersonally. The idea is that you remove any personal bias from the argument when you write impersonally. Check the three sentences below to see how this is achieved:

1. I conducted a survey on the use of social media in schools. [First person singular]
2. The author conducted a survey on the use of social media in schools. [Third person singular]
3. A survey was conducted on the use of social media in schools. [Impersonal writing]

Note that some grammar checkers will question the use of the passive voice (i.e. how the verb is used in the last example given in the list above). It is argued that the use of the passive makes the text "heavy". This can be the case, and in many cases it is appropriate to use the "active" voice, for example in writing out an instruction leaflet or creating an exciting narrative in a work of fiction. However, in academic work the use of the passive voice is wholly appropriate when the goal is to present a set of arguments in an unbiased way. It also permits the construction of short, neat sentences. Consider the examples below:

1. The researchers administered the questionnaires over a period of three days. [Active voice]
2. It took three days to administer the questionnaires. [Passive voice]

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3. Forming arguments

3.1 Sensible use of paragraphs

Assignment specifications give you few words to write up your essay or report. You must make the most of them. As you structure your work ensure that each section offers a different (yet related within the context of the assignment specification) perspective of the issue under discussion, and that you present a logical development of a clear line of thought.

A paragraph deals with just one topic or major point of an argument relevant to the essay or report. That topic or argument should normally be announced in the opening sentence. This is sometimes called the topic sentence. The sentences which immediately follow the topic sentence should expand and develop the statement, explaining its significance to the question in general. This opening statement and amplification should then be followed by evidence to support the argument being made. You should provide illustrative examples which are discussed as an explanation of the central idea. Alternatively you can quote a source that supports your argument. The last sentence of a paragraph should round off the consideration of the topic in some way. It may also contain some statement which links it to the one which follows.

Paragraphs should normally be between 50 words minimum and 200 words maximum in length. However, they might be longer if you were explaining a topic in considerable detail in an extended essay. Paragraphs should be long enough to develop a point, not just state it.

Consecutive paragraphs may be linked with terms such as "However" so as to provide a sense of continuity in your argument. However, if you are in any doubt, let them stand separately and speak for themselves.

The recommended organisation of a typical paragraph is:

1. opening topic sentence, i.e. main point given
2. explanation of topic sentence
3. supporting sentences that explain its significance
4. discussion of examples or evidence (citing authorities; drawing on empirical evidence, i.e. research carried out by others or, in the case of a dissertation, you; drawing on your own experience, for example from placement)
5. concluding sentence

Sometimes, even though you have a set of arguments crafted into good paragraphs, it is difficult to work out how to order them in the written up version of the report or essay. It is possible to play around with the structure by:

1. writing the main point of each paragraph on to separate pieces of card
2. experimenting with ordering the cards so that eventually associated cards end up next to each other in a logical sequence
3. writing on a separate sheet of paper the order of topics
4. numbering the topics on the sheet of paper to show a hierarchy which reflects the logic of the new order of paragraphs

You now have the order of the components of your assignment. You then have to consider how to link from one paragraph to the next in the text so that there is adequate signposting and guidance for the reader. You can check that the links work by:

1. underlining linking words and phrases
2. asking someone else to read through your work and asking that person to explain how the paragraphs relate to one another

A well-structured assignment typically has the following format:

- It begins with an introduction which provides the reader with the indication of the direction the report or essay will take before conclusions can be drawn
- Paragraph 1 that makes claims relevant to the question set and central to the overall argument of the work, presents evidence to back up claims made and ends with a linking statement to paragraph 2
- Paragraph 2, that makes claims relevant to the question set and central to the overall argument of the work, presents evidence to back up claims made and ends with a linking statement to paragraph 3
- Paragraph 3, that makes claims relevant to the question set and central to the overall argument of the work, presents evidence to back up claims made and ends with a linking statement to paragraph 4 *and so on until all the main points are made*
- It ends with a conclusion which relates back to the introduction where what the report set out to do was been noted. It concludes on the evidence presented in the main text of the report itself. It adds value to the work presented by making sense of the report's/essay's main points, showing the implications of the arguments made. No new material appears in a conclusion. It is a genuine conclusion and not a simple summary of the rest of the work.

Throughout the work the sequence of the argument is well sign-posted. This is achieved through sensible use of language (for example, "As the next example shows...", "It can therefore be concluded that..."), conciseness, reminders to the reader, as appropriate, of what the main arguments are, how this is amplified through the work and where they are heading. If your work requires you to use the report format you can sign-post your work through the use of clear headings with section numbering. It is much easier to do this if you compose your work at a keyboard, rather than hand-write your work and then type it up. It is also useful to be able to print work out regularly to get an overview of how the work is developing.

3.2 Repetition and waffle

Repetition (or waffle) will not win marks. If you are tempted to use a phrase such as "As already mentioned", "As explained above" or (the dreadful) "aforementioned", check that you are only providing a link back to earlier arguments, rather than simply repeating them. If you are using repetition and waffle as a strategy to make your essay or report meet the recommended word length, you need to think carefully about how well you have prepared to write up your assignment. It is likely that you have not gathered enough information or read adequately for the assignment if this is the case.

3.3 Answer and analyse

No matter how well presented your work is, to pass your assignments you must answer the questions set. The work that you present should be relevant to the discussion.

There is always some description in essays or reports for assignments, but it is the degree of analysis of what is described that is valued by those marking the work. This might be described as the "So what?" factor of your work. You will be rewarded for linking ideas together to draw conclusions, or discussing the implications of what you have described. You will be rewarded for questioning the material that you have researched for preparing your assignment. You will not be rewarded for simply listing everything that you have discovered on a topic. As you progress through undergraduate studies the degree of analytical ability assumes greater importance.