

Academic Writing Skills

Academic Writing Skills

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PART I

ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS

1. A Note from the Author

Originality

The author would like to acknowledge that *Academic Writing Skills* is a clone of Megan Robertson's *Academic Writing Basics*, and as such draws on and synthesizes the contributions of the Kwantlen Polytechnic University Learning Centre team. The following ten chapters have been edited and refined from the original text:

1. Overall learning objectives
 2. Assessing current knowledge
 3. Building basics
 15. Types of academic writing
 16. Keyword Clues – Determining the Type of Writing
 17. Breaking down an assignment
 18. Concept Mapping – Seven Steps
 19. Outlining Sample
 28. Planning Your Writing – Overcoming Obstacles
 29. Revising Your Writing
- All other chapters have been written by Patricia Williamson.

Acknowledgements

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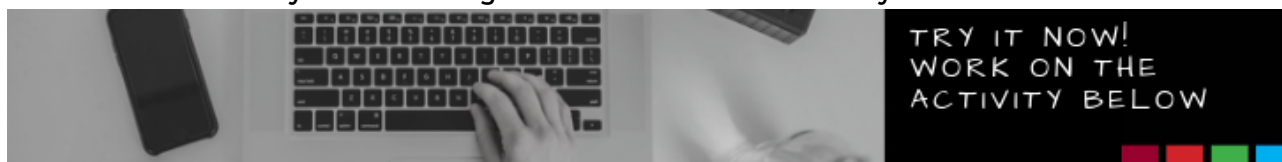
I would also like to acknowledge my very patient family and supportive partner Tony who has been energetic in his encouragement of the entire project. Thank you.

2. Overall Learning Objectives

By reading and completing activities in this resource you will be able to:

- Identify and use different language basics – parts of speech, grammatical and sentence structures
- Demonstrate note-taking skills
- Apply paraphrasing, quoting, summarising, and referencing techniques
- Understand the importance of academic integrity
- Understand and apply annotated reading techniques
- Synthesize and integrate source material
- Write and complete an oral presentation
- Understand the process of academic writing for more than one purpose
- Determine the type of academic writing you might be asked to complete
- Review approaches to developing and structuring ideas
- Develop a thesis statement with a single assertion or dual perspectives
- Apply strategies for planning your writing assignment, including:
 - Concept Mapping
 - Drafting paragraphs
 - Searching for academic sources for quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing
 - Integrating sources / evidence, and applying the evidence using reasoning
 - Overcoming obstacles to academic writing
 - Challenging your preconceived assumptions and biases to write objectively
- Apply strategies for writing cohesive academic essays – including the introduction, body paragraph structure, and a conclusion
- Use key questions for revising and editing

There are activities for you to do throughout this resource. Each activity will have this banner above it:

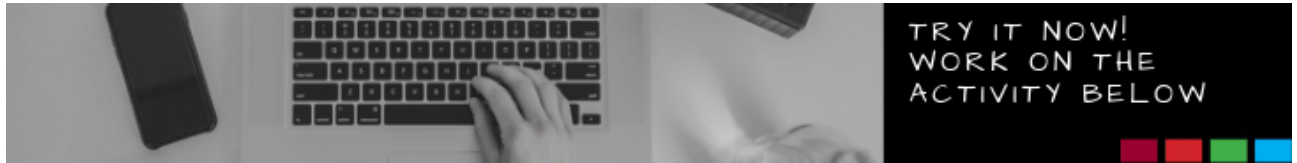


3. Assessing Current Knowledge

If you are new to academic writing, have done some academic writing, or are already an experienced academic writer, there is always more to learn!

Reflecting on your current writing process can help you decide what steps to take next.

Take the quiz below to determine if you are currently at the beginning stages of academic writing, the intermediate stages, or in the experienced stages.



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<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=206#h5p-1>



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4. Building Basics

As we cover academic writing basics, you'll see tips and suggestions especially for beginning academic writers. Intermediate and experienced academic writers may also benefit from using these strategies and approaches.

Based on your current stage of academic writing, consider how the information and examples used in this Pressbook may be applied to your specific background and experience:

Beginning writers may want to closely follow templates and resources to learn more about techniques, conventions, and expectations of academic writing. This can help you become more familiar with the basics of academic writing.



Beginning



Intermediate

Intermediate writers may have some knowledge of the basic techniques, conventions and expectations of academic writing. Adapting and extending examples used in this course can help further develop your writing skills and your own voice as an academic writer.



Experienced

Critically reflecting on the material in this course can help experienced academic writers further refine their ideas and techniques. By experimenting with different approaches that complement your existing writing process, you can learn more about how to best showcase your research and discussion skills.

5. Language Basics

Parts of Speech

1

A language system can be defined as a network of grammatical and word choices. When learning any language system we must learn to use the right word in the right way in a sentence – this is essentially one of the keys to good grammar. This brief lesson will not make you an expert in the field of grammar, however it may jog your memory a little. You will find information relevant for **beginner, intermediate and experienced writers**.

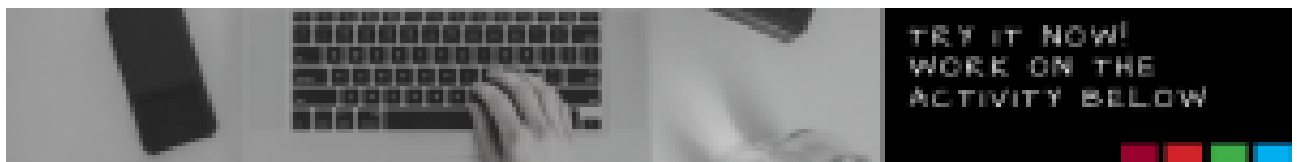
Let us begin with parts of speech or word classes:

Major Classes

These words are categorised as major because they dominate the sentence structures of the English language.

Part of Speech	Definition	Examples
Noun	A naming word that typically identifies people, places, things, ideas, or abstract qualities.	Brisbane, city, university, freedom, determination, child, pet, happiness
Verb	A word that commonly defines what someone or something does (an action) or is (a state of being). This includes not only physical actions, but feelings, thoughts and speech acts.	Study, make, run, laugh, think, say, have, bring, cause, love, ruin, build, know. be, exist
Adjective	A word that gives additional information about a <i>noun</i> . It may add information such as the qualities the noun has.	Enormous, educational, difficult, quiet, impressive, daunting, beautiful, funny
Adverb	Adverbs give extra information about <i>verbs</i> or <i>adjectives</i> . They generally indicate such things as how, when, where, or under what circumstances.	Now, occasionally, soon, above, downstairs, underground, slowly, quickly, carefully, exquisitely, truthfully

You may have already realised from these limited examples that words can change between parts of speech depending on how they are used in a sentence. More on this later when we examine Connotation and Denotation.



1. Information in this chapter has been adapted and modified from: Hale, A., & Basides, H. (2013). The keys to Academic English. Plagrave Macmillan.



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced



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Minor Classes

These words are categorised as minor because they serve the function of contextualising and supporting major words.

Pronouns are a particular type of word used in place of a noun and come in various forms (see tables below). Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Person	Singular	Plural
First	I	We
	Me	Us
	My	Our
	Mine	Ours
Second	You	You
	You	You
	Your	Your
	Yours	Yours

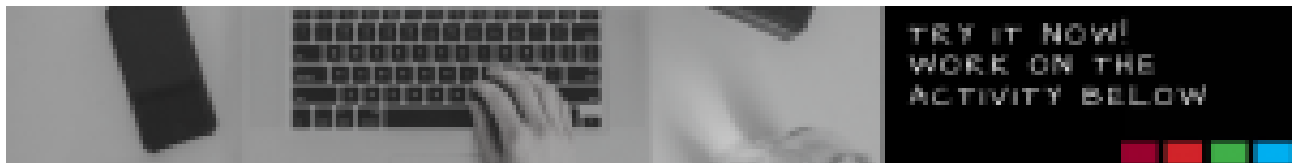
Person	Masculine	Feminine	Neutral	Plural
Third	He	She	It	They
	Him	Her	It	Them
	His	Her	Its	Their
	His	Hers	Its	Theirs

The Preposition is generally placed at the beginning of a phrase to *indicate time, place, and manner*. Prepositions can occur as single words or also as word phrases. For example: to, off, in, on, for, from, by, at, after, above, with, next to, due to, in spite of, in accordance with, as far as, ahead of, on behalf of.

The Conjunction is used to *link* words or phrases together. While there are far too many conjunctions to list here, it is worth noting that there are two different types.

The **coordinating conjunction** joins two equal grammatical units together, such as two independent clauses, two noun phrases, or two adjectival phrases, and so forth. The following are examples of interchangeable coordinating conjunctions: for / because; in addition / and; nor / and not; or /either; so / therefore; yet / however.

Whereas the **subordinating conjunction** joins two grammatical units of unequal status, usually a dependent and an independent clause. Some simple examples include: if, because, after, which, that, when, before, even if, though, while, who, once, whenever.



Intermediate



Experienced



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The Article is the small word placed before a noun to indicate which person or thing you are referring to. For example: He sat at *a* desk; She had *an* umbrella in her hand; They were studying at *the* university. There are only three articles – a, an (indefinite), the (definite).

Denotation and Connotation



Beginning

Beginning writers may be unfamiliar with these terms and should read this section in full to gain a deeper understanding of the different aspects of 'meaning-making' in English.



Intermediate

Intermediate writers may have come across these terms before, though would benefit from a little additional information.



Experienced

Experienced writers should understand the difference between denotation and connotation, though it may be helpful to jog your memory and potentially gain a new perspective.

Denotation

Simply put, **the denotation of a word is the dictionary meaning**. It is thought to be objective, non-context-driven, and non-culturally-specific. It is highly definitional by nature and relates to all things in that particular category. If I search a dictionary for the meaning of the word 'cat', it will provide two definitions – one for a smaller domestic cat and one for larger cats such as those found in Africa. It will also provide the Word Class, which in this instance is *noun*.

However, newer versions of the English dictionary may also provide other lesser-known meanings plus connotations for the word being defined.

Connotation

If we say "I let the *cat* out of the bag" we are not referring to a literal cat, but a secret we should not have shared. Therefore, this usage of the word cat has a different *connotation* because of the **context** created by the sentence. **Connotation offers more than a simple definitional representation of the word, but a subjective interpretation that is contextually derived.** Often we place our own personal connotations on

words based on our memories, culture, religion, up-bringing, education and more. Even when you read the word *cat*, I guarantee that you are all thinking of a different cat from your past or present. This type of meaning-making is deeply subjective and dynamic.

If you are a student from a non-English speaking background, you may need to be especially mindful of the different connotations words can carry in varying cultural contexts. This is especially true when it comes to Australian humour. Please seek advice from your teacher and peers if you are having trouble with interpreting the meaning of a text because of the connotation of certain words.

When we refer to connotation in academic writing terms, it is about being mindful of the context in which they are written – time, place, author, words on the page – all of which help the reader to gain overall understanding. Watch the video below for further information about denotative (objective) and connotative (subjective) word use.



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6. Grammar Basics

Brief Introduction

Traditional or prescriptive grammar tends to focus attention on parts of speech or classifying individual words (see previous Chapter 5), whereas *functional or descriptive* grammar centers on the way these words work together. The word grammar means more than using the right words in the right way. When we understand the rules of language, we become independent users, rather than always memorising specific usages¹. There are many excellent grammar resources available in book and online format; this is not intended to be a complete guide, only a brief introduction.

Functions

There are four main sentence types – **statement**, **exclamation**, **question**, and **command**. Sentences are made up of smaller parts we call **clauses** and there are two different types of clauses. (Click on each bold font word for a definition)

Independent Clause

An independent clause can stand on its own, hence the name. It must contain a subject (who or what) and a verb (an action being performed by the subject), for example, it can be as simple as – The rain *fell* on the window (Subject underlined and verb italicised). All simple sentences are independent clauses. Independent clauses can be joined together, using conjunctions, to form more complex sentences (see previous Chapter 5 for conjunctions).

Dependent Clause

A dependent clause, also called a subordinate clause, relies on the information in an independent clause to make a complete meaning.

For example, let's use our previous sentence and add additional information – The rain *fell* on the window **in great cascades**.

The original sentence and its meaning is still intact, though the final three words are dependent upon the independent clause for their meaning. The preposition 'in' indicates in what manner – 'in' the current setting or circumstances already indicated by the independent clause. The noun **phrase** (or group) 'great (adjective) cascades (noun)' adds additional information to the independent clause. The introduction of a second noun does not cancel out the subject of the sentence; the dependent clause 'borrows' the subject of 'rain' in order to make the sentence's meaning clear.

1. Hale, A., & Basides, H. (2013). The keys to Academic English. Palgrave Macmillan.

How do I identify a clause?

As we are already aware, words are not used in isolation and rely on each other for making meaning. When trying to identify a clause, **firstly look for the verbs or verb phrases in the sentence, then ask yourself who or what is performing the action in the sentence.**

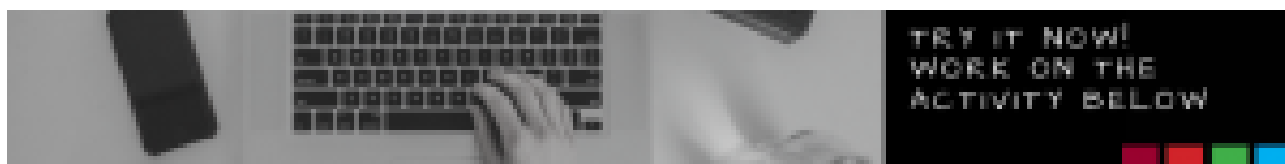
For example – The student was *studying* in the library. *Studying* is the **main verb** and *was* is an **auxiliary verb** that modifies the meaning and provides the ‘When’ – past. Now ask ‘Who’ is doing the studying, and this will indicate the subject of the sentence – The student. ‘The student was studying’ is an independent clause; it makes sense on its own. ‘In the library’ is a dependent clause that adds additional information though would not make sense on its own.

Therefore, in a verb phrase or group the main word is always a verb and this is often preceded by an auxiliary verb that modifies the action. All Major Word Classes can be categorized into Word Groups (see below for further examples).

Word Groups

2

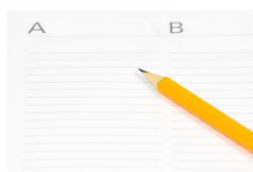
Word Group	Structure	Example
Noun group	The main element is a noun and it is often preceded by an article – the, a, an It often contains an adjective, used to describe the noun A third person pronoun can also be used	<u>The soldier</u> stood his ground. Even now <u>the old woman</u> remembers. <u>He</u> insisted on going to <u>the café</u> .
Adjective group	The main element is an adjective and it is used to modify the meaning of a noun or noun phrase	He had <u>extremely blue</u> eyes. She wore <u>professional looking</u> clothes. University provides an <u>excellent educational</u> opportunity.
Verb group	The main element is a verb and may contain auxiliary verbs to modify the action	She <u>went running</u> yesterday. They <u>would later encounter</u> their lecturer. The boy <u>was hugging</u> the dog.
Adverbial group	The main element is an adverb and provides extra details about events, such as how, when, why, or where A preposition combined with a noun group	The football team were <u>simply</u> told to take the field. (how) He travelled <u>after midnight</u> . (when) <u>To better understand</u> , ask questions <u>regularly</u> . (why and when) The captain stood <u>in the middle</u> of the field. (where)



In the activity below you will find three simple sentences broken into two phrases. Each has an

2. Adapted from: Humphrey, S., Love, K., & Droga, L. (2014). Working grammar: An introduction for secondary English teachers. Pearson.

independent and a dependent clause. Click, drag, and drop the clauses into the correct field and then check your answers.



Beginning



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7. Sentence Basics

Recap

In Grammar Basics (Chapter 6) the four main sentence types – **statement**, **exclamation**, **question**, and **command** – were introduced. Plus, sentences are made up of smaller parts we call **clauses** and there are two different types of clauses. Therefore, you have the building blocks of good sentence structure – words (parts of speech), word groups (clauses). (Click on each bold font word for a definition)

Active and Passive Voice

At this point, it is important to recognise another key element in sentence structure – the **object**. A direct object in a sentence is always a thing or a person who receives the action of the verb. **When a subject performs an action on an object** (S-A-O), this is known as an **ACTIVE VOICE** in writing.

For example: The girl (subject) ate (verb) the strawberries (object).

Alternatively, **when the subject of the sentence is receiving the action or when the object of the sentence is performing the action** (O-A-S), this is known as **PASSIVE VOICE**.

For example: The strawberries (subject) were eaten (verb phrase) by the girl (object).

The strawberries have been made the most important noun of the sentence by the positioning, and therefore the subject of the sentence.

Many writers view passive voice as a weaker and less direct way of writing, however, it can be very helpful in avoiding personal (first person) pronouns in academic writing.

For example:

Incorrect – I suggest the research is incomplete, as indicated in the report...

Correct – **The report** indicated that the research is incomplete...

By moving the object (report) into subject position and replacing the personal pronoun (I), the meaning is actually made more **succinct** by this edit and the use of the personal pronoun, not recommended in academic writing, is **negated**.

Changing from the active to the passive voice also has the added benefit of being a useful paraphrasing technique, as the structure of the sentence must by necessity change (more about paraphrasing in Chapter 9).

Simple Sentence

The first and most basic form of sentence structure is one **independent clause**. That is, a clause with one subject and one main verb clause.

For example: Max (subject) waited (verb) for the bus (object).

Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is two or more independent clauses often linked by **conjunctions**.

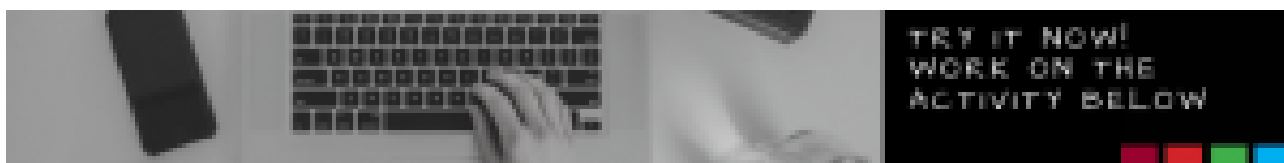
For example: Max (subject) waited (verb) for the bus (object), even though (conjunctive phrase) the rain (subject) kept falling (verb phrase).

The second independent clause – the rain kept falling – could stand alone as a sentence and is not dependent on the first independent clause for its meaning.

Complex sentence

In a complex sentence the main independent clause is connected to one or more **dependent clauses** often using **subordinating conjunctions** (see Chapter 5 – *Language Basics* for conjunctions).

For example: Max waited for the bus, *which was running late* (dependent clause), even though the rain kept falling *and (conjunction) was ruining his hat* (dependent clause).



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

Choose the correct *sentence type* and *voice* for the following examples:



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<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=213#h5p-5>

Take Away

Hopefully the simple structure of sentences is made more clear by understanding the building blocks of language and grammar.

WORD → WORD GROUP (CLAUSE) → SENTENCE

Every word and phrase (clause) serves a purpose in a sentence and should be planned and placed thoughtfully. Good academic writing begins with understanding the basics. Watch the following video to review key points about sentence structure.





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8. Note-taking Skills

The capacity to take and organise notes during lessons, for research and assessments, and for exam preparation is a key academic writing skill.

This chapter will cover why, when, where, what, and how to take notes.

Why?

No student has ever reached the end of a term or semester and said “gee, I’m really glad I didn’t bother taking any notes”. Note-taking is a key strategy for organising information, ideas, and what you have learned in a chronological and systematic way that can be reviewed later. Humans are not physically or neurologically wired to remember vast amounts of information long-term (unless of course you are one of the extremely rare individuals with an **eidetic** memory). Also, the more senses you actively use while learning, the more likely you are to remember the information, therefore, writing (or typing) engages another part of your mind.

When?

The short answer is *ALWAYS*. Every lesson, lecture, library session; every time you engage in a learning activity. The fact is, you won’t know exactly what you’ll need until further down the track and it’s too late when you’ve arrived at the end of the study period and you realise that you haven’t captured enough information to refresh your memory before the big exam or assessment is due. Playing catch-up can be very stressful.

Where?

Part of good note-taking is making your notes accessible. Design specific files on your computer or device desktop or have designated partitions in a notebook. Divide your notes into weekly lectures, tutorials, assessment research, further reading. For example, if you have an assessment that involves the weekly readings or materials from weeks 1-5 of the term, then you should know exactly where to locate those materials on your device or in your notebook. It sounds like common sense, but you might be surprised how many students quickly develop poor organisation of their notes.

What?

Important points or key ideas will generally be repeated by your teacher. They will show up on power points or in readings. Use your teachers’ speech and body language **cues** to identify when a point is being stressed. It is physically impossible to type or write every word that a teacher says because on average they speak about 125 words a minute. That is why it is important that you identify the key points and record them.

How?

There is no one correct method to record notes. There is only the right method for you. Choose something that works for you and develop consistency. However, here are three popular methods:

Cornell Method



"Note-taking: Cornell Method" by mattcornock is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

In the Cornell Method the page is quickly divided into a 30:70% split. This can be done prior to class or as the class gets underway.

At the top (Title section) record the date, course/subject, and teacher/lecturer.

To the right, record the key information from the lesson or lecture. Remember to watch and listen for cues from the teacher and/or power point.

The left-hand side and summary section are used after class to help commit the information to memory and to review the lesson prior to next class.

Writing questions in the left-hand column helps to clarify meanings, reveal relationships, establish continuity, and strengthen memory. Also, the writing of questions sets up a perfect stage for

exam-studying later¹.

Summarising the class notes into your own words will create a quick reference guide for exams and help you retain valuable knowledge.

As you can see, the right-hand column has the key content as presented by the teacher/lecturer (made in dot-point form). The left-hand column has your thoughts and reactions to these ideas. Once you have had a chance to review the content and how it fits together, the summary at the bottom shows that you have mentally digested the key content and can put it accurately into your own words – a very powerful learning tool.



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1. Cornell University: Learning Strategies Center. (2019). The Cornell note-taking system. <http://lsc.cornell.edu/notes.html>

Mapping



Also known as concept mapping, this technique creates a visual representation of information and ideas in an organised way. It is a great way of making connections between concepts and demonstrating **intertextuality** and contextual relationships. It can be very helpful when trying to analyse or break down larger concepts into key features and supporting elements. **Watch this quick video to learn more:**



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Charting

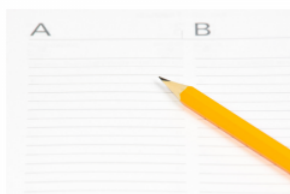
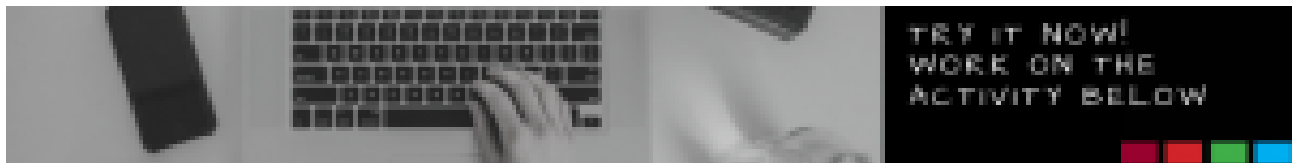
The Charting Method

Method	Description	Application	Pros	Cons
Topic A				
Topic B				
Topic C				
Topic D				

The charting method provides a systematic overview of your notes. The page is split into rows and columns (a table), and labelled. While this method requires some additional preparation time before your lesson, consider making up a simple word document that can be edited and adapted for your purposes. You might find it saves time during class as you can quickly categorise information as you hear or see it. It also transforms into a quick reference guide when it is time to study for your exams.

The charting method is also very useful for synthesizing large amounts of information that is compared across different sources (e.g., topics, theories, readings, approaches, experts). Your job at the start is to determine the best categories to

compare and contrast the sources (see blue-green words in diagram).



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced



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<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=217#h5p-6>

9. Paraphrasing and Quoting Skills

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is an everyday skill we all use to relay information from one source to another. We may retell a simple story we heard at work, relay information from one person to another in our household or recap a news story we heard on the television or radio. In doing so we are using paraphrasing techniques.

At university paraphrasing is a fundamental skill that is often expected to be demonstrated from the very first semester. It is a helpful skill because at university you are operating within a community of academic thinkers. You need to be able to address the ideas of others with integrity while also contributing your own original thoughts to the learning environment.

This chapter will enable you to identify and formalise the paraphrasing techniques you may already be familiar with, plus teach you some new skills.

In academic writing paraphrasing is a set of techniques used to express another person's ideas in your own words. Therefore, each time material is paraphrased it must include an in-text citation and end of text reference (more about this in the referencing Chapter 10). To use someone else's ideas without giving appropriate credit is called **plagiarism** and may incur academic penalties.

Watch a Youtube video by Scribbr "How to Paraphrase in 5 Easy Steps".¹



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=218#oembed-1>



Beginning



Intermediate

Paraphrasing Techniques

1. Start by reading the passage several times to gain understanding.
2. Note down key concepts as you read.

1. Scribbr. (2019, October 31). How to paraphrase in 5 easy steps [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiM0x0ApVL8&t=235s>

3. Write your own version of the passage, without looking at the original. This will test if the key concepts have been remembered yet you are capable of putting the ideas into your own words.
4. Compare the two texts (the original with your own) and edit any sections that may be too close to the original wording.
5. Cite the source of the original text to avoid plagiarism [see Chapter 10: Referencing].

Paraphrasing Tips

- a. Start at a different point in the original passage (re-order the material).
 - b. Use **synonyms**.
 - c. Change the sentence structure, e.g., active / passive voice (see Chapter 7: Sentence Basics).
 - d. Break up long sentences or combine shorter ones.
- Review the example of a paraphrased paragraph on the video above.²

Paraphrasing Example

Original Text

Just seven kilometres from Brisbane's city centre, UQ College is located in the beautiful grounds of The University of Queensland St Lucia Campus.

Considered one of the most beautiful campuses in the world, UQ campus is a vibrant mix of old sandstone buildings, modern architecture, parklands and lakes. It's a city within a city, with everything you need to study, live and relax³.

Paraphrasing Notes

Key information: UQ College is located at The University of Queensland St Lucia Campus; it is close to the city centre of Brisbane; the campus is well-equipped.

Paraphrased Text

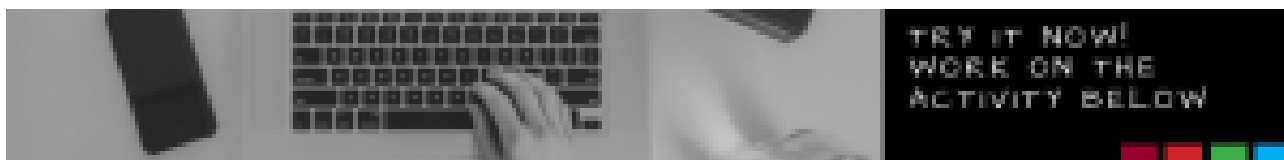
UQ College is only seven kilometres from Brisbane's central district at The University of Queensland St Lucia Campus and is well equipped with everything a student needs. It is both architecturally pleasing and has beautiful natural spaces in which to study and relax.

2. All Paraphrasing techniques and tips are taken from the cited Sribbr Youtube video, for continuity of content.

3. <https://www.uqcollege.edu.au/about-campus>

Techniques Used in the Above Paraphrase:

- It began at a different point – rearranged the information
- It used **synonyms**. For example, “Brisbane’s city centre” = Brisbane’s central district.
- Instead of listing categories, it grouped things together. For example, “a vibrant mix of old sandstone buildings, modern architecture” = architecturally pleasing; “parklands and lakes” = natural spaces.
- It kept key facts. For example, “UQ College”, “seven kilometres from Brisbane” and “The University of Queensland St Lucia Campus”.
- It alters the sentence structure and now there are two sentences instead of three.
- It maintains the original meaning.



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

Practise

Practise paraphrasing the following text. Follow the steps above and identify which techniques you are using. Maintain the original meaning of the text.

Original Text

In your chosen courses you will engage in practical tasks that relate to real-world uses of your academic skills and knowledge. Your teachers will encourage you to develop your own learning style and help you to achieve your study goals.

Classrooms and laboratories are equipped with the latest technologies and equipment and our courses cover a variety of topics and use a mix of course materials, including textbooks, video, audio and digital content⁴.

4. <https://www.uqcollege.edu.au/programs-tpp>

Quoting

What?

In short, a quote in Academic Writing means to repeat words that someone else has said or written. It is represented within a body of text using double quotation marks. A quote is **verbatim**. As soon as you deviate from the original words, it is no longer a direct quote and can be misinterpreted as poor paraphrasing.

Why/When?

Use quotes sparingly in Academic Writing. The following is a useful guide to when it may be appropriate to quote material rather than paraphrase, though paraphrasing is considered better academic practice.

- If you are analysing an author's position/claim/argument and want to state it clearly before addressing it.
- The language of the passage is instrumental to its meaning, for example, poetry, creative writing, technical or medical language.
- You are completing an in-depth analysis of a text, for example, studying literature and analysing Shakespeare's plays.
- You wish to add weight or credibility to your own argument by enlisting the words of an expert for support. Use this very sparingly.

How?

The following information, plus more, is available through the [UQ Library Style Guide for APA 7th style](https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/apa7/direct-quotes) referencing⁵. There are many different referencing styles, so always confirm with your lecturer/tutor which style is being used for your course. It can vary from course to course across programs.

A direct quotation reproduces word-for-word material taken directly from another author's work, or from your own previously **published** work. You cannot resubmit work from a previous assessment submitted via Turnitin. This will raise a red flag as **plagiarism** and may lead to an academic misconduct enquiry.

If the quotation is **fewer than 40 words**, incorporate it into your paragraph and enclose it in double quotation marks. Place the in-text reference before the full stop.

David Copperfield starts with "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (Dickens, 1869, p. 1).

If the quotation **comprises 40 or more words**, include it in an indented, freestanding block of text, without quotation marks. At the end of a block quotation, cite the quoted source and the page number in parentheses, after the final punctuation mark.

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. (Dickens, 1896, p. 1)

5. <https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/apa7/direct-quotes>

In the following Chapter 10 you will learn about referencing paraphrases and quotes in your own academic writing.

10. Referencing Skills

What?

Reference any and all materials you have used within your written work that are from a published text, video, or recording.

A referencing style is a set of rules on how to acknowledge the thoughts, ideas and works of others in a particular way. Referencing is a crucial part of successful academic writing, avoiding **plagiarism** and maintaining academic integrity in your assignments and research¹.

You will need the author's name (all authors); the year of publication; the chapter or journal article title; the book or journal name; editors names if it is an edited text; in a journal you will need the volume number and issue number; page ranges are needed for book chapters and journal articles; the publisher is needed for a book; if it is an online book, a **DOI** is needed. See the link in the "HOW?" section below for specific details of how to reference different types of texts.

Why?

Primarily to avoid **plagiarism**, plus you should also give credit where credit is due. It demonstrates evidence of your research and reading of academic **sources** for your assessments and adds the weight of expert knowledge to your own arguments/points/claims. It is good academic practice and demonstrates academic integrity. It also allows readers of your work to seek information from your sources or complete further reading.

When?

Whenever you are searching for academic articles or books for your assessment, always take notes of the required referencing information. An **in-text citation** must be included in your written work each time you use materials (**sources**) that are not your own. You must also provide an **end-of-text reference list** that corresponds with all citations used in-text. Only sources cited in-text should appear in the reference list and no other sources you may have examined though not included in the finished assessment.

How?

The University of Queensland provides all relevant style guides. UQ College Academic English uses APA (7th edition). Each edition of a style has variances, so ensure you have asked your lecturers/tutors which specific style and edition you are required to use for your particular courses.

APA 7th style guide – library link

<https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing/apa7>

1. <https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/referencing>

What is a reference list?

All works that include the ideas, words and images of other authors need to include **citations**. The full reference for each brief **citation** must be listed on a new page at the end of the written work, with the heading – **References** (centered on the page).

The following information is included in the [UQ Library style guide for APA \(7th ed.\)](#). Visit the style guide and access the full information via the “reference List” tab on the left-hand side of the screen.

- No specific font type or size required. Recommendations include Calibri size 11, Arial size 11, Lucida size 10, Times New Roman size 12, Georgia size 11 or Computer Modern size 10 (LaTeX). NOTE: It should align with the rest of the assignment.
- The reference list is **double line-spaced**.
- A reference list is **arranged alphabetically by author last name**.
- Each reference appears on a new line.
- Each item in the reference list is required to have a **hanging indent from the second line onward**.

Zarate, K., Maggin, D. M., & Passmore, A. (2019). Meta-analysis of mindfulness training on teacher well-being.

Psychology in the Schools, 56(10), 1700–1715. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22308>

- References should not be numbered.
- If a reference has no author, it is cited by title, and included in the alphabetical list using the first significant word of the title (not A, An, or The).
- If you have more than one item with the same author, list the items chronologically, starting with the earliest publication date.
- If there is no date, the abbreviation **n.d.** may be used. It is extremely rare to not find a publication date; if it is a website, use the date the page was last updated, found at the very bottom of the page or home page.
- Use the **full journal name**, not the abbreviated name, and type it as it appears in the journal – use appropriate capitalization.
- Web addresses or **DOIs** can either be live links (blue and underlined) or as normal black text with no underline. If the work containing the reference list is to be made available online, use the live link format.

What is the difference between a reference list and a bibliography?

- A **reference list** only includes the **sources** (books, articles, and web pages, etc.) that are cited in the text of the document (essay, report).
- A **bibliography** includes all sources consulted, even if they are not cited in the document. This is more frequently used for research and PhD students.

Example Reference List (An extended list is available via the UQ Library style guide)

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Journal article references*. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples/journal-article-references>

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association: the official guide to APA style* (7th ed.).

McAdoo, T. (2020, March 16). *How to create an APA style reference for a canceled conference presentation*. American Psychological Association. <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/canceled-conferences>

Melbourne University Law Review Association & Melbourne Journal of International Law. (2010). *Australian guide to legal citation*. (3rd ed.). https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1586203/FinalOnlinePDF-2012Reprint.pdf

Also see Chapter 14 – Integrating Sources and Academic Integrity

11. Skimming and Scanning

Practical activities for these skills will be demonstrated in class as part of term one course content.



Beginning



Intermediate

Skimming

Skimming enables you to get a quick overview of a text, without reading it in full.

Run your eyes over the text looking at titles, headings, sub-headings, emphasized text, figures, tables, images, dot-points, and key words. Also read the first sentence of each paragraph for key information, such as names, dates, people and places.

This will quickly build an overview of the main ideas in the text. This is a very useful academic skill, particularly when research and reading is required for written assessments. It will help you to determine whether a source is useful or worth further in-depth reading. Good reading and research will take up a great deal of your time as a university student. Therefore, it is important you learn the necessary skills to be an effective and efficient reader.

Scanning

This technique helps you discover specific information in a text (**source**) quickly.

Perhaps you're thinking "I can just use the 'ctrl F' shortcut on my computer keyboard and type in the key word or phrase I'm searching for". While this is true, many exams are *paper only* and you will require the capacity to identify answers within the text quickly.

Firstly, determine the key words you are searching for, so you know what to focus on.

Then, quickly and systematically scan across and down the page from left to right, top to bottom. If you are searching for data, scan the page for numbers and percentages and look at tables and graphs also. If you are searching for a key word, think of it as a whole word, don't just look for the first letter of the word (like a word search puzzle).

You may need to complete a second or third pass over the material to identify what you are looking for. Therefore, it makes sense to use the skimming technique first to identify key sections of the text where you may find the relevant information you are seeking.

Video ¹



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=222#oembed-1>

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3F8pQLtY_Q&ab_channel=MaryatiHulalata

12. Annotated Reading Skills

Annotated reading, also known as close reading, is a deliberate interaction with a text with the aim of helping the reader to understand it more fully. It often involves highlighting sections, making notes in the margins of a printed text or comments in a PDF, or underlining important points for later review.

This chapter will help you understand why, when, and how to annotate a reading.

Why?

Annotating a text you are reading gives you a quick reference guide for future use. Rather than having to re-read the article or PDF each time you return to it for information, you can rely on the quick reference points you have highlighted or the notes and comments you have made in the margins. This is a very useful skill when preparing assessments, synthesizing sources, and comparing and contrasting key concepts and ideas across different academic texts. When you are annotating a reading you are actively engaging with the text and will therefore read it more closely. Annotation also gives you the opportunity to add your own thoughts and comments, raise questions for further investigation, and challenge ideas within the text.

When?

After you have skimmed and scanned the text (see previous Chapter 11), for an overall understanding of its key ideas, you should complete a more in-depth reading if you intend to use the text for an assessment, to gain deeper understanding of the topic, or to engage with the text for class preparation. Even while completing the initial skimming and scanning you may want to mark key headings, sub-headings, concepts, or words. It is beneficial to go back over the text and add additional notes and comments as your understanding increases, specifically if you are comparing and contrasting different texts (journal articles, book chapters) about the same topic.

How?

While the method generally comes down to personal preference, here are some basic guidelines:

- Keep your annotations brief – use single words or brief phrases, rather than whole sentences.
- Use different coloured highlighters to signify different concepts. However, use highlighting very sparingly. Excessive highlighting generates a colourful page where nothing stands out, which is the point of highlighting in the first place.
- Circle or mark words you are unfamiliar with and use a dictionary to understand their meaning and use. This will have the added benefit of increasing your academic vocabulary.
- You may find it simpler to create a 'key' with symbols that represent different concepts or elements and insert the symbols within the text. You can use a range of keystrokes, for example, * # > < " " {} + ** ! @ ? A word of warning, include the 'key' on the document/text so that you have a quick reference guide for later and do not forget what the symbols stand for.
- **Adobe Acrobat Reader DC** offers Comments and Edit facilities to subscribers. **This software is pre-loaded on all UQ Computers**¹, however if you would like to use it at home you will need to purchase a subscription online. Alternatively, you can Track changes in a Microsoft Word document (insert comments), highlight and change fonts. Perhaps you would prefer to simply print the class handouts

and write on them; please ensure these are printed ahead of class time.

Below is an example of an annotated text with a key:

Built Environment



The environment built for business can have a significant impact on the natural world.



Meaning!

Green - key word/idea

Blue - familiar concept

Yellow - unfamiliar concept



What UQ is doing

- UQ is committed to showcasing **green building design** and construction. *Example*
- Buildings such as the **Global Change Institute** and **Advanced Engineering Building** are living buildings, incorporating design features like passive cooling and heating, solar energy, and recycled materials. *Plus*
- Throughout UQ, buildings are constantly **substituted** with more sustainable infrastructure and monitoring systems. *Plus*
- The majority of UQ's new buildings are connected to a **building management system**, enabling the control of air conditioning systems that conserve energy. *Plus*



Why this is Important

- **Built environments** can segment and disrupt natural ecosystems, creating barriers that affect organisms' movement and survival. *negative*
- **Building materials**, noise pollution, emissions and human activity affect **biodiversity**.
- Incorporating **green building designs** using space efficiently and reducing carbon footprint will reduce ecosystem impact. *positive*
- **Green spaces** and travel corridors support wildlife movement.



What you can do

- **Monitor** your air conditioning, lighting, energy and water use when in buildings. *Example*
- **Control** green design up where it provides areas of improvement.
- **Monitor** green spaces by dropping off litter responsibly and making **patches**. *Example*
- **Take care** not to disrupt or feed the native wildlife: they can become dependent on your food and lose their capacity to survive on their own. *Example*

ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICE UQ STAFF

The Sustainability Office
Property and Facilities Division
The University of Queensland
St. Lawrence/081-8072 Australia

T 07 3365 1887 or 07 3365 3076
E sustainability@uq.edu.au
W sustainability.uq.edu.au
F @uqfacilities @UQsustainability



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

There are a range of annotating tutorials available via YouTube. Below is one example²

2. CC license: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtRGUNo2pck&ab_channel=GVSULibrariesInstruction



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13. Summarising Skills

As with paraphrasing, summarising is an everyday skill used to **condense** information so that it may be relayed to others. For example, if you have watched a two hour movie at the cinema and you want to give a **synopsis** of the overall plot to your friends, you may tell them in ten minutes or less what it took you two hours to watch. This is summarising in action.

In academic writing we can use summarising techniques to condense the ideas of others to support the main points of our own discussions or arguments. This chapter will help to formalize your understanding of the process and techniques used.

This chapter uses previous techniques you have learnt, such as skimming and scanning (chapter 11), annotated reading (chapter 12), paraphrasing (chapter 9), and referencing (chapter 10). Refer to these chapters when needed.

Step-by-step Instructions

1. Skim and scan the text for the key ideas and concepts
 - look at headings, sub-headings, images and graphics, and dot-points
 - go a little deeper and read the abstract, the findings/outcomes (research), and the conclusion to better understand the aims and answers contained in the text
2. Annotate the reading to identify the key ideas/arguments/claims/concepts
3. Make notes from your annotated reading and begin to convert sections into your own words as you do so
4. Identify the author/s, year, and page range needed for the in-text citation
5. Paraphrase the main ideas from your notes and the text in your own words

Tips

- Avoid using quotes from the original author/text. The main purposes of a summary are to reduce the text in length and to write it in your own words.
- Do not add any additional material or your own thoughts and opinions to the summary. If you wish to interject your own points within the summary, split the summary and provide an in-text citation for each section.
- You do not need to provide proof for the author's ideas or claims. By eliminating supporting evidence such as data, examples and explanations, this will naturally reduce the word count.
- How much you need to reduce the word count will largely depend on the needs of the assignment you are using it for. Summaries can range in length from only a sentence or two to several paragraphs. For a larger text, the summary should be no more than 1/5 of the original text. In your own academic writing however, you are more likely to only need a few sentences. Always ask your lecturer/tutor if you are unsure
- Summaries, as with paraphrases, are included in the overall word count for your assessments
- All summarised information **MUST** include an in-text citation to avoid plagiarism

Lastly

Do not fall into the trap of analysing the text instead of summarising it. You are not critiquing the text, only **encapsulating** its key ideas.

Watch this quick video for more information.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=225#oembed-1>

14. Integrating Sources and Academic Integrity

In all academic writing we use secondary research from **peer reviewed** and academic sources. These might include academic journals (both online and hard copy), books, conference notes or reports, educational webpages, published and unpublished theses (available online), research findings, and government data.

How you integrate and acknowledge the authorship of these **sources** is a key academic skill regardless of your level of study.

This chapter will help to develop your source integration and referencing skills.



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

What is a reporting verb?

Answer: The answer is in the name. It is a verb (doing word), or verb phrase, used to report about what other authors have written or said. There are a vast array of reporting verbs; in fact too many to list them all here. They each have a slightly different **connotation** depending on the context in which they are used. (See the table below for a few examples)¹

1. University of Adelaide. (2014). Verbs for reporting. Writing Centre Learning Guide.
<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/sites/default/files/docs/learningguide-verbsforreporting.pdf>

Context	weaker position	neutral position	stronger position
addition	adds		
advice	advises		
agreement	admits, concedes	accepts, acknowledges, agrees, concurs, confirms, recognises	applauds, congratulates, extols, praises, supports
argument and persuasion	apologises	assures, encourages, interprets, justifies, reasons	alerts, argues, boasts, contends, convinces, emphasises, exhorts, forbids, insists, proves, promises, persuades, threatens, warns
believing	guesses, hopes, imagines	believes, claims, declares, expresses, feels, holds, knows, maintains, professes, subscribes to, thinks	asserts, guarantees, insists, upholds
conclusion		concludes, discovers, finds, infers, realises	
disagreement and questioning	doubts, questions	challenges, debates, disagrees, questions, requests, wonders	accuses, attacks, complains, contradicts, criticises, denies, discards, disclaims, discounts, dismisses, disputes, disregards, negates, objects to, opposes, refutes, rejects
discussion	comments	discusses, explores	reasons
emphasis			accentuates, emphasises, highlights, stresses, underscores, warns
evaluation and examination		analyses, appraises, assesses, compares, considers, contrasts, critiques, evaluates, examines, investigates, understands	blames, complains, ignores, scrutinises, wars
explanation		articulates, clarifies, explains	
presentation	confuses	comments, defines, describes, estimates, forgets, identifies, illustrates, implies, informs, instructs, lists, mentions, notes, observes, outlines, points out, presents, remarks, reminds, reports, restates, reveals, shows, states, studies, tells, uses	announces, promises
suggestion	alleges, intimates, speculates	advises, advocates, hypothesises, posits, postulates, proposes, suggests, theorises	asserts, recommends, urges

Why use a reporting verb at all?

In order to correctly integrate material from an external source (anything you did not write) into your own writing, a reporting verb helps you to introduce the ‘stranger in the room’ (that is, the outside source). Good source integration also acknowledges the original author/s, using an **in-text citation** (see Chapter 10 – *Referencing Skills*). In academic writing you will often see an assessment marking criteria dedicated to source integration and/or referencing. Proficient use of reporting verbs and verb phrases will demonstrate

your capacity to integrate sources better than simply providing a citation at the end of an entire paraphrase or summary.

Correct examples (generic):

Author (citation) claims [paraphrase].

Author and Author (citation) acknowledge that “[insert quote]”.

Author et al. (citation) describe [paraphrase], whereas Author (citation) and Author (citation) disagree, stating that [paraphrase].

Basics:

Sometimes the simplest way is the best way. Two commonly used reporting verb phrases are – According to Author (citation), and Author (citation) states.

Avoid using the term ‘said’, the past tense of ‘say’, as a reporting verb. This is a word used to describe spoken or uttered words, not written work, and there are far better and more pointed or creative ways to introduce authors’ perspectives, knowledge, claims, or arguments.

Unreliable vs Reliable Sources

When researching for materials for your an assignment, always use reliable sources that contain factual or truthful information. **Unreliable sources** include personal blogs, social media, personal webpages, bias webpages (e.g., a vegan website giving “balanced” dietary advice), and many commercial media outlets. They are often inherently biased and based on personal opinion rather than sound research.

Reliable sources contain information that has been fact-checked and cross-referenced for validity and include tertiary educational publications and websites, government websites, and some registered and well-known organizations (e.g., World Health Organization²; UNHCR³; AHRC⁴; Red Cross⁵⁶; Amnesty International⁷). Reliable media include ABC⁸ (Australia), BBC⁹ (World News), The Guardian¹⁰ (AU; UK), and The Conversation¹¹.

World organizations will frequently use social media to raise awareness or ask for donations, plus media outlets publish stories via social media, however, you should go directly to the source of the information, not rely only on what you see on social media. **Ensure you are completing your own fact-checking and cross-referencing so that you have the full story.**

2. <https://www.who.int/>

3. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/Home.aspx>

4. <https://humanrights.gov.au/>

5. <https://www.icrc.org/en>

6. <https://www.redcross.org.au/about/how-we-help/international-aid>

7. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/>

8. <https://www.abc.net.au/>

9. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world/australia>

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/au>

11. <https://theconversation.com/au>

Reliable vs Academic Sources

While **reliable sources** are good for gaining background information on an assignment topic and to increase your overall understanding, **academic, peer reviewed sources** are required for academic assessments. You may cite a reliable source if you are scrutinizing the way events or people are represented in the media or if you are specifically required to use them for an assessment, however academic sources are generally what are required in the marking criteria of assessments.

An academic source is well-researched, written by an academic, usually peer-reviewed, and published in an academic journal or book by a reputable publisher. **Peer review** means exactly that; it has been reviewed by other academics, often in the same field of study, to ensure that it is of the highest quality of research and writing.

In the [UQ Library](#) catalogue peer reviewed publications are marked under the entry details:



In term two of TPP Academic English, you will have a scheduled lesson with one of UQ's excellent librarians to help you navigate the vast array of information accessible to you, via Academic Journal Databases and the library catalogue.

In the third term of TPP Academic English you will learn about the "Hierarchy of Reading" in class and this will ensure you are fully prepared for your term three written assessment and beyond.

Academic Integrity and Misconduct

What happens if I do not use in-text citations?

As defined in Chapter 10 – *Referencing Skills*, plagiarism is the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own. Using paraphrased or summarised information from any source without acknowledging the original author will lead to an allegation of academic misconduct and an investigation.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a way of describing the ethical principles that underpin academia, the pursuit of knowledge and student life. These include the International Center for Academic Integrity's fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage.

Academic integrity forms a central part of your intellectual and personal development. It teaches you how to uphold values, develop proper skills in research, thinking and writing, and how to conduct yourself in an ethical manner. These are lifelong skills that will serve you well in your future life and career.

As a member of the UQ academic community, you have a duty to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity in your work. You must avoid cheating, plagiarism, collusion and other forms of academic misconduct¹².

12. University of Queensland. (2021, August 23). Academic Integrity and student conduct. <https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/manage-my-program/student-integrity-and-conduct/academic-integrity-and-student-conduct>

For further information visit [my.UQ – Academic integrity and student conduct](#)

Synthesizing Sources

Synthesizing simply means combining. Instead of summarising main points from each text in turn, you **combine the key ideas and findings of multiple sources** to make an overall point. At its most basic level it involves looking at the similarities and differences between all your sources.

When preparing for a written assignment it can be helpful to organise your research notes in the form of an annotated bibliography (see *The Charting Method* in Chapter 8 *Note-taking Skills*). This will make the transition to synthesizing sources simpler because you can quickly compare ideas and claims across a range of texts (synthesizing sources will be covered in further detail in the TPP Academic English course with detailed examples given in class).

Refer to Chapter 10 for Referencing Skills.

15. Types of Academic Writing

Identifying the keywords in your assignment instructions can help you understand the type of writing that you are expected to do.



Beginning

If you are a beginning academic writer, at [UQ College](#) or in your first semester of university studies, you will likely start with some descriptive writing.

By the end of your first study period (term or semester), you may be expected to include analysis, persuasion, and critique in your writing. Most of the academic writing you will do as a university student will include a combination of these different types of writing.



Intermediate



Experienced

If you are an intermediate or experienced academic writer, you may already be familiar with these types of writing.

Below, we'll look more closely at the four different types of writing (descriptive, analytical, persuasive, and critical) and consider strategies for developing ideas.

Click on the titles to expand the sections.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=230#h5p-7>

For further information view the video below. The video has no sound and you can pause regularly to read the information in detail.

1



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Intermediate



Experienced



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=230#h5p-8>

16. Keyword Clues – Determining the Type of Writing

When you receive your writing assignment from your instructor, it's important to stop and think. What are the requirements? What is the purpose of this assignment? What is your instructor asking you to write? Who are you writing for?

Before you begin to write any part of an assignment, think about the requirements and how you plan to meet those requirements. It's easy to jump into an assignment without stopping to *think about and analyze the assignment requirements*.

What does it mean to think about and analyse assignment requirements?

It means that you're considering the purpose of the assignment, the audience for the assignment, the **voice** (see Chapter 20 – *Academic Tone and Language*) you might want to use when you write, and how you will approach the assignment effectively overall.

With each writing assignment, you're being presented with a particular situation for writing. Learning about assignment requirements and expectations can help you learn to make good decisions about your writing.

Every writing assignment has different expectations. There is no such thing as right, when it comes to writing; instead, try to think about good writing as being writing that is effective in that particular situation.

1

When you receive an assignment from an instructor, paying close attention to the assignment description and expectations can help you determine what will be most effective for your writing.

The University of Queensland myUQ student support site provides tutorials about how to approach and complete an assignment:

[my.UQ – Steps for Writing Assignments](https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/student-support/study-skills/assignment-writing/steps-writing-assignments)

Analysing the topic

2

Before you start researching or writing, take some time to analyse the assignment topic to make sure you know what you need to do.

Read through the topic a few times to make sure you understand it. Think about the:

- learning objectives listed in the course profile – understand what you should be able to do after completing the course and its assessment tasks
- criteria you'll be marked on – find out what you need to do to achieve the grade you want
- questions you need to answer – try to explain the topic in your own words
- Identify keywords in the topic that will help guide your research, including any:
 - task words – what you have to do (usually verbs)
 - topic words – ideas, concepts or issues you need to discuss (often nouns)
 - limiting words – restrict the focus of the topic (e.g. to a place, population or time period)
 - If you're writing your own topic, include task words, topic words and limiting words to help you to focus on exactly what you have to do

1. Adapted from "Thinking about Your Assignment" by Excelsior Online Writing Lab CC BY 4.0

2. Source: <https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/student-support/study-skills/assignment-writing/steps-writing-assignments>

KEYWORDS



Example of Keyword Identification

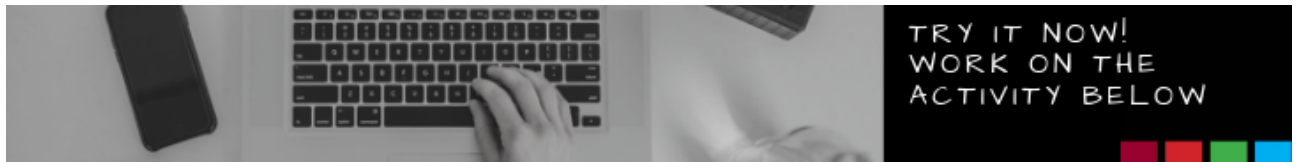
Sample Assessment Topic: **Evaluate** the usefulness of a task analysis approach to assignment writing, especially with regard to the writing skill development of *second language learners* in the *early stages of university study* in the *Australian university context*.

Task words: Evaluate – HOW

Topic words: task analysis approach, assignment writing, writing skill development – WHAT

Limiting words: second language learners (population), early stages of university (time period), Australian university (place) – SPECIFICS

Looking for and highlighting keywords in your assignment can help you know what your instructor expects. Try it out! Match the keywords below with their definitions:



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

3



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online

3. ⁴

4.

— here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=232#h5p-9>

5

These are some of the most common keywords you might see in an assignment. Whether a **beginner, intermediate, or experienced academic writer**, if you are uncertain about assignment requirements – ask your teacher / instructor.

5.⁶

6. [1]

-
1. From "[College Success: "Chapter 8, Section 8.1: What's Different about College Writing?"](#)" by [Saylor Academy](#) (2012) [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)
[↵](#)

17. Breaking Down an Assignment

Sample Topic Analysis

Once you know about the expectations related to the type of writing that you are required to do, you can make a plan to gather information and develop your ideas.

Let's look at an example, we'll come back to this example throughout the different sections of this Pressbook.

An instructor in a first-year communication course asks students to complete the following assignment:

Write a 1000 word persuasive essay that responds to the question: "Are transit services effective for Kwantlen University students?" Include your own perspective in your analysis and draw on two [academic sources](#).



In my assignment, I'll need to **describe** transit services. Once I have my description, I can include some **analysis** of those services, based on my own perspective and sources that I'll need to identify. As this is a **persuasive** essay, I want to make sure that I'm presenting a clear argument. I can already see that I'll be using three types of academic writing in this one assignment!

As I work on my assignment, it is important that I keep checking back with the assignment instructions; I want to make sure that I'm staying on topic and responding to the question.

Now that I have an understanding of the type of assignment that I'm working on, I can begin to develop ideas, gather information, and organize what I want to say. We'll look more closely at brainstorming and concept mapping next (see Chapter 18 – *Concept Mapping – Seven Steps*).

What are Academic Sources?

The UQ Library provides excellent guidelines for determining if a source is of academic quality.
[Evaluate information you find – Library – University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](https://www.library.uq.edu.au/evaluate)

18. Concept Mapping - Seven Steps

Creating a concept map is a way of organizing your brainstorming around key concepts. Mapping was introduced in Chapter 8 – *Note-taking Skills*.

This video from the University of Guelph offers a brief and helpful overview of concept mapping:¹

Let's use our example where an instructor has given us the assignment: *Write a 1000 word persuasive essay that responds to the question: "Are transit services effective for Kwantlen University students?" Include your own perspective in your analysis and draw on two **primary** and two academic sources.*



We'll follow the seven steps of concept mapping outlined in the video below and I'll include some examples.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You

can view them online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/>

academicwritingskills/?p=239#oembed-1

If you have your own assignment that you are currently working on, use the steps below to make your own concept map for your assignment.

Step One

- Identify the main topic
- Brainstorm everything you know about the topic
- Use relevant content from course, lectures, textbooks, and course material

¹.

2. [1]

Sticky notes can be a great way of jotting down ideas – you can move the notes around as you begin to identify similarities and differences. You can also ask questions and include reminders of work that you need to do. See the example below of some sticky notes I might use to start my assignment:



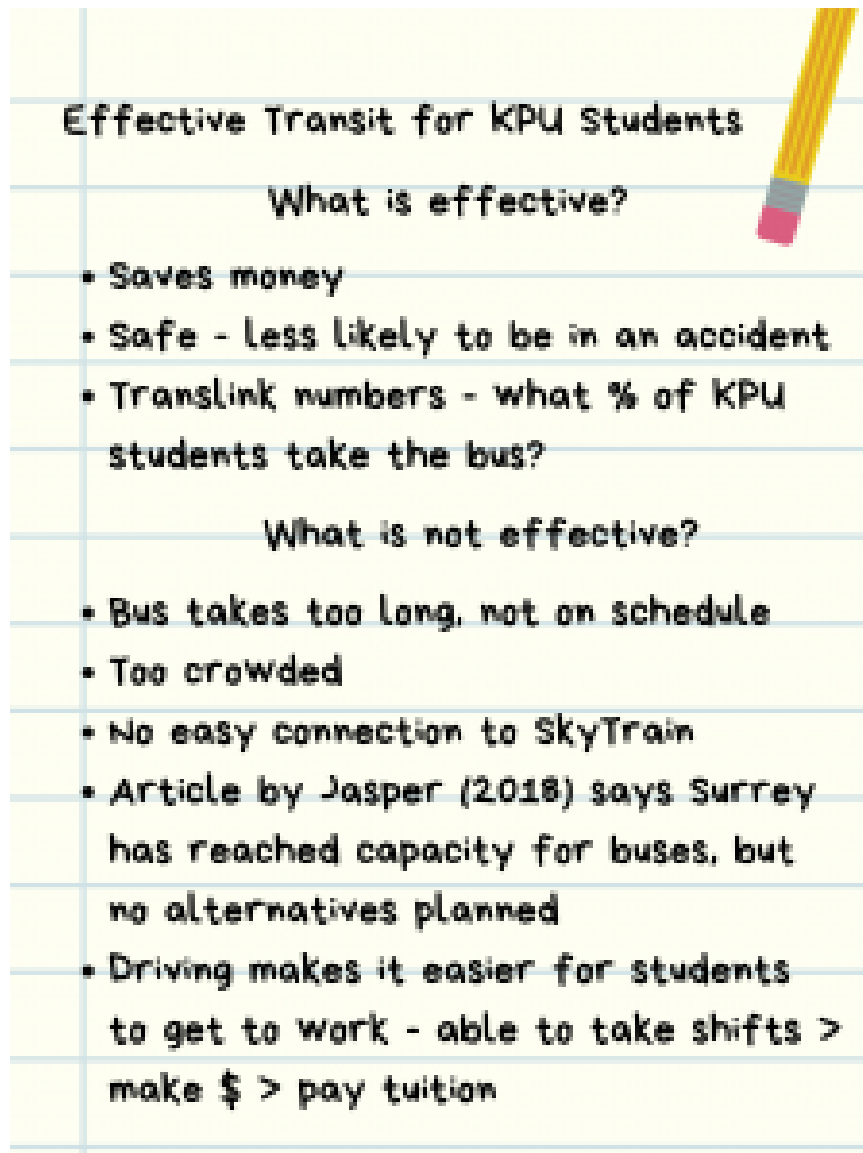
I'll add more sticky notes with key questions that relate back to the assignment – I'll need to find **primary** and **academic sources**. I can use these questions as I begin my research process and identify the primary and academic sources I need to support the argument that I will make:



Step Two

- Organize information into main points

After noting down what I know about my topic and identifying key questions that I'll need to research, I can focus on a few things that will be important to describe and analyze in my essay. I've made a list of some I can use:

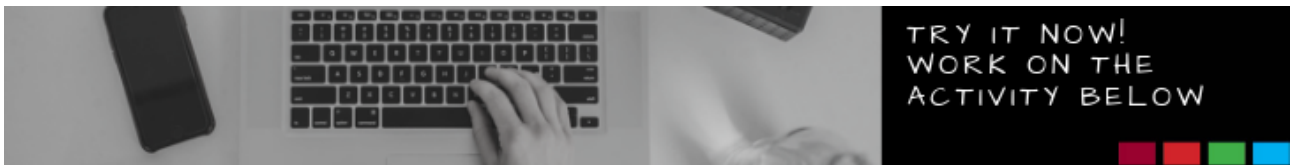


Based on what I've done so far, I'm setting up a descriptive comparison of transit options for KPU students, though I will emphasize that current transit options are not effective. I want to look for further connections between ideas and see how I can shape my argument.

Step Three

- Start creating map

- Begin with main points
- Branch out to supporting details

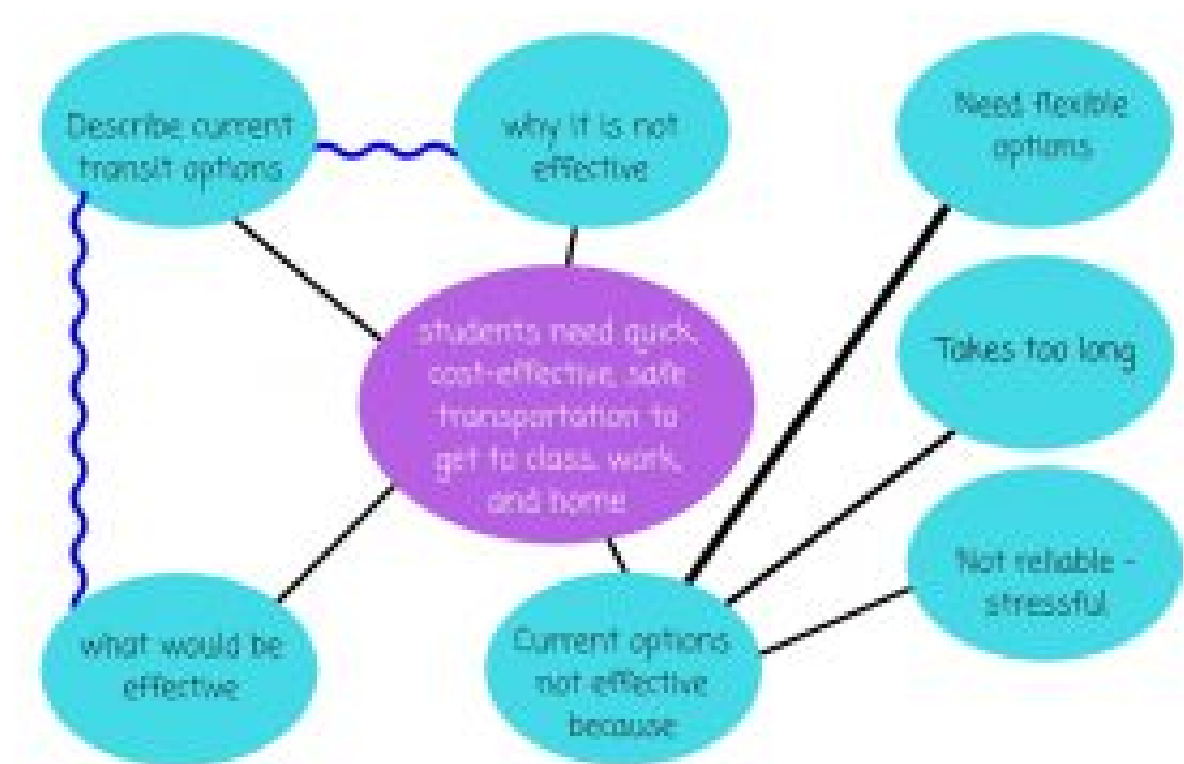


Give it a try! Based on your experience of public transport and the ideas that I've outlined so far, how might you start to create a concept map? You can use a piece of paper, or concept mapping software, to make notes of ideas and start to connect them.

Step Four

- Review map and look for more connections
- Use arrows, symbols, and colours, to show relationships between ideas

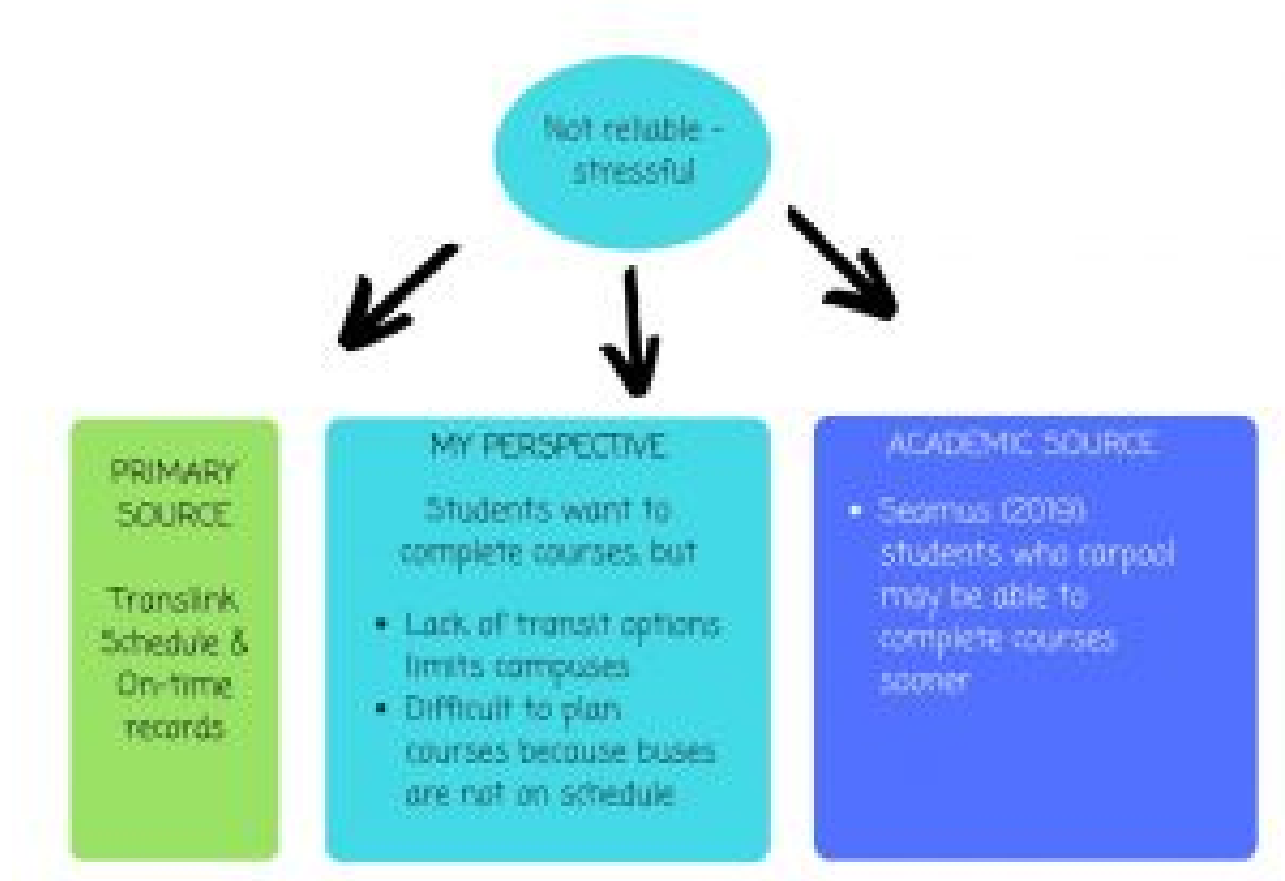
I start to build layers of connections and relationships in my map:



Step Five

- Include details

This is where I can provide more information about each point – below, I've taken one of the points and added to it:



Step Six

- Analyze and improve map by asking questions
- How do ideas fit together?
- Have all necessary connections been made?

This is where I can step back and review my map and keep the purpose of my assignment in mind. This is also a good time to follow up on questions that I might have. I can talk through my ideas with a classmate or visit my instructor as I continue to develop and refine my ideas.

Step Seven

- Update concept map as you learn more
- Ask key questions about connections between ideas

I'll keep my map with me as I meet with my instructor to discuss my ideas and when I visit the library to locate any academic resources that I might need; this way, I can keep everything together.

1. [“How to Create a Concept Map”](#) by University of Guelph Library [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)

19. Outlining Sample

Once you have your concepts and know how you are going to connect them, you can start to shape your essay by working on an outline. An outline can help structure your writing. Imagine that your outline is your travel plan for what you want to do on your vacation – you know which sights you want to see, which pictures you want to take, and where you want to go. Once you know this, you can then decide *how* you're going to do these things: what do you want to visit first? How will you travel between destinations? How long will you stay in each place?



1

For your writing journey, an outline can help you answer similar questions: which concept do you want to discuss first? How will you travel between different concepts? How much will you write about each concept?

Your outline helps you plan and structure what you want to say and in what order you will say it. As your ideas develop, you may adjust your outline so that it better fits with the concepts you want to connect and the evidence you will use to support your ideas.

All academic writing adheres to three basic structural elements:

- an introduction (including backgrounding of the topic, a thesis or hypothesis statement, and an outline of how the information will be organised in the text)
- a body (the length of which will primarily be determined by the word count of the assessment; may contain sub-sections)
 - Note that the overall *topic* of the body paragraphs remains the same – *Transit Services for Kwantlen University students*. It is the **controlling idea** that changes with each paragraph e.g.,

time, distance, translink.

- and the conclusion (no new information should be introduced at this point; you provide a summary of your key ideas and arguments, drawing to a logical conclusion; usually includes a recommendation or prediction).

Using our example writing assignment, I can get started on my outline.



I'll group ideas and concepts into paragraphs:

Introduction

- Describe what it's like to take the bus

Thesis Statement

Paragraph 1

- Time
- Students have many things on their schedule
- Buses late, don't come

Paragraph 2

- Distance - travel between campuses
- Not reliable
- Limits course options
- Carpooling quicker, easier



Paragraph 3

- Tranlink and Surrey not prepared for KPU students
- Students not a priority

Paragraph 4

- Counterpoints
- U-Pass is good, but it's not just about money
- While some can study/sleep on the bus - not the best place for either

Conclusion

- Keypoints
- What would effective transit look like?



Right now, I haven't written my thesis statement, but that will be my next step.

If you are an intermediate or an experienced academic writer, you might want to try creative graphic approaches to outlining.

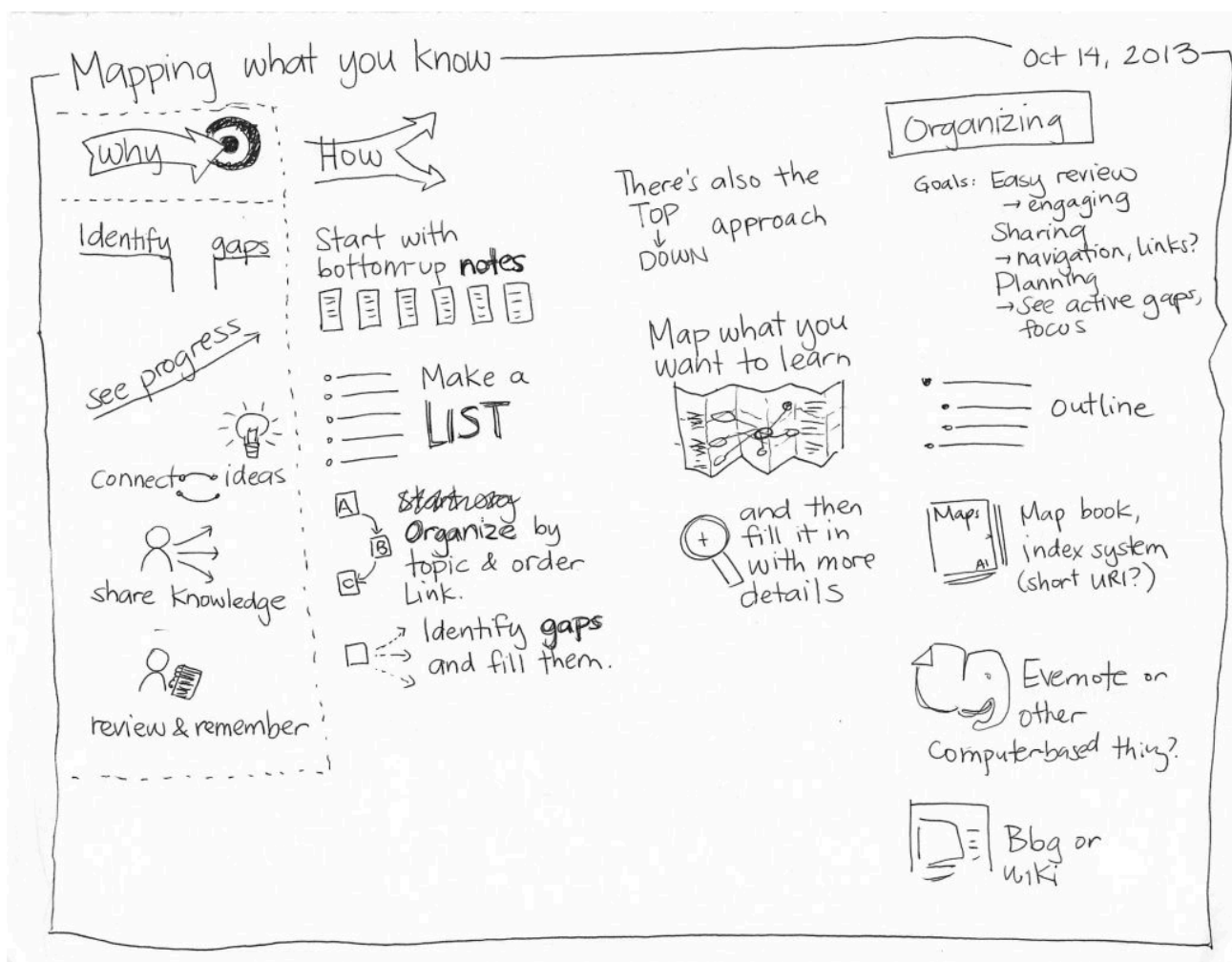


Intermediate



Experienced

Below you can see an example of using text and drawing to organize key ideas and assess options when putting together a project.



20. Academic Tone and Language

Academic Language

Academic language has certain characteristics regardless of the course you are writing for.

- It is formal (see *tone*), yet not overly complicated. It is unlike standard conversational language and the *hints and tips* below will help to elevate your writing style.
- It should be factual and objective; free from personal opinions, bias and value judgments. On rare occasions you may be asked to state your own personal point of view on a particular concept or issue. You should only do so if it is explicitly prescribed. This is the only time first person pronouns (I, my, we, our – see Chapter 5) are permitted.
- Academic writing is always supported by evidence rather than personal opinion, therefore emotional (emotive) or exaggerated (hyperbolic) language are not used.
- Academic language is most often enquiring or analytical in nature, therefore you must be willing to review more than one perspective on a topic and use language that demonstrates the ability to compare and contrast ideas (see signposting below).
- Academic language should be explicit; clear and not vague. Signposting can be used to lead the reader through the text from one section to another or from one idea to the next (see below).
- Passive voice (see chapter 7) can be used to avoid the use of personal pronouns. For example, instead of writing “In this essay **I** will discuss...”, you can write “This **essay** will discuss...”

Signposting

Signposting is the use of words and phrases to guide the reader through your written work. There are two types – major and minor.

Major Signposting

Major signposting is used to signal the introduction of key sections or aspects of the work. These might include the aim, purpose, or structure.

Examples

In the introduction

- This essay will...
- The aim of this essay is to...
- The major issue being discussed is...
- This essay will define and describe...
- This essay will critically examine...
- This essay will first define...then discuss...before making recommendations for...
- This essay is organised in the following way;

In the conclusion

- To conclude,
- In conclusion,
- To summarise,
- It is evident that

Minor Signposting

Minor signposting are linking words and phrases that make connections for your reader and move them through the text.

Examples

- They may be as simple as: First, second, third, next, then, last, lastly, finally
- To offer a counterpoint: However, although, though, yet, alternatively, nevertheless
- To indicate an example: For example, notably, for instance, in this case

These are just a few examples of signposting. For further information and some very useful instances of signposting please follow the link to Queen's University Belfast¹

[Filetoupload,597684,en.pdf \(qub.ac.uk\)](https://www.qub.ac.uk/graduate-school/Filestore/Filetoupload,597684,en.pdf?qub.ac.uk)

Academic Tone

Tone is the general character or attitude of a work and it is highly dependent on word choice and structure. It should match the intended purpose and audience of the text. As noted in the Academic Language section above, the tone should be formal, direct, consistent (polished and error-free), and objective. It should also be factual and not contain personal opinions.

What is the difference between tone and voice?

When learning academic writing skills you may hear “voice” referred to, especially in terms of source integration and maintaining your own “voice” when you write. Note this does not mean maintaining your own opinion. This is something entirely separate. Voice is the unique word choices of the author that reflect the viewpoint they are arguing. Your “voice” is about WHO the reader ‘hears’ when they read your text. Are they ‘hearing’ what you have to say on the topic? Are your claims direct and **authoritative**? Or, is your “voice” being drowned out by overuse or overreliance on external sources? This is why it is so important to understand that **academic sources** should ONLY be used to support what *you* have to say – *your* “voice”, *NOT opinion* – rather than being overused to speak on your behalf. This comes with practise and increased confidence in your own writing and knowing that you have something worth saying. Therefore, do plenty of background reading and research so that you can write from a well-informed position.

1. Queen's University Belfast. (n.d.). Signposting. Learning Development Service. <https://www.qub.ac.uk/graduate-school/Filestore/Filetoupload,597684,en.pdf#search=signposting>

Hints and Tips

Exclude

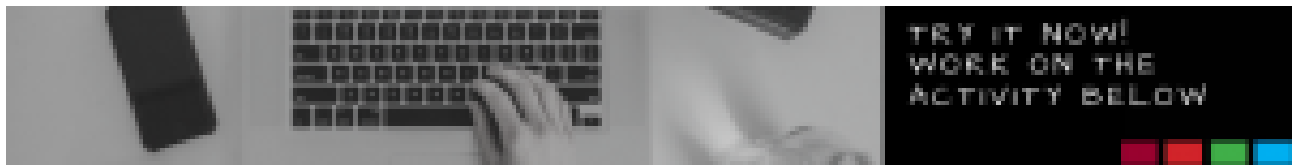
- First person pronouns (e.g., I, my, me) and second person pronouns (e.g., you, your, yours) (see Chapter 5).
- Contractions: as part of everyday conversational English, contractions have no place in formal academic writing. For example didn't (did not), can't (cannot), won't (will not), it's (it is – not to be confused with the pronoun its), shouldn't (should not), and many more. Use the full words.
- Poor connectives: "but", in particular is a very poor connective. Instead, refer to the signposting examples of however, although, nevertheless, yet, though. Also the overuse of "and"; try alternatives, such as plus, in addition, along with, also, as well as, moreover, together with.
- Avoid **colloquial** language.
- Avoid **hyperbole**.
- Avoid **emotive** language. Even in a persuasive text, appeal to the readers' minds, not feelings.
- Avoid being **verbose**.
- Avoid **generalizing**.
- Avoid statements such as "I think", "I feel", or "I believe"; they are clear indicators of personal opinion.
- Do not begin a sentence with "and", "because", or digits – e.g., 75% of participants... Always begin a sentence with a word – Seventy-five percent.
- Do not use digits 0-9 as digits; write the whole word – zero, one, two, three. Once you get to double digits you may use the number – 10, 11, 12. The only exception to this rule would be sharing data or statistics, however the previous rule still applies.

Include

- Academic vocabulary (sometimes this is discipline specific, such as technical or medical terms).
- Use tentative or low modal language when something you are writing is not definite or final. For example, could, might, or may, instead of will, definitely, or must.
- Be **succinct**.
- Include variance of sentence structure (see Chapter 7).
- Use powerful **reporting verbs**(see Chapter 14).
- Use clever connectives and **conjunctions** (see Chapter 5).
- Ensure you have excellent spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Use accurate referencing, both in-text and the reference list (see Chapter 10).
- Ensure correct use of capital letters for the beginning of each new sentence and for all **proper nouns**.
- Lastly, use correct **subject-verb agreement**. For an excellent list of examples of subject-verb agreement, please refer to Purdue Online Writing Lab.²

[Subject/Verb Agreement // Purdue Writing Lab](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/subject_verb_agreement.html)

2. Purdue University. (2021). Making subjects and verbs agree. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/subject_verb_agreement.html



Beginning



Intermediate



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=245#h5p-10>

21. Writing an Introduction and Conclusion

The introduction and conclusion are the strong walls that hold up the ends of your essay. The introduction should pique the readers' interest, **articulate** the aim or purpose of the essay, and provide an outline of how the essay is organised. The conclusion mirrors the introduction in structure and summarizes the main aim and key ideas within the essay, drawing to a logical conclusion. The introduction states what the essay *will do* and the conclusion tells the reader what the essay *has achieved*.

Introduction

The primary functions of the introduction are to introduce the topic and aim of the essay, plus provide the reader with a clear framework of how the essay will be structured. Therefore, the following sections provide a brief overview of how these goals can be achieved. The introduction has three basic sections (often in one paragraph if the essay is short) that establish the key elements: background, thesis statement, and essay outline.

Background

The background should **arrest** the readers' attention and create an interest in the chosen topic. Therefore, backgrounding on the topic should be factual, interesting, and may use supporting evidence from **academic sources**. Shorter essays (under 1000 words) may only require 1-3 sentences for backgrounding, so make the information specific and relevant, clear and **succinct**. Longer essays may call for a separate backgrounding paragraph. Always check with your lecturer/tutor for guidelines on your specific assignment.

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is a theory, put forward as a position to be maintained or proven by the writing that follows in the essay. It focuses the writer's ideas within the essay and all insights, arguments and viewpoints centre around this statement. The writer should refer back to it both mentally and literally throughout the writing process, plus the reader should see the key concepts within the thesis unfolding throughout the written work. A separate section about developing the thesis statement has been included below.

Essay Outline Sentence/s

The essay outline is 1-2 sentences that articulate the focus of the essay in stages. They clearly explain how the thesis statement will be addressed in a sequential manner throughout the essay paragraphs. The essay outline should also leave no doubt in the readers' minds about what is NOT going to be addressed in your essay. You are establishing the parameters, boundaries, or limitations of the essay that follows. Do not, however, use diminishing language such as, "this brief essay will only discuss...", "this essay hopes to prove/ will attempt to show...". This weakens your position from the outset. Use strong signposting language, such

as “This essay will discuss... (paragraph 1) then... (paragraph 2) before moving on to... (paragraph 3) followed by the conclusion and recommendations”. This way the reader knows from the outset how the essay will be structured and it also helps you to better plan your body paragraphs (see Chapter 22).

Brief Example

(Background statement) Nuclear power plants are widely used throughout the world as a clean, efficient source of energy. *(Thesis with a single idea)* It has been proven that **thermonuclear energy (topic) is a clean, safe alternative to burning fossil fuels.** *(Essay outline sentence)* This essay will discuss the environmental, economic, social impacts of having a thermonuclear power plant providing clean energy to a major city.

- Background statement
- Thesis statement – claim
- Essay outline sentence (with three controlling ideas)

Thesis Statement

Regardless of the length of the essay, it should always have a thesis statement that clearly **articulates** the key aim or argument/s in the essay. It focuses both the readers’ attention and the essay’s purpose. In a purely informative or descriptive essay, the thesis may contain a single, clear claim. Whereas, in a more complex analytical, persuasive, or critical essay (see Chapter 15) there may be more than one claim, or a **claim** and **counter-claim** (rebuttal) within the thesis statement (see Chapter 25 – Academic Writing [glossary]). It is important to remember that the majority of academic writing is not only delivering information, it is arguing a position and supporting claims with facts and reliable examples. **A strong thesis will be original, specific and arguable.** This means it should never be a statement of the obvious or a vague reference to general understandings on a topic.

Weak Thesis Examples

The following examples are too vague and leave too many questions unanswered because they are not specific enough.

“Reading is beneficial” – What type of reading? Reading at what level/age? Reading for what time period? Reading what types of text? How is it beneficial, to who?

“Dogs are better than cats” – Better in what way? What types of dogs in what environment? Domesticated or wild animals? What are the benefits of being a dog owner? Is this about owning a dog or just dogs as a breed?

“Carbon emissions are ruining our planet” – Carbon emissions from where/what? In what specific way is our planet suffering? What is the timeframe of this problem?

A strong thesis should stand up to scrutiny. It should be able to answer the “So what?” question. Why should the reader want to continue reading your essay? What are you going to describe, argue, contest that will **fix** their attention? **If no-one can or would argue with your thesis, then it is too weak, too obvious.**

Your thesis statement is your answer to the essay question.

A strong thesis treats the topic of an essay in-depth. It will make an **original claim** that is both interesting and supportable, plus able to be refuted. In a critical essay this will allow you to argue more than one point of view (see Chapter 27 – *Writing a Discursive Essay*). Again, this is why it is important that you complete sufficient background reading and research on your topic to write from an informed position.

Strong Thesis Examples

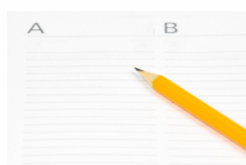
“Parents reading to their children, from age 1-5 years, enhance their children’s vocabulary, their interest in books, and their curiosity about the world around them.”

“Small, domesticated dogs make better companions than domesticated cats because of their loyal and intuitive nature.”

“Carbon emissions from food production and processing are ruining Earth’s atmosphere.”

As demonstrated, by adding a specific focus, and key claim, the above thesis statements are made stronger.

Beginner and intermediate writers may prefer to use a **less complex and sequential thesis** like those above. **They are clear, supportable and arguable. This is all that is required for the Term one and two writing tasks.**



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

Once you become a more proficient writer and advance into essays that are more analytical and critical in nature, you will begin to incorporate more than one perspective in the thesis statement. Again, each

additional perspective should be arguable and able to be supported with clear evidence. A thesis for a **discursive essay** (Term Three) should contain both a **claim** AND **counter-claim**, demonstrating your capacity as a writer to develop more than one perspective on a topic.

A Note on Claims and Counter-claims

Demonstrating that there is more than one side to an argument does not weaken your overall position on a topic. It indicates that you have used your analytical thinking skills to identify more than one perspective, potentially including opposing arguments. In your essay you may progress in such a way that refutes or supports the claim and counter-claim.

Please do not confuse the words ‘claim’ and ‘counter-claim’ with moral or value judgements about right/wrong, good/bad, successful/unsuccessful, or the like. The term ‘claim’ simply refers to the first position or argument you put forward, and ‘counter-claim’ is the alternate position or argument.

Discursive Essay Thesis – Examples adapted from previous students

“Although it is argued that renewable energy **may not meet** the energy needs of Australia, there is research to indicate the **benefits** of transitioning to more environmentally favourable energy sources now.”

“It is argued that multiculturalism **is beneficial** for Australian society, economy and culture, however some members of society have **a negative view** of multiculturalism’s effects on the country.”

“The widespread adoption of new technologies is inevitable and **may benefit** society, however, these new technologies could raise ethical issues and therefore **might be of detriment**.”

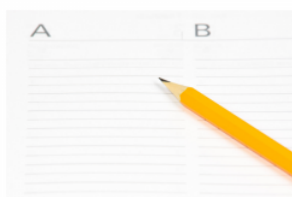
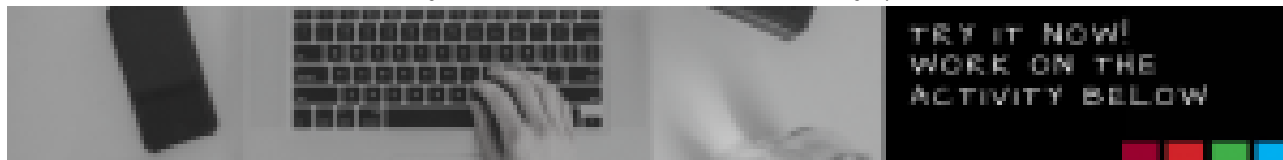
Note the use of **conjunctive** terms (underlined) to indicate alternative perspectives.

In term three you will be given further instruction in developing a thesis statement for a discursive essay in class time.

Conclusion

The conclusion is the final paragraph of the essay and it **summarizes and synthesizes the topic and key ideas, including the thesis statement**. As such, **no new information or citations should be present in the conclusion**. It should be written with an **authoritative**, formal tone as you have taken the time to support all the claims (and counter-claims) in your essay. **It should follow the same logical progression as the key points in your essay and reach a clear and well-written conclusion – the statement within the concluding paragraph that makes it very clear you have answered the essay question**. Read the marking criteria of your assignment to **determine whether you are also required to include a recommendation or prediction** as part of the conclusion. If so, make recommendations relevant to the context and content of the essay. They should be creative, specific and realistic. If you are making a prediction, focus on how the information or key arguments used in the essay might impact the world around you, or the field of inquiry, in a realistic way.

A strong, well-written conclusion should draw all of the threads of the essay together and show how they relate to each other and also how they make sense in relation to the essay question and thesis.



Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced



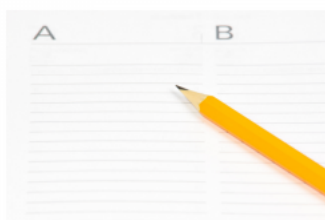
An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=246#h5p-11>

22. Basic Paragraph Writing

A paragraph is a distinct and separate piece of writing that forms part of an overall text. Each paragraph contains one key idea or topic and at least one **controlling idea**. When writing a larger text, such as an essay, the writer must also consider how the ideas in each paragraph connect to each other. *Types of Academic Writing* are discussed in Chapter 15 of this resource, therefore this chapter examines only the *BODY* paragraph.

This chapter explores a useful academic structure for a basic body paragraph and the elements that contribute to its cohesiveness.



Beginning

Beginner writers should follow the simple acronym explained below (TEEL) as it will help to organise your academic writing and make the meaning and aim of each paragraph clear to the reader.



Intermediate

Intermediate writers should work towards refining sentence structures and academic language choices to develop more **cohesive** and **coherent** paragraphs.



Experienced

Experienced writers should consider how they can **augment** the basic paragraph structure with more sophisticated examples, linking arguments, and logical conclusions.

Many readers of this chapter may have already encountered the T.E.E.L. (or P.E.E.L.) structure of a body paragraph in school and have a good understanding of general paragraph structure, however, now would be a good opportunity to refresh your memory. Review the following diagram that demonstrates where the acronym comes from:

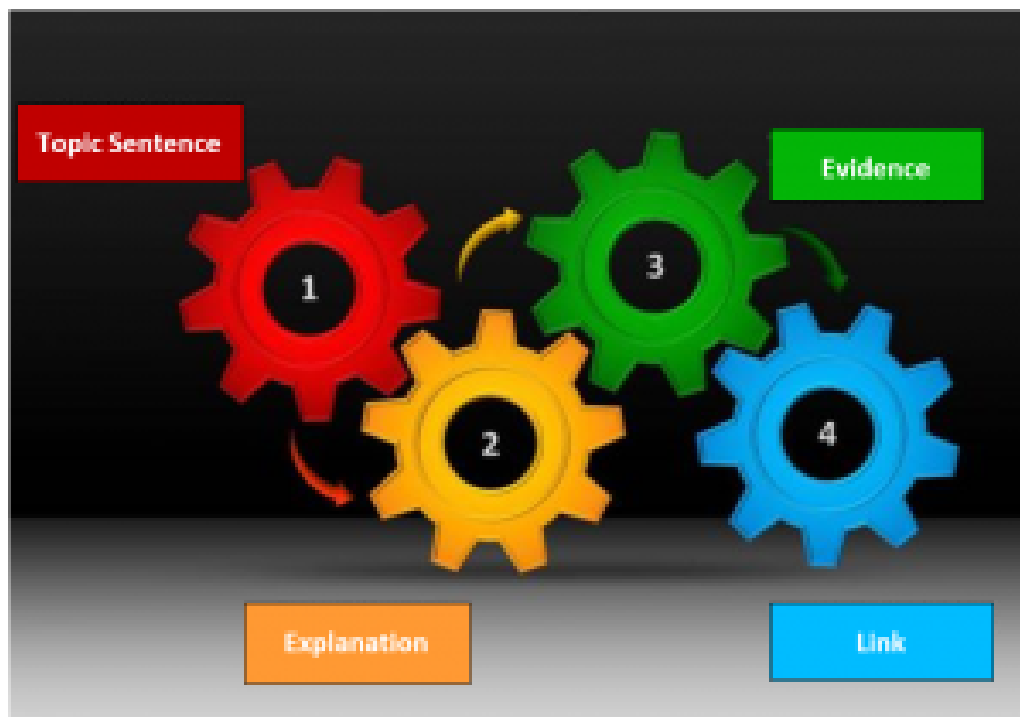
T – Topic sentence with a controlling idea

E – Explain and make a claim (about the controlling idea)

E – Evidence from academic sources (plus evaluate how this supports the claim)

L – Link back to the key idea or argument (or to the topic of the next paragraph)

This simple paragraph structure will introduce your ideas to the reader, add additional explanations and evidence for support and then link all this information back to the main idea of the overall paragraph or essay. Perhaps it could be more effectively displayed as a series of gears working together to make the whole machine move forward.



1

What is a topic sentence?

A topic sentence makes a connection between the overall topic or main idea of the essay and a controlling

idea. For example, the overall topic of an essay could be sustainable energy. The controlling ideas might examine solar, wind, and hydro electricity. Each controlling idea becomes the basis for a paragraph, whereas the overall topic remains the same throughout the essay.

It is often taught that each new paragraph represents a new topic, though in actuality the topic remains the same and the controlling idea changes.

What is a controlling idea?

A controlling idea limits, restricts or controls what is being discussed in relation to the main topic.

For example:

Sustainable energy (topic) has long been a topic of discussion and solar energy (controlling idea), in particular, has had a great deal of attention.

This signals to the reader that the essay is about sustainable energy, though in this particular paragraph only solar energy will be discussed. Therefore, the topic is restricted to only solar energy (controlling idea). It may go on to discuss both the positive and negative attributes of solar energy, however, it is still being controlled by one idea.

In the next paragraph the topic would remain *sustainable energy*, but the controlling idea would change to *wind power*; the third paragraph would discuss *hydro power*. When you understand the building blocks behind good paragraph structure, the essay begins to write itself.

What am I explaining to the reader?

The next sentence or sentences should **elaborate** on the controlling idea and may make an **assertion or claim** about it.

For example:

Modern Australian home owners are turning to solar panels to offset their electricity costs (fact), however, their effectiveness is greatly depleted in sustained cloudy weather (claim).

What is the evidence meant to support?

Given that the claim is often unsupported initially, the next sentences should **provide supporting information for the controlling idea and the claim** made in relation to it.

For example:

According to Energy Australia (2020)² solar panels operate at 10-25% capacity in cloudy weather, although this varies depending on the type of panel.

Writers can build on their discussion or argument by adding more evidence to support the claim. Use reputable **academic sources** (refer to Chapter 14).

What am I evaluating?

It is important not to assume that the reader will make the mental connection between the claim and the evidence. Therefore, **evaluate the relevance** and explicitly state the connection to the reader.

2. Energy Australia. (2020). 8 surprising facts about solar. <https://www.energyaustralia.com.au/blog/better-energy/8-surprising-facts-about-solar>

For example:

This demonstrates that solar energy, while environmentally supportive, may not be a solution to all of Australia's energy needs.

How do I link my topic, claim, and evidence?

If we use the analogy of the gears working together, think of the linking sentence as the one that turns back in on the contents of the paragraph and locks it all together.

For example:

Sustainable energy is currently being debated and solar power offers one alternative, though it may be less productive on cloudy days depending on the quality of solar panels being installed on Australians' rooves.

A linking sentence can also be used to draw the reader onto the next paragraph and provide a mental bridge between controlling ideas for the reader. This creates good **cohesion** and **coherence** throughout the essay.

For example:

While there are benefits to using solar energy to offset household electricity costs, even if somewhat inconsistent in cloudy weather, *wind power (next controlling idea)* also offers a more sustainable energy source than our finite fossil fuel supplies.

The next paragraph could discuss how wind power is infinite and therefore far more sustainable than fossil fuels.

Now let's put it all together:

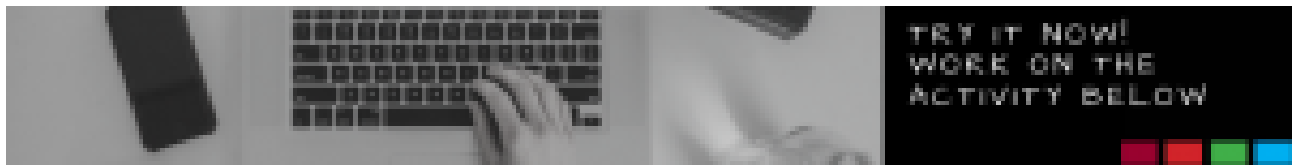
Sustainable energy (topic) has long been a topic of discussion and solar energy (controlling idea), in particular, has had a great deal of attention. Modern Australian home owners are turning to solar panels to offset their electricity costs (fact), however, their effectiveness is greatly depleted in sustained cloudy weather (claim). According to Energy Australia (2020) solar panels operate at 10-25% capacity in cloudy weather, although this varies depending on the type of panel (evidence). This demonstrates that solar energy, while environmentally supportive, may not be the solution to all of Australia's energy needs (evaluation and explanation of evidence). **Sustainable energy is currently being debated and solar power offers one alternative, though it may be less productive on cloudy days depending on the quality of solar panels being installed on Australians' rooves (links back to claim).

Or

**While there are benefits to using solar energy to offset household electricity costs, even if somewhat inconsistent in cloudy weather, wind power (next controlling idea) also offers a more sustainable energy source than our finite fossil fuel supplies (links to next controlling idea in the essay).

Recap

These are the basics of writing a well structured academic body paragraph. Repeat this process to structure an essay that demonstrates a logical progression of thoughts, claims, and supporting evidence. T.E.E.L. is an easy acronym to remember and great to fall back on if you begin to get a little lost in your writing. You can **augment** your paragraphs with further evidence, explanations, and elaborations; you are not limited to only two "E" sentences.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=248#h5p-12>

23. Choosing Your Assignment Topic

Regardless of the assignment type, choosing the ‘right’ topic from the outset involves careful thought, research, and planning in advance. While some may recommend choosing the topic that is most appealing to your own interests, this can sometimes lead to biased writing or subjective claims. Nor do you need to choose the most complex topic in order to gain the highest grades. A simple, well-executed topic can often lead to a better grade overall. Weigh all of your options before carefully proceeding.

No Choice

If the entire class is given the same task question, remember that it is up to you to decide how to approach the question and write your thesis statement. Refer to Chapters 16-18 of *Academic Writing Skills* to better understand what the task question is asking you to do. Identify the keyword clues, break the question down, and complete a concept map. While you may have no choice of task question, you may be able to vary your approach to the question, your claims and counter-claims, and your supporting evidence. One hundred essays can be successfully written on the same topic from different perspectives, using alternative supporting evidence.

Few Choices

When your options are limited to a few topic choices, or task questions, read and re-read each question. Do not make your choice based purely on personal interests. Before settling on a topic you will find it helpful to explore **academic sources** to ensure you will have supporting evidence for the ideas you are formulating about the tentative topic choice. Refer to Chapters 11-12 of *Academic Writing Skills* to refresh your skimming and scanning techniques, to quickly peruse academic texts, plus remember annotated reading skills. Once you have confirmed your topic choice, begin to map and outline your assignment topic.

Too Many Choices

At times students feel overwhelmed and somewhat stressed when they have too many topic choices or they are directed to use a topic of their own choosing. First, it is important to narrow the field of enquiry. Examine the marking criteria for the assessment and discover what it requires you to achieve. Ask yourself “How must I treat the chosen topic?”, “What must I include/exclude in/from my work?”, “Am I limited to recent academic sources e.g., the past 5 years?”, “How many academic sources are required?”, “What type of writing is required – descriptive, analytical, persuasive, or critical?”, “What is the required word count for the assessment?”

Also, consider what you already know about the topic you are considering. Will your prior knowledge be a hinderance or a help in your writing? Will you be capable of presenting alternative viewpoints without bias or judgment?

Consistency is Key

Once you have chosen a topic, do not waver! Too many students have come unraveled close to assessment deadlines because they have changed their topic too many times throughout the writing process and

inevitably the result is an assessment that is neither **cohesive** nor **coherent**. Make an informed choice from the outset and plan your assignment carefully, before proceeding to the writing stage. Assignment questions are designed to attract an array of responses from students. Focus less on choosing the 'right' topic, as they are ALL right in your lecturer/tutor's eyes, and more on researching and structuring your assessment correctly and in accordance with the marking criteria. Also worth noting, assessments are designed to evaluate what you have learnt within a course, therefore showcase what you have learnt. This seems obvious, though many students miss the point.

24. Oral Presentations

Many academic courses require students to present information to their peers and teachers in a classroom setting. This is usually in the form of a short talk, often, but not always, accompanied by visual aids such as a power point. Students often become nervous at the idea of speaking in front of a group.

This chapter is divided under five headings to establish a quick reference guide for oral presentations.

A beginner, who may have little or no experience, should read each section in full.



Beginning



Intermediate

For the intermediate learner, who has some experience with oral presentations, review the sections you feel you need work on.



Experienced

If you are an experienced presenter then you may wish to jog your memory about the basics or gain some

fresh insights about technique.

The Purpose of an Oral Presentation

Generally, oral presentation is public speaking, either individually or as a group, the aim of which is to provide information, entertain, persuade the audience, or educate. In an academic setting, oral presentations are often assessable tasks with a marking criteria. Therefore, students are being evaluated on their capacity to speak and deliver relevant information within a set timeframe. **An oral presentation differs from a speech in that it usually has visual aids and may involve audience interaction; ideas are both shown and explained.** A speech, on the other hand, is a *formal* verbal **discourse** addressing an audience, without visual aids and audience participation.

Types of Oral Presentations

Individual Presentation

- Breathe and remember that everyone gets nervous when speaking in public. You are in control. You've got this!
- Know your content. The number one way to have a smooth presentation is to know what you want to say and how you want to say it. Write it down and rehearse it until you feel relaxed and confident and do not have to rely heavily on notes while speaking.
- Eliminate 'umms' and 'ahhs' from your oral presentation vocabulary. Speak slowly and clearly and pause when you need to. It is not a contest to see who can race through their presentation the fastest or fit the most content within the time limit. The average person speaks at a rate of 125 words per minute. Therefore, if you are required to speak for 10 minutes, you will need to write and practice 1250 words for speaking. Ensure you time yourself and get it right.
- Ensure you meet the requirements of the marking criteria, including non-verbal communication skills. Make good eye contact with the audience; watch your posture; don't fidget.
- Know the language requirements. Check if you are permitted to use a more casual, conversational tone and first-person pronouns, or do you need to keep a more formal, academic tone?

Group Presentation

- All of the above applies, however you are working as part of a group. So how should you approach group work?
- Firstly, if you are not assigned to a group by your lecturer/tutor, choose people based on their availability and accessibility. If you cannot meet face-to-face you may schedule online meetings.
- Get to know each other. It's easier to work with friends than strangers.
- Also consider everyone's strengths and weaknesses. This will involve a discussion that will often lead to task or role allocations within the group, however, everyone should be carrying an equal level of the workload.
- Some group members may be more focused on getting the script written, with a different section for each team member to say. Others may be more experienced with the presentation software and skilled in editing and refining power point slides so they are appropriate for the presentation. Use one visual aid (one set of power point slides) for the whole group. Take turns presenting information and ideas.
- Be patient and tolerant with each other's learning style and personality. Do not judge people in your group based on their personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender, age, or cultural background.
- Rehearse as a group, more than once. Keep rehearsing until you have seamless transitions between speakers. Ensure you thank the previous speaker and introduce the one following you. If you are rehearsing online, but have to present in-person, try to schedule some face-to-face time that will allow you to physically practice using the technology and classroom space of the campus.
- For further information on working as a group see:

[Working as a group – my.UQ – University of Queensland](#)

Writing Your Presentation

Approach the oral presentation task just as you would any other assignment. Review the available topics, do some background reading and research to ensure you can talk about the topic for the appropriate length of time and in an informed manner. Break the question down as demonstrated in Chapter 17 *Breaking Down an Assignment*. Where it differs from writing an essay is that the information in the written speech must align with the visual aid. Therefore, with each idea, concept or new information you write, think about how this might be visually displayed through minimal text and the occasional use of images. Proceed to write your ideas in full, but consider that not all information will end up on a power point slide. After all, it is you who are doing the presenting, not the power point. Your presentation skills are being evaluated; this may include a small percentage for the actual visual aid. This is also why it is important that *EVERYONE* has a turn at speaking during the presentation, as each person receives their own individual grade.

Using Visual Aids

A whole chapter could be written about the visual aids alone, therefore I will simply refer to the key points as noted by [my.UQ](#)

To keep your audience engaged and help them to remember what you have to say, you may want to use visual aids, such as slides.

When designing slides for your presentation, make sure:

- any text is brief, grammatically correct and easy to read. Use dot points and space between lines, plus large font size (18-20 point).
- the colour theme is simple and the background colour provides enough contrast
 - Resist the temptation to use dark slides with a light-coloured font; it is hard on the eyes
- if images and graphs are used to support your main points, they should be non-intrusive on the written work

Images and Graphs

- Your audience will respond better to slides that deliver information quickly – images and graphs are a good way to do this. However, they are not always appropriate or necessary.

When choosing images, it's important to find images that:

- support your presentation and aren't just decorative
- are high quality, however, using large HD picture files can make the power point file too large overall for submission via Turnitin
- you have permission to use (Creative Commons license, royalty-free, own images, or purchased)
- suggested sites for free-to-use images: [Openclipart – Clipping Culture](#); [Beautiful Free Images & Pictures | Unsplash](#); [Pxfuel – Royalty free stock photos free download](#); [When we share, everyone wins – Creative Commons](#)

This is a general guide. The specific requirements for your course may be different. Make sure you read through any assignment requirements carefully and ask your lecturer or tutor if you're unsure how to meet them.

Using Visual Aids Effectively

Too often, students make an impressive power point though do not understand how to use it effectively to enhance their presentation.

Tips

- Rehearse with the power point.
- Keep the slides synchronized with your presentation; change them at the appropriate time.
- Refer to the information on the slides. Point out details; comment on images; note facts such as data.
- Don't let the power point just be something happening in the background while you speak.
- Write notes in your script to indicate when to change slides or which slide number the information applies to.
- Pace yourself so you are not spending a disproportionate amount of time on slides at the beginning of the presentation and racing through them at the end.
- Practice, practice, practice.

Nonverbal Communication

It is clear by the name that nonverbal communication are the ways that we communicate without speaking. Many people are already aware of this, however here are a few tips that relate specifically to oral presentations.

Being confident and looking confident are two different things. Fake it until you make it.

- Avoid slouching or leaning – standing up straight instantly gives you an air of confidence.
- Move! When you're glued to one spot as a presenter, you're not perceived as either confident or dynamic. Use the available space effectively, though do not exaggerate your natural movements so you look ridiculous.
- If you're someone who "speaks with their hands", resist the urge to constantly wave them around. They detract from your message. Occasional gestures are fine.
- Be animated, but don't fidget. Ask someone to watch you rehearse and identify if you have any nervous, repetitive habits you may be unaware of, for example, constantly touching or 'finger-combing' your hair, rubbing your face.
- Avoid 'voice fidgets' also. If you need to cough or clear your throat, do so once then take a drink of water.
- Avoid distractions. No phone turned on. Water available but off to one side.
- Keep your distance. Don't hover over front-row audience members; this can be intimidating.
- Have a cheerful demeanor. You do not need to grin like a Cheshire cat throughout the presentation, yet your facial expression should be relaxed and welcoming.
- Maintain an engaging TONE in your voice. Sometimes it's not what you're saying that is putting your audience to sleep, it's your monotonous tone. Vary your tone and pace.
- Don't read your presentation – PRESENT it! Internalize your script so you can speak with confidence and only occasionally refer to your notes if needed.
- Lastly, make good eye contact with your audience members so they know you are talking with them, not at them. You're having a conversation. Watch the link below for some great speaking tips, including eye contact.

Below is a video of some great tips about public speaking from Amy Wolff at TEDx Portland¹



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=250#oembed-1>

1. Wolff, A. [The Oregonian]. (2016, April 9). 5 public speaking tips from TEDxPortland speaker coach [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNOXZumCXNM&ab_channel=TheOregonian

25. Academic Writing - Sound and Valid Argument

Academic Speak – Clarification

When reading about academic writing you will sometimes come across a set of words that seem to be used somewhat interchangeably and even randomly at times. So, just to set the record straight:

Claim / assertion / premise / proposition are all statements that require support either to justify them or prove their soundness. They need further evidence. These are the starting point of reasoning.

Position / Thesis identify the stance you are taking on the main topic of the essay and it is generated by the essay question provided by your instructor. In an analytical or critical essay, it may indicate more than one available stance.

Also, some authors refer to the thesis as the premise or proposition. This is not the best description, though it is not completely inaccurate because the thesis statement does need to be supported with sound evidence and valid arguments throughout the essay.

Glossary of Terms

Argument – noun

- Logic – a reason or set of reasons given in support of an idea, action, or theory

Claim – noun (synonyms – premise, assertion, proposition)

- an assertion that something is true

Claim – verb

- state or assert something, typically without providing evidence or proof

Counter claim – noun

- a claim made to rebut a previous claim; refutation of opposing arguments

Deduction – noun

- Logic – the act of understanding something, or drawing to a conclusion, based on evidence

Induction – noun

- the process or action of bringing about or giving rise to something

*Position – noun (synonym – **thesis**)*

- the main point or overall argument that is to be proven or justified. It focuses the writer's ideas and minor arguments

Premise – noun (synonyms – claim, assertion, proposition)

- Logic – a previous statement or proposition from which another is inferred or follows as a conclusion
- a statement in an argument that provides reason or support for the conclusion

Proposition – noun (synonyms – premise, claim, assertion)

- Logic – a statement or assertion that expresses a judgment or opinion
- a statement that expresses a concept that can be true or false

Soundness – noun

- the quality of being based on valid reason or good judgment
- the soundness of an argument has two qualities 1. valid structure 2. true premises

Validity – noun

- Logic – the quality of being justifiable by reason
- the conclusion follows from the premises

Introduction to Academic Argument

The capacity to academically argue is a core skill that many students are not taught adequately prior to university writing. Argumentative ability is centered around knowledge. Not only knowledge of a topic, but knowledge of how to write a clear and coherent argument. Basically, an argument is an informed position, on a topic, that you are supporting or defending with sound evidence and valid conclusions. An essay may have one overall argument or position, yet include a series or set of smaller arguments that support or develop the overall position of the writer. This may include evaluating sources or contradictory evidence. The position is stated in the thesis (see Chapter 21 & 26). This position must be supported by sound academic evidence obtained through reading and research.

Suspend Bias

In order to develop sound and valid arguments, students must first suspend their personal judgments or bias on a topic (see Chapter 30). This can be achieved through self-reflection and critical thinking. Academic writing must be clear and objective, and this means you must be open and willing to examine more than one perspective of a topic or argument without preconceived ideas and opinions, without bias. Make a conscious effort to step beyond your own subjectivity and depersonalize both the topic and the supporting evidence. Through critical thinking skills, such as objectivity and analysis, you can begin to closely examine and evaluate sources and the production of knowledge. As a writer, sound and valid reasoning assists you in determining the best evidence to support your own claims and in evaluating the claims of other writers. As an objective writer, you should remain open to other viewpoints, though rely on your critical analysis skills to both identify and write sound and valid academic arguments.

Validity

Validity primarily means that in an argument the conclusion follows from the premises. If the premises are true, then the conclusion must also be true. *Salva veritate* (Latin) means “without loss of truth” – a rule of inference must be truth preserving; it must take one from truths to truths = Validity¹

Examples:

Valid Argument

1. All cats are aliens
2. Felix is a cat

Therefore, Felix is an alien

This is a **valid argument**. Hypothetically, **if all the premises are true, then the conclusion cannot be false**. It is logically impossible for the premises to be true and for the conclusion to be false.

Invalid Argument

1. All cats are aliens
2. Felix is an alien

Therefore, Felix is a cat

This is an **invalid argument**. Hypothetically, just because Felix is an alien does not guarantee that he is a cat. There may be other types of creatures that are also aliens. However, if the first premise said “Only cats are aliens”, then the argument would be valid.

1. Only cats are aliens
2. Felix is an alien

Therefore, Felix is a cat

This is a **valid argument**. **No individual premise (claim, assertion) is labelled as valid or invalid, only the argument structure as a whole**. However, premises can be checked for soundness.

Soundness

The soundness of an argument relies on two qualities:

1. the structure of the argument is valid (see above)
2. the premises are true and therefore the conclusion is also true.

Hence, Felix is not an alien unless we can provide sound proof (truth or true facts) that support this premise (claim, assertion). We would also need to provide evidence that Felix is indeed a cat! So, while the argument structure may be correct (valid), the premises could be untrue, therefore the premises and overall argument lacks **soundness**.

1. Honderich, T. (Ed.). (2005). The Oxford companion to philosophy (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Deductive Syllogism

The structure of the above arguments is called a **deductive syllogism** and it is the conventional way of displaying or writing a deductive argument:

Premise + Premise = Conclusion

Of course, you can have more than two premises or reasons to support your conclusion. In academic writing the major position is put forward in the thesis statement and the balance of the essay has the task of unpacking the **claims** and **counter-claims** surrounding the key arguments and providing supporting evidence. **Note also, you should never begin your assignment preparation with a predetermined conclusion in mind** (called “jumping to the conclusion”) and work your argument back from that point. Yes, in an essay the thesis is proposed in the introduction, though it is assumed that you arrived at this thesis statement through research and careful consideration of the facts and evidence surrounding the chosen topic. Whereas “jumping to the conclusion” beforehand and attempting to make the evidence fit your thesis is not the actions of an open and critical thinker who responds to evidence found through research. It instead indicates a very determined bias in thinking and academic writing.

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning is often defined as the inference from particular to general². It is based on formulating theories through detailed observations. It is useful in scientific fields, however, it presupposes that the future will resemble the past. This type of reasoning moves from evidence to assumptions (about the future) to a claim. The claim cannot be a deductive conclusion, only a generalization from observable evidence and applied assumptions.

Example

You're in the supermarket and would like to buy a couple of ripe avocados. To determine if they are ripe, you give them a gentle squeeze. After testing three to four from the fruit case, you determine that they are all still too green and decide not to purchase avocados.

Through induction, you have made your own **observation**, and from the **evidence** at hand made an **assumption** – they're all too green. This is a **generalization** made using observable evidence and applying an assumption. As you cannot know for certain that every avocado is green, without testing each one, this cannot be a deductive argument. While there may be **sufficient evidence** to make a decision and therefore, strong inductive reasoning, the reasoning has not been proven true, merely an assumption.

While inductive reasoning may be useful in formulating a scientific hypothesis for further testing, it is not a strong form of reasoning for academic writing.

Final Note

Good academic writing is founded on your capacity to academically argue from a well-researched and informed perspective, free from subjectivity and personal bias. The deductive syllogism is a good illustration of sound and valid argument structure that is the backbone of all well-written academic discussions.

2. Honderich, T. (Ed.). (2005). The Oxford companion to philosophy (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

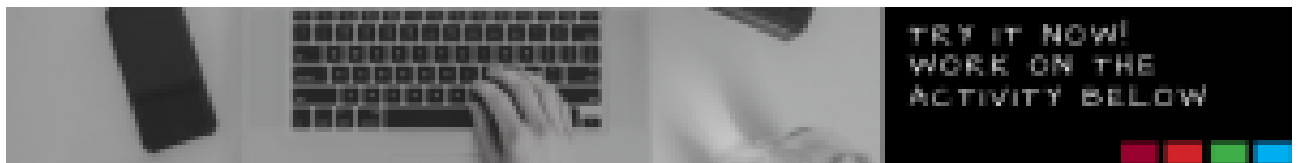
Video

3

Watch the video below for further information and examples of deductive and inductive reasoning. Particularly helpful is the middle section on evaluating deductive and inductive arguments / reasoning.



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Beginning



Intermediate



Experienced

Test your knowledge with five quick questions:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=251#h5p-13>

3. Plumlee, D., & Taverna, J. [Center for Innovation in Legal Education]. (2013, August 24). Episode 1.3: Deductive and inductive arguments.

26. Planning a Discursive Essay

Discursive Essay – Description

A discursive essay is a form of critical essay that attempts to provide the reader with a balanced argument on a topic, supported by evidence. It requires critical thinking, as well as sound and valid arguments (see Chapter 25) that acknowledge and analyse arguments *both* for and against any given topic, plus discursive essay writing appeals to reason, not emotions or opinions. While it may draw some tentative conclusions, based on evidence, the main aim of a discursive essay is to inform the reader of the key arguments and allow them to arrive at their own conclusion.

The writer needs to research the topic thoroughly to present more than one perspective and should check their own biases and assumptions through critical reflection (see Chapter 30).

Unlike persuasive writing, the writer does not need to have knowledge of the audience, though should write using academic tone and language (see Chapter 20).

Choose Your Topic Carefully

A basic guide to choosing an assignment topic is available in Chapter 23, however choosing a topic for a discursive essay means considering more than one perspective. Not only do you need to find information about the topic via academic sources, you need to be able to construct a worthwhile discussion, moving from idea to idea. Therefore, more forward planning is required. The following are decisions that need to be considered when choosing a discursive essay topic:

- What will be the three main things I choose to discuss in relation to my topic? (Recommended for a 1000 word essay.)
 - These will become the controlling ideas for your three body paragraphs (some essays may require more). Each controlling idea will need arguments both for and against.
 - For example, if my topic is “renewable energy” and my three main (controlling) ideas are “cost”, “storage”, “environmental impact”, then I will need to consider arguments *both for and against* each of these three concepts. I will also need to have good **academic sources** with examples or evidence to support my **claim** and **counter claim** for each controlling idea (More about this in Chapter 27).
- Am I able to write a thesis statement about this topic based on the available research? In other words, do my own ideas align with the available research, or am I going to be struggling to support my own ideas due to a lack of academic sources or research? You need to be smart about your topic choice. Do not make it harder than it has to be. Writing a discursive essay is challenging enough without struggling to find appropriate sources.
- Claims and counter claims **MUST** align with one another. It is not enough to think of one pro and one con, they must be about the same idea.
 - For example, perhaps I find a great academic journal article about the uptake of solar panel

installation in suburban Australia and how this household decision is cost-effective long-term, locally stored, and has minimal, even beneficial environmental impact due to the lowering of carbon emissions. Seems too good to be true, yet it is perfect for my assignment. I would have to then find arguments AGAINST everything in the article that supports transitioning suburbs to solar power. I would have to challenge the cost-effectiveness, the storage, and the environmental impact study. Now, all of a sudden my task just became much more challenging.

- How accessible is information on this topic, in relation to my thesis?
 - There may be vast numbers of journal articles written about your topic, but consider how relevant they may be to your tentative thesis statement. It takes a great deal of time to search for appropriate academic sources. Do you have a good internet connection at home or will you need to spend some quality time at the library? Setting time aside to complete your essay research is crucial for success.

It is only through complete forward planning about the shape and content of your essay that you may be able to choose the topic that best suits your interests, academic ability and time management. Consider how you will approach the overall project, not only the next step.

Research Your Topic

When completing a library search for online peer reviewed journal articles, do not forget to use Boolean Operators to refine or narrow your search field. Standard Boolean Operators are (capitalized) AND, OR and NOT. While using OR will expand your search, AND and NOT will reduce the scope of your search. For example, if I want information on ageism and care giving, but I only want it to relate to the elderly, I might use the following to search a database: ageism AND care NOT children. Remember to keep track of your search strings (like the one just used) and then you'll know what worked and what didn't as you come and go from your academic research.

The [UQ Library](#) provides an excellent step-by-step guide to searching databases:

[Searching in databases – Library – University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](#)

Did you know that you can also link the UQ Library to Google Scholar? This link tells you how:

[Google Scholar – Library – University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](#)

Write the Thesis Statement

The concept of a thesis statement was introduced in Chapter 21. **The information below relates specifically to a discursive essay thesis statement.**

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the discursive essay should not take a stance and therefore the thesis statement must also impartially indicate more than one perspective. The goal is to present both sides of an argument equally and allow the reader to make an informed and well-reasoned choice after providing supporting evidence for each side of the argument.

Sample thesis statements:

Solar energy is a cost-effective solution to burning fossil fuels for electricity, however lower income families cannot afford the installation costs.

Some studies indicate that teacher comments written in red may have no effect on students' emotions,

however other studies suggest that seeing red ink on papers could cause some students unnecessary stress.¹

According to social justice principles, education should be available to all, yet historically, the intellectually and physically impaired may have been exempt from participation due to their supposed inability to learn.²

This is where your pros and cons list comes into play. For each pro, or positive statement you make, about your topic, create an equivalent con, or negative statement and this will enable you to arrive at two opposing assertions – the claim and counter claim.

While there may be multiple arguments or perspectives related to your essay topic, it is important that you match each claim with a counter-claim. This applies to the thesis statement and each supporting argument within the body paragraphs of the essay.

It is not just a matter of agreeing or disagreeing. **A neutral tone is crucial.** Do not include positive or negative leading statements, such as “It is undeniable that...” or “One should not accept the view that...”. You are NOT attempting to persuade the reader to choose one viewpoint over another.

Leading statements / language will be discussed further, in class, within term three of the Academic English course.

Thesis Structure:

- Note the two sides (indicated in green and orange)
- Note the use of tentative language: “Some studies”, “may have”, “could cause”, “some students”
- As the thesis is yet to be discussed in-depth, and you are not an expert in the field, do not use definitive language
- The statement is also one sentence, with a “pivot point” in the middle, with a comma and signposting to indicate a contradictory perspective (in black). Other examples include, nevertheless, though, although, regardless, yet, albeit. DO NOT use the word “but” as it lacks academic tone. Some signposts (e.g., although, though, while) may be placed at the start of the two clauses rather than in the middle – just remember the comma, for example, “While some studies suggest solar energy is cost-effective, other critical research questions its affordability.”
- Also note that it is based on preliminary research and not opinion: “some studies”, “other studies”, “according to social justice principles”, “critical research”.

Claims and Counter Claims

NOTE: Please do not confuse the words ‘claim’ and ‘counter-claim’ with moral or value judgements about right/wrong, good/bad, successful/unsuccessful, or the like. The term ‘claim’ simply refers to the first position or argument you put forward (whether for or against), and ‘counter-claim’ is the alternate position or argument.

In a discursive essay the goal is to present both sides equally and then draw some tentative conclusions based on the evidence presented.

- To formulate your claims and counter claims, write a list of pros and cons.
- For each pro there should be a corresponding con.
- Three sets of pros and cons will be required for your discursive essay. One set for each body paragraph. These become your claims and counter claims.

1. Inez, S. M. (2018, September 10). What is a discursive essay, and how do you write a good one? Kibin.

2. Hale, A., & Basides, H. (2013). The keys to academic English. Palgrave

- For a longer essay, you would need further claims and counter claims.
- Some instructors prefer students to keep the pros and cons in the same order across the body paragraphs. Each paragraph would then have a pro followed by a con or else a con followed by a pro. The order should align with your thesis; if the thesis gives a pro view of the topic followed by a negative view (con) then the paragraphs should also start with the pro and follow with the con, or else vice versa. If not aligned and consistent, the reader may easily become confused as the argument proceeds. Ask your teacher if this is a requirement for your assessment.

PROS	CONS
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Planning

Use previous chapters to explore your chosen topic through concept mapping (Chapter 18) and essay outlining (Chapter 19), with one variance; you must include your proposed claims and counter claims in your proposed paragraph structures. What follows is a generic model for a discursive essay. The following Chapter 27 will examine this in further details.

Sample Discursive Essay Outline

The paragraphs are continuous; the dot-points are only meant to indicate content.

Introduction

- Background
- Thesis statement
- Essay outline (including 3 controlling ideas)

Body Paragraphs X 3 (Elaboration and evidence will be more than one sentence, though the topic, claim and counter claim should be succinct)

- Topic sentence, including 1/3 controlling ideas (the topic remains the same throughout the entire essay; it is the controlling idea that changes)
- A claim/assertion about the controlling idea
- **E**laboration – more information about the claim
- **E**vidence -academic research (Don't forget to tell the reader how / why the evidence supports the claim. Be explicit in your **E**valuation rather than assuming the connection is obvious to the reader)
- A counter claim (remember it must be COUNTER to the claim you made, not about something different)

- **Elaboration** – more information about the counter claim
- **Evidence** – academic research (Don't forget to tell the reader how / why the evidence supports the claim. Be explicit in your **Evaluation** rather than assuming the connection is obvious to the reader)
- **Concluding sentence** – **Links** back to the topic and/or the next controlling idea in the following paragraph

Conclusion

Mirror the introduction. The essay outline should have stated the plan for the essay – “This essay *will* discuss...”, therefore the conclusion should identify that this has been fulfilled, “This essay *has* discussed...”, plus summarise the controlling ideas and key arguments. **ONLY** draw tentative conclusions **BOTH** for and against, allowing the reader to make up their own mind about the topic. Also remember to re-state the thesis in the conclusion. If it is part of the marking criteria, you should also include a *recommendation* or *prediction* about the future use or cost/benefit of the chosen topic/concept.

A word of warning, many students fall into the generic realm of stating that there should be further research on their topic or in the field of study. This is a gross statement of the obvious as all academia is ongoing. Try to be more practical with your recommendations and also think about who would instigate them and where the funding might come from.

This chapter gives an overview of what a discursive essay is and a few things to consider when choosing your topic. It also provides a generic outline for a discursive essay structure. The following chapter examines the structure in further detail.

27. Writing and Formatting a Discursive Essay

The previous chapter describes a discursive essay as a form of critical essay that attempts to provide the reader with a balanced argument on a topic, supported by evidence. This chapter examines the structure in increased depth.

Organise your key claims and counter-claims

Consider how you want your reader to move through your arguments for and against your controlling ideas. When you write your essay outline sentence in the introduction, the controlling ideas should appear in the same order as they will be organised within the essay body. For example, in an essay about artificial intelligence, if the essay outline sentence states “This essay will argue how the influence of AI may impact the **health, military, and industrial sectors** of society and whether the benefits outweigh the negative ramifications on humanity’s future”, then the body paragraphs must follow the same sequence – health, military, and industrial sectors.

For each of these controlling ideas, there must be both a supportable claim and counter claim. As the outline sentence states, the essay will discuss “whether the benefits outweigh the negative ramifications on humanity’s future.” Therefore, both sides of the argument must be presented, both perspectives, in a **nonbiased** manner.

Outline

As you begin to write your essay outline, include your supportable claims and counter claims in the body paragraphs. Go as far as to note sources that may be used as supporting evidence. Do not forget to synthesize your academic sources. Synthesizing simply means combining. Instead of summarising main points from each text in turn, you combine the key ideas and findings of multiple sources to make an overall point. At its most basic level it involves looking at the similarities and differences between all your sources (this is examined in week 16 of *TPP Academic English*).

Example Body Paragraph Outline

Note the focus here is on the non-bracketed sections of the paragraph.

Topic sentence and controlling idea: **Artificial Intelligence [AI]** (*topic*) within the **medical industry** (*controlling idea – health*) is still in the early stages of conception.

Claim: Application of **AI** in the **health sector** poses concerns (*claim*) regarding the use of this technology
– Sources: Finlayson et al. (2018); Yanisky-Ravid & Hallisey (2019)

(Elaboration – more information about the claim)

(Evidence -academic research)

Counter claim: Despite these factors (*indicates a contrasting idea*), the application of **AI** within the **health sector**, when used ethically, has (*counter claim*) the potential to revolutionize the future of health care –
Sources: Topol (2019); Wahl et al. (2018)

(Elaboration – more information about the claim)

(Evidence -academic research)

Linking sentence: While application of **AI** within the **health sector** is significant to the future of humanity, so too is the impact of AI within the military.

NOTE: The topic and (singular) controlling idea are maintained throughout the paragraph. The linking sentence links AI to the next controlling idea – military use.

Once you have outlined your entire essay, including where you will use your academic sources, you are ready to write a draft discursive essay and flesh out your ideas. Remember that your reader has not done the same level of reading as you have on your chosen topic and be sure to walk them through your arguments step-by-step. Do not assume they understand the subtle connections between your assertions, evidence, and conclusions – make them obvious. Use good, clear signposting (see Chapter 20) and introduce your sources using reporting verbs (see Chapter 14). Remember good, clear, academic paragraph structure also (see Chapter 22).

Adhere to the Template and Formatting

Once at university you will not have your hand held through essay writing. There will most likely not be any time allocated in class to write or research. It is also unlikely that you will be provided with a template for assignment writing. Therefore, take every opportunity to learn the expected structures and formatting while preparing for future academic writing. It is your responsibility as a student to seek clarification from your teacher if there is something you do not understand.

While universities should provide model essays or assignments for students, often the instructions rely on prerequisite knowledge or assumed understanding of academic writing. Do not be afraid to ask questions. It is highly likely that other students in your class have similar questions and lack the initiative to come forward. Remember teachers/ tutors/ lecturers are there to teach and often they are a vastly untapped resource. Make an appointment or try to catch your teacher before or after class if it's a quick question.

Formatting in APA 7th ed.

What many people do not know is that assignment formatting is aligned to the referencing style. Therefore, an assignment in MLA or Chicago style referencing will have different formatting to APA 7th ed. This is a question that needs to be answered by your lecturer, though below is a basic guide for formatting according to APA 7th edition and UQ College guidelines.

Font:

APA does not specify a single font or set of fonts however it is recommended you use sans serif fonts such as **11-point Calibri, 11-point Arial (university assignments)**.

Title Page:

APA 7 instructions for formatting the title pages of **student papers** (high school, college, or university courses). The following should be double line-spaced and centered vertically, that is, it should sit in the middle of the title page. However, the title page information should be centered in the upper half of the page.

Spacing:

The entire paper should be double line-spaced, including the title page, abstract, and reference list.

Title page information: DO NOT include sub-headings on the title page and follow the order as set out.

Title of the Paper (*a mix of upper and lowercase; any word four letters or more should begin with a capital. It should be written in **bold font** and not contain abbreviations*)

Author's Name (*that's you*)

Student ID *(All assessments should include your eight / 8 digit student identification number, found on your ID card)*

Class ID *(every tutorial class has an allocated class line or number, please include this also)*

Institutional Affiliation *(UQ College)*

Course number and name *(ENGL1002 Academic English)*

Instructor name *(Do not include titles such as Dr. or Prof.)*

Assignment due date *(Written in full – September 30, 2021)*

Assignment Topic *(state the selected assignment topic)*

Sample:

The Benefits and Ramifications of Artificial Intelligence in Humanity's Future

Joseph Smith

443888125

Law II

UCI College

ENGL 1002 Academic English

Patricia Williamson

September 20, 2021

Artificial Intelligence

Header and Footer

APA does not use anything in the footer, however the paper does need a header with a page number and a copy of your thesis statement.

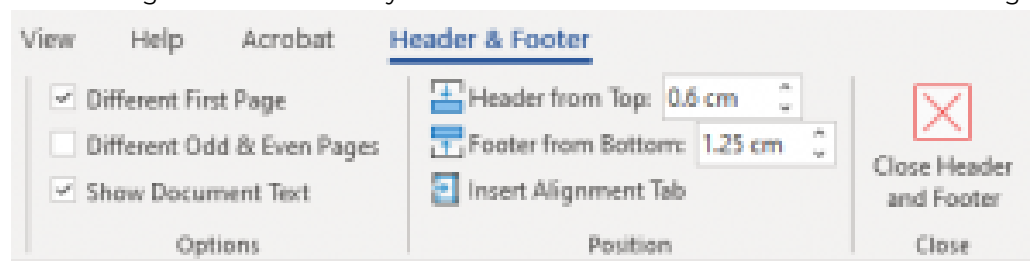
On the title page you will have the phrase **Running Header:** (no quotation marks and followed by a semi-colon before your thesis statement. The thesis statement begins with a capital letter) followed by your title or, **in the case of your discursive essay, the thesis statement.** Technically, the running header should be no more than 50 characters, including letters, spaces, and punctuation. Though in the case of the discursive essay, it is more important to your instructor / grader to have the thesis statement available to refer to on each page.

In the header and footer tab (click “Insert”, “edit header”) you can make the header on the first page different to the rest of the paper by checking the box that says “Different First Page.” In **all headers that follow**, you will not need the Running Header title, **only the thesis statement.** You can also decrease the Header margin from the top and use a smaller, less obtrusive, font – no smaller than 10 point font.

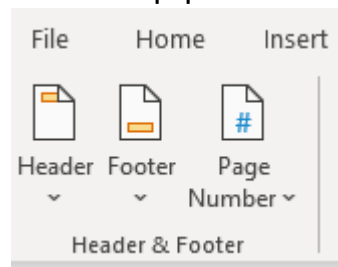
Example:

Running Header: The application of artificial intelligence is worrying to humanity and should be avoided, however there is a consensus that artificial intelligence promotes a promising future for humanity.

All following headers would only contain the thesis statement without the “Running Header” title.



You must also **number each page, including the title page.** In the header, **tab to the far right**, click the arrow on “Page Number” on the far left, then “Current Position” and finally, “Plain Number”. This will give you running page numbers, beginning on the title page. The number must appear in the **top right-hand corner of the paper** and must not include the word page or any abbreviation such as p., page 1 of.



Please note, these instructions are for Microsoft Word and your personal device may vary.

If you have questions regarding any aspect of your assignment, please do not hesitate to ask your teacher for assistance.

28. Planning Your Writing – Overcoming Obstacles

When you are trying to write your first draft, it can be challenging to get started when facing a blank page!

So what can you do?

Just write. You already have at least one idea. Start there. What do you want to say about it? What connections can you make with it? If you have a working thesis, what points might you make that support that thesis?

Review and update your outline. Re-write your topic or thesis down and then jot down fresh points you might make that will flesh out that topic or support the thesis. These don't have to be detailed. In fact, they don't even have to be complete sentences (yet)!¹

Create Smaller Tasks and Short-Term Goals. Your assignment might seem too large, and maybe the due date is weeks away, or next week. These factors can contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed or increase the tendency to procrastinate. However, the remedy is simple and will help you keep writing something each day toward your deadline and toward the finished product: divide larger writing tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks and set intermediate deadlines.

Collaborate. Talk to your friends or family, or to [Learning Support](#), about your ideas for your essay. Sometimes talking about your ideas is the best way to flesh them out and get your ideas flowing. Write down notes during or just after your conversations. Classmates are a great resource because they're studying the same subjects as you, and they're working on the same assignments. Talk to them often, and form study groups. Ask people to look at your ideas or writing and to give you feedback. Although, don't expect them to read full drafts as they may be time-poor because they are working on their own assignments. Be realistic with your expectations of others. Set goals and hold each other accountable for meeting deadlines (a little friendly competition can be motivating!).

Talk to other potential readers, that is, teaching staff. Ask them what they would expect from this type of writing. Also, review the marking criteria and assignment instructions. Meet with someone from [Learning Support](#). Be sure to come to the appointment prepared with a copy of the assignment and a clear idea of what you want to work on.²

Try to start writing well in advance of your deadline so that you can continue to improve your assignment before you need to hand it in.

1. "Writing the First Draft" in [The Word on College Reading and Writing](#) by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)
2. Adapted from "Overcoming Writing Anxiety and Writer's Block" in [The Word on College Reading and Writing](#) by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

29. Revising Your Writing

Once you've worked on your draft, you need to revise and edit your work. Revising will help you check if you've responded to the assignment instructions and clearly communicated your ideas. Revising will also help you correct grammatical, punctuation, and presentation issues. When you are revising, try moving through three different stages:

- [Checking in on the Big Picture](#)
- [The Mid-view Review](#)
- [Editing Up Close](#)

We'll look first at Checking in on the Big Picture...

Revising Stage 1 – Checking in on the Big Picture



"Seeking Adventure" by [Jasper van der Meij](#) on [Unsplash](#)

When you first begin revising, you should focus on the big picture. The following questions¹ can help guide you with this:

- Do you have a **clear thesis**? Do you know what idea or perspective you want your reader to understand upon reading your essay?
- Is your essay **well organized**?
- **Is each paragraph a building block** in your essay: does each explain or support your thesis?

1. [Revising Stage 1](#) by [Excelsior Online Writing Lab](#) CC BY 4.0

- Does it need a different shape? **Do parts need to be moved?**
- Do you fully **explain and support the main ideas** of your paper?
- Does your **introduction provide background information that grabs the reader's interest?**
- **Does your conclusion summarise the key arguments and perspectives used in the paper?**
- Are you saying in your essay what you want to say – **maintaining your own “voice”?**
- **What is the strength of your paper? What is the weakness?**

Revising Stage 2 – The Mid-View Review



"The south of Mexico" by [Mitch Lensink](#) on [Unsplash](#)

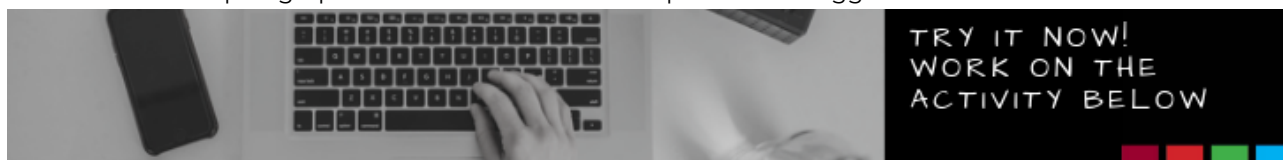
The second stage of revising requires that you look at your content closely at the paragraph level. It's now time to examine each paragraph, on its own, to see where you might need to revise. The following questions² will guide you through the mid-view revision stage:

- Does each paragraph contain **solid, specific information, or examples** that support the point you are making?
- Are there are other **facts, quotations, examples, or descriptions** to add that can more clearly illustrate or provide evidence for the points you are making?
- Are there sentences, words, descriptions or **information that you can delete** because they do not add to the points you are making or may confuse the reader?
- Are the paragraphs in the **right order** – **do they align with your essay outline sentence in the**

introduction?

- **Are your paragraphs overly long?** Does each paragraph explore **one main idea**?
- Do you use **clear transitions / signposting** so the reader can follow your thinking?
- Are any paragraphs or parts of paragraphs **repetitive** and need to be deleted?
- Have you **elaborated, explained, evaluated, and given examples** that demonstrate your sound and valid reasoning?

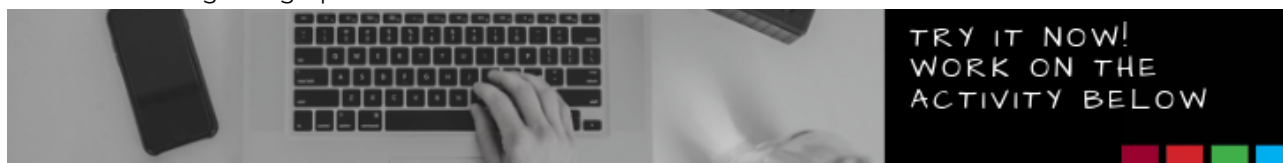
Take a look at the paragraph³ below and click the hot spots to see suggestions for revision:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=262#h5p-14>

Practice: Revising Paragraphs



Review the paragraph⁴ below and select the most important revision that Sophie, the student writer, should focus on in her revisions:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://uq.pressbooks.pub/academicwritingskills/?p=262#h5p-15>

3. "[Revising Paragraphs](#)" in [Writing Skills Lab](#) by [Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi](#)
4. "[Revising Paragraphs](#)" in [Writing Skills Lab](#) by [Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi](#) CC BY 4.0

Revising Stage 3 – Editing Up Close



Photo by [Andrew Pons](#) on Unsplash

Once you have completed your revision and feel confident in your content, it's time to begin the editing stage of your revision and editing process. The following questions⁵ will guide you through your editing:

- Are there any **grammar errors**, that is, have you been consistent in your use of tense, do your pronouns agree? Have you eliminated first-person pronouns?
- Have you accurately and effectively used **punctuation**?
- Do you rely on **strong verbs and nouns** and maintain a good balance with **adjectives and adverbs**, using them to enhance descriptions but ensuring clear sentences?
- Have you **avoided emotive language and hyperbole**?
- Are your words as **accurate** as possible, for the sake of clarity?
- Do you **define any technical or unusual terms** you use?
- Are there **extra words, clichés or colloquial terms** in your sentences that **you can delete**?
- Do you **vary your sentence structure**?
- Have you **accurately presented facts**; have you copied quotations precisely?
- If you are writing an academic essay, have you tried to be **objective** in your evidence and maintained **academic tone**?
- If writing a personal essay, is the **narrative voice lively and interesting**?
- Have you **spellchecked** your paper? Have you **proofread** your paper – spellcheck does not address every error or incorrect word use?
- If you used sources, have you **consistently documented all of the sources' ideas and information**

5. [Revising Stage 3](#) by [Excelsior Online Writing Lab CC BY-4.0](#)

using a standard citation and referencing style? APA 7th ed. is used at UQ College in Academic English.

30. Perception and Perspective - The Subjective Writer

Perception and Perspective

Def: Perception (noun)

The ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. The way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted.

Def: Perspective (noun)

A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; point of view.



It is impossible to move through the world without engaging in the development of our own perceptions and perspectives, whether they be purely physical or emotional, or in the case of academic writing, theoretical.

It is when those perceptions and perspectives too heavily influence our writing that we may inadvertently become **subjective writers**, incorporating a hidden, or not so hidden, **bias** in our logical reasoning and thoughtful writing. Writers use their own perceptions to describe, explain and analyse content, both in the analysis of other writers and in their own communication.

To be a critical thinker it is important to reflect on your own perceptions and the way they influence your perspectives of people, the world, essay topics, sources of information, events, and histories.

Perception and perspective, while separate, are entwined because they constantly influence each other in a circular way. Perceptions, the way you sense the world and interpret it, impact on your perspective, your point of view of said world, which again influences your perceptions.

Due to differing perceptions among people, perspectives (points of view) often conflict with one another,

therefore you must try to determine which one makes the most sense through logical reasoning. It is also important to rely on more than one source of information. Consider the following scenario as an example.

Example: Perception and Perspective

Scenario:

A woman is driving a car down a suburban street when she swerves to miss a dog on the road and accidentally hits a parked car. It is a low impact accident and the driver gets out of the vehicle to inspect the damage. The owner of the dog appears on the scene to apologise profusely for the trouble his dog has caused and offers to pay for the damages to both vehicles. The owner of the parked vehicle is at their car by this time and hears the conversation between the dog owner and the driver who hit their parked vehicle. The driver throws her hands in the air. She is elated by the dog owner's quick offer of compensation and thankful that the potentially dreadful situation is quickly remedied.

Three people witnessed the incident and had different perceptions of what happened which altered their perspectives.

Witness 1:

"I was travelling behind the car when it swerved erratically and hit the parked car. The driver must be on something because it's a straight road and there's no reason to be driving erratically like a crazy person on a quiet street." (The witness did not see the dog and therefore assumed the driver was at fault.)

Witness 2: Walked around the corner as the dog owner and driver began to exchange words, but was too far away to hear the conversation.

"The owner of the parked car (incorrect) looked really annoyed and was abusing the guy that crashed into her car!" (This person only has part of the story and has jumped to conclusions about who did what.)

Witness 3: Watched the accident happen from a second floor window.

"A dog ran out in front of the car and the lady swerved just in time to miss it, but she hit a parked car as a result. Both the dog owner and owner of the parked car didn't look happy and judging from the way she threw her arms in the air I'm guessing they were both blaming her." (This person was not close enough to hear the conversation and assumed the outcome based purely on their perception of events.)

Only the three people directly involved in the conversation would know the actual outcome.

The three witnesses were heavily influenced by what they think they saw and how they chose to interpret their perceptions.

Perspectives are not something we are born with, they are socially constructed through language and formed or influenced throughout our life by such things as our beliefs, our level of education, our family histories, gender experience, health experiences, nationality, ethnicity, our age, and where our needs and interests lie. No two people will have the exact same perspective of the world and therefore perceptions need to be agreed upon to become accepted norms or universal.

Perception is like being given a set of prescription glasses that only you can see through. The factors mentioned above help to determine the prescription. The majority of people are not aware that their prescription is different to those people around them. This **self-awareness is crucial** if you are to become

a critical thinking and thoughtful academic writer. The lenses of your “glasses” (perception) act as a filter system that is selective and helps to shape how you “see” the world – your point of view (perspective).

What We Focus On

Humans tend to focus their attention on, or perceive, what they are **interested in, need, or desire**. For example, have you ever had the experience where you buy something new, such as a car, accessory, new shoes, and then suddenly notice the same item everywhere you go. Suddenly you’re surrounded, whereas previously you may not have noticed these things. This is because your attention or **interest** is diverted. Another example is someone who is fixated on a physical attribute, such as a short person always noticing tall people because they wish they were taller, or a women noticing other women’s long hair because they wish their hair was longer. This type of perception is based on **desire**. Trying to find someone in a crowd of people may be based on **need**, as you scan the crowd for the person you don’t notice the many other things occurring in the crowd. Your perception is filtering out unnecessary or useless information.

Academic Focus

Focusing on elements that are most meaningful to us also occurs in our **academic reading and writing**. This can be beneficial if we are skimming and scanning a source for information, however, it can also be detrimental if it means we are skipping over (filtering) useful information because it sits outside our preformed perspective (point of view).

It is important to read broadly on a topic when preparing for an assignment because no two writers will have the same perspective. Yes, they will share key theories or theorists, yet they will always bring their own interpretation into their writing – their *voice* (see Chapter 20); their “glasses” lead them to make different choices when writing. So too, your “glasses” will filter information and shape your academic writing. **The key to unbiased writing is reflective practice and to be alert to your own preformed perceptions.** Be open to new ways of thinking and viewing the world through use of your critical thinking skills, plus analysing a text to identify biases.

Also be aware that feelings and emotions can influence the way we interpret events and experiences. That is why it is so important to leave **emotive** language out of academic writing and maintain an objective, academic tone and language.

Knowledge of your topic should have the biggest influence on your academic writing. This will enable you to present an informed perspective of your own, plus multiple perspectives that you may have identified from other writers through researching the topic.

Avoid Bias Writing

There are a range of things students can do to help eliminate bias from their academic writing.

1. **Check your own assumptions.**

- **Assumptions are often gender-based, race-based, or age-based.** Do not assume that academic writers are white, male, middle to upper class persons. For example, search for information about the author of a journal article so that you do not inadvertently refer to them by the wrong gender pronoun. Lecturers may get agitated when you refer to a key female theorist as “he” in your assignment. Avoid stereotyping Asians as good at math or African Americans as good at sports and so on. Do not assume that all children are innocent and that all elderly people need help.

- Add details *only* when they are contextually called for, otherwise **leave stereotypes out of your academic writing**. For example, instead of writing “The disabled boy did well in his exam”, simply state “The boy did well in his exam.” Instead of writing “Not surprisingly, the Sudanese man came first in his sprint race”, eliminate the race-based assumption or stereotype, “The man came first in his sprint race.”

2. Avoid statements based solely on personal experience.

- Bias can be both negative and positive and **your own experiences or perceptions will shape your perspectives**.
- Also **avoid first person plural pronouns** that assume the reader holds the same perspective you do; words such as **we, us, and our** are indicators of personal bias that the writer believes their reader shares.

3. Avoid generalizations.

- Do not make assertions that include the words **“all” or “never”**. For example, “All educators incorporate student feedback into their lesson planning”, when a more accurate statement might be “Some teachers regularly review student feedback when considering their lesson planning.” This second sentence acknowledges that not all teachers work the same way.

4. Support your claims with evidence.

- Given that your claims will be non-personal, they should be academically supported by balanced and nonbiased sources.
- Be a critical thinker when reading and check for biases within the research. Who or what is being ignored or excluded? Is the source overtly negative (against) or positive (for) towards the topic you are researching?
- The aim is to demonstrate that your perspective (point of view) is reasonable based on objective evidence and well-reasoned argument, not subjective perceptions.

5. Use gender-neutral terms.

- **Choose gender neutral pronouns** such as *they* and *their*.
- Avoid inadvertently using **sexist terms** that are deeply entrenched in our culture, such as chairman instead of chairperson, mothering instead of parenting, and mankind instead of humankind.
- This point is also related to assumptions (point 1) in that society traditionally appoints certain roles to certain genders. For example, the majority of nurses and teachers are female; the majority of police are male. Again, do not let your assumptions take over. Therefore, the use of **gender-neutral terms** indicates that different genders can and are in the same job description or role.

In conclusion, in order to be a good academic writer, you must be self-aware and self-reflective. Examine your own perceptions and perspectives to highlight and eliminate biases in your writing. Also, be critical thinkers when you are reading for academic research and mindful of the biases created by authors due to their own interest, need, or desire.