

GUIDE TO ACADEMIC WRITING

Below are some general points to remember when you are writing your assignments:

- Keep your writing clear, concise and in a formal register.
 - Avoid colloquial expressions, slang, idioms and the language of texting.
 - Avoid personal language such as ‘I’ or ‘in my opinion’ unless the task requires you to write like this such as in a reflection statement or persuasive writing as in NAPLAN.
 - Avoid posing questions to your reader and making assumptions about their views on the subject.
- You should aim for accuracy in your use of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, paragraphing and spelling. Not only what you have to say is important, but also how you express it is critical for success.
- Remember that you're writing for an audience which is well informed and interested in what you have to say about the topic. Your ideas should be your own, based on your informed opinion. If you use someone's work you should use quotation marks and acknowledge that this is their work in your bibliography.
- Academic writing tends to be fairly dense, with relatively long sentences and wide use of subordinate clauses. Incorporate relevant metalanguage to make your points clearly and effectively.

Structure

Different text types require different writing styles however each piece of writing requires that you have a beginning, middle and end.

- Your writing is separated into paragraphs to facilitate the flow of your argument. We start a new paragraph when we want to present a fresh viewpoint on the topic or to develop our initial point. Each paragraph contains a topic sentence (usually the first sentence of the paragraph) which highlights this change in direction or development. The body of the paragraph then provides evidence to support the main idea. The last sentence concludes the idea.
- The introduction paragraph orientates the reader to your approach to the topic. Each body paragraph builds on this approach examining different aspects of the topic and using different evidence to support your ideas. The conclusion expresses your final thoughts and deductions. It should not simply repeat what you have said in the introduction.
- Your ideas flow more smoothly with the use of connectives and help to make your meaning clear. For more on connectives see the list below.

Connectives

The use of connectives helps to ensure that you remain on track in addressing the question. When connectives are used together with paragraphs, they act as signposts which assist the reader to focus on the direction of your argument.

- *Conjunctions of time* – as, after, as soon as, at first, at once, before, finally, just, meanwhile, next, now, now that, since, then, until, when, whenever, while

- *Conjunctions of reason* – although, as a result, because, by, consequently, despite, due to, for that reason, in case, in order, in this way, otherwise, since, so, so as to, so that, therefore, though, thus, to that end, unless, until, yet
- *Conjunctions of information* – and, also, as well as, besides, in addition, including, moreover, similarly
- *Conjunctions of contrast* – alternatively, but, except, however, in contrast, instead of, not only ... but also, on the one hand ... on the other hand, or, whereas

Punctuation

There are conventions in the use of punctuation that you should observe in your writing. These include:

- Capital letters to begin sentences, for first names and surnames, titles, place names, institution names, days of the week, months of the year, street names, book and film titles, holidays and historical events.
- Full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to end sentences.
- Commas are *used* in lists, indicate a pause in the sentence, and mark clauses and phrases. They surround the name of a person being addressed, separate the day of the month from the year in a date, and separate a town from the state.
- Dashes, like commas, indicate added emphasis, an interruption, or an abrupt change of thought. They should be used carefully and are more suited to creative writing.
- Apostrophes are used for contractions to take the place of one or more letters and also indicate possession.
- Quotation marks for text extracts, highlighted words and words used with ironic intention
- Parentheses (also known as brackets) enclose statements that clarify and enclose numbers and letters that are part of a list.
- Colons are used to separate a sentence from a list of items also between two sentences when the second one explains the first and to introduce a long direct quote.
- Semicolons are used to take the place of a conjunction and often connect two different ideas related to the same point. They are also used to separate a list of things if there are commas within each unit.

Grammar

The following points are the ones you are most likely to come across when writing assignments.

- You may see ‘Fragment (consider revising)’ when you are doing your assignment. This is because you have written an incomplete sentence. Sentences contain a complete thought and a subject, verb and object. You are required to write in complete sentences in expositions.
- Subjects and verbs have to “agree” with each other. This means that singular nouns take the singular form of the verb; plural nouns take the plural form of the verb.
- You are encouraged to use nominalisation; that is, try to write noun-based phrases rather than verb-based ones. For example, instead of *The level of obesity was increasing rapidly and health professionals were becoming concerned*. Write: *The rapid increase in obesity was causing concern among health professionals*.
- The choice between the past and present tense often indicates the difference between specific information and generalisations. For example, in reporting empirical investigations (experiments, surveys, etc.), details which are specific to the study, e.g. methods and results,

are reported in the simple past tense, *This survey was conducted on 18-30 year olds living on the Northern Beaches* and the present tense is used for generalised conclusions, *We can conclude that in this demographic there are no significant health risks.*

- The present perfect tense is really concerned with the present situation, even though the action that the verb refers to happened or started in the past. The present perfect is, therefore, the appropriate choice for describing current trends: e.g. *From the middle of the previous decade, Australia has enjoyed a sharp run-up in the prices of our key commodity exports. This has led to an unprecedented boom in mining investment.*
- The present perfect is often used with time expressions that refer to periods that are still continuing, or have just ended: *since 2001, in recent years, in this century.* In contrast, you use the past tense when you 'locate' the situation or action in a past time - for example, when you refer to a past date or period: *Our family migrated to Australia over 20 years ago.*

Conditionals and modals

When you draw conclusions based on evidence, or the application of a theory, you often need to make statements about your assessment of the likelihood that something:

- is true now
- will happen in the future
- happened in the past.

One of the most useful resources for expressing varying degrees of certainty is the system of modal verbs. The modals that are usually used in this way are: *might, would, could, may, should, will and must*

Would - used to speculate about hypothetical situations

Will - firm prediction

Must – confident conclusion, no other explanation possible

Should – confident assumption based on things going as predicted

Would – describing a hypothetical situation or possibility

May, might and could – describing weaker possibilities

Active and Passive Voice

All sentences are in either the active or the passive voice, therefore tenses also have active forms and passive forms. In the active form, the thing/person doing the action is the subject of the sentence and the thing receiving the action is the object. E.g. *Macbeth's heroic actions deceived Duncan.* Most sentences are active and it is generally preferable to use the active voice. In the passive form the thing/person is the object of the sentence and the thing/person is the subject, e.g. *Duncan was deceived by Macbeth's heroic actions.*