

**GUIDE TO ESSAY WRITING FOR PROGRAMS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH
2007**

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Faculty of Health Sciences

School of Public Health

La Trobe University

Introductory Comment

Why Ask You to Write an Essay

Many jobs require you to research information relating to particular problems, questions or issues, and to write a clear, concise and logical submission. Examples are case notes, letters of referral, and legal reports. The requirement to write a clear, concise and logical essay can then be seen as preparation for job-tasks of various kinds.

When you are asked to write an essay the staff member generally has the following aims in mind:

- a) To encourage you to think through some important issues in counselling, formulate an argument and reach a set of conclusions;
- b) To encourage you to read, in reasonable depth, books or articles bearing on a particular aspect of counselling;
- c) To give you practice in using library and other resources to locate material relating to a particular issue or topic in counselling;
- d) To give you practice, with feedback, at writing a clear, concise and logical response to an assigned task.
- e) To encourage you, where appropriate, to integrate reflections on personal and professional experience.

In the light of these five aims, doing the essay the night before it is due may get you enough marks to pass but means that the educational aims of the task are not fulfilled for you.

Steps in Preparing an Essay for Counselling

The task can best be seen as having three components:

- a) Locating information relevant to the topic
- b) Synthesising the information in relation to the topic
- c) Writing your response in answer to the topic.

Locating Information

All access to information in the Latrobe library is now available on computer, and there are computer banks available for student use. Searching for information on a topic or on works by a specific author is done electronically, and so is locating information on books, journals, etc which are held in the Latrobe library. The library catalogue and search facilities are also available through the Latrobe home page on their web site at <<http://www.latrobe.edu.au>>. The library staff will be happy to help you if you are not familiar with electronic access, or if you require any other assistance in locating relevant information - BUT YOU HAVE TO APPROACH THEM IN PLENTY OF TIME, TO ENLIST THEIR AID.

NOTE that unless otherwise stated, students are expected to read more extensively than the material provided by the lecturer.

Synthesising Information

To some extent the locating and synthesising aspects occur together. As you discover new information your ideas change, and as your ideas change you look for new sources of information.

Essay topics almost always involve the analysis and discussion of issues or problems. They should NOT consist solely of the repetition of facts. The first requirement then is to understand the basic issues which are involved in the topic. For this reason it is best to begin your reading with brief, general books or articles which just sketch in the main elements. This is much better than plunging straight into detailed reading about specifics. Then, when you have formed a picture of the issues involved, begin to read in detail on the specific issues you understand to be most relevant to the topic. During your reading, concentrate on noting down the main ideas being presented and exactly where they come from (the reference, plus the page[s]).

Keep an on-going bibliography of the **full details** of every reference you read, including name(s) and initial(s) of author(s), date, journal, volume, start and end page numbers of the article. If it's in a book, you also need the name(s) and initial(s) of the author(s) or editor(s), date and place of publication, and the publishing company (see below for details of how to present references). It's infuriating to find that you have a wonderful quote but you didn't write down which volume of the journal, or the date of publication, or which book the article was in, or some other necessary piece of information.

To an increasing extent, students are using Endnote as a support for note-taking and referencing. We recommend its use, or that of a similar program, if you write a thesis.

Writing the Essay

Plan the *structure* of your essay. That is, decide how you will begin, what you want to argue, what support you will advance to support your argument, how you will conclude. A poor essay lacks structure, is fragmented and has no continuity. Good essays take time to prepare. One way of doing this is to write a first rough draft, quickly, so that you have a complete piece of work to revise. Do not worry if parts of it (for example, the introductory paragraph) look shaky. Leave it for 24 hours, then re-write it more carefully, polishing up and revising. Get someone else to read the revised draft and if necessary straighten up any obscurities or aspects which are not clear. Then prepare the final form carefully observing the format and conventions required (see below). Essays should be typed, double spaced.

The Style and Format of Counselling Essays

The Title Page

The essay title should be stated in full on the centre of the page. Your full name should be immediately below it. Below that should be the Subject Code and below that the lecturer's name. Toward the bottom of the page you should state the due date (not the date submitted) and the required length.

The Abstract

Abstracts are generally not necessary in the Graduate Diploma of Counselling and Human Services. In other courses, an abstract may not be necessary, and lecturers will advise when it should be included. When necessary, an abstract should be on a separate page, straight after the title page. It is headed "Abstract" and not numbered. The abstract must be a concise summary of the main arguments in your essay. It should be in prose that is in the form of grammatical sentences, not in point form, and should be between 100-200 words in length. It should be only one paragraph.

The Essay

This begins on a new page. The title is at the top of the page, with the author's name and institution below. The body of the essay should have a logical plan giving it continuity, with an introduction and a concluding statement. Where the essay is long (say more than 2,000 words) it may be best to break up the essay into sections with sub-headings; (for example, Historical Background, The Current Position, Unresolved Issues, Conclusion).

Wherever possible, take a reasoned, critical, evaluative approach; do not merely describe. Usually some descriptive material is needed but it should not be excessive. Arguments and opinions must be supported. That is they must be related to experimental findings and/or the considered evaluation of other writers in the area. There is scope for relating your own experiences to the concepts and issues under consideration as long as these are relevant, and facilitate understanding of the argument being made.

Paraphrasing or quoting large chunks of texts or articles is not acceptable. Only quote something when the quote is really important for the essay. *Try to frame ideas in your own words.* If you do want to use a quote, acknowledge the source. For example, Greenberg and Paivio (1997), in an effort to clarify the nature of feelings and emotions wrote: "emotions give us information about reactions to our situations ... This organismic process of tacitly evaluating what is good or bad for us is often referred to as feeling" (p. 20). *Note:* the ... dots above indicate that portions of the original text have been omitted. Quotations in excess of 40 words need to be block indented, begin with a capital letter and end with a page number.

Careful attention should be paid to the quality of your English expression. What you say must make plain sense. Ensure that you use punctuation correctly to make clear the meaning you intend.

Spelling should be correct - acquire an English usage dictionary and a dictionary of psychology and use them when in doubt. NOTE that the spell check function of word processor packages will not detect errors such as "fro" instead of "for", or "no" instead of "not". Careful proof reading is essential.

Ensure that your spelling checker is set to Australian English. This will assist you in avoiding unintended use of American English.

References

The reference list comes after the concluding paragraph. It begins on a new page. It should be headed "References" and centred. NOTE that a reference list is NOT a bibliography. A bibliography is a listing of references which you have consulted. A reference list includes ONLY those works which you have actually cited in the text of your essay.

A list of references is arranged alphabetically and chronologically by author's surname. Surnames are given first followed by the initial(s) only. The date of publication follows the surname and initials of the author. For example: Singer, P. (1989).

- Entries are NOT preceded by Arabic numbers.
- Several references by the same author are arranged by year of publication, the earlier first.
- If the reference list includes more than one publication in the same year by a given author, lowercase letters a, b, c and so on are placed immediately after the year, within the parentheses.

For example: Kaufman, J. R. (1980a). Control of ...

- The reference list must be double spaced. A hanging indent format should be used.
- Footnoting is NOT to be used as a means of referencing.

NOTE: References should follow the format described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th edition (APA Publication Manual, 2001). A copy of this is available in the La Trobe library. Further details on correct citation and referencing are contained below.

Appended Material

Sometimes you may believe that it is appropriate to attach some material which relates to the essay as an appendix. This will not be required very often. Instances might include newspaper reports illustrating certain psychosocial phenomena.

An Appendix comes after the reference list. If there is more than one item in the Appendix, each should begin on a new page and be headed: Appendix I: (title of the item), Appendix II: (title of the item), and so on. Note the use of Roman numerals for each appendix item.

Concluding Comment: What to Avoid

The above tells you what to do; you should now note carefully what NOT to do.

Before submitting your paper, check that you have not committed any of these common errors:

- a) Use of the wrong tense. In general, essays are written in the PAST tense.
- b) Avoid all abbreviations (i.e., e.g., etc., don't and the like).
- c) Avoid Latin terms such as "op cit", "ibid", "viz" and so on.
- d) Point form should be avoided unless it is strictly necessary. Different points should be tied together so that the essay forms a logical, coherent whole. In particular, make sure that you have linked the introduction and the body of the essay.
- e) Use of empty generalisations such as "all counsellors say or do such and such ..." or "everyone knows that...". Supporting evidence is always required. When opinions are given, they should be advanced impersonally, tentatively, and with a summary of the evidence for and against.
- f) Muddled organisation. This usually stems from failure to plan in advance. A detailed plan is a necessary starting point. One way of assessing whether there is a logical order to your essay is to list its headings then inspect the list to see whether there is a logical continuity to the headings.
- g) Typing errors. Always proof-read the final draft and correct any errors. As mentioned on p. 4 above, use spell check to correct any spelling errors. *NOTE* that spell check will NOT pick up errors such as typing "fro" when you meant "for", or "thin" when you meant "then", so you must proof read to see that your text makes sense.
- h) Avoid language constructions that might "imply bias against persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age" (APA Publication Manual, 2001, p. 61). For a full discussion of the guidelines to reduce bias in language, see the APA Publication Manual, 1994, pp. 61-76.

Headings

Some material on the use of headings has been included at the end of this document. It is only required for use in the writing of theses, and is not necessary in the presentation of class essays and assignments.

Procedures for Submission

Number of Copies

One copy of each essay must be submitted.

The Cover Sheet

All essays are required to be submitted to the office on level 1, building HS1, by 4.30 pm on the due date. Essays should be prefaced with a signed cover sheet obtained from the School of Public Health general office. Keep the top copy for your records. Your lecturer might, instead, prefer submission of essays in electronic format. Check with your lecturer.

Extensions

Extensions will not normally be granted for things which are foreseeable and can be planned around (for example, family celebrations, work commitments). However, every now and then, things can go wrong (illness, accidents, personal trauma). If you find yourself in difficulties, DO NOT just do nothing and let things pile up on you. Talk to your lecturer before things get too complicated.

Late Submissions

If an extension has not been sought or granted:

- For the first two weeks, late submissions will be downgraded by one lettergrade per week or part thereof, or will attract a pass only, whichever is the higher.
- Between two and four weeks, late submissions will be graded pass/ fail only.
- After four weeks, late submissions will be deemed not to have been submitted, and will be awarded a fail grade.

Criteria for Assessment

Introduction

The introduction sets the overall context of the essay. The title should be clear and appropriate and there should be a clear statement of the issue or problem.

Literature Review

The literature review should be up to date, and should show broad and deep reading. It should be a critical review, examining the strengths and weaknesses of the work reviewed, rather than a laundry list of Smith says this and Bloggs says that.

Presentation

An essay should be written in a clear, readable writing style, following the APA style in the text (see APA Publication Manual, 2001). It should be clearly laid out, with the length of sections well balanced with the length of the whole. Care should be taken to use correct syntax, and the placement of paragraphs should be well thought out. Terminology should be used with precision. In a long essay (say, over 2500 words) subheadings should be used to mark the various points raised. Appendices should be used appropriately.

Analysis

You should discuss what has resulted from the essay - that is, what is the current state of play and/or where is the issue or the field going.

Comments/Recommendations

The essay should conclude with a summary of the argument and any comments or recommendations you feel arise from the material you have discussed.

Marking Scheme

- Essays will be graded A to D, "Deferred", or N (fail).
- In the case of "N" grades, essays are to be second marked.
- Essays resubmitted after receiving the mark "deferred" will at best be marked "D" with no higher mark possible.

A+ = 95-100; A = 80-94; B = 70-79; C = 60-69; D = 50 -59; Deferred = 40-49; N = < 40.

Use of Quotations and Reference Citations in Essay Writing for Psychology and Professional Counselling

Here follow some guidelines to ways in which references should be cited, however, they are by no means complete. They are provided in order to facilitate your learning of these widely used conventions in publishing and academic writing.

Quotations in the Text

Short Quotations.

Quotations of less than 40 words are incorporated in the text and enclosed by double quotation marks. The author's name, year of publication and the page(s) from which the quote is taken must be clearly stated.

Example: Brown (1988) defined learning as "any relatively permanent change in behaviour which occurs as a result of experience or practice" (p.85).

Long Quotations.

Quotations of more than 40 words are displayed in a freestanding block of typewritten lines. The block is indented to the position of the indent for a new paragraph. They are not enclosed by quotation marks. They should be double spaced in the same way as the rest of the text. The page number from which the quotation came is placed last, in brackets. The indented quotation begins with a capital letter even if the quotation is extracted from within a paragraph.

Example:

Bozett (1987) described families as:

Established groups of individuals who interrelate in order to satisfy their mutual needs for love and affection, both physical and emotional. They meet one another's survival needs by providing food and shelter, and by assisting each other to maintain their social, spiritual, psychological and physical health. They are interdependent economically, psychologically, and physically. They are committed to nurturing one another, they provide

each other with a sense of identity, and they have a shared history, past and present, with the intention of a future. [If they have children] ... they have the additional responsibility of transmitting cultural and societal values to the next generation (p. xv).

Citation of Source.

Cite the author, year, and page number in either of two forms:

“The purpose of alternate research paradigms may be characterised by an emphasis on understanding or the illuminations of meanings” (Hoshmand, 1989, p. 13).

Or:

Hoshmand (1989) believes that “The purpose of alternate research paradigms may be characterised by an emphasis on understanding or the illuminations of meanings” (p. 13).

NOTE: Surnames only and *no* initials.

Changes From the Original Source.

- The case of the first letter of the first word and the punctuation at the end of a quotation may be changed to fit the syntax.
- Three points (...) are used to indicate omitted material within a sentence; four points indicate omissions between two sentences. (*NOTE.* Do not use points at the beginning or end of a quotation).
- Material inserted into a quotation by someone other than the original author is enclosed in square brackets [].

Reference Citations in Text.

One work, one author

Example: Strupp (1980) studied success and failure in time-limited psychotherapy.

or

In a study of success and failure in time-limited psychotherapy (Strupp, 1980) ...

One work, two authors

If a reference has two authors, the citation must include the surnames of both authors each time the citation appears in the text.

Example: In their review of the literature Grey and Jones (1986) concluded that ...

NOTE: Names are joined by “and” when the citation occurs in running text, but “&” when authors’ names are bracketed, or in a table:

Example: In one review of the literature (Grey & Jones, 1986) it was found that ...

One work, more than two authors

If a reference has more than two authors, the citation includes the surnames of all the authors the first time the citation appears in the text. Later citations of the same reference record the surname of the senior (first) author and the abbreviation “et al.”

Example: (first citation) Hafner, Mackenzie and Costain (1990) ... (subsequent citations) Hafner et al. (1990) ...

Multiple works, one author

Multiple citations of the same author at the same point in the text are arranged in chronological order:

Example: Past research (Couper 1978, 1980, 1981) ...

Multiple works, same author(s), same publication date

Example: Several studies (Farrell & Hammond, 1977a, 1977b; Wolman 1980a, 1980b, 1980c) ... *NOTE* that commas separate the years, semicolons separate the authors.

Multiple works, different authors

Multiple citations, with different authors, are arranged alphabetically, according to the first author's surname:

Example: (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Downes, 1992; Maier, 1994).

Authors with same surname

Include the author's initials in all text citations to avoid confusion.

Example: ... a recent study (G. L. Jones, 1986) has shown... but A. B. Jones (1987) has disagreed...

NOTE: This is and personal communications (next) are the only occasions in which initials are included in a citation.

Personal communication

Letters, memos, telephone conversations, et cetera, may be cited in the text but not in the reference list. Cite the initials and surname of the communicator and as exact a date as possible:

Example: (C. D. Brown, personal communication, April 25, 1998)

Works in press

Works accepted for publication, but not yet published, are cited as follows:

Example: Smith (in press) or (Smith in press)

Translated works

Give the author and publication date of the original work followed by the publication date of the English translation:

Example: (Luria, 1965/1969)

Citation of monographs (books)

The entry should contain all data necessary for identification and library search, including place and date of publication, publisher's name and the edition. Note that in earlier editions of the APA Publication Manual (up to 4th edition) book and journal titles were underlined. This denoted italicising. With the common use of word processors, APA format now specifies using *italicised type* rather than underlining.

Courtois, C. A. (1988). *Healing the incest wound*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Or, if a new edition

Sue, D. W., & Sue D. (1990). *Counseling the culturally different: Theory and practice*. (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

An edited book

Parks, C. M., & Stevenson-Hinde, J. (Eds.). (1982). *The place of attachment in human behaviour*. New York: Basic Books.

A specific chapter in a book

Safran, J. D., Muran, C., & Wallner Samstag, L. (1994). Resolving therapeutic alliance ruptures: A task analytic investigation. In A. O. Horvath & L. S. Greenberg (Eds.), *The working alliance: Theory and practice*. (pp. 225-253). New York: Wiley Interscience.

Citation of a journal article

Bachelor, A. (1995). Clients' perception of the therapeutic alliance: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(3), 323-337.

Note that the title of the journal and the volume number are italicised and that capital letters for the beginning of words are used only for the names of journals.

Citation of an unpublished manuscript

If you have an article from someone (say from some previous course you have done), but it has never been published, this can be cited as an unpublished manuscript as follows:

Friesen, J. D. (1991). Substantive relational themes. Unpublished manuscript, Dept of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

If you don't know the date, use (no date).

If the manuscript is a thesis, then the word "manuscript" is replaced with the kind of thesis, eg Unpublished masters thesis or unpublished doctoral thesis.

Citation of web-based articles

As the amount of academic material published on the world wide web increases, the need for a standard method of citing such material is becoming more frequent.

There are two really helpful websites with information on APA formatting of electronic media: <http://lisweb.curtin.edu.au/guides/handouts/apa.html#exelec> from Curtin University library has details of how to cite an electronic reference in the reference list.

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html from Columbia University Press has information on citing electronic material in the text.

The 5th edition of the APA Publication Guide (2001) has full details of citations for electronic media.

Citing of secondary sources

Secondary sources are those where the comments that you wish to use are being reported by someone other than the person who originally wrote them.

In general the conventional practice is that every researcher, student or lecturer should endeavour to read the work of others in the original and not rely on the interpretation of other people. However, it is recognised that students do not always have the resources or the time to do this.

If, after all reasonable effort, it has not been possible to read the original or primary source, then the following procedure should be followed for the citing of material from a secondary source.

In the text, cite the original work together with the secondary source. For example, if Buhler's early study (1933) is to be mentioned and it is to be taken from the secondary source of Piaget (1951), then in the text the following citation should be used:

... Buhler's (1933) study (as cited in Piaget, 1951) suggests that ...

and then in the list of references Piaget should be cited as follows:

Piaget, J. (1951). *The psychology of intelligence*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

This will mean that a reader will be able to locate the Buhler report by finding the book by Piaget.

This style of citation should only be used in the following circumstances:

1. If the study being referred to is out of print and unavailable.
2. If the study is unpublished in the usual academic journals.
3. If after reasonable effort it is not possible to find the original report in the time available.

Policy on Plagiarism or Copying

All students should be familiar with the University's policy on plagiarism, which can be found at: www.latrobe.edu.au/policies/plagiarism.pdf

Copying From Published or Unpublished Source

If any major part of an assignment is copied unacknowledged, from any published (e.g. book, article, **internet**) or unpublished source (e.g. unpublished paper, earlier year student's work, or a thesis, etc.) the assignment will get a mark of zero (0).

Copying From Another Student or Students

If any major part of an assignment is copied from, or shared with, other students in the same course, one mark only will be given to the work. The students are to decide among themselves how the mark is to be divided. Unless, the marker is notified to the contrary, the mark will be divided equally. For example, if three (3) students hand in almost identical pieces of work which are assessed at 69%, only one mark of 69% will be given. That is, the students in question may decide that each person will get 23%; or that one will get 46%, one will get 23% and the third person will get zero; or that one student deserves the 69% and the other two, for their part, deserve nothing; and so on.

NOTE: This policy will prevail UNLESS the published assessment requirements for the subject permit the submission of assignments which have been jointly prepared by two (2) or more students. Second or repeated infringements of this policy will result in the student having a fail grade (N) for the unit in question, recorded against her or his name. It may also mean that any future enrolment in the unit is jeopardised.

Headings

NOTE: THIS MATERIAL APPLIES ONLY TO THE WRITING OF THESES OR PAPERS FOR SUBMISSION TO JOURNALS. IT IS NOT REQUIRED THAT YOU FOLLOW HEADING STYLES IN THE PRESENTATION OF ESSAYS, HOWEVER AN EFFORT TO DO SO WOULD PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO PRACTISE APPROPRIATE USE OF HEADINGS.

Headings indicate the way in which your paper or manuscript is organised. It is important to provide a consistent way of ordering headings so that the reader will understand which headings are of equal and which of subordinate relative-importance.

The number of headings that you require for a particular paper or thesis depends on the complexity of the ideas being presented to the reader. Some papers/theses might function perfectly well if only two levels of heading are used. Others, with more complex levels of ideas, might require 5 levels. This document, for example, required 4 levels of heading.

APA Requirements

The APA Publication Manual provides a maximum of five levels of heading, as follows:

- CENTRED UPPERCASE HEADING (level 5)
- Centred Uppercase and Lowercase Heading (level 1)
- Centred, Italicised, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading* (level 2)
- Flush Left, Italicised, Uppercase and Lowercase Side Heading* (level 3)
- Indented, italicised, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a full-stop* (level 4)

The APA guide identifies specific combinations of headings depending on the number needed for a particular paper or thesis.

1. If you need only one level of heading, you use the Level One Heading (Centred uppercase and lower case heading).
2. If you need two levels of heading you use a Level 1 heading and a Level 3 heading. For example:

Method (Level 1)

Procedure (Level 3).

3. If you need three levels of heading you use a level 1, 3 and 4 combination of headings. For example:

Method (Level 1)

Apparatus and Procedure (Level 3).

Pretraining period (Level 4)

4. If you need four levels of heading you use a level 1, 2, 3 and 4 combination of headings. For example:

Experiment 2 (Level 1)

Method (Level 2)

Stimulus Materials (Level 3).

Auditory stimuli. (Level 4)

5. If you need all 5 levels it could look like this:

EXPERIMENT 1: AN INTERVIEW VALIDATION STUDY

External Validation

Method

Participants.

Sleep deprived group

The first few sentences of a paper or chapter are understood to be an introduction, so it is not necessary to use the word “introduction” as a heading. The first heading is presented as the first, substantive category of information presented in the paper.

A practical example of a three-level heading-set follows:

Are Client-Centred/Experiential Therapies Effective?

(The title is centred with upper and lower case letters)

Abstract

Method

Sample.

Procedure

Measurement of Study Characteristics.

Table 1

Meta-analysis of pre-post change.

Results

Overall Effects.

Table 2

Correlates of Effect Size.

Table 3

Table 4

Table 5

Focused Comparisons Between Experiential and Cognitive-behavioural Treatments.

Table 6

Discussion

Acknowledgment: This guide is based on an undated guide to essay writing for psychology units prepared for (the then) Swinburne Institute of Technology.

References

Guide to research report and essay writing for Psychology units. (no date). Melbourne, Australia: Swinburne Institute of Technology.

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.). (2001). Easton, MD: American Psychological Association.