Postgraduate Study by Coursework: A Survival Guide

Hitting the Ground Running – Ouch!

Part of the appeal of studying for a postgraduate qualification by coursework is that the courses are short: you can finish quickly and get on with the rest of your life. But if you haven't come straight from a bachelor's degree in Australia, that short time frame can add to the challenge. You don't have much time to get used to the requirements of postgrad study before your first assignment is due, or to consolidate your competence in written academic English, if it is not your first language. We know how hard this transition can be, so we have put together this guide. It will explain some of the

- purposes and expectations you are likely to encounter
- ways of using other people's ideas in your own writing
- common structures of academic texts
- common difficulties with language and how to deal with them (whether English is your first or an additional language)

It will also tell you about other sources of help at the uni, in the library, and online, and offer resources for specific purposes:

- for organising your individual study and/or group projects
- for giving oral presentations
- for making posters, PPT, and Prezis
- for tackling particular kinds of assignments such as annotated bibliographies, reviews, or literature reviews

What are we doing here?

Everybody has their own reasons for embarking on a uni course. But whatever your personal reasons are, you are now joining a group of scholars that share a wider purpose. Their efforts are directed at making knowledge in their field, which is much larger than the uni department that you now belong to. This field is a vast international community of people who share interests and practices, and who communicate ideas and information via publications in books, reports, and journal articles. Your reading will take you into that conversation in print, and your writing should be framed as a contribution to it. Even if your lecturer is the only person who will read that writing, you are being trained as a member of the scholarly/professional community, sharing its purposes.

Your course will introduce you to the state of knowledge in your field, and to the questions that its members are currently exploring and arguing over. You will need to be alert to

- what those questions are
- why people agree or disagree about the answers to them
- what perspectives or approaches you find helpful, and why
- what problems or limitations you find in the approaches you encounter.

Many of your assignments will focus on one or more of these points.

You will also need to pay attention to the conventions that have developed in your field for writing within this conversation. In each field, there are certain kinds of texts that are commonly written, each with a characteristic structure that is suited to its purpose. You can read these texts more efficiently, and write them more effectively, if you are aware of the way they are usually structured. ("Usually", because not every text will conform to the usual patterns; but many will.) Finally, each field has conventional formats for recording what sources (= "references") you have used in your research, and you are expected to use the format specified for "referencing" in each of your subjects.

It can feel tedious to learn a whole new set of conventions, when you already have ways of presenting ideas and information that were used in your previous work or study context. But every context has its own culture, with its own particular values and practices for managing its work. Maybe it will help to think of yourself as a traveller in an unfamiliar place, where you have to learn the money and the transport system and appropriate public behaviour in a hurry! It's not necessarily better than what you're used to, and over time, you may be able to influence how things are done. But the first thing is to get your head around what people in that culture do, how they do it, and why they do it that way.

Example: **How is postgrad coursework different from professional development?**

How is postgrad coursework different from professional development?
While each course is different, and so is each workplace, it may help to be aware of some likely differences between your previous experience and the university course you are embarking on. If you have done an undergraduate degree at uni, you'll find that a postgraduate coursework degree is more vocationally-oriented, with more practical experience and real-world problem-solving. However, you probably expected this and chose the course for this reason. What may be less expected, if you have come from a workplace, are some of the ways that uni courses differ from the professional development offered to employees on occasion. In many PD courses, the time that is set aside for the course is the time you can expect it to take; and the materials you will use are all there ready for you. At uni, however, the time and materials are the tip of the iceberg, and the rest of that iceberg is your responsibility. You may have to spend two, three, or four times as long in independent study as you spend at uni, and you will have to do your own research beyond the resources provided in the course. Similarly, the aims of a uni course are more ambitious than with most PD. It's not done when it's done, because the aim is to learn about approaches you will continue to develop throughout your career; and to develop a critical perspective to guide your professional judgements about thinking and practice as you go on.

PD for the workplace	PG by coursework
Limited aims to be achieved during the course	Introduction to approaches, to be developed beyond the course
Work done mainly during session	Work done mainly in learner's own time
Most materials supplied	Many materials to be found by learner
Practical emphasis	Theoretical as well as practical
Develop technical skills	Develop technical skills
Acquire knowledge	Develop a critical perspective on knowledge acquired
Learn how to get answers	Learn how to frame problems
Now that's over with…..	No closure!

Purposes of assignments

If you think of your own studies as part of that wider project of making knowledge within your field, how does that help you to approach your assignments? You'll find that many assignments are focussed on the relationship between theory and practice, and that your job is to assess

- how the theory informs your practice as a member of your field,
- and how that practice, in turn, reflects back upon the theory.

What is theory?

Theory is the way that scholars try to make sense of the great variety of experience in their field. They look for patterns from which they can derive generalisations about how and why things happen in the ways that they do. These generalisations are intended to help us understand what we see in practice, and mostly, they do help. However, there may be aspects of practice that are not satisfactorily explained by a theory we're working with. So, although theory and practice work together, they are also, always, potentially in tension with each other. When the theory seems to be inadequate, then scholars ask what might be needed to improve the theory so that it leads to better understanding, and in turn, to better practice? Some of your readings are likely to explore such problems, and you may be asked to evaluate competing ideas that you find there.

What does it mean, then, when you are asked to reflect critically on a theory? It doesn't mean that you have to find fault with it; rather, you need to ask yourself how the theory helps you to understand what you are looking at, and/or what the theory helps you to do. At the same time, you should ask yourself whether there are limits to its usefulness, and if so, why. Your course is designed to help you operate competently in your field of practice, but not just by following the manual. You need to know why particular approaches are recommended, and what problems remain unresolved, and why. Thus, you can approach your assignments more effectively if you recognise that many are designed to raise your awareness of that unstable relationship between theory and practice, with each continually reflecting on and revising the other.

Examples

If we look at some of the assignments students are given at this level, we can see how they are focussed at this interface between theory and practice. (Theory may appear in various forms: as "theory", or as an "approach", or as "the literature", which means the body of scholarly writing on whatever the topic is.)

Foundations of art therapy:

Art therapists approach their practice from various theoretical standpoints, for example, a psychodynamic, gestalt or cognitive-behavioural orientation. Each of these theoretical approaches has differing assumptions or emphases about such things as: how we develop knowledge (or epistemology), the place of art in our lives, how personal change takes place and the structure of the psyche.

In this paper you are asked to focus on two approaches to art therapy which hold some interest for you and to **compare and contrast** these in light of:

(i) how the ideas of each art therapy approach developed historically,
(ii) their key theoretical underpinnings (eg in a psychoanalytic approach the structure of the personality and the role of the unconscious is one defining element),
(iii) an example of how this approach may be used in an art therapy session
(iv) issues you think may arise when applying each art therapy approach within a cross cultural context and,
(v) what attracted you to these two approaches in particular

Maternal and Child Health: Introduction to Practice

Promoting child development is a major component of maternal and child health nursing practice. Using relevant literature to support your work, discuss the role of the maternal and child health nurse in promoting optimal development of children.

Intercultural Communication and Education (EDU5CCU)

Task 3: Essay - "Identity, culture and communication are complex issues. Discuss in relation to theory and the notion of intercultural competence." (2000 words)

Community Development

Community development is a neo-liberal ideology that redirects attention away from fair distribution of resources. Discuss.

"Discuss" may just mean "explain", or more often, it may (as in the last example) mean something like "Here is a view that could be held about an issue explored in this course. Explain

- What it means
- Why it is held (what is it based on?)
- What has been said about it in the scholarly literature
- In what ways/to what extent is it true of a particular example(s) you focus on in your assignment
- What other view(s) might make better sense in connection with the example(s) you focus on?"

You might wonder why, if that's what it means, the assignment doesn't just say so! But at least, now you have some questions to guide you in your research and writing.

Not only does it help to make sense of your assignments if you're aware of the underlying purpose of making knowledge in your discipline. It also makes sense of the way that sources are used in both your reading and your writing, and it makes sense of the ways that texts are structured – both the texts you read, and the ones you write. We'll look now at each of these areas in turn.

Using other people's ideas in your own writing

For most assignments, you are expected to make use of the "literature"; and in this context, that doesn't mean fiction, it means scholarly publications on the topic you are exploring. You will usually

be assigned readings to do each week, often with lists of "further reading" to do if you have time. You are also expected, often, to find more readings for yourself, developing your research skills and your ability to judge what sources are most relevant and reliable for your purposes. It's in all these sources that you find the information, the views, the questions and debates that make up the published conversation around your topic. By considering these sources, and responding to what you find there, you are in a position to join this conversation. In marking your work, your lecturer will consider how far you have engaged with the recommended reading and, if applicable, how well you have succeeded in bringing other appropriate sources into your discussion.

How do you find suitable reading?

Usually, your subject lecturer will provide lists of "essential" and "further" readings, which you should consider central to your assignment, and use as a starting point if the assignment requires you to find more sources for yourself. You can go to the Library's website to train yourself in finding and evaluating sources both in print and online at the "Libskills" page: http://latrobe.libguides.com/finding-information . This includes a section on how to judge the relevance and reliability of sources that you find for yourself, at http://latrobe.libguides.com/finding-information .

One important point to bear in mind is that, in addition to catalogue and database searches, you can find very useful readings by noticing what sources are referred to in the readings your subject has recommended. If you follow references from one reading to another, you can be confident that they share a relevance because they are all in the same "conversation". Have a look at this Example to see how this works.

Example:
In a Master's level subject called Community Planning, students read an article about a community development project in the rural area of Hertzog in South Africa (Nel, E., Binns, T., and Motteux, N. (2001). Community-based development, non-governmental organizations and social capital in post-apartheid South Africa. *Geografiska Annaler Series B: Human Geography, 83*(1), 3-13). The article begins, as most do, by sketching in the context of previously published discussion around the topic this article explores – in this case, issues in community development in poorer regions. As you read this introductory paragraph, notice how the authors reference these other sources.

> Introduction
> Developing countries are frequently confronted with serious internal and externally imposed constraints on the ability of governments to provide meaningful support for their populations at the grass-roots level. In consequence, from both theoretical and applied perspectives there is now wide-spread support for the notion of 'bottom-up' development which is variously referred to as 'self-reliance', 'endogenous development' and 'local economic development' (LED) (Stohr, 1981; Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Stock, 1995). From a policy perspective, the concept of community-driven economic development has been endorsed by bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Stock, 1995). However, in reality, it would be unrealistic to anticipate that a multitude of community-based economic development endeavours can emerge spontaneously and sustain themselves indefinitely. Such factors as shortages of local capacity and resources, poor understanding of the broader economic environment and the frequently limited life-span of projects all play a part in ensuring that, other than for isolated success stories such as Machakos in Kenya (Tiffen et al., 1994), community self-reliance initiatives are "unlikely to achieve more than

small sporadic victories for the disadvantaged majority" (Stock, 1995, p. 363). In most cases, as Burkey (1993) notes, there is a very defined role and place for limited external guidance and support: "Self-reliant participatory development processes normally require an external catalyst to facilitate the start of the process and to support the growth of the process in its early phases" (Burkey, 1993, p. 73). Within this context, the delicate balance between ensuring local control and involving limited, yet appropriate, external support and guidance needs to be carefully mediated. It is suggested that two of the key factors impinging on the success of such a scenario will be the role of local social capital (Buckland, 1998; Fine, 1999) and the appropriateness of external support, which in many cases in now provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in community development initiatives (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). In the absence of these inputs, it might be suggested that prospects for the widespread emergence of self-initiated, community-based projects will be limited and, where they do emerge, their long-term prognosis could be doubtful.

As you saw, the other sources to which these authors refer are given in brackets usually located at the end of the sentence that refers to one or more publications elsewhere. For each source, we are given just the author(s) and year of publication, and if the sentence quotes directly from the source, we are also told which page was quoted from. At the end of the article, in a list of references, we would find the rest of the information needed to track down each publication. (For example, the full reference for Stock (1995) is Stock, R. (1995): *Africa South of the Sahara: A Geographical Interpretation*. Guilford Press, New York.)

Now, how could you use this paragraph to find more reading? Which source(s) would you look for:
- If you wanted to know more about the concept of 'bottom-up' development?
- If you wanted to know what approach to community development is favoured by policy-makers?
- If you wanted to learn about a successful development project other than the one discussed in this article?
- If you wanted to explore issues involved in the role of NGOs?

How can you use the sources in constructing your own answer?

The sources themselves don't usually provide the answer to your question. You'll have to decide how the sources relate to each other, to the question you started with, and to your own ideas. You should also work out how the question you are addressing relates to the larger questions or concepts of the subject in which this assignment is set. When you have all that clear in your mind, you will be able to write an introduction that makes it clear to your reader as well. See the box for some possible ways this might look, depending on your question and your readings:

Try to structure your discussion as a contribution to a wider conversation that the subject has been introducing you to. The way you introduce your essay depends on the nature of the question and the sources; but some common possibilities are shown below:	
• Topic • Question	This essay focusses on _____ and asks/ considers/ explores how/why/whether) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____. It has been suggested (refs) that _____ _____ __ __ __

• Context of a common view on the topic • How your essay relates to this view • Alternative sentences, depending on what that relationship is • Signposting how your discussion will proceed	_____ _____. I / this essay will show/suggest/ argue that _____ __ _____ _____ ___ _____ _____ . *[Alternatives might include:* • *We see this in _____* • *While there are good reasons for this view, there are also problems: _____* • *An examination of _____, however, does not support this view.* ▪ *While this view is illuminating in some ways, I will suggest that we need also to consider _____ _ .]* I/it will look at/ draw on (whatever sources) / OR First I/it will _____and then _____ ___ __ (what you'll discuss in what order).

When you use sources in your writing, what does this look like?

Because your assignments ask you to use other writers' ideas and information in constructing your own discussion, you need to pay attention to how this is done in academic writing. When do you quote the words of a source, and when do you discuss its content in your own words? How do you show your reader where this material can be found? How do you show your reader where you are putting forward your own ideas? What do you do if you read similar ideas in more than one source? What do you do if you didn't read the original source but you found a discussion of that in some other source? Should you quote long passages, and if not, how can you condense the material you want to quote? What if the material you quote doesn't fit smoothly into your own sentence? You will have to deal with all these challenges, so it's a good idea to take those questions with you to your reading, and see how other scholars do it. Here, we can show you briefly what to do, and refer you to further guidance in the library.

To quote, or to use your own words?

Generally, your lecturers would prefer you to discuss the ideas from your reading in your own words, for various reasons.
- You show that you understand the ideas
- You can show how they relate to each other
- You can express ideas more briefly by summarising what you read.

Sometimes, though, there is a good reason to show your reader the original words from the source. The original wording may convey an attitude, or emotion, or a way of thinking that would not come through so clearly if you rephrased it. This is particularly likely when you are discussing "primary sources", that is, things said or written by people who were involved in the events you are looking at. By quoting, you share with your reader the immediate experience of hearing from participants in these events. It is also necessary to quote directly when you want to comment on the way that something was expressed by its author. When you are writing about creative works, this happens often, because the words of the novel, play, poem, or film constitute the evidence for points that you are making. It may also happen when you are discussing the particular way that a scholar uses terms in putting forward some idea.

So, quote if there's a good reason to do so, and otherwise, use your own words.

How do you show your reader where this material can be found?

In both cases, whether you quote directly or use your own words, you need to show your reader where you read the ideas you are discussing. By referencing, you fulfil a responsibility to both your sources and your readers. You give credit to the authors of the sources you read, for the ideas and information that you found there. An author's writing is his/her "intellectual property": it belongs to that author, as it is the way that authors build their professional reputation. For this reason, unis take the obligation to reference sources very seriously, and if you neglect it you can be penalised for "plagiarism" – that is, reproducing somebody else's ideas or words without a reference. It's important to be aware of this requirement, and you can read about it in detail at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/academic-integrity/referencing-help .

Most important, though, is that referencing keeps the scholarly conversation open as well as honest. You tell readers where they can go to look at the original sources you used, so they can decide whether they would have understood them in the way that you did; and if they want to know more about a source than they found in your essay, they can follow it up for themselves. (Sometimes international students are uncomfortable about Australian referencing practices, feeling that they may seem disrespectful of their readers. It may be that most educated people in your home country were familiar with the common sources of knowledge, and would not need to be reminded of where you learned your facts and ideas. It might even seem a little impolite to remind them, in this situation. But you will find that, in Australia, it is considered both polite and essential to do so.)

You do this by putting a reference in the sentence where you discuss a reading (as you saw in the extract from Nels, Binns, & Motteux , 2001, above), and by listing that reference again in the bibliography/reference list at the end of your assignment. If you are quoting, you put quotation marks around all the words that you have copied from the source, and a reference after them; if you are using your own words, you don't use quotation marks but you put a reference at the end of your sentence just the same.

Different disciplines require different styles of referencing. In all of these, references must be given in the body of the assignment and again in a list at the end. However, styles differ

- in the items of information that must be included (author, title, publisher, date, etc)
- in the order of those items
- in the punctuation that must be used between them
- and in the abbreviations that can be used.

Another difference is that some disciplines prefer to give full details of each publication in footnotes at the bottom (= "foot") of the page, with each note matching a number in the text, while others prefer a short note in brackets in the text itself. We don't give detailed instructions for each style here, because the library provides these on its page of "Referencing Style Guides" at http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/help/style-guides.php . You need to find out from your lecturer or your subject LMS which style to use for each particular subject, and go to the library page to see how to use it. (Don't just copy a style used in your readings, because it may not be the one that your subject requires.)

Should you quote long passages, and if not, how can you condense the material you want to quote? And what if the material you quote doesn't fit smoothly into your own sentence?

Try to quote only as much as you need in order to illustrate the point you are making. If that runs to three lines or more, you should "block-indent" the whole quotation in from the margin (press "enter" at the beginning, so that it starts on a separate line; then select the text and use the "increase indent" icon on your toolbar to indent it). When you block-indent like this, remove the quotation marks from around the quotation, because the indentation is the signal to your reader that all of this is quoted. If you have not already noticed such block-indentation in the texts you read, have a look for some examples now. It's good to be confident of how it should look, before you do it in your own work.

Mostly, however, you will be using your own words and integrating short pieces of quotation into your own sentences when you want to share with your reader some phrase that is, in itself, good evidence for the point you are making. For this purpose, select only what you need from the source. You can even shorten a quoted sentence, if it has material that you don't need, as long as you put in dots ("ellipsis") to show where you left something out. If the omitted material comes from just one sentence, leave three dots each time you leave something out ("blah blah blah … blah"). But if you are putting together bits from more than one sentence, leave four dots. That fourth dot is the full stop that you have left out, along with the missing words! However, make sure that whatever remains makes sense, and that it fits smoothly together, ***and*** smoothly into your sentence. If repairs are necessary to make it fit, you can add word(s) or change the form of a word, putting the addition in square brackets.

What would this look like? We can make an example by condensing the first sentence after the heading, and the third sentence of the last paragraph above:

> I advise you to "quote only as much as you need, to illustrate … [your] point …. even shorten[ing] a quoted sentence … as long as you put in dots … where you left something out."

How do you show your reader where you are putting forward your own ideas?

You may be wondering, at this point, whether there is any place in an assignment for your own ideas, and if so, how will your lecturer know that they are yours? This is a reasonable question, because most of your ideas, in any assignment, will be your thoughts about the ideas of others that you have read. This may not seem very original, but after all, the point of studying at uni is to build on, and to challenge, the knowledge you bring with you. This is why you are given so much reading, and expected to discuss it in assignments. What is original about your work is

- the way you relate ideas and information from the sources to the question you have been asked;
- the way you explain the ideas, and your choice of examples and evidence;
- your testing of other people's ideas against evidence, and against the ideas of others;
- your judgement of the strengths and limitations of other people's thinking;
- your ability to ask questions arising out of your encounters with other people's ideas;
- your ability to apply the ideas of others in new contexts; and
- your ability to construct answers of your own.

Using sources in your writing is a bit like weaving: you use threads from various different places (including readings and your own experience), but the new pattern that you weave is your own.

Your lecturers will assume that they are reading your ideas if you have not given a reference to a source. This means that you do not need to preface your ideas with "In my opinion/ I think/ etc." However, when you draw on your own experience, it's wise to make that clear: for example, you might write "In my work at an aged care facility, the issue of restraint arose frequently, and staff were divided on best practice in this situation."

What do you do if you read similar ideas in more than one source?

You can make a reference that includes more than one source, separated by semicolons (;), when different readings discuss ideas in common. We saw several examples of this practice in the extract from Nels, Binns, & Motteux (2001), such as:

> In consequence, from both theoretical and applied perspectives there is now wide-spread support for the notion of 'bottom-up' development which is variously referred to as 'self-reliance', 'endogenous development' and 'local economic development' (LED) (Stohr, 1981; Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Stock, 1995). From a policy perspective, the concept of community-driven economic development has been endorsed by bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Stock, 1995).

This is also possible in footnotes, and again, you separate each reference with a semicolon.

This method of grouping references enables you to show your wide reading on a topic, and your recognition of what concerns or perspectives are shared by various scholars, without having to report on each one separately (which gets repetitive if they all have similar things to say!).

What do you do if you didn't read the original source but you found a discussion of that in some other source?

You name the person who originally said or wrote the thing you want to refer to, but add the reference to where you read it:

> The idea that the Bill of Rights was the "original contract" guaranteeing liberty can be traced back to debate in the House of Commons in 1690 (Grey 1769, cited in Miller 1992, p. 86).

Here, Grey called the Bill of Rights the "original contract", but you didn't read Grey's 1769 publication where he said that. Instead, you read Miller's 1992 publication, which referred to it. Note that in the reference list at the end of the assignment, you would give the full reference to Miller, but you would not give a reference to Grey.

Common structures of academic texts

Most uni courses require a lot of reading, and it's much easier to get what you need out of a text if you know where it's likely to be. This means you need to know a bit about the typical ways that academic texts of various kinds are organised. Probably the most common types you will encounter *in print* are journal articles, books, and reports, and perhaps primary sources. *Web-based materials* come in a greater variety of forms, often with many layers of information that readers can move around by clicking on links. Sometimes material on the web is identical to the print version, but has been put on the web so that more users can access it; many of the journal articles and public documents you read are of this kind. Other materials, however, have been created for presentation online, and are not usually addressed to an academic audience.

How do web-based texts differ from print-based ones? See the box below for a comparison.

Many web-based materials do not have the "linear" structure that is familiar from print resources, which are designed to be read from beginning to end (though you may choose to read only some parts). Because we cannot see the whole text at once, usually web pages provide some guidance as to how the material has been divided and how the parts are related. To help us "navigate" around texts online, there may be
- a list of contents in the middle of the page
- a list down the left-hand or right-hand side of the page
- and/or tabs across the top of the page that may have drop-down menus with the "contents" of a particular section.

When using a web resource, take a few minutes to get a sense of what is included and how it is structured, before you plunge in.

Within the text, as you read, you will come across coloured "hyperlinks" that you can click on to move to someplace where that topic is dealt with in more detail, often in some other source beyond the document you are reading. It's very helpful to have this immediate access to further layers of information. However, it can also distract you from the main text you are reading, and it's possible to get lost! Notice whether you need to close the linked document to return to your original text, or whether you can use a "back" arrow at the top left on your screen.

In this guide, we focus on some characteristic structures of *academic* texts, which are designed for "linear" reading even if a version is also available online as well in print.

Journal articles (/book chapters). Unlike textbooks that aim to introduce you to a field of knowledge, journal articles (and, similarly, chapters by different authors that have been collected in edited books) are not addressed to students but to fellow scholars, and you may find them difficult to read because it's like stepping into the middle of an unfamiliar conversation. However, it is here that you find particular scholars' new (and often contested) ideas. Articles tend to have a characteristic structure of "moves" that serves to share new information, and interpret its meaning and significance for others in the field. If you expect and look for these "moves", you can often get a good sense of a writer's purpose from the start.

If academics want to get something published, they have to convince editors and reviewers that they are making a contribution to the discipline community by adding something to its discussion of a topic

of common interest. This may be new information, or a new perspective on known information, or a challenge to established interpretations in this area. The opening paragraphs of an article commonly do this work, with some combination of the following "moves":

- what topic this article is focussing on;
- the scholarly context, i.e. what has already been said about this topic by other scholars;
- what aspect this article is investigating;
- what question or problem the writer is raising about this;
- what the writer's own idea about it is going to be;
- how they are going to show this.

(Students are sometimes confused by encountering ideas at the start of an article that seem to be in conflict with other ideas that follow after; but if you understand that those early ideas, held by people other than the author of the article, make up the *context* for the author's new suggestion, you will not mistake them for the author's own viewpoint.)

See below for an example of "moves" in an article abstract:

This comes from the first page of an article referred to earlier in this Guide: Nel, E., Binns, T., and Motteux, N. (2001). Community-based development, non-governmental organizations and social capital in post-apartheid South Africa. *Geografiska Annaler Series B: Human Geography, 83*(1), 3-13. Like many articles, it has an "abstract" before the article begins, summarising its purpose and content.

Abstract	"Moves"
Community-based development strategies are gaining in credibility and acceptance in development circles internationally and notably in post-apartheid South Africa.	Context of current practice
In parallel, the concept of social capital and the role of supportive nongovernmental organizations are receiving attention as key catalytic elements in encouraging and assisting community-based initiatives.	Context of current theory
In this paper, a well-documented initiative, the Hertzog Agricultural Co-operative in Eastern Cape province, is re-examined after the passage of several years to assess the impact of	Focus
social capital and the involvement of a particular non-governmental organization in ensuring the sustainability and economic survival of the project.	Question (how does a case reflect on key aspects of theory?)
While both elements have proved critical to the project's life-cycle, particularly in recent years, concerns over possible dependency and project sustainability exist.	Findings

In an abstract, the "moves" are close together because an abstract is brief. In an article, it may take several paragraphs, or even a couple of pages, to reach the writer's main idea (and that is the case in this particular article). When you think you have found it, you can check by going straight to the end of the article, because the main idea is usually restated in the conclusion.

Skimming an article. Then, you can get an overview of how the argument develops by reading just the first sentence of each paragraph in turn. In Australian academic writing, the point of each paragraph is commonly in the first ("topic") sentence, and the rest of the paragraph develops that point with more explanation, evidence, and / or example. (In American writing, the point is often in the last sentence of the paragraph, so you may need to look for it there!) Skimming the article in this way – introduction, conclusion, then topic sentences – takes only a few minutes, and can save you from

making lots of unnecessary notes as people often do just because they're not sure what's going to turn out to be important. Once you have this overview, then read the article more thoroughly.

Books. In the kind of book where different authors have contributed chapters to a collection, each chapter is likely to have the same sort of structure as a journal article (but in addition, look out for an introduction to the book, and/or an introduction to each section, that summarises the various contributions and relates them to each other. This can be *very* helpful to you!).

In the kind of book where the whole thing is written by one (or more) author together, the structure is likely to be similar to an article, but more spread out because a book is on a larger scale. For example, the whole first chapter of the book is likely to do the same job as the opening, introductory paragraphs of an article; the second chapter may provide the scholarly context; and so on.

Research articles. One particular kind of article has a different structure, which you can also read more efficiently if you know what to expect. While all academic articles discuss the meaning of evidence in relation to some question, not all of them present original evidence discovered by the authors themselves. Many do, however, present the results of some original research project (= a "study") the authors have undertaken, and these are often called "research articles". These are likely to have a structure based on the scientific value of objectivity, in which the research is carried out and the findings recorded before the researcher interprets what those findings mean. This probably doesn't really match the research process, because we can't help thinking about what our discoveries might mean all the way through the process of discovering them! However, the format of the research article keeps these things separate, and organises the material into sections that typically have these headings:

"**IMRD**" structure (**I**ntroduction, **M**ethod, **R**esults, **D**iscussion)

Heading	What is in this section
• Abstract	• Summary of article
• Introduction	• What we wanted to find out
• Method	• What we did to find that out
• Results	• What we found out
• Discussion	• What we think it means

Sometimes there is another section, a "Literature review" between the Introduction and the Method section, where the authors discuss what other work has been done before by other scholars, and how their own research relates to that. However, this discussion is often included in the Introduction, without a separate section.

An efficient way to read this kind of article is to read the Introduction, so you know what question the authors set out to answer, and then move straight to the Discussion, where you find out what they think their answer is. Then you can go back and look at the method and results, which may make more sense once you know what they led to. Especially in a "quantitative" study (one that sets out to find numbers/percentages of something), the methods and results sections are likely to have a good deal of information about statistical operations. This has to be there so that scholars can judge how well the study was conducted, but you are unlikely to need to make notes on it, and it's helpful to get an overview of the study before returning to the more technical parts.
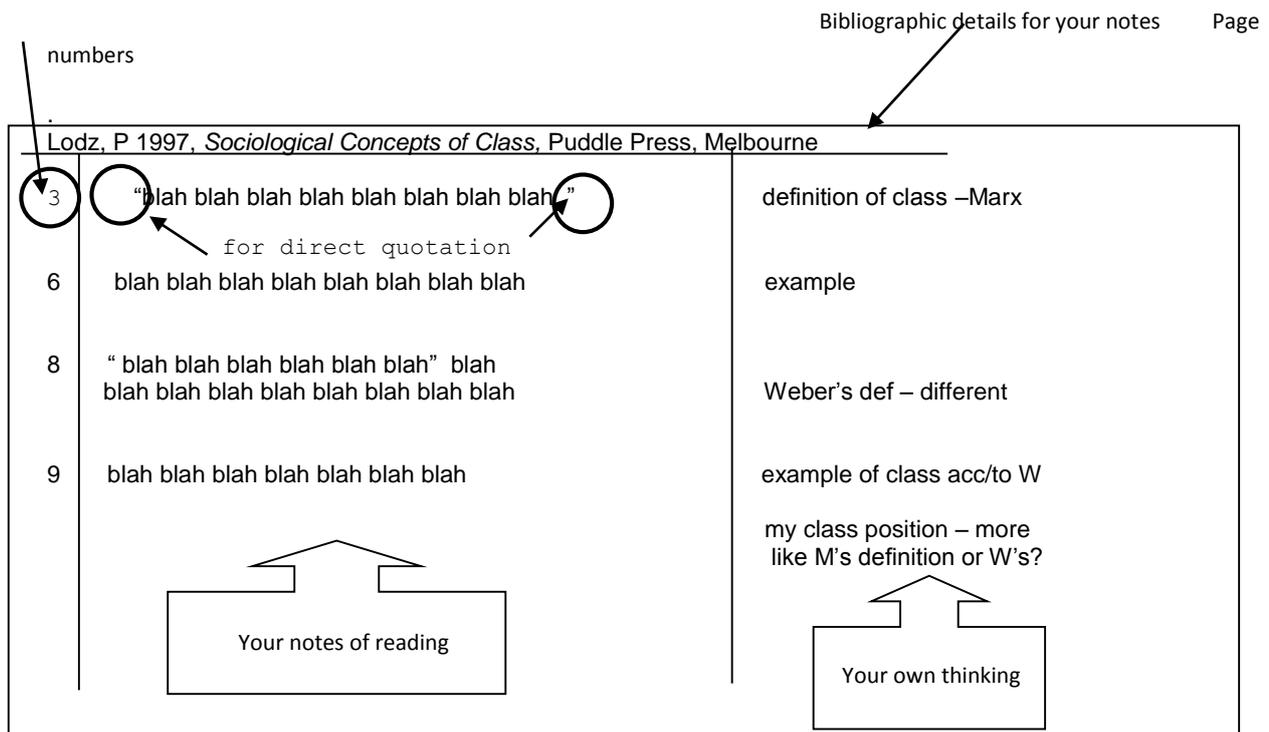
Reports. A report has a different structure, and again, the structure is shaped by the purpose and audience for the text. Usually a report has been "commissioned": that is, some organisation has asked a researcher(s) to focus on some particular problem or question, with the purpose of recommending a course of action. The researchers have been given some "terms of reference", setting out the purpose and scope of what the organisation wants them to do. Usually their work includes a review of the literature relevant to their investigation, and a process of gathering new information on which to base their recommendations. The report they produce begins with an "Executive Summary" or simply "Summary", which sets out briefly what the project was for and what it found out, so this is where your reading must start. Then there is a detailed list of contents, in chapters with numbered sections, so it is easy for you to find the most relevant parts for your own purposes. The body of the report is often followed by one or more Appendices containing the raw information that is discussed in the report, and a list of references is given before or after those appendices.

Many people find reports easier to read than academic books or articles, because they are not designed to test a theory nor to explore all of the complexity and contradictions that scholars are engaged with. Reports are more practically-oriented, and written to be understood by educated but non-specialist readers. Like academic texts, they are in formal, correct English. However, much of the material in reports is presented in point form, which, again, makes it easier to "see" than in the densely-argued paragraphs often found in academic texts. (You may wonder, for this reason, why all writing is not like this! But academic writing is perhaps more suited to the exploration of theoretical complexities at greater depth, and often without resolution. Point form shows how a topic breaks down into parts, but paragraph form is better suited to showing how the parts are related.)

Primary sources, the raw material that researchers go to, may be fiction, letters, diaries, media reports, public or private records of many kinds -- all sorts of things. They weren't written to present any main idea to an academic or professional readership, so you're not looking for a problem, an argument, or conclusions. You'll read with questions that you bring from the subject you're doing, and make notes of anything that helps you to answer those.

How can you take notes efficiently from various kinds of sources?

Different note-taking methods suit different kinds of texts, and serve different purposes. If you are asked to write a close, detailed commentary on a text, you may want to paraphrase and copy bits as you go. Make sure to note the page numbers from the text, as you will need them for your referencing; and if you set up your notes with a column for the notes themselves, and a column for your own thinking (*why did I take this note? How is it useful for my assignment?*), you can review them more easily when you are ready to write.

Bibliographic details for your notes   Page numbers

.

Lodz, P 1997, *Sociological Concepts of Class*, Puddle Press, Melbourne

3	"blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah "	definition of class –Marx
	`for direct quotation`	
6	blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah	example
8	" blah blah blah blah blah blah" blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah	Weber's def – different
9	blah blah blah blah blah blah blah	example of class acc/to W
		my class position – more like M's definition or W's?

Your notes of reading

Your own thinking

But what if you have a lot of articles to read, and you're uncertain of what you are going to find there, or what you may need to use in your assignment? Sometimes people waste a lot of time making copious notes that they will never use. Alternatively, people may read several articles without taking notes, and then have trouble remembering what was in any of them. Very diligent students often cannot tell when they have read enough and should start to write something! The format below is useful for recording very briefly, as you finish each article, what it was about and how it relates to your assignment and to other things you have read. At the same time, you can note what *kinds* of evidence it presents (not the details), and page numbers you can go back to if you decide to use that material.

Bibliographic details: (Author, date, title, publisher [of book] city of publication]; or Author, date, article title, journal title, volume, pages [of article])		
This reading asks:		
The answer it gives is that:		
Reason:	Evidence:	page
Reason:	Evidence:	p
Reason:	Evidence:	p
Reason:	Evidence:	p
Helps me understand:		
Problems/limitations?		
Connections with other readings?		

Pattern notes

Some people find it helpful to make "pattern notes" or "mind maps" as visual reminders of how the ideas in a reading are related (for examples, go to James Cook University's page, http://latrobe.libguides.com/writing/writing-at-university).This can also be a great way to plan your own writing, especially if you are not yet ready to decide what order things should go in. You can work out the relationships of ideas/information within sub-topics first, and then decide how to arrange those clusters in your draft.
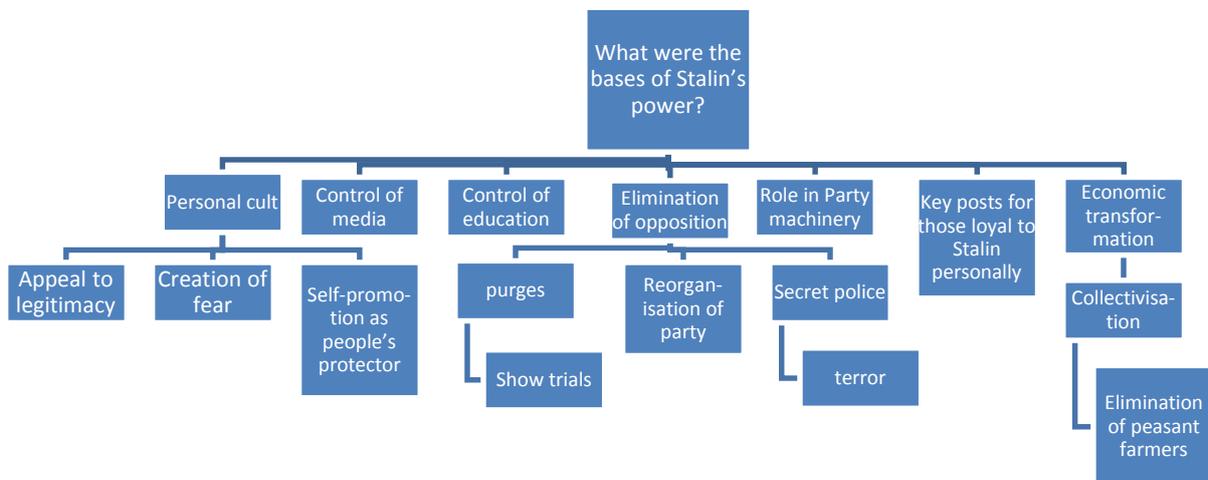
Grid notes

Another method of note-taking can be particularly helpful in enabling you to do your thinking as you go, so that you are well on the way to producing a draft by the time you have made your notes. This method is suitable for most questions that involve some sort of comparison (and many do, even if they don't have "compare" or "contrast" in their instructions. For example, you might be tracing the development of something over time – then the comparison would be between an earlier and a later stage of that development.)

Here is a general template, and below, an example of a more elaborated version.

Thing One		Thing Two		
Points of comparison	Evidence	Points of comparison	Evidence	So what?

EXAMPLE

"How has life changed for the people of Upper Rivers since the 1950s?"

This kind of question, looking at how something has developed over time, is common in many subjects, and lends itself to a "what; how; why; with what effect?" format for analysis. The writer has started by dividing her material into 4 broad aspects: economic life, gender relations, family structure, and religion. Then, for each of these, she has compared how it was in the 1950s with how it is now, according to the sources she has read.

Aspect	What?	How?	Why?	With what effect?
Economic life	1950s	Hunter-gatherer economy	Land unproductive for farming, no private ownership of land	Adequate, shared food resources and simple material life
	now	Labouring in mine	Investment by multi-national mining company	Government sold land to mine. Locals lost rights to use land; dependent on selling labour; poor diet
Gender relations	1950s	Men hunted Women gathered	Men's greater physical strength; gathering could be combined with child-rearing	Gender roles different but both valued
	now	Men sell their labour; women are unemployed	Where physical strength is essential, women are less productive	Men have sole economic power in family
Family structure	1950s	Extended family lived in large group	Food supply adequate & no known alternative	Resources shared
	now	Nuclear families of middle-aged adults & young children	Poverty leads to decreased support for elders & young adults	Youth move to city to join cash economy
Religion	1950s	Worshipped spirits of land and animal life	Spirituality integrated with maintenance of food sources	Authority of elders derived from experience of living off the land
	now	Christian	Missionaries offer education to converts	Traditions no longer respected, authority shifts to Church
So what? Conclusion: Upper Rivers is more economically developed now than in the 1950s. However, development has entailed a heavy cost to the local people in terms of interdependence and equality between genders and between generations.				

Structuring your own writing

After the content, probably the most important aspect of your writing is the way you organise it. To be successful, the writing must be perceived as coherent: that is, readers must think the writing holds together and makes sense. We say that it "must be perceived" this way, because there is no single standard of coherence! You achieve coherence by organising your material in a way that your readers expect, and that varies with the type of text (essay? report? something else?) and the educational culture within which you are writing.

- Are you expected to provide lots of background and current information about your topic, and let your reader draw their own conclusions about how that answers your question? Or should you spell out, early and explicitly, what your reader ought to conclude from the information you are going to present?
- Are you meant to display vast knowledge about your topic, or present only what is needed to address a limited question?
- Should you enrich your reader's experience by using poetic language, or be direct and concise in your style?

There is no universal answer to these questions, but different educational cultures have strong preferences for one option or another! For each of the choices above, Australian academic readers are likely to prefer the second and may even judge the first incompetent. Australian academic readers expect the things they read to be structured so that **points are made first, and are then developed further**. You have seen how this works in an abstract or in the summary at the start of a report. In an essay, it means that the first, "introductory", paragraph should make the overall point the essay will develop. Then, in each "body" paragraph, the first ("topic") sentence should make the point of the paragraph, and then supporting sentences explain that point and illustrate it with evidence. The whole essay is closely focussed on the question and its context, and only material that is relevant to that is welcomed. And, as the essay unfolds, there are connecting words and phrases that show the reader how ideas relate to each other and to the main, organising idea of the essay. (See the diagram below.)

Structure a piece of academic writing	To answer these questions in a reader's mind
Introduction	
Topic ←	What's this about?
Context ←	What larger discussion does it relate to?
Question/problem ←	What is this writer asking?
Thesis ←	What does s/he think is the answer?
Signposting ←	How is s/he going to show it to me?
Point I ←	Why does s/he think this?
(explanation) ←	(what does this mean?)
Evidence/example ←	Based on what?
With reference(s) ←	Where did s/he learn this?
Point II (and so on) ←	(same questions again)
Conclusion ←	So what? How does all this relate to what s/he asked at the beginning?

This "deductive" structure is considered appropriate in Anglo-western academic culture, where it reflects the idea that each individual plays a role in the construction of knowledge and must be explicit and assertive in doing so. Meaning is the writer's responsibility, not the reader's. In some other academic cultures, where readers take more responsibility for deciding what the text conveys, people are made uncomfortable by a way of writing that insists upon its conclusions from the start. It seems to them more respectful to approach that conclusion indirectly, giving lots of background and allowing readers to do more of the thinking for themselves (as we do, for example, in detective stories). If you are used to that "inductive" structure, and the cultural values underpinning it, you need to know that Australian tutors will not think it disrespectful if you tell them what you want them to think right from the start. They will find it helpful, and feel confident that you know where you are going and will take them there!

When you have written a draft, you can check how coherent it is by making a new document and pasting into it;

- Your introductory paragraph
- The topic sentence of each paragraph after that
- Your concluding paragraph

That will give you a very short version of your whole essay. If the structure doesn't seem coherent, be ready to revise it. Most pieces of writing have to go through several drafts before they are good enough

to submit. You can feel free to make whatever mess you need to, in your first draft, because it's only for you, to get your ideas out where you can see them. Luckily, there is a good routine for revision that will help you to re-arrange them so that your reader can see them too!

Revising for structure: Steps in brief

Print out your assignment; get ready to literally cut and paste!
Label each paragraph in your draft with a few words in the margin, saying what it deals with. In this way, you can

- Make an outline of your whole draft
- See if you've dealt with any point in more than one place. If so, bring that material together, and weed out any repetition.
- See if any paragraph doesn't make any relevant point. If there *is* a point to be made, make it in the topic (first) sentence; if not, discard that material.
- See if any paragraph makes *more* than one point. If so, separate the material into two (or more) paragraphs, and write a topic sentence for each.
- See if the material flows logically; if not, try rearranging it till it does.
- See if you've shown connections between ideas, transitions from one section to the next. Write any missing links.
- Once you've got all that under control, you can go back to the beginning of your draft and check that the first paragraph introduces what you have now produced!

Language of coherence.

As you saw in that routine for revising, coherence has two aspects – arranging the text according to the relationships between your points, and showing your reader how you've arranged it. It's important to signpost, early in the text, how it is going to unfold. And, as it goes on, you should make the connections between ideas explicit as you move from one part of a paragraph to another, and as you move from one paragraph to the next. It's possible to overdo this, if the connection is so obvious that it doesn't need to be expressed. Often, however, a word or a phrase is needed to "glue" ideas together: *however, on the other hand, furthermore, in fact, for example, in the event*. (For a collection of useful words and phrases, go to http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/). Sometimes this may take a whole sentence, or, in a long and complex section, even a short paragraph. See below for an example of how this can work.

Example

The following are just the topic sentences from a series of paragraphs in A.D. Smith's book *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), in which he sets out "the elements of national identity". You can see how, with each new paragraph, Smith recalls the point of the previous paragraph (or paragraphs) and then adds something new, which he is going to discuss next. Each point is given a different colour below, to help you trace the development of this structure. At the same time, another use of language to signpost the structure of the text is highlighted in pink: *first, second, concurrent with, finally.*

…what we mean by "national" identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous.

This is, of course, a peculiarly Western conception of the nation.

It is worth spelling out this Western or "civic" model of the nation in more detail. It is, in the first place, a predominantly spatial or territorial conception.

A second element is the idea of a *patria*, a community of laws and institutions with a single political will.

Concurrent with the growth of a sense of legal and political community we may trace a sense of legal equality among the members of that community.

Finally, the legal equality of members of a political community in its demarcated homeland was felt to presuppose a measure of common values and traditions among the population, or at any rate its "core" community.

Historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of its members, and common civic culture and ideology; these are the components of the standard, Western model of the nation.

Structuring a "Minor Thesis"

In some courses, you are asked to write a minor thesis, which is a longer text comprising several chapters. This gives you scope to explore a topic in more depth and detail, and many students enjoy the freedom of a longer word limit. At the same time, you need to take care to keep this longer text coherent in the same ways that you have used in shorter assignments:

1. Mechanics of coherence at all levels:

    - Labelling – contents, titles and headings
    - Whole text – make main point in introduction
    - Each section(chapter) – make main point at beginning
    - Each paragraph – make main point in first sentence ("topic sentence")

2. Language of coherence – guide your reader through the text by "signposting": forecasting, linking, making transitions, recapping, and drawing conclusions. Some *language choices you may find useful are in the table below, and more can be found at* http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/

Function	Language
Introducing an idea	It is argued/ I argue that/ It is suggested/ I suggest It is arguable that/ It seems that/ It may be that This essay will ask/ argue/ explore/ analyse/ examine/ look at … the arguments/ evidence/ development of…
Building up an idea (explaining, giving examples, adding, bringing in another aspect):	For example/ To illustrate/ …such as…/ In other words/ In addition/ Another/ It is relevant to add/ It should be noted/ In this connection/ Similarly/ likewise/ Thus/ Moreover/furthermore,
Chronology (time order)	First/ Secondly/ After that/ Then/ Next,
Similarity	Similarly/ Likewise
Contrast	In contrast/ Conversely/ On the other hand/ While/ Although/ However/ Nevertheless/ Nonetheless/ Despite/in spite of/ Notwithstanding/ Whereas,
Cause & effect	With this in mind/ In view of this/ As a result/ Therefore/ Consequently,
Summary (not necessarily at the end of the essay; perhaps also between stages of the argument)	In conclusion/ To sum up/ In summary/ In short / In brief,
Evaluating	On balance / overall,

What the Parts of a Thesis Tell the Reader

In scientific disciplines, a thesis may follow the "IMRD" structure described for research articles (above), with Introduction; Method; Results; and Discussion. In humanities and social sciences, the thesis has no rigid boundaries between the literature, the facts, and the interpretation, but its structure covers roughly the same ground. In either case, your thesis needs to answer these questions in your examiner's mind:

- What current disciplinary/ professional conversation does your thesis relate to?
- How does it relate to that conversation?
- What problem/question does it address?
- How does it go about this?
- What do your findings suggest?
- What does this imply for practice in this field?

Managing a thesis

The University Library offers a range of training sessions on using the software program "Endnote" for managing notes and references, and on ways of "managing a long document". To find out what is on offer just now, go to http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/training/ and click on "by campus" or "by training session".

<u>Writing style</u>

Writing for humanities and social science subjects is ideally clear and straightforward. You may find yourself reading some sources that don't live up to that ideal, but you'll appreciate the ones that do, and your lecturers feel the same about your writing! Under the influence of densely theoretical readings, students at this level sometimes adopt obscure vocabulary or overlong, elaborate sentence structure, but it isn't necessary and it can interfere with meaning. At the same time, your writing should be formal rather than conversational. That is, we avoid colloquial expressions and contractions (conversational forms like *isn't, it's, or would've* instead of the "written" forms *is not, it is, or would have*). We write sentences that are grammatically complete and use punctuation in conventional ways (explained below). It's worth making an effort, in your final draft, to submit writing that is precise (not vague), concise (not long-winded), formal, clear and correct.

Common difficulties with language and how to deal with them

Even at uni, some types of grammar and expression errors are quite common. Here we deal with the most frequent ones, and hope that you will look closely at your writing to see whether any of these are lurking there. It can be distracting to worry about grammar when you're trying to get your ideas down in your first draft. Before you hand in your final draft, however, you are wise to proofread it rigorously, as correcting your errors can make a substantial difference to your marks.

In order to understand simple grammar errors, you need to know a little bit about basic sentence structure.

What is a sentence?

In order for a sentence to be complete it must usually contain a **subject** and a **verb**. A sentence must also convey a complete thought. For example, *'A student is.'* contains a subject and a verb but doesn't express a complete thought. It doesn't convey any information and is thus not a complete sentence.

The subject says who or what does the action e.g. 'who decides?'

The verb is the 'doing word' and describes an action or state. For example,

The voters	decide.
(subject)	*(verb)*

A simple sentence can also have other elements:

An object answers the question 'what' after the verb e.g. 'decide what?' For example,

The voters	decide	the result.
(subject)	*(verb)*	*(object)*

<table>
<tr><td>

A complement says what something is/was etc. For example,

The students	were	confused.
(subject)	*(verb)*	*(complement)*

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

An adverbial tells us *how, when, where*, or *why*. For example,

In most places**,**	the voters	filled out	their ballots	carefully.
(adverbial – where)	*(subject)*	*(verb)*	*(object)*	*(adverbial - how)*

Notice that we use a comma when the adverbial element comes before the subject.

</td></tr>
</table>

Some of the most common grammar errors

1. Comma splice error

(a "splice" is a joining of 2 separate things, like ropes or sections of film)

A comma splice error occurs when two complete sentences are joined together by a comma. For example:

✖ *Thugs intimidated voters, the election failed.*

Comma splice errors are quite common, particularly for native speakers of English. They often result from the desire to avoid writing short sentences. Often, too, people write these sentences because they know that a sentence must contain a complete thought, and if their idea isn't finished, they keep going until it is! However, it can take several sentences – indeed, a whole essay – to discuss an idea fully. A "complete thought" is not everything you have to say, but enough to make sense.

A comma splice error can be fixed in different ways, depending on the length of the sentences and the way their contents are related.

- ▪ If the two sentences are short, you can join them with a conjunction ("joining word") such as "and", "so", or "but"', that expresses the relationship between the two ideas:

✔ *Thugs intimidated voters, so the election failed.*

- ▪ An alternative is the semicolon, which is useful when there is no word that expresses the relationship between ideas:

Thugs intimidated voters; this occurred at many polling stations.

- ▪ You can use a colon if the relationship is general: specific – that is, the first part says something general, and the second part says something more specific about that:

✔ *Thugs intimidated voters: they beat them up or threatened their families with violence.*

The "something more specific" could be an explanation; more details; or an example. This is why writers often use a colon to add a quotation that explains or exemplifies a point they have made:

Thugs intimidated voters: "We will know if you have tried to vote and we will make you sorry", villagers were told in one constituency (Muller, 2003, p. 46).

- If the two sentences are already rather long, it is better to put a full stop between and have two separate sentences.

✔ *Backed by the party in power, thugs intimidated voters. Therefore, the election failed despite the efforts of observers to ensure a free and fair polling process.*

2. Run on sentence

Run on sentences are the same as the comma splice errors described above, except that there is no comma placed between the two sentences. These are less frequent than comma splice errors and can be fixed in the same way.

✘ *Thugs intimidated voters they beat them up or threatened their families with violence.*

✔ *Thugs intimidated voters: they beat them up or threatened their families with violence.*

3. Sentence fragment

A fragment is an incomplete sentence. Fragments do not convey a complete thought, either because they've been separated from the main idea or because they lack a verb or a subject.

✘ *Because the ruling party refused to hand over power.* ⇦ FRAGMENT

To correct this sentence it needs another part. For example:

✔ *Because the ruling party refused to hand over power, the election failed.*

There are many words similar to "because" that, when used in this way, require another part to make a full sentence. Some examples are given in the table below. Don't be confused. This doesn't mean that you can't start a sentence with 'Because' (a common urban grammar myth!). You *can* start a sentence with 'Because' as long as you make sure to include the *other* part of the sentence.

	Fragment example
Because/ since	Because the ruling party clung to power.
Although/ Whereas/ while	Although a majority wanted change.
Unless	Unless free elections can be guaranteed.

All of the fragments in the above table could be corrected by adding another sentence part with a subject and a verb.

Example of a fragment with no verb or subject

> ✖ *Being an uncompromising faction.*

We don't know who is an uncompromising faction, and we don't know what they did. To fix the fragment in the above example, another part with a subject and verb is needed.

> ✔ *Being an uncompromising faction, the ruling party refused to hand over power.*

Here's another example of a fragment.

> ✖ *In most polling stations with adequate security.*

The example above is a fragment because it only tells us the "where" part of the sentence. Again, we don't know who is doing what.

> ✔ *In most polling stations with adequate security, the voters filled out their ballots confidently.*

4. Subject verb agreement

In many cases, subjects must "agree with" verbs in number. This means that singular subjects need singular verbs, while plural subjects need plural verbs. This "agreement" is required in the present tense that we use when talking about things that don't change with time. For example,

He (singular) drives to uni	She (singular) has a large family	Jack (singular) eats by himself.
They (plural) drive to uni	They (plural) have a large family	Mel and Anne (plural) eat together.

Notice that "s" on a verb makes it singular, while "s" on a noun makes it plural. This is confusing, but that's how it is!

"Agreement" is also required when the verb is some form of "be":

He (singular) is nice	She (singular) was worried
They (plural) are nice	They (plural) were worried

Making subjects agree with verbs is fairly easy when the sentence is short and the subject is right next to its verb. However, when sentences are long and complex, subject verb agreement can be more difficult, as in the following example.

> ✖ *Punctuating long sentences, such as the ones in the following examples, **cause** difficulties for many writers.* *(verb)*

> ✔ *Punctuating long sentences, such as the ones in the following examples, **causes** difficulties for many writers.* *(verb)*

In order to check whether the subject agrees with the verb, you first need to identify the main verb in the sentence ("cause" in the sentences above) and then ask who or what causes difficulties? The answer is "punctuating" (not "examples"). "Punctuating" is singular ("it", not "they"), so the verb must be singular too.

5. Problems with commas

Many people are unsure how to use commas correctly. A lot of the time, this doesn't matter as many sentences "requiring" a comma can be easily understood even without the comma. However, a comma acts as a visual aid to the reader by making the subject and verb more visible, because they are the most important part of the sentence.

   i) Separate any introductory phrases off with a comma, so readers can easily find the subject and verb that come next:

   ✖ *Where threats were made the turnout was low.*

   √ *Where threats were made, the turnout was low.*

          (introductory bit)   (main part of sentence)

ii) Don't separate the subject from the verb with a comma, because it suggests that they don't belong together:

   ✖ *The turnout, was low.*

      (subject)   (verb)

    √ *The turnout was low.*

iii) If you put any information in between the subject and verb that is additional but not crucial to the meaning of the sentence, separate it off with a comma at each end. This alerts the reader to hold the subject in mind until they find the verb at the other end.

   The turnout, independent observers reported, was low.

    (subject)   (verb)

   In the next example, the inserted information is crucial, that is, it couldn't be removed without damaging the meaning of the sentence. This is because the low turnout was caused by the threats. As the information is essential, it is not enclosed in commas.

   The turnout where threats were made was low.

   Don't, in any case, put in just one of those commas and not the other – it confuses the signals you want to send about what belongs with what!

   ✖ *The turnout, independent observers reported was low.*

   ✖ *The turnout independent observers reported, was low.*

It may seem strange that punctuation can direct a reader's attention in these ways, but these are conventions that we learn from reading which help us navigate through long and complex sentences without losing the plot. Mostly, commas in writing are matched by pauses in speech, because they mark the "chunks" and shifts of meaning in a sentence. However, it doesn't work to throw in commas wherever you would pause if you were reading aloud, because we pause in speech more often, and for more different reasons (for emphasis, or just to breathe!). Your safest guide is the grammatical reasoning above.

6. Parallel structure

Problems with maintaining parallel structure often occur when constructing lists, either as dot points or within a sentence. Items in a list should be the same type of word in terms of grammar, for example, a list of nouns or a list of verbs. The following examples should illustrate.

✖ *The objectives of this analysis are:*
- *Identifying the main categories of cultural difference*
- *To give an account of the dangers of stereotyping*
- *The different ways to conceptualise difference*

Each of the dot points has a different grammatical form. To give the items in the list parallel structure, they should have the same grammatical form as in the list of verbs (actions) below.

✔ *The objectives of this analysis are to:*
- *identify the main categories of cultural difference*
- *give an account of the dangers of stereotyping*
- *describe the different ways to conceptualise difference.*

7. Modifiers (descriptions) must be next to the thing they describe

✔ *Abandoned at birth, he never knew his parents.*

NOT

✖ *Abandoned at birth, his parents never knew him.*

(This would mean that **his parents** were abandoned at birth!)

8. Apostrophes

Apostrophes are notoriously difficult to use correctly. There is even a website showing examples of 'apostrophe abuse' on signs from around the world: www.apostropheabuse.com/

Apostrophes are used for two main reasons:

1. To denote one or more missing letter(s)

When we put two short words together, we use an apostrophe to show that a letter is missing. It is **not common** to use these shortened forms in academic writing. Here are some examples.

do not ⇨ don't ;   is not ⇨ isn't; you are ⇨ you're;   it is ⇨ it's

we are ⇨ we're;   he would ⇨ he'd;   would have ⇨   would've

(Note that *would've* and *could've* are contractions of *would have* and *could have*, **not** *would of* or *could of*.)

We do not use an apostrophe to make a plural, even with abbreviations, acronyms, or years, where you may think it looks funny just to add an "s". We do just add an "s"!

✗	✓
CD's	CDs
USB's	USBs
ATM's	ATMs
1960's	1960s
90's	90s
(also!) sofa's only $199	sofas only $199

2. To denote possession

Apostrophes are used to show possession or ownership of something, as in the following examples. Note that the apostrophe is placed after the "s" if the owner is plural and ends in "s". The table below contains some examples.

singular "owner"	plural "owners"
The student's writing	The students' writing
The paper's references	The papers' references
The computer's functions	The computers' functions

A point of confusion

The words that cause the most confusion when using apostrophes are *it's* **and** *its.*

It's – the apostrophe denotes a missing letter (i.e. short form of *it is*)

Its – is used to show possession but has no apostrophe (e.g. *Its* ears are big).

A word about Microsoft Word grammar checker and spell checker

Automatic spelling and grammar checkers are not as accurate as a human editor, and given the current state of technology, the Microsoft Word spell checker and grammar checker make mistakes, particularly the grammar checker. For example, the grammar checker often misses subject verb agreement errors or identifies a sentence as containing an error when it doesn't, in fact, have one. Grammar checkers are useful for writers who have a knowledge of correct grammar. They can alert the writer to inadvertent mistakes and typos, but ultimately, it is the writer that makes the final decision whether to accept or reject the suggestion.

A spellchecker works by matching, not by meaning. It will alert you if you type a word that has *not* been included in its programmed vocabulary. However, not every word is in there, so you should check your dictionary. Also, the spellchecker will not know if you have typed a word that wasn't the one you meant (for example, if you type "tenant" when you mean "tenet" or "their" when you mean "there"). The spellchecker will accept the word you typed, if that word *is* in its programmed vocabulary.

If English is not your first language

If English is not your first language, you may encounter some people who think you have less language than they have, when it fact you have more! – often, students with language backgrounds other than English have learned two, three, or sometimes several languages before tackling English as well, and it can be frustrating if lecturers and fellow students seem to notice the few things you *don't* know rather than the many things you *do* know about using English. Remind yourself that your undertaking to study in an additional language is evidence of both your courage and your competence! – but yes, you will also have to take particular care with your writing for your subjects. It is common for writers to make some further kinds of mistakes if English is not their first language, and particularly if English grammar is very different from the grammar of their first language. A major difference lies in whether meaning is signalled largely

- by separate words,
- or by changes in the form of words,
- or by the order of words,
- or by the context

-- and these ways of making meaning are found in different combinations in different languages. The ways of signalling meaning in English can be especially confusing, because the language has changed a good deal over time, combining features of other languages (Latin, Greek, French, German, and others) with which it has come into contact.

English uses **changes at the ends** of words to show

- whether something is singular or plural (number),
- whether an action is in the past, present, or future (tense)
- and whether it is complete or continuing (aspect).

It adds **prefixes to the beginning of a word** that change its meaning, for example:

*as*sist, *de*sist, *re*sist, *per*sist, *sub*sist, *in*sist.

Furthermore, **variations of the same word** do different grammatical jobs, for example:

Adjective (what kind of)	Noun (what)	Verb (does what)	Adverb (how)
care*ful*	care*rs*	care	car*ingly*

These ways of signalling meaning may or may not occur in your first language; and when they do occur, the system that structures them may be quite different from English.

When a meaning in one language has no match in another, it can be hard to learn because it is hard to understand. For example, speakers of other languages often find that using "a" and "the" in English is a problem as many other languages have no equivalent words and their use in English is a maze of rules and exceptions!

Most of the changes in the form of words that are required in English are not a problem for people who learned the language naturally, as children; but they can be difficult to remember if English is not your first language. You have studied English grammar and you're aware of most of these things, but they are not automatic and errors are likely to persist in your writing. For speaking, it may not matter very much if you don't get all the forms right, because your choice of words themselves will usually communicate your meaning adequately. If listeners are confused, they can ask for clarification. But lecturers marking your written work can become distracted, and even annoyed, by errors that require them to make repairs in their mind as they read your assignments.

So what can you do?

When you have got your ideas down on paper, and organised them to your satisfaction, then it's time to edit your grammar. This is more efficient if you know what errors you should be looking for – that is, which errors are characteristic of *your* work. If you have got an assignment back with comments and corrections, go through it carefully to see what *kinds* of errors you have made. Do you have difficulty with where to put "a" or "the"? Do you often forget to put "s" on the end of a word to show that it is plural? Do you forget to put tense endings on verbs? Do you have difficulty with changes of tense in reported speech, or changes of word order in reported questions? All of these are common problems for writers from language backgrounds other than English. Identify your patterns of errors, make a list, and go through your draft looking for each kind of error that *you* are likely to make.

Language help elsewhere (whether English is your first or additional language)

There are too many kinds of common errors to deal with in this resource, but helpful sources are available on the internet. Some of the best advice can be found on the websites of

- Purdue University at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/sitemap/   ("The OWL at Purdue"; their front page is not as helpful as the site map, I feel)
- University of North Carolina at http://writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/online-tools/
- Frankfurt School of English at http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/rules/article.htm

- Monash University at http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/grammar/articles/index.xml
- "Online English Grammar" by Anthony Hughes at http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/grammar_topics.php
- University of Victoria (Canada) – this links to a variety of useful grammar activities: http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/grammar.htm
- Warwick University, "Learning English Online" at http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/learning_english/leap/grammar/
- University of Wisconsin Writing Centre's "12 Common Errors" page: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CommonErrors.html

Where to find more help

Your lecturers have consultation hours every week, when you can ask their advice. They will not read drafts of your work, but if you make a brief plan of your assignment they may tell you if you are on the right track, or if there is something you have not yet understood, or some source you have overlooked.

The library staff are available to help you develop your skills in searching for information, and different staff members specialise in different subject areas. You can ask to speak to a librarian with expertise in your field. The library also offers training sessions (http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/training/) in a range of things you might want to know more about, such as

- managing a long document (think minor thesis!)
- installing and using Endnote, a software system for handling your references which is available free to staff and students of La Trobe
- dealing with qualitative data
- statistics
- and more! (check out the page to see what training is on offer at your campus)

Student Learning staff students have access to face-to-face support on all campuses via drop ins. Students can 'drop in' (without an appointment) to see a Student Learning lecturer. Timetables and locations are available for all campuses here: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/learning/drop-in-learning-support
In addition, if you believe that you are in danger of failure or withdrawal from your course of study, you can ask your lecturer to send a referral to Student Learning, and a staff member will contact you about an appointment when you can talk about how to improve your work for your subjects.

Apart from academic support, you may want to be aware of other kinds of assistance in relation to a range of needs including accommodation, financial, legal, health (including mental health), child care, cultural, religious and other areas of life. If you have moved in order to study, you may not know what kinds of help are available in your new location; in particular, if you have come from overseas, you may not be aware of support available, for example, to help you with the emotional stress of leaving family members behind, or the practical demands of looking after them

if you have brought them with you. Also, you may not know about Australian law and services to help you if you are a victim of crime or if a dangerous situation develops involving people you know, whether at work, in your neighbourhood, or even in your family. While such problems are uncommon, they can happen to anybody on rare occasions, and it's good to be able to ask for advice from one or another of the services at your university. La Trobe has:

- a Counselling Service that can help with stress https://www.latrobe.edu.au/counselling/
- an Equality and Diversity Centre that helps with disability, support for refugees, issues of equal opportunity, and related matters http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/support
- an Indigenous Education Office http://www.latrobe.edu.au/indigenous/)
- a Chaplaincy representing a range of faiths http://www.latrobe.edu.au/chaplaincy/
- a legal service offered through the Student Union http://unione.latrobesu.org.au/Common/ContentWM.aspx?CID=36
- IT (information technology) support for students http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/it
- International Students Support Services http://www.latrobe.edu.au/international/students/international   (for contacts on each campus, see http://www.latrobe.edu.au/international/contact)
- Health care and Emergency services (police, fire, ambulance, rescue) http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/international

On the "Current students" webpage at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/ , you can find links to the services available on your campus ("Campus-specific resources").

Resources for particular purposes:

- **Organising your individual study and/or group projects**
- **Oral Presentations and visual aids (Posters, PPT, Prezis)**
- **Annotated bibliographies**
- **Reviews**
- **Literature reviews**

Organising your individual study and/or group projects

If you've got as far as doing postgrad work, you're probably really good at organising yourself, whether you learned those skills on a job, or wrangling children, or managing a previous course of study (or all of those at once!). For postgrad study, there are just a few particular things to be aware of, which may not have been part of your earlier experience.

Planning on the scale of a semester

Most of us use diaries to keep track of what we have to do and when. But if you're mapping out your work for a whole semester, you'll probably find a poster-sized planner is useful to allow you to see all your tasks at once. You can make your own planner showing what is due in each week of semester. (See below for a possible model; and if you use this, you'll notice that you'll have to add subjects down

the left-hand column as needed, and also the weeks after semester break that are not shown here for reasons of space.)

Semester Planner

WEEK SUBJECT	1 1-7 Mar	2 8-14 Mar	3 15-21 Mar	4 21-28 Mar	5 29 Mar-4 Apr	6 5-11 Apr	SEMESTER BREAK
Politics				(Mum's 50th b'day Sun)	Country brief (10%)		
Sociology			Research Skills Exercise Tue (15%)			Article Review Thu (20%)	

The rest of the iceberg

It's good to be aware that the bulk of your study time is not going to be the classes you have to attend, but the preparation, research, and assignments associated with those classes. Sometimes the meetings for your course are scheduled to make it easier for you to combine study with work – they may happen in the evening, or weekends, or in a "block" mode. However, fitting in all those other tasks is left up to you, and it's best if you can plan to spread them out so that you're not trying to do a week's study all at once. Make a "to do" list of tasks (e.g., read one article; search for literature on [topic]; watch documentary; review notes; first draft; revise draft; meet with study group; etc.) and try to find spaces in your day or your week when it is possible to get these done. A **grid** can be a useful tool for this.

It is important to be realistic. Don't set impossible goals for yourself. You'll be more likely to stick to your timetable if you take into account

- the limitations of your attention span (nobody can read all day with close attention. Not just you. Nobody.)
- the importance of food, fresh air, sleep, and the people you love.

One consideration, for students who visit the campus infrequently, is to organize that time to include whatever combination of things you need to be on campus to accomplish: not just class attendance, but socializing with fellow students, visiting your supervisor, collecting sources from the library, sorting out administrative queries or paperwork, etc. For all kinds of meetings, remember that it's essential to be on time. For one thing, it's an (essential) courtesy to the other people involved; but also, the most important things typically happen in the first few minutes – announcements, explanation of tasks, introduction to the most important concepts for that class, etc.

Finally, be aware that planning is not just a matter of allocating time, but also of getting a grip on how your course is planned to develop over time. You'll do yourself a huge favour if you read the whole subject learning guide for each subject in the first few days. At the beginning of the guide, note the

aims of the subject, and the learning objectives you are expected to achieve. Then read the questions and tasks that unfold week by week, so you can see:

■ Where the subject introduces its main concepts, and how it builds on them over time

■ How the readings and other learning activities are designed to engage you with different aspects of those concepts, and give you practice in applying them

Organising to work with a group

This, too, is something you may be very good at already. However, if you or anybody in your study group is not used to working as a team, it may be helpful to share with them some routines that are commonly used.

Planning. This involves identifying roles, identifying subtasks, and agreeing on procedures.

You may need

- a chairperson to take the group through each meeting's work;
- a record-keeper to take notes each time and circulate them afterwards;
- a time-keeper to ensure that each part of the work, and each member of the group, gets enough time (but not too much);
- and perhaps a project manager to keep track of each member's progress on the sub-task s/he is responsible for.

Identifying sub-tasks. These may include:

- gathering various kinds of information (reading? statistics? images? interviews? observations?);
- designing "tools" such as questionnaires, categories for analysing information, or formats for presenting your results
- different roles or contributions to the end product for assessment (writing? editing? proofreading? illustrating? speaking?)

Deciding on procedures

- How often to meet
- Where to meet (in person? electronically? some combination?)
- How to manage plans (an agenda for each meeting?), records (minutes or dot points?), and responsibilities. Good examples of an agenda and a set of minutes can be found at the Higher Education Academy website,
  http://learnhigher.ac.uk/?s=sample+agenda+and+minutes
- A simple format that handles everything could be:

Date	Item	Whose Responsibility	Done	To do

Distributing sub-tasks. When team work goes well, it's because everyone knows what needs to be done, and what they are responsible for. You may want to consider:

- What skills/knowledge each member brings to the task
- What skills/knowledge each would like to develop
- What constraints each member has (time; distance from uni; cultural constraints on certain activities; language; disability). Nobody should do less because of a particular constraint; but you should find ways of enabling each member to do the best they can.
- What could be usefully done in pairs (someone with expertise in some aspect of the task partnered with somebody inexperienced, so skills are shared)
- Fairness. Some sub-tasks need to be done earlier in the process, some later. Some are bigger than others.

Overcoming difficulties. These may be of various kinds:

- Problems with communications (make a contact list for all members to use, and make sure it's clear who has to communicate what, with whom, by when)
- Problems with keeping to the timetable you've planned (if somebody is in difficulty, find out why, and how the rest of you can help; but make sure the person who falls behind contributes fairly in return)
- Problems with technology (see what the group can do before asking the tutor's advice)
- Problems with personalities. If you feel that a member of your group is too dominant, or too passive, or too lazy, or plain incompetent, you need to find a way to deal with that. At the same time, bear in mind that everyone is different – if somebody is naturally shy or quiet, they may be great at research or writing , and may not need to do much speaking. Also, it's important to be aware of cultural differences, as people's willingness to be critical, outspoken, outgoing, etc, can depend on cultural values and preferences which should be respected. Finally, be aware that if English is not somebody's first language, they may need a little while to form what they want to say, and discussion should allow for that. It's often too simple to attribute different ways of interacting to personality, when so many things shape who we are and how we work together.

Jointly constructing and delivering work for assessment. There are many ways to do this, depending on the tasks, how you have shared them out, and what skills your members bring to the work. You will need to decide whether to

- sit down together and draft a joint presentation, or
- compile individuals' contributions into one file or document, or

- entrust the final write-up, PPT, or whatever to one member of the group, who is therefore asked to do less of the earlier work

Reflecting on group work

This may be a component of your submission for assessment. If so, the purpose is to get you to think about what you have learned (for better or for worse!) about working in a group. What went well, and why? What didn't go well, and why not? What could you have done differently, for a better result? What would you be sure to do whenever you are called upon to work in a group, based on this experience?

Useful links:

- La Trobe University, **Achieve@Uni**: http://latrobe.libguides.com/learning-at-uni/managing-teamwork .
- Higher Education Academy: http://learnhigher.ac.uk/Students/Group-work.html
- Harvard University: http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/wigintro.html
- Carleton College: http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/cooperative/roles.html

Oral Presentations and visual aids (Posters, PPT, Prezis)

While you will usually submit a written version of your work, you may also be expected to present it to your class orally or online. This can be a great opportunity to learn presentation technologies such as posters, PowerPoint or "prezi". You can make visual aids to support your spoken delivery, ranging from basic points to more complex multimedia creations incorporating film clips, pictures, graphics and animations. Most of these technologies offer free templates, or starter versions, along with online tutorials in how to use them. The websites below are only a few of those you can find via a web search (the ones we found most helpful at a basic level).

Posters: These can be made on PowerPoint or Microsoft Word. They're not difficult to design, but before you decide to make one, check how you will get it printed, as that can be expensive if you have to pay a printer.

- Making an academic research poster using Power Point by Jerry Overmyer, University of North Colorado at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqgjgwIXadA&feature=related
- PosterPresentations.com: Free Research Poster PowerPoint Templates at http://www.posterpresentations.com/html/free_poster_templates.html
- MakeSigns.com: Scientific Poster PowerPoint Templates at http://www.makesigns.com/SciPosters_Templates.aspx
- Posters4Research: Free Templates at http://posters4research.com/templates.php
- StudentPosters.co.uk at http://www.studentposters.co.uk/templates.html

Oral Presentations

Structuring the presentation: An oral presentation is structured and each section has a specific purpose and organisation.

Introduction: aims to catch the audience's attention and introduce the topic.

- Open in a way that **stimulates interest**. Tell a short story (anecdote), present an interesting fact, statistic or image related to your topic.
- Provide some **background or context** for the topic. In other words, indicate to the audience why your topic is important and/or describe the problem you are working on. Don't assume that the audience is already familiar with your topic or project.
- Give a clear statement of the **main point** of your presentation.
- Provide **a plan** of your presentation by outlining the main points to follow.

Discussion/ Findings (body of the presentation): aims to inform your audience.

- Present **only a few main points**. It is better to discuss each point in depth.
- Use connectives to **link your ideas**, such as Firstly, Secondly, In addition, Finally, However. This provides cohesion and logic for the audience.
- In concluding, thank the audience and invite questions if appropriate.

Visual Aids

The internet has many sites where you can download templates and instructions for visual aids. Some good ones are:

PowerPoint:

Specific advice on using PowerPoint (and other presentation aids is available at La Trobe University's Achieve@Uni 'Presentations' section: http://latrobe.libguides.com/presentations/presentation-aids .

There is a very useful page on "Oral Communication" at Brunel University's site Learn Higher: Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/designing-visual-aids.shtml . From here, follow the links to

- **"**Getting Started with PowerPoint", by Kate Ippolito & Ravinder Chohan from the LearnHigher CETL at Brunel University: http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/getting%20started%20with%20powerpoint.pdf
- "Example of a power point presentation": http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/UsingPowerPoint.ppt
- and "Rehearsing your presentation": http://www.brunel.ac.uk/learnhigher/giving-oral-presentations/rehearsing-your-presentation.shtml

Also, The Learning Centre at the University of New South Wales has a page on "Academic Skills Resources: Using PowerPoint in oral presentations", https://student.unsw.edu.au/using-powerpoint

Prezis: A "prezi" is a screen on which you can put text, photos, film clips, diagrams, etc, together in whatever arrangement you like and create a "path" between them. Have a look at:

- Prezi Academy Lesson 1:Step-by-Step Tutorial on Prezi Basics by Angelie Agarwal at http://prezi.com/learn/getting-started
- Prezi: Choose a license to start using Prezi at http://prezi.com/profile/signup

Finally, Monash University's site, Language and Learning Online, has a very comprehensive resource, which is full of suggestions about language you might want to use: http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/speaking/index.xml

Using PowerPoint Effectively

Keep it Simple. If using a template, choose a simple one with easy to read fonts. Avoid special effects and animations unless they are related to a point you are making. Do not overuse colour.

Avoid overcrowding slides. Use bullet points if appropriate (but do not assume all text should be bulleted). Never use full sentences (except for – rare – quotations); use key words only. It is better to use more slides with fewer points on each than to overcrowd slides.

Make it readable. If the audience cannot read what is on your slides, there is no point in including it. Font size should be at least 20. Avoid capital letters. Diagrams can be a very effective way to convey

information, but make sure they are easily readable. Make sure you guide the audience through your diagram by pointing to the relevant parts as you speak.

Choice of colour is a very important factor influencing readability. The Colour Visibility Chart shows a few different coloured fonts on different background colours. White on blue isn't bad, but red on orange is horrendous! Whatever you choose, go for clarity.

Colour Visibility Chart	
black on white	white on black
blue on white	white on blue
red on orange	orange on red
red on green	green on red

Avoid reading the presentation as there is an automatic drop in both audience attention and marks. However, it is unwise to attempt to memorise the whole speech. [For some very nervous people, a script may be useful to fall back on, but if you use one, make sure that you write in conversational "spoken" language, not formal "written" language. For example, use contractions (*didn't* instead of *did not)*; build in some repetition so listeners don't have to hold too much in memory.]

Some useful hints:

1. **Use power point slides as cues:** Summarise each main supporting point. Use headings and sub-headings, a numbering/lettering system and key words. Try using the 'presenter view' function on PowerPoint. This enables you to see which slides are coming up next, while the audience only sees the slide you are presenting.

2. **Practise, practise, practise!** Practise the complete presentation **aloud and many times.** Practise in front of an audience such as family, friends, videotape or **a mirror! Time** the speech and **stick to given limits**.

3. Have a **backup plan** in case the technology fails! You could put your main points or examples on a handout (so try to learn how many are likely to attend).

Use visual aids to add interest, to help simplify the message and to increase audience understanding. Visual aids need to be large, clear, simple and relevant. Make any handouts available before the speech begins. Refer directly to the visual aid in the speech. Know how to use the technology and ensure that equipment works before the presentation begins.

Know what's coming up next. Be sure to know which slide is coming up next so that you can introduce it and link it to the previous slide *before* you hit the page down button.

Voice signals are vital. Speak more slowly, pronounce words more clearly than normal, raise your voice and project towards the back wall.

Body signals are also important. Always face the audience (never board or screen unless you need to point to something on a diagram) and stand straight with chin up to direct your voice to the listeners. Keep hands open and avoid nervous gestures. Eye contact is essential. Be sure to scan across the audience rather than focusing on one or two individuals.

Remember, it's normal to be nervous! Thorough preparation and practise decrease anxiety**.** Organise equipment and visual aids early and ensure power point slides are simple and clear. It may help to bring detailed notes to get you started and as a 'safety net' throughout the presentation. Breathe deeply.

If you're intimidated by the idea of an audience, you can get them on your side from the beginning by asking them for help! Just say you hope they will help you to think about a (specified) problem in your project, or steer you toward more reading on some particular aspect. At the end of your talk, repeat the request, and/or ask if they would share their own experiences with a problem of this kind.

Annotated Bibliographies

What is this? You could think of this as the thing you wish a friend who'd done the subject last year had handed you just before you started your research. It's a list of sources on some topic, each one accompanied by a paragraph saying what that source is good for. Usually an annotated bibliography assignment is an early step on the way to writing a research essay. The idea is that you go to the library, and perhaps to the internet (check with your lecturer), and find out what has been written already about your topic. You decide which sources are most relevant to what you're doing, and figure out *how* they're relevant.

You don't need to read every word or every book, at this stage. Read the introductory chapter, or the chapter that introduces the section dealing with your topic. If it's an article, read the first couple of pages and the last, and look at the headings. If it's a research article, scan the introduction and the discussion section (what did they ask? What did they learn?). If it's a report, read the summary at the beginning. Use your judgement about how much more you need to read in order to know what this source says and does. You'll come back to it when you're ready to write the research essay.

Follow any particular instructions your lecturer gives you about the format of this assignment. You may or may not be asked for an introductory paragraph setting out the topic, question, and the common themes you found. Then, the body is a series of separate entries, with the reference as a heading each time (author, title, etc – set it out according to the referencing guidelines in your LMS). After this heading, write a paragraph saying what the source deals with, its particular focus, its main argument, and how it contributes to an exploration of your topic. Mention any important limitations, too; each source is not going to give you everything you need.

What could an annotation look like? Suppose you're working on the question: "How do courtroom conventions work to ensure compliance with the legal system?" One of your annotations might be something like:

Bloggs, F 2001, "The architecture of the courtroom", *Justice Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 33-54

This deals with the way that courtroom spaces separate the administrators of the law from the public, elevate the judges, and isolate the witnesses. It draws attention to the use of space to define roles that participants then accept as given. The discussion is limited to the design of the highest courts in the judicial system, which may be different from courts in which mediation is the aim.

(Adapted from Rao, V, Chanock, K, & Krishnan, L 2007, *A visual guide to essay writing*, Association for Academic Language and Learning, Sydney, p. 49. This book is available free at http://www.aall.org.au/teaching-and-learning-resources)

Reviews

An academic review is a bit different from the kind you find in newspapers or magazines, which usually focus on how interesting the book was, and how well written (or not). When you review a book or article for a university subject, the quality of the writing is not the main focus. Your purpose is to tell another reader what the central idea of the book is; how it is argued (i.e. what points, supported with what kinds of evidence, arranged in what kind of structure); and how useful it is in helping you to think about its central questions, &/or whatever questions you took to it. Follow any special instructions your lecturer gives you; but these are the aspects you should probably cover:

Review of a reading:
Topic
    Context (what discussion does it contribute to?)
Purpose
Method
Structure
Content (themes &/or argument)
Assess: How is it useful?
         To discussion in the discipline
           To you as a reader
       How useful is it?
         Strengths – problems – limitations

Literature reviews

In the context of this assignment, "literature" does not mean fiction. When we put "the" in front of it, "the literature" on some topic means the publications that academics have written about it. In a literature review, you're looking at a lot of different sources to see how they have dealt with some particular topic.

It's normally an early stage of some larger project – a preliminary to your own research. The aim is to find what other people have published about the topic that interests you, to see
- what themes and issues have interested them;
- how their work helps you to think about your topic;
- what they agree about, and what they don't; and
- what still remains to be asked about your topic, in the light of what they've said.

Find what you can, read it and decide how it's relevant to your own project. Some sources may offer a framework within which you will explore your topic, or a method you will use in your research. Alternatively, some may have approached the topic in a way that you see problems with, and your research will try to correct their mistake or fill a gap they've left. Either way, they are a springboard for your own investigation, and your literature review will need to explain how.

How is it different from an annotated bibliography? The literature review is similar in *purpose*, but it takes a different *form*. You start with a paragraph introducing your project and giving an overview of the literature you've found. ("There is some debate about the effect on court proceedings of judges wearing wigs and gowns. The literature has focused mainly on the benefits of anonymity for judges and of respect for judicial authority, on the one hand; and on the disadvantages of creating an intimidating distance between citizens and the law, on the other.") Then, in paragraphs with or without headings (check with your lecturer on this) you go into detail, not source by source but theme by theme, looking at how various sources, or clusters of sources, deal with each theme. You're likely to have sentences like "While Bloggs and Pugg (1992) see wigs as old-fashioned and ridiculous, Smith (2001) has found that jurors are in awe of them, and Loonish (1989) notes that spectators' behaviour is more subdued in courts where judges sit in wigs and gowns". For another way of dealing with multiple references, try "Several writers have noted the intimidating effect of wigs and gowns in court (Smith 2001; Loonish 1989; Rumpole 1985 & 1987)." When you've covered the ground, conclude with a brief paragraph, drawing out what seems to be the most interesting idea(s) emerging out of your review of the literature; and if you've been asked to do this assignment in order to formulate a research question of your own, this is the place to say what that is, and how it relates to the sources you've discussed.

How is it different from an essay? You're not using the sources, at this stage, to construct your own argument in answer to some essay question. So you don't go into detail or harvest quotations; you summarise their contributions to your exploration of the topic. (You could think of it like pushing other people's work down a funnel to emerge with an idea you want to test or a question you want to answer.)

This assignment from Education is an example of a two-piece assignment that starts with a literature review and then uses that as the basis for a research proposal:

> **Research Methods in Education (EDU5RME)**
> **2. Literature Review (Essay) (40%) – 3,000 words**
> The Review should include a critical analysis of SIX (6) journal articles. The analysis should include an overview of the theoretical significance of selected articles for you and possible implications for your intended research approach.
> **3. Project Proposal (30%) – 2,000 words**
> This assignment will build on the Literature Review. … It is expected that this proposal will follow carefully the format used for Human Ethics applications. The focus will be on translating the Literature Review into a theoretical framework and research question(s) and arguing the case for your selected research design and strategies for developing new knowledge.