UHOH FACULTY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
ACADEMIC WRITING AID SERIES

# ACADEMIC WRITING: PRACTICAL GUIDANCE AND TIPS

# PREFACE

This PDF is a collection of academic writing aid materials aimed at helping you with a range of academic writing issues, from what the question wants in the first place, to editing your final draft. Each topic provides an assortment of tips and pointers to help you on your way. Feel free to read through from cover to cover, or dip into what you feel you need support with most. However, the guidance provided here is by no means exhaustive. Don't forget to use other important resources for further assistance, including the Internet, the library, professors, supervisors, friends, peers and family (to name a few).

Happy reading (and happier writing…)

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# CHAPTER 1 NOTE-TAKING AND FINDING SOURCES

# Part 1 Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking

So, you've been given a seminar paper to write. Whether this is your first or your thirty-first, it can be difficult to get started. Below is a bit of guidance to help you push through those initial hurdles.

## ■ Read the question (properly)

This may seem obvious, but if you don't read the question properly and understand exactly what it is you're being asked, you're going to waste a lot of time and energy meandering down the wrong path. If you're confused as to what's being asked of you, ask your professor or lecturer. It can also be helpful to discuss the question with your peers and see what their take on it is: they may understand the task completely differently to you!

## ■ Examine the question

Once you understand what's being asked of you, you should examine the question thoroughly: in what way are you being asked to tackle this topic?

Below is a list of popular assignment questions:

- **"Argue…":** you need to provide evidence for or against an issue, using sound sources and clear reasoning.
- **"Analyze…":** to analyze involves looking at the different parts of an issue and scrutinizing their relationship.
- **"Compare…":** for this question you might be given two or more concepts, theories or situations, and you'll then be required to look at the similarities between them.
- **"Contrast…":** on the other hand, you might be asked to look at the differences between them.
- **"Define...":** this involves giving the definition of a main idea using your own understanding, but backed up by evidence and sound reasoning.
- **"Describe…":** when you're asked to describe, for instance, a concept, you'll be expected to provide a detailed account of this idea using your own words.
- **"Discuss…":** to discuss a topic in an academic essay is not like having a discussion in a tutorial. In a seminar paper, you're expected to construct a main argument, and then to organize your evidence accordingly. You need to evaluate the literature you find, not simply provide a summary of source materials.
- **"Evaluate…":** in this circumstance, you need to provide an assessment of, for instance, a particular situation or an ideology. You'll need to give an appraisal of its value.
- **"Examine…":** similar to "analyze", you should break a situation or concept down into different parts and debate each critically.

- **"Illustrate…":** if you're asked to illustrate, then you need to give examples of a particular concept, situation, etc.
- **"Outline…":** this means that, instead of providing a detailed account, you only give an overview of the main features or ideas.
- **"State…":** for this you're expected to provide a clear and concise explanation without any form of analysis.
- **"Suggest…":** this relies on your own experience and point of view. The question is asking you to contribute an interpretation, but you should still use evidence and clear reasoning to support it.
- **"Summarize…":** this is where you provide the primary points and ideas of a more complicated topic.
- **"Trace…":** as with "outline", you're only required to provide the central components of a particular concept, idea, etc.

In addition to these kinds of words, underlie other keywords and terms in the question and take time to consider what they mean.

## ■ Find a topic

This is not relevant for everyone as your professor or lecturer may have provided you with a specific question. However, if they didn't, here are a few tips to get started on creating your own:

- begin by **jotting down what you already know about the subject area**, and use this as a platform from which to draft questions
- **look through your textbook, PowerPoint presentations, and lecture notes** for inspiration
- have a look at **journal papers** already written on your topic and skim down to the conclusion: sometimes you'll find a few open questions posed by the author(s)

Make sure that your topic isn't too broad. A seminar paper topic must be narrow in its scope. For instance, "global warming" would be too broad – you're writing a seminar paper not a book – whereas "the effect of global warming on the Arctic tundra" would be more plausible for a paper of 15 pages or so.

Here's a short check-list to help you ascertain whether you have a good topic for your seminar paper:

- Is it relevant to what's being asked of you?
- Does your paper have a simple answer? A good question won't have a clear "yes" or "no" answer; it'll have a number of possible answers, none of which are necessarily "right".
- Is your question one that would interest others? Will it hook people's attention?
- Ideally, is it a question that interests you personally?
- Is the topic broad/narrow enough for the requested word or page count and deadline?
- Is there enough sound information available?

## ■ Jot down your ideas

Before you start looking elsewhere, consider whether you already know anything about this topic. What have you heard or read about this subject before? Have you already got an opinion about the issue or concept? Have you got some form of personal experience regarding it?

It can help to jot down the main elements of the subject you're going to discuss. There are a number of ways you can do this. Two are outlined below:

- **Free writing**
  As its name suggests, this is where you just let yourself write down any thoughts you have on your topic. Even if you only know a little about the subject in hand, you can jot this down. Don't be tempted to look over what you've written while you're writing. Save this for the end, and highlight any interesting ideas. You might surprise yourself with what you come up with.

- **Mind maps/webs**
  These are similar to free writing, but, instead of whole sentences, you just scribble down words and phrases. It can also be more effective if you're a more visual person as you can circle words and/or phrases, and make connections between different elements. If you're conscious about saving trees, you can download mind map software for free online.

## ■ Find your source material

Once you know what it is you're writing about, you can look for appropriate academic sources. For more information on where to look for such sources, check out **"Sourcing academic materials"** in the following part of this chapter.

## ■ Skim and scan the text

Before you read a text properly, it can help to skim over it first to ascertain if it's worth taking the time to read properly. **Skimming** helps to give you a general overview. If a text is useful, it can also help to gauge which parts are of particular interest. The sections that you should look at with most care initially are the abstract, introduction and conclusion. For the rest of the paper, focus on the first and last lines of each paragraph. Skim the text for main concepts, and avoid getting stuck on unknown words and ideas.

**Scanning** is slightly different to skimming. Whereas with skimming you're trying to get a general overview, with scanning you're looking for particular material. This is very important when writing a research paper as you may have to look through a number of journal articles and books in order to find the material you need.

## ■ Take notes from your source material

Once you've found a relevant journal article or book, you can move onto the next stage: extracting what you need from the text. This means determining key points

and taking notes. There are a number of reasons why note-taking is an important process and a useful skill to improve:

- by not simply coping from the text, you can avoid plagiarism (have a look at **"How to avoid plagiarism",** chapter 2, part 2)
- good note-taking is not only useful for writing essays, but also for preparing for exams
- it can help you during lectures and seminars

There are a number of ways you can take notes:

- **highlighting or underlining text** in photocopies or print outs, and then paraphrasing in the margins
- **creating documents for different parts of your topic** – always remember to include the source, and if you copy and paste make sure you use quotation marks
- **writing in a note book or on note cards** – again, remember to jot down the source

Note-taking is very much a personal exercise. Therefore, you'll need to develop your own, comprehensible style. However, here are a few tips to help you on your way:

- **Use headings and sub-headings** to organize your notes so that you can categorize your main points as you go.
- Using these central ideas, you can **attach secondary concepts** to each theme – you may find that these secondary concepts can attach to more than one central theme.
- **Don't write out full sentences** – save time by simplifying your grammar and using abbreviations (although, of course, make sure you remember what any of your own abbreviations stand for).
- **Paraphrase from the beginning** – don't be tempted to copy text word for word. In this respect, it can help to paraphrase in the margin if you highlight or underline text.
- When you take notes from a particular source, make sure you **write down the source's reference**.
- To remain focused, it can help to **always keep your question or seminar title next to you.**

# Part 2 Sourcing academic materials

For an academic report, you're expected to support your arguments and provide evidence, and for this you must use sound, academic sources. If you don't use reliable source material, you won't know if the information is correct and objective, biased, or even a fabrication. By using poor sources, you can lose marks on a seminar paper. Below is an overview of what to look out for when sourcing materials, both on- and offline.

## ■ What are academic sources?

The most common examples of academic sources are:

- journal articles
- published literature
- published reports

However, these are not the only sources: nowadays, it's possible to use sources like YouTube to get your information. However, this doesn't mean you can use any video off the Internet, and it definitely doesn't mean you can start citing Wikipedia as source material…

Attributes to look out for in your sources include:

- Is the author a recognized expert in their field? Look at the qualifications of the author(s).
- What is the main organization involved? What is the background of this organization?
- Has the article been peer-reviewed? This means that other academics have read through the article before it was published and checked it for accuracy. Academic books and articles in academic journals will have gone through such a procedure.
- Is the article biased? Ideally, you should look for work that's objective. However, saying that, it depends on what information you're looking for and what you're researching.
- What sources did the author(s) use? Are they in themselves sound?
- Is the source aimed at academics (and, yes, that includes you)? Information aimed at academics – from professors to students – tends to provide reliable information.

Sources to be more wary of include:

- newspaper articles
- magazine articles
- opinion pieces
- unofficial websites

The main reason is that they're not usually academic, and there's the major risk of bias. However, of course, there are exceptions, and, again, it depends very much upon what you're researching.

## ■ Primary and secondary sources

A **primary source** provides first-hand account evidence. Main examples include:

- raw data from an experiment or interview you carried out
- historical or original data, e.g., interview transcripts, diaries, speeches, letters, official records, etc.
- creative works, e.g., music, art, novels, poetry, etc.

A **secondary source** extracts information from a primary source. For instance, it could discuss the primary source, or use it as evidence. Such sources are useful because you can benefit from the analysis of an expert. Examples include:

- journal articles
- magazine articles
- historical textbooks

For your thesis, you can choose between two main outlines: you can conduct your own experiment(s), and thereby base your thesis on primary sources, supplemented with secondary data; or, you can only use secondary sources, for example, to research a particular concept or analyze a certain policy. Neither is easier nor better: it simply depends on what the focus of your thesis is.

## ■ Finding sources: online

The Internet is a wondrous resource: not only does it appear to be the portal to everything, but you don't even necessarily have to leave the comfort of your own home to use it. However, as much as it's full of useful material, it's also full of *not* so useful material: it's easier – but also harder – to find bona fide sources. Below are a few ways to make your search for useful information within the World Wide Web somewhat easier.

- **Use academic search engines:** there are a number of search engines that can help you to specifically locate academic sources. Two of the most popular are **Google Scholar** and **Scopus.**
- **Search on the websites of journal publishers:** not all of these articles are free, but you can gain access to a large number of abstracts without the need for a payment.
- **Access the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ):** as its name suggests, this directory provides access to journals free of charge, offering a wide array of subject areas and languages.
- **Check out the websites of academics, organizations, societies and faculties:** you can access articles and reports directly from the website of a relevant expert or organization. For example, the United Nations offers a wealth of academic and professional reports for free, as well as the majority of non-governmental organizations.
- **Explore government and legislative websites:** this includes committees, commissions and state annual reports.
- **Use the Elektronic Journals Library (EZB):** the University of Hohenheim provides access to electronic full-text journals. E-journals licensed to the university are indicated with a yellow dot or yellow-red dot, but you need to be

connected to the Hohenheim network. Simply click on the link below for more information:

http://rzblx1.uni-regensburg.de/ezeit/search.phtml?bibid=UBHOH&colors=7&lang=de

- **Find information using the Database Information System (DBIS):** also provided by the University of Hohenheim, this database can help you to find bibliographic information on relevant articles and literature. If available electronically, it'll link you directly to the EZB. Find out more by clicking on the link below:

http://rzblx10.uni-regensburg.de/dbinfo/fachliste.php?bib_id=ubhoh&lett=l&colors=&ocolors

## ■ Guidance for online research

Some – if not most – of your research will undoubtedly be online.

- First of all: **don't be tempted to *only* use online sources.** Good old-fashioned books contain information not attainable from the Internet.
- Think about **effective keywords** for your search. There's *so* much information and data online that it can be overwhelming. Have in mind a few keywords to apply when using a search engine.
- Try out **different search engines.** Different search engines work differently. Apart from Google, you can use, for instance, Bing, Yahoo, Beaucoup (composed of more than 2,500 directories and search engines), or Search Engine Colossus International Directory of Search Engines (composed of search engines from more than 230 countries worldwide).
- Keep a **note or bookmark of useful websites.** You may also find it useful to keep a note of *unhelpful* websites.

When assessing a website, there are a few questions you should bear in mind:

- Who is the author (this could be an organization)? What is their background? Who are they affiliated with?
- Who is the website aimed at (e.g., age range)?
- When was the website last updated?
- Is the information provided factual as opposed to simply someone's opinion?
- Are the arguments based on sound evidence?
- Does the website provide reliable sources?
- Is the author objective and not biased?
- Is the website well-laid out? Are there any grammatical or spelling mistakes?

## ■ Finding sources: offline

There is, of course, a world outside of your laptop screen. Here are a few offline resources to consider.

- **Check out Hohenheim's Central Library:** up and running again since 2014, the central library is home to many English and many more German literary works. Check out the main website below for opening times and its location (and don't forget to save a 2 € coin for a locker):

https://kim.uni-hohenheim.de/94991?&L=1#jfmulticontent_c241279-1

If you can't find what you want in the library, then use the inter-library loan option online to order it for a fee of 1.50 €. More information can be found here:

https://kim.uni-hohenheim.de/95576?L=1

- **Visit the Departmental Library:** located in the Schloss, this library contains literature focused on business, economics and social sciences (you'll also need 2 € for a locker). For information on opening times and its location, click on the link below:

https://kim.uni-hohenheim.de/94991?&L=1#jfmulticontent_c241279-1

- **Ask at your institute of interest:** most institutes at the university have their own library. Make sure you ask a relevant professor or supervisor.
- **Stuttgart's Municipal Library:** shaped like a giant cube, Stuttgart's Municipal Library can be found in the center of the city. You can buy a borrowing card for a monthly or annual fee at the front desk. More information can be found at:

http://www1.stuttgart.de/stadtbibliothek/bvs/actions/profile/view.php?id=159

## ■ Additional tips

- **Using personal experience:** personal experience is very compelling, especially within an international institution like the University of Hohenheim. However, there are a few pitfalls in using it:
  - over generalizing – your experiences are not universal
  - using hearsay as fact

  Outside academic sources not only consider numerous sources, and rely on evidence and research, but they are usually peer-reviewed by experts. You *should* provide your own opinions – it's important to include original ideas, and show that you have understood and thought about what you've read and researched – but you need to support these with evidence from other sources. For more guidance on this issue, have a look at **"Academic writing style tips"** (chapter 2, part 2).
- **Check the publication year:** in certain circumstances, using "old" information is completely valid, for instance, when you're researching about a particular historical event. But, if you require contemporary data, take the time to look for information that's as up-to-date as possible.
- **Look at the reference list or bibliography of sources you've used:** this is a great way to find relevant sources and, if it's a new, or fairly new, publication, you should be able to find a number of recently published sources.

# Part 3 Lecture note-taking methods

Note-taking is an important part of attending lectures. Most people can't remember everything – especially over the course of two or more hours – and, even if you have access to the slides used by your lecturer, they'll undoubtedly digress from them.

There are a number of ways to arrange your notes so that they're easier to follow when you need to look over them again, whether to write an assignment or to revise for an exam.

## ■ Print out the lecture slides

If you can get access to the lecturer's slides before the lecture, then print them out. With PowerPoint presentations, there's a printing option whereby you can choose a layout with lines for note-taking next to each slide, thereby providing an easy way in which to organize your notes.

Even better: *read* through the slides before you go to the lecture. Of course, this isn't always possible, but it'll give you a bit of a head start in regard to the contents if you can.

## ■ Outlining method

This is where you have your main point on the left hand side of the page and then indent any supporting ideas under this key concept to the right, indenting further right as the supporting ideas become increasingly minor in importance. A supplementary or alternative idea to indenting is to use dashes, bullet points or numbers.

So, you'd start with your main idea here:

This would be a supporting idea.

And so would this one.

- Then you could include a few additional points.
- If you want, you can include dashes or numbers for clarity.

You might then have another supporting idea on this level.

- Followed by another on this level.

Then, you can put your second main idea here and continue as before.

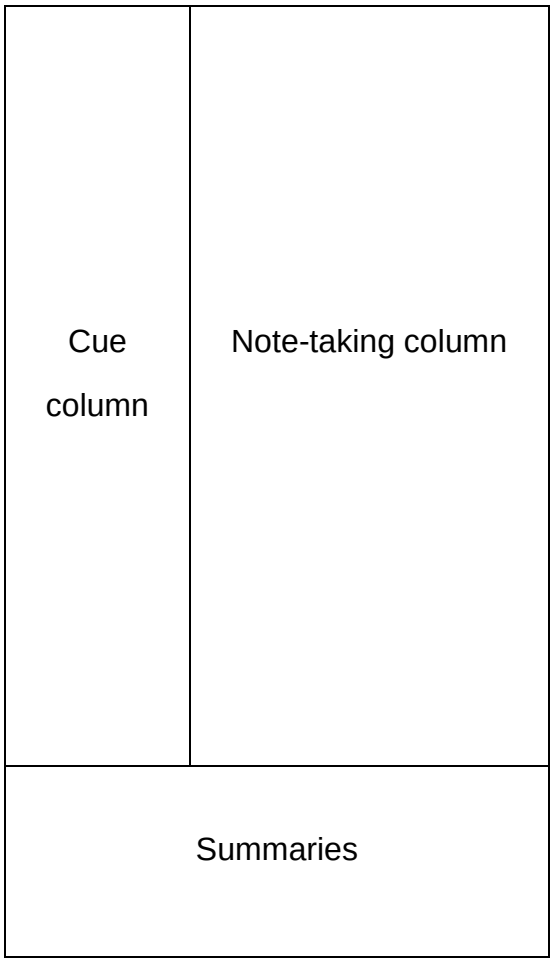
| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ This is an effective way to organize ideas (if done correctly)<br>■ You can easily see not only the main content of the lecture, but also the main relationships between the ideas<br>■ There's no real need to edit when reviewing | ■ To organize notes in this fashion takes some thought<br>■ If the lecturer speaks too quickly, this note-taking method isn't really effective<br>■ Ideally, the lecture should have an outline organization, moving from point to point |

## ■ Cornell method

This method requires a little preparation work. First, you draw a line down the left hand side of a piece of paper to create two columns, but the left column should take up only just over a quarter of the page (or 2.5 inches to be exact). The smaller, left hand column is your “cue column” in which you write key words and significant pieces of information. The larger, right hand column (which should be six inches in length) is your “note-taking column” in which you write – you guessed it! – your main notes. There’s an optional third section – the “summary area” – which appears as a row at the bottom of the page. You can keep this space free in order to jot down a few sentences explaining the main ideas behind your notes.

When you want to review your notes, you can cover up the note-taking column, then go through your cues and try and remember as much as you can about each, checking with the right hand column as you go.

So, your page would look something akin to this:



| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ It's simple to follow<br>■ This method provides a systematic way in which to review your notes<br>■ You can easily discern between your main concepts and additional information<br>■ You can use it in any type of lecture | ■ Requires a little preparation |

## ■ Charting method

Again, you need to carry out a little prep work beforehand, not only in regard to page layout, but also in terms of knowing what the lecture will be about. For this method, you create a number of columns, each of which has a label appropriate to the lecture topic. For each category, you can then note down key words, phrases, etc. For example, say the lecture was about different types of human parasite. You might have the following columns:

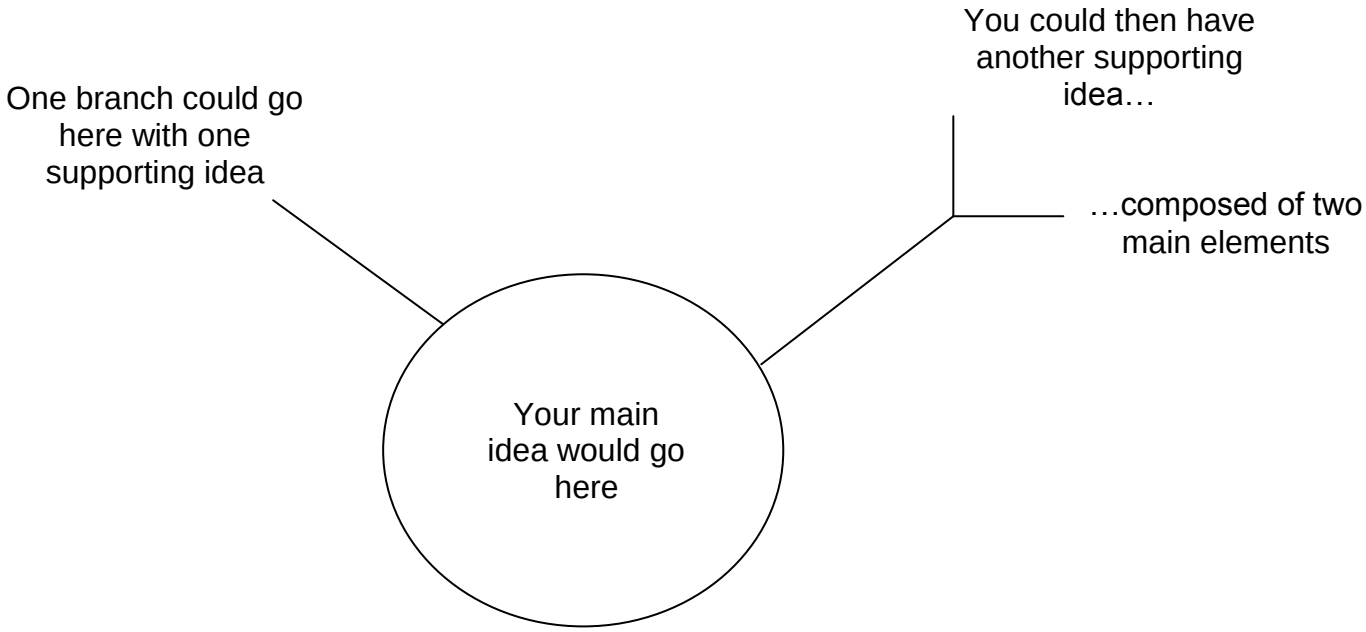
| Parasite name | Type | Life cycle | Disease caused |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ It provides an simple way in which to review the information you noted down<br>■ You can notice different relationships and easily compare<br>■ It can save on writing time | ■ The lecture needs to be fact based<br>■ You need to make sure that you know exactly what the lecture is about beforehand (which isn't necessarily a negative point…) |

## ■ Mapping method

This method is particularly effective if you're a visual learner. The main idea is written in the center of the page and then supporting ideas are added, connected to the primary concept via lines. You can also use different colors and/or numbers to link up ideas.

This system would look something like this:




| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ You can keep a visual track of your lecture<br>■ It allows you to see relationships easily, and you can use different colors and symbols to help<br>■ When you review your notes, they'll make you rethink how these points fit together<br>■ It's good for when you're unsure of the lecture content beforehand | ■ The lecture needs to be well-organized |

## ■ Sentence method

As the name implies, each time a new fact, idea or topic is introduced, you write it down on a new line, each of which you number. However, avoid writing in full sentences: you should paraphrase and use abbreviations to save time. So, for example:

1) 1st note here
2) No. next note 2
3) And cont. using abbrev., paraphrasing, etc.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ You can write down basically all the information from the lecture<br>■ It works well for lectures where there's a lot of information and it's not clear how it relates | ■ You can't tell major and minor points from each other<br>■ It's harder to review in this respect, and you may have to spend extra time relating points to one another |

## ■ Reviewing your notes

Ideally, you'll review your lecture notes on the same day you took them. This will ensure that they all make sense and will be reusable at a later date. Of course, this isn't always possible. So, if not, aim to review them at least once at week. This may feel like an additional chore, but, when it comes to your exam, it'll be much easier to retain the information as you've already refreshed it once in your mind.

# CHAPTER 2 WRITING

# Part 1 Basic writing tips

The following provides a basic overview of common issues faced by students when writing an academic assignment or thesis. If you know them in advance, you should find writing in English much easier.

Please note that only basic definitions are provided here for grammatical terms. If you're unsure about any of the terms used, double check in a grammar textbook or online.

## ■ Different parts of speech

### ▶ Pronouns

Pronouns are used *instead of repeating nouns*, for example, "he", "she", "it", "them", etc. Points to remember concerning these are:

- **Do they agree in number?** *Singular* pronouns are used instead of *singular* nouns (e.g., "he states" instead of "Einstein states"), and *plural* pronouns instead of *plural* nouns (e.g., "they discovered" instead of "Watson and Crick discovered").
- It's advisable to use the **third person,** i.e., "he", "she", "him", "her", "they", "them", instead of the first, i.e., "I", "me", "you". But, whichever you decide to use, be consistent.
- When you use a pronoun, make sure that the reader knows **which noun it's replacing.** In other words, if you start to refer to a concept as "it", be sure that your reader is clear what "it" stands for.

### ▶ Prepositions

Prepositions are used in sentences to *connect* nouns or pronouns to other words. In general, they show a connection with time or space, for instance, "in", "on", "at", etc.

- Be careful **not to use prepositions superfluously.** This will make your writing wordy and long-winded. Generally, you shouldn't need more than one at a time.
- There are **certain words that are *always* followed by a particular preposition,** for instance, "acquainted with" or "objection to". Make sure you know which these are (otherwise, you should check a grammar textbook or online for guidance).

### ▶ Nouns and verbs

Nouns are *naming* words, for example, "farmer", "business", "land". Verbs are *doing* words, for instance, "to own", "to harvest", "to calculate". Make sure that your nouns and verbs agree in terms of *singular* nouns with *singular* verbs (e.g., "Directly addressing the needs of smallholder farmers *is* essential" not "Directly addressing the needs of smallholder farmers *are* essential"), and *plural* nouns with *plural* verbs (e.g., "With secure *rights* to land, *smallholder farmers are* more likely to qualify for credit" not "With secure *rights* to land, *smallholder farmers is* more likely to qualify for credit").

## ■ Sentence structure

A good sentence should consist of a **noun** and a **verb,** and needs to be complete in itself in regard to meaning. If you don't convey a fully developed thought, this is known as a **sentence fragment:** they tend to be missing a verb or a subject. For example:

> Agroecology is regarded as an alternative smallholder farming system to the industrialized system. Because farmers can produce more food with fewer resources.

This can be easily remedied by joining the second sentence (the fragment) with the first sentence:

> Agroecology is regarded as an alternative smallholder farming system to the industrialized system because farmers can produce more food with fewer resources.

**Run-on sentences,** on the other hand, are the opposite: they're too long, consisting of more than one sentence and bad punctuation. For example:

> Phytomedicine is the study of plant illness and damage it is concerned with methods that support plant health.

This, again, can be easily fixed by splitting the sentence into two. Either by using a period:

> Phytomedicine is the study of plant illness and damage. It is concerned with methods that support plant health.

Or by using a semi-colon:

> Phytomedicine is the study of plant illness and damage; it is concerned with methods that support plant health.

## ■ Paragraphs

One way to think of paragraphs is as clusters of sentences with a common focus. Paragraphs are dealt with in detail in **"How to write paragraphs"** (part 3 of this chapter).

## ■ Tense shifts

In general, try not to switch from one tense to another while writing about a particular situation or topic: it can be confusing for the reader and appear awkward. (Of course, this is not *always* the case). For more guidance on this issues, have a look at **"How to use tenses"** (part 5 of this chapter).

## ■ Double negatives

Make sure to avoid **double negatives.** This is where you use two forms of negation in the same sentence. They sound awkward and can obscure your meaning. They can even cancel out what you were trying to say in the first place.

One way to avoid them is to refrain from using "not" with negative words such as:

- neither
- never
- no-one
- nobody
- nothing
- no
- none

For instance, instead of putting "There *are not no*…", you should write "There *are not any*…".

## ■ Punctuation

Good punctuation makes your writing sound more refined and gives it more clarity. The English language uses a plethora of different types. The ones listed here are those that seem to give many people the most problems.

### ▶ Apostrophes (')

The apostrophe signals **ownership.** There are six different ways that it can be used:

- **singular possessive,** e.g., the *farmer's* field; *Mr. Briggs'* cattle
- **plurals that don't end in 's',** e.g., *women's* rights; *children's* nutrition
- **possessive plural nouns that end in 's',** e.g., *stakeholders'* money
- **indefinite pronouns**, e.g., climate change is *everybody's* responsibility
- **plurals of numbers, letters and figures,** as well as some money and time expressions, e.g., the program was the result of a *year's* worth of research; one farmer chose all *three's* in the survey
- **using the last word to relay possession** with organizations or joint ventures, e.g., the Food and Agriculture *Organization's* report; Professor Bird and *Dr. Finch's* project

When writing, **don't use contractions** (as used here), e.g., use "it is" not "it's", or use "she is" not "she's". This issue is also dealt with in **"Academic writing style tips"** (chapter 2, part 2).

### ▶ Commas (,)

In English, the use of commas is more common than some people realize. A rule of thumb for commas is to regard them as breaths: say the sentence in your mind and think about when you would naturally breathe or take a short pause. Commas can really change the meaning of a sentence. For instance, "Let's eat mother" has a very different meaning to "Let's eat**,** mother"! So, it's worth bearing them in mind.

Be careful not to use a comma instead of writing two sentences. This is known as a **comma splice.** For example:

> Plants create a large proportion of the oxygen and food depended upon by humans, they are the foundation of nearly all the world's animal life.

Instead, use a period, a semi-colon or a conjunction, e.g., "and" or "because".

So, using the example above:

> Plants create a large proportion of the oxygen and food depended upon by humans. They are the foundation of nearly all the world's animal life.

Some people use serial commas when writing lists. This is where a comma is added after the last element of a list, e.g., "she grows carrots, cauliflowers, and cabbages", as opposed to "she grows carrots, cauliflowers and cabbages". In this sentence, *without* the last comma you would still understand the sentence, so using them in this instance is very much a personal choice.

▶ **Colons (:)**

Colons can be used for a number of reasons:

- **To start off a list,** but it must follow a complete sentence, e.g., "BRICS stands for four different countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa" and not "The BRICS acronym consists of: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa".
- **To elaborate on what was said before,** e.g., "The global economy presents an unfair system: it favors richer countries and corporations". Using a colon in such a way instills a more authoritative tone than using a period, for instance.

▶ **Semi-colons (;)**

The semi-colon is one of the most misunderstood punctuation marks. The great thing is, you can get away with not using it at all if you're unsure of how to. However, the following will provide you with two basic situations in which you can:

- To **separate independent clauses instead of using a conjunction,** e.g., "The project was composed of 25 people; eight of them were women" instead of "The project was composed of 25 people and eight of them were women".
- To **separate elements in a series instead of using commas.** If you're listing explanations as opposed to just words, using semi-colons can make this clearer for the reader, e.g., "There are three main attributes of the present global structure which contribute to world hunger: firstly, inequity, which is inherent in the system; secondly, the increasingly encroaching power of non-state actors over the state; and thirdly, that the influences of the system are usually the diffuse outcome of different actors".

Remember that whatever comes before and after a semi-colon must be a standalone sentence in itself.

## ■ Capitalization

In English, there are only a few situations in which you need to use capitalization:

- the first word in a sentence
- proper nouns, i.e., the names of people or places

- the names of organizations and institutions
- the first word of a complete quotation
- titles, e.g., books, journals
- the pronoun "I" and any of its contractions, e.g., "I'll", "I'd"

In German, nouns in general are capitalized. Refrain from doing this! If the situation is none of the above, the chances are that you don't need to capitalize.

## ■ Hyphens (-) and dashes (–)

The hyphen is the smaller of the two, and used for compound words, e.g., "semi-colon", and between numbers when indicating moving from one to another, e.g., "25-26 chickens were kept in each coop".

The dash is longer. If you have keyboard with a numeric keypad, you can create an **em-dash** by holding down the alt key and typing in 0151. Two of the main circumstances in which using the em-dash is effective are:

- **instead of brackets** to give what you're saying more emphasis, e.g., "NGOs and CSOs do not have – or, at least, should not have – state or corporate allegiances".
- **instead of a colon,** again, to add more emphasis to what you're saying, e.g., "Democracy is extensively considered to be the only acceptable form of governance – it could even be said almost universally".

## ■ Abbreviations and acronyms

An **acronym** is where only the first letters of a name or sentence are given, e.g., UN instead of United Nations. Always spell out acronyms initially, providing the shortened form in brackets, and then *only* use the acronym from then on throughout your writing. However, there are a few exceptions whereby the acronym is essentially more well-known than the spelt out version and so can be used as such from the beginning, e.g., AIDS, USA, NATO.

An **abbreviation** is where you shorten or contract a term or name, e.g., Dr. instead of Doctor. If you decide to abbreviate a title or name in your writing because, for instance, it's too long to keep repeating in full, e.g., you decide to use "The Norms" instead of the "*Norms* on the Responsibilities of *Transnational Corporations* and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights", you need to make this clear to your readers. This can be achieved as follows:

> The *Norms* on the Responsibilities of *Transnational Corporations* and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights (hereafter known as the Norms) was approved by the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on 13 August, 2003.

Don't overuse abbreviations and acronyms: it can make your writing confusing. If you only use the name or title once, or even twice, there's no real need to provide an abbreviation or acronym for it.

## ■ Underlining and italics

**Underlining** and ***italics*** have the same function: to emphasize a word or phrase. However, italics is much more common with word processed documents (underlining is more common for handwritten pieces). Nevertheless, whichever you decide on, make sure you're consistent. And don't use CAPITALIZATION to emphasize.

## ■ Footnotes and endnotes

**Footnotes** come at the bottom (foot) of a page, whereas **endnotes** can be found at the end of an article, book chapter or book. Both can be used for two main reasons:

- for **references**, instead of providing a citation in the text followed by a reference section
- to provide your reader with **additional information** that doesn't have to be included in the main text

More guidance on foot- and endnotes can be found in **"How to use footnotes and endnotes"** (chapter 5, part 1).

# Part 2 Academic writing style tips

Academic writing is different from other forms of writing. Take how these writing aid materials are written, for example: the tone is more relaxed and conversational than that you'd find in, for instance, a journal article. This is *not* an academic style of writing, and would not be acceptable in a seminar paper.

Reading academic literature and journal articles is a great way of understanding the language and style used in academic writing. However, if you're still unsure, below are a few tips to help you get a feel of what's expected of you when you're asked to write a academic paper, report or thesis.

## ■ Objectivity and conciseness

Academic writing aims to be **objective** (unbiased, impartial) and **concise** (getting your point across using as few words as necessary).

You may have – in fact, hopefully you do have – your own thoughts and opinions on what you're researching. However, in an academic paper, the focus is not on personal experience, but **sound evidence** and **analysis**.

Most academic texts are written in the **passive voice:** it avoids personal pronouns such as "I", "me" and "you". (For more information on the passive voice, check out **"Active versus passive voice",** chapter 2, part 5). This is not to say that you can't use this kind of personal language at all. You just need to make sure that you keep your language and style formal.

Other ways in which to achieve this include:

- **don't contract your verb forms** (as demonstrated here): for example, use "do not" instead of "don't"
- **avoid colloquial language:** this means everyday language, like using "mum" instead of "mother", or "TV" instead of "television"
- **be precise when using facts, figures and dates:** don't write "a lot of people" when you can write "30 million people"
- **try not show your personal opinion** through the words you use: so, avoid words like "luckily" or "unusually"
- **avoid clichés:** these phrases are very overused, for example, "diamond in the rough" or "the writing on the wall"
- **don't overuse "etc.":** use "and" instead when writing lists
- **don't overuse exclamation marks (!), brackets(()) and/or dashes (–)**
- **use capital letters suitably:** don't use them for EMPHASIS
- there are also a few words you should avoid, opting instead for more formal, concise alternatives:
  - **"like":** use "for example" or "for instance"
  - **"thing"** and other such combinations: use "factor" or "element"
  - **"lots of":** use "many" or "substantial amount"
  - **"little"** and **"big":** use "small" and "large"
  - **"good"** and **"bad":** use "positive" and "negative"

## ■ Varied vocabulary

It can be boring for your reader to come across the same vocabulary throughout your writing. One way to avoid this is to use **synonyms.** Synonyms are words that have a similar meaning, but not necessarily the same. This is why it's important to ascertain that the meaning is close enough when swapping one word for another. Therefore, check all words you're unsure of in the dictionary first.

## ■ Complex sentences

Academic writing is formed of more complex sentences than you'd use when speaking. This doesn't mean that you should sacrifice meaning and clarity for eight line sentences and six syllable words. In fact, simple sentences and words are encouraged to ensure conciseness. Just keep an eye on the language you use and how your paragraphs are constructed.

## ■ Language sensitivity

Avoid using **absolute comments** and **generalizations.** So, instead of stating "*All* transnational corporations put their profits above respecting human rights", write "*There is evidence that many* transnational corporations put their profits above respecting human rights". This is also known as "hedging": using cautious language, e.g., "appear to be", "suggests", "possible", as opposed to "always", "never".

Also, avoid using **offensive language,** such as swear words. Using such language takes away from your objectivity and, in fact, weakens your case.

## ■ Unbiased language

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have to convey meaning. As we've become more socially aware, so has how we use language. To avoid being offensive to certain groups of people, it's important to avoid **biased language.**

- **Gender bias**

  One of the biggest issues is that of **gender bias.** For instance, assuming that the individual in question is male, e.g., writing "man" instead of "human", or stating "Every doctor should be legally bound not to hurt *his* patients".

  One way to bypass using "he/she" is to use the plural form instead, i.e., "they", "their". So, instead of writing:

  > Today, for a farmer to apply for a grant, **he/she**…"

  You can write:

  > Today, for a farmer to apply for a grant, **they**…"

  Although this is a matter of contention in some writing circles – as you're using a plural for a singular case – it's more concise then continuously using "he/she", and, as people can also be gender non-specific, could also be considered as more accepting.

Gendered forms of words, for instance, “policeman” or “policewoman”, can easily be changed to the **non-gendered form:** “police”.

If you use old texts, such biased language might be unavoidable. In these circumstances, you should just quote as is or paraphrase.

- **Referring to different groups of people**

  When referring to a person who, for instance, has a disability or is homeless, put their disability last. So, instead of “disabled person” write “a person *who is disabled*”, and instead of “homeless person” write “a person *who is homeless*”. This is because they’re people before their disability or situation.

  Avoid writing groups of people as adjectives, e.g., females, gays, Asians. Instead, substitute for nouns: women, gay people, Asian people.

  Make sure you use the **correct terminology.** Certain terms are outdated and can be offensive, e.g., “black” or “Indian” (as opposed to “native”). You should also be aware of your audience regarding this point. Try and be as precise as possible when referring to different groups. This will help you to avoid stereotypical terms.

# Part 3 How to write paragraphs

At first, this may seem like a simple topic to broach; however, being able to compose good paragraphs is not only vital in regard to writing coherency and flow, but helps you as a writer to stay on track and keep focused.

## ■ What is a paragraph?

In short, a paragraph is a collection of sentences that are concerned with the same topic. They thereby allow you to organize your ideas, and provide a clear thread to the topic you're dealing with throughout your writing.

There's no sentence – or even word length – to a paragraph: it should be as long as required to make sense. However, academics are known to push for certain lengths, primarily to assist students in disciplining their writing style.

## ■ One idea per paragraph rule

A general rule is to keep **one idea to one paragraph.** If you find yourself discussing a new idea, make a new paragraph. For instance, if you have an idea and with this idea you include supporting evidence, this is one paragraph. If you have a number of concepts connected to one idea, you can include these in one paragraph, as long as each concept doesn't start to become too long and then, perhaps, require its own paragraph.

## ■ Main components of a paragraph

- **Topic sentence**

  Although this doesn't have to be the first sentence of your paragraph, it should at least be near the beginning of it (although, of course, this is not the only way to do it). It's like a summary, allowing your reader to understand what the focus of the paragraph will be. The topic sentence should make clear how this paragraph connects to the main argument, and all other sentences in the paragraph should connect to it in some way.

- **Explaining and supporting sentences**

  Subsequent sentences should explain and support the predominant idea and thinking behind your topic sentence. In order to achieve this, you could include:

  - specific facts, figures and data from sound sources
  - interpretations and analysis of the evidence

- **Final sentences**

  As you come to the end of a paragraph, you should tie in again with your main hypothesis. You can use the final line to introduce your reader to the next paragraph or section.

## ■ What your paragraph should include

- **Focus:** this means that it shouldn't start to move into other areas halfway through, or be a mish-mash of ideas.
- **Coherence:** the concepts you include should function together. The sentences used should flow and progress in a way that coherently explains and discusses the main idea.
- **Development:** you should make sure that the idea you're focusing on in the paragraph is explained and discussed well. In this respect, if your paragraph is only a couple of sentences long, you might need to develop it further.

## ■ When to start a new paragraph

- **Starting a new idea or aspect of an idea:** as stated before, each time you begin a new idea, start a new paragraph. If your idea requires an extended explanation, then each new aspect should consist of its own paragraph.
- **Contrasting ideas or arguments:** you can add clarity to discussions by placing different ideas or arguments into different paragraphs.
- **Creating a pause:** one way to approach paragraphs is to view them as pauses for your reader. This allows your writing to flow, making it easier to follow.
- **Writing your introduction or conclusion:** these parts should always be granted their own paragraphs.

# Part 4 Tips for writing concisely

You've been assigned an academic paper and need to fill up 15 pages. Repetition and wordiness will take up space, but will also lose you marks. On the other hand, you may have become so caught up in the topic that you've written 10 pages over the limit…

Learning to express yourself concisely is not only good for improving your writing style, but also for discerning how well you yourself understand a particular idea or concept. The tips listed here are aimed at helping you to become a more concise writer. But, don't worry: it's not all about reducing your word count! It's primarily about learning how to use words and phrases that describe what you want to say most effectively.

## ■ Components of writing concisely

There are a few major components to writing clearly and concisely:

- choose your words carefully
- construct your sentences thoughtfully
- use grammar correctly

## ■ Using meaningful words over vague counterparts

Occasionally, you may find yourself describing a concept using a number of small, vague words when one or two will do. This can lead to wordiness, which more often than not makes the point you're trying to state unclear and hard to follow. A great place to start when searching for more meaningful vocabulary is a thesaurus (and many can be found online). However, if you find a new word, be sure to look up what its precise meaning is first by checking in a dictionary: synonyms have *similar* meanings, but not usually *exactly the same* meaning.

## ■ Combining sentences

You can get rid of words by reading through your work and combining sentences. The main meaning of one sentence could be implanted into another sentence, thereby retaining the essence without the excess words.

## ■ Get rid of clichés and euphemisms

Clichés and euphemisms are phrases that have been overused to the point that they've lost their meaning. **Clichés** includes phrases such as "to make a long story short" or "ripe old age". **Euphemisms** are words or phrases that substitute language that might come across as offensive or blunt, for instance, instead of stating someone died, you can say they "passed away" or they've "gone to sleep". Delete any you find in your writing, opting instead for more concise ways of making your point. This issue is also dealt with in **"Academic writing style tips"** (chapter 2, part 2).

## ■ Look out for deadweight words

If a word is adding nothing to a sentence, get rid of it. There are a number of ways you can achieve this, including eliminating:

- details and information that you feel would be obvious to your reader
- words that don't add anything to the meaning of your sentences, e.g., "particular", "actually", "basically", "really"
- words that have the same meaning
- pairs of words that indicate each other, e.g., "end result", "past history", "true fact"
- words that signify the category being discussed, e.g., "agricultural field", "period in time", "in a confused state"

## ■ Additional ways to avoid wordiness

- Avoid **formulaic phrases.** Instead, use single word versions. For example, instead of "with regard to" use "about", or instead of "due to the fact" use "because".
- Avoid **padded verbs,** and, again use single word versions instead. For instance, instead of "to have an expectation" write "to expect", or instead of "to make an inquiry" write "to inquire".
- Get rid of needless **"to be"**s. For example, in the sentence "Democracy is consider *to be* the best governance system" the "to be" can be omitted: "Democracy is considered the best governance system".
- Similarly, get rid of useless **relative structures,** i.e., "that", "which" and "who". For instance, in the sentence "In the book, *which is* entitled…" "which is" and even "which is entitled" can be omitted: "In the book…"

# Part 5 How to use tenses

How you use tenses is an important part of academic writing. Tenses provide your reader with information regarding when an action took place, and whether it's finished or not.

In academic writing, certain tenses are used more than others. Outlined below are the three main tenses you should use, and when and how you should use them.

## ■ Past simple

The past simple is used to describe **an action that finished at a particular time in the past.** There are two main reasons why you'd use this tense in your writing:

- When you want to describe research carried out by someone else that has finished, e.g., "In 1672, Sir Isaac Newton discovered that white light is composed of a number of colored rays".
- When referring to your own work, including the method(s) you used and the results you found, e.g., "The increase in dry mass was used to calculate the rate of photosynthesis in the leaves".

## ■ Present simple

This describes **an action that is repeated** (or not), e.g., a hobby, habit or daily event. You'd use this tense:

- Within your introduction to explain what's *known already,* e.g., "Most of the world's hungry reside in developing countries".
- Within your conclusion to state what we *now know,* e.g., "This research shows that the lack of corporate accountability is a major hurdle to human rights realization".
- To discuss possible future research, e.g., "Future research could consider Westernized governments instead or developing ones".
- When you want to make a general statement about previous research in regard to what is known now, e.g., "Previous studies show that agroecology is an effective farming method for smallholder farmers".
- To cite another study without stating the author(s) directly, e.g., "Resource curse literature states that economies based on agriculture are less likely to need to contend with conflicts than those that deal with high-value resources (then cite your sources)."
- In order to bring in supporting evidence, e.g., "There is evidence that genetically modified crops do not play a major role in food security; in fact, quite the opposite."
- In order to agree with a conclusion or theory from another paper, e.g., "Pittsburg (2013) states that…"

## ■ Present perfect

This tense is used when you want to discuss **an action that occurred at an unspecified time before now.** This means that you can't use this tense if you want to use a *specific* time expression, e.g., yesterday, last week, etc. However, you can use it with expressions like many times, yet, already, etc.

- Within academic writing it's usually used to refer to research that has already been carried out, e.g., "A number of investigations have shown that music is beneficial for people who suffer from stress."
- It can be used to introduce a new topic area, e.g., "There have been a number of studies into…"
- You can use it to connect previous research with your own. In other words, you can state what's already been discovered and how your investigation will contribute to this body of knowledge, as well as what the knowledge gap is, e.g., "Advances in knowledge have been made into…However, problems still exist in regard to…"
- You can refer to previous studies without referring to the author(s) directly, providing, instead, the citation(s) at the end in parenthesis e.g., "It has been found that… (then cite your source(s))."
- It can be used to describe the background to your research.
- It can describe your findings, e.g., "We have found that…"
- And, lastly, it can be used to discuss conclusions, e.g., "This has led us to conclude that…"

## ■ Tenses for different sections

The table below provides a *generalized* idea of which tenses to use when.

| Section | Tense |
|---|---|
| Abstract | Past |
| Introduction | Present |
| Materials and methods | Past (but present for describing tables and figures) |
| Results | Past (but present for describing tables and figures) |
| Discussion | Present for significant results)<br>Past for summarizing |
| Conclusion | Present for major implications, limitations and future research<br>Past for summarizing |

# Part 6 Active versus passive voice

The way in which you write can have a major impact on *how* what you want to say comes across. A major concept concerning this issue within academic writing is the idea of the active voice and the passive voice. You'll have to get your head around a little English grammar, but it may help you to write more effectively.

## ■ What's the difference?

With the **active voice**, the **subject** of the sentence performs the *action*. A popular example to demonstrate this is:

**The dog** *bit* **the boy**

With the **passive voice**, the *action* is performed on the **subject** of the sentence, highlighting instead the **receiver** of the action. For example:

**The boy** *was bitten by* **the dog**

You can recognize the passive voice because it almost always includes the verb "to be", for example, as "is", "was", "were", etc. It'll also probably include the words "by the" (as in the example above).

You can see that the second sentence in the passive voice is longer than the sentence in the active voice. In general, writing in the active voice is more **direct,** which assists in making your writing more concise and forceful.

The passive voice, on the other hand, is more **indirect.** It's generally wordier, and regarded as weaker and ambiguous.

## ■ Using the active and passive voice

In academic writing, it's traditional to use the **passive voice.** This is primarily because it allows you to avoid using personal pronouns or proper names, i.e., "I", "you", "me", etc. This makes your writing appear more **objective** and **unbiased.**

The **passive voice** is also effective when:

- you want to focus on those experiencing a particular action or on the action itself
- you don't want to repeat who the person/people carrying out the action is/are
- you don't want to name the actor(s) involved
- if you don't know who the actor(s) is/are

However, nowadays, many journals accept – if not encourage – the **active voice.** This is because, as mentioned before, it helps make writing more **concise.**

Nevertheless, you should never consider one as *always* right and the other *always* wrong: you need to use both purposefully in order to get your meaning across.

# Part 7 How to write a counterargument

The main purpose of an academic essay is to argue a particular case. You put forward your main idea – your **hypothesis** – and then you provide evidence for it, using different sources. However, if you only provide a one-sided argument, this makes your work **biased.** As strange as it may sound, by not arguing *against* your main idea, you're not fully justifying your position. You can actually make your argument stronger by giving different perspectives to it. Providing counterarguments allows you to be one up on any skeptics by anticipating possible objectives they may have. It also demonstrates sound reasoning, helps to sharpen the way in which you think about your ideas, and assists you in developing a clearer and more powerful stance regarding your hypothesis.

## ■ Choosing your counterarguments

Don't pick counterarguments that nobody believes or agrees with: you're not going to gain anything from these. A couple of points to consider when deciding on which counterarguments to choose are:

- Is there sound evidence that this could be the case?
- Or, at least, is this a well-known counterargument to your hypothesis? Don't forget to consider your audience.

## ■ Denouncing your hypothesis

First of all, you need to denounce – or turn against – your hypothesis:

- think of any weaknesses or disadvantages it has that could be used against it
- consider a substitute or alternative proposal that others could or do claim makes more sense than yours

Use evidence and good sources to make this challenge, and be clear and convincing. Be objective, and consider who might hold such a counterargument. Avoid using biased language: to do so would only be counterproductive. Even if you disagree with a counterargument, at least give it the benefit of the doubt in your writing.

## ■ Introducing a counterargument

You need to make sure that you introduce your counterarguments in a way that your reader knows that the view or opinion you're about to convey is not one that you (completely) agree with. Otherwise, it'll look like you're contradicting yourself. Simple ways are to begin a sentence or paragraph with "But…" or "However…" Another is to contribute the idea to someone else: use the name of the specific writer or thinker, or state "Many people think…" or "It is also believed that…"

## ■ Reaffirming your hypothesis

You then need to return to your original argument: “But…” “However…” “Yet…” Your counterstatement – or rebuttal – is the argument you use to reaffirm your hypothesis. For instance:

- you could explain how this counterargument is not correct or mistaken in some way, maybe factually, analytically or morally
- you could recognize that the counterargument is valid, but that, on balance, your hypothesis is more so
- you could even start a new section in which you analyze your hypothesis in light of the counterargument

Nevertheless, be careful to use sound reasoning and evidence as to why your hypothesis still stands; don’t simply dismiss counterarguments as intrinsically wrong.

## ■ Introducing your counterstatement

You also need to introduce your rebuttal carefully; otherwise, as before, your reader will become confused as to what your main argument is. You need to make it clear that you’re responding to a counterargument in favor of your own hypothesis: “This is a valid/popular argument, but…”

## ■ Agreeing with a counterargument

You may come across a counterargument that you actually agree with! This doesn’t mean that you have to abandon your original hypothesis. However, it might mean that you need to adjust it in some way to accommodate this new idea, perhaps if only to acknowledge that in certain circumstances this counterargument could be the case. Thereby, you’re not contradicting yourself, only refining your argument.

## ■ Using counterarguments in your writing

There are no hard and fast rules as to where to put counterarguments. However, having said this, counterarguments shouldn’t be placed in your conclusion: you should have presented *all* of your arguments before this final section.

Common places to include counterarguments are:

- when you first present your hypothesis in your introduction – it can provide justification to your topic
- as a following section to your introduction
- after a relevant section in which you argued the opposite case
- the section before your conclusion, thereby providing additional support to your closing statement

# CHAPTER 3 SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENTS

# Part 1 An overview of the main types of academic writing

Seminar papers, annotated bibliographies, theses…At the end of the day, the focus of academic writing is on reading about a particular topic, analyzing the subject matter, and ending with a well-thought-out conclusion. But, there are a number of ways in which this can be achieved. Here's just an overview of the main types you may come across during your time at university.

## ■ Seminar/research paper

In a seminar or research paper, you're expected to research and understand a particular topic, then demonstrate your comprehension of the subject through analysis and original thought, using academic sources to support your arguments. You're required to structure and organize your evidence and ideas in a comprehensive manner, allowing your reader to follow the main thread of your thoughts. Your professor or supervisor will provide you with the main concept, page or word limit, and deadline. For guidance on how to write such a paper, have a look at **"How to write an academic paper"** (chapter 3, part 2).

## ■ Scientific paper

In a scientific paper, you're required to write-up the procedure(s) you carried out for a scientific experiment, followed by a discussion of the results and conclusions you found. Unlike a seminar paper, generally you'll need to include a "materials and methods" and a "results" section. When writing such a paper, you should bear in mind the question: reading this report, could someone else now repeat the experiment I conducted? For guidance on how to write such a paper, check out **"Scientific writing: how to write a laboratory report"** (chapter 3, part 3).

## ■ Literature review

For a literature review, you're expected to provide an overview of the literature that's been published on a particular subject. However, it's not simply a matter of supplying a brief description of all the books and journal articles you find on a specific topic: you need to objectively analyze these sources. Literature reviews are more often than not part of a thesis, and here they play an important role in placing your research question(s) and/or hypothesis(es) within the wider context, and in demonstrating the knowledge gap that your research aims to fill. For guidance on how to write such a paper, have a look at **"How to write a literature review"** (chapter 3, part 4).

## ■ Annotated bibliography

As with a literature review, the main focus of an annotated bibliography is literature. However, instead of attempting to bring your sources together, you look at each separately, providing a short explanation – or annotation – of around 150 words for each one. This allows you, or someone else interested in the topic, to know the overall contents of the book, journal article or report quickly and succinctly. However, you don't just focus on what the literature is saying: you also need to consider the accuracy and relevance of the text. It can be useful to keep an annotated bibliography when you're preparing to write or are writing your thesis. It's a way of managing notes on the literature you've read, allowing you to promptly ascertain if a source is useful or not for the part you're currently writing.

## ■ Reflective writing

This is more common if you study social sciences. You might be asked to write a reflective essay or keep a journal in which you examine your own personal experiences in light of what you've learnt or read during a module, for example, regarding different theories or literature.

## ■ Research proposal

You might be required to write a research proposal for your Master thesis, but they're usually required for people who want to undertake a PhD. Its overall purpose is to demonstrate the need for conducting your proposed research: you need to provide the aim(s) of your study, its significance within the wider context, and how you intend to investigate the problem. Different institutes and universities have different guidelines in regard to what they expect from your proposal, as well as specific deadlines, so make sure you look into these first.

# Part 2 How to write an academic paper

It can be daunting to start writing an academic paper, whether you know what you want to say or not. However, the following tips should help you in tackling the major hurdles you may face.

For an academic paper, you're usually expected to write somewhere between 10 and 20 pages. What an academic paper is *not* is a mini-thesis. Therefore, don't follow the main layout of a thesis, e.g., including an abstract, a methodology and a results section. If you're writing a report on an experiment you carried out then, of course, the last two sections – at least – are required. But, for a discussion paper based on secondary source material, they're not. However, you should always check with your professor or supervisor first to ascertain exactly what it is they're expecting from you.

For more information on different styles of academic writing, have a look at **"An overview of the main academic writing types"** (part 1 of this chapter).

## ■ Understand your brief

First things first: know what your professor or lecturer wants from you. This may seem obvious, but it's very easy to end up on a tangent when you're unsure of exactly what's being asked. Different professors or lecturers will, undoubtedly, appreciate an issue or a topic in different ways, so it's vital from the off-set that you comprehend specifically what their angle is. For more guidance on understanding your academic paper question, check out **"Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking"** (chapter 1, part 1).

## ■ Choose your referencing software

Before you start writing, get your referencing software sorted out. This will save you a lot of time in the long-run. There's nothing worse when writing than having to try and find sources you forgot to record at the start. This kind of software is a fantastic asset, so make sure you take advantage of it. For more information on referencing software, have a look at **"How to reference"** (chapter 4, part 1).

## ■ Plan out your structure

This is possibly the hardest part. It may even feel like a waste of time when all you want to do is get some words down. However, once you have the basic skeleton of your paper, all you have to do is flesh it out. The outline doesn't have to be very detailed – you might be a writer who only requires a very basic plan – just decide what works best for you.

The *fundamental* layout of an academic paper is:

- introduction
- main body
- conclusion

As previously stated, unless specified by your professor or lecturer, you don't need to include elements like an abstract: this is more for longer pieces of writing like theses. Your main aim in a seminar paper is to provide arguments and counterarguments to the topic in question.

Using your notes, you can work out headings and sub-headings (see **"Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking"** for further guidance). You can then group your major and minor points accordingly. Then use these bullet points to create your overall outline. Always remember to keep your essay topic in mind and ask yourself: do these points support my topic area/question?

Creating a structure can be time consuming; however, once you've figured it out, it will, in fact, save you time in the long run by helping to keep you focused.

## ■ Writing the introduction

As its name suggests, the introduction is the part in which you introduce your reader to the subject you'll be discussing. Setting the overall direction at the beginning of your paper will allow you to lead your reader smoothly to your conclusion, and give them the motivation to want to do so in the first place.

First of all, you need to grab your reader's attention. Ways in which you can achieve this include starting with:

- a key fact
- a powerful image
- a quotation
- an anecdote
- a counterargument

This is your **"hook" sentence,** so make it interesting. Just be sure that what you choose is relevant to your topic. And don't jump straight in with your main argument: you want to build up to this.

The most important role of the introduction is letting your reader know what the topic of your essay will be. You can achieve this by providing the **context or background of your topic** so that your reader can get an understanding of how it fits within the grander scheme of things. It's like building a frame in which your topic sits. Through this, you can also justify why your topic is worth looking into in depth. Be careful not to go into *too* much detail: you only need to provide an **overview.**

With your introduction you should also make sure that your reader knows what the **central question or problem** is. Again, only provide an **overview of the main points.** You should also put forward your **main argument – your hypothesis.** This is what your introduction was building up to, so it's important that you state this coherently.

Once you've presented your main argument, you can provide a **brief outline** of your paper. This gives your reader a general idea of what to expect. The last sentence of your essay should introduce the next section so that your reader moves seamlessly into the body of your paper.

To summarize, the overall layout of your introduction should be as follows:

- hook sentence
- state the context

- state the central problem and main points
- state your hypothesis or main argument
- provide the overall layout of your paper

Your introduction shouldn't be too long. However, it should be proportional to the whole of your paper. For instance, if your limit is 15 pages, then stick to no more than one page or so.

The introduction is the first part of your seminar paper, but it doesn't necessarily have to be the first part you write. Many people find it easier to write it at the end, once they know exactly what it is they're introducing. However, it can be useful to get something down on paper if only to help you focus. Plus, if time runs out faster than you'd expected – as it often does – at least you have a rough draft completed.

## ■ Writing the body paragraphs

The body of your essay is where you discuss your main arguments. The general way to structure your arguments is to use your strongest or most significant first. However, this depends on your topic: it might make more sense to lay them out chronologically instead.

As well as arguments for your hypothesis, you should include **counterarguments.** For more information on writing counterarguments, read **"How to write a counterargument"** (chapter 2, part 7).

The most important aspect to bear in mind is that the sections that make up the body of your essay have a **common thread** to them: you can't view them as separate entities in themselves. You need to lead your reader through your mind process – they need to be able to understand why you argue as you do –, therefore, only use relevant examples.

For guidance on constructing paragraphs and their main components, have a look at **"How to write paragraphs"**(chapter 2, part 3).

## ■ Writing the conclusion

Your conclusion is, in a sense, the most important part of your paper: this is the last chance you have to get your reader to understand – if not agree with – the standpoint you've taken throughout your paper.

**Bring together the main concepts** you discussed: don't simply summarize them. Remind your reader of your main hypothesis. Don't be tempted to add any new information. Your conclusion shouldn't include any citations either, only your own interpretations and analysis.

You should also **demonstrate the importance of your findings:** what do they add to the wider context you described in your introduction? Do they fill a knowledge gap?

As with your hook sentence, end your paper with a **strong concluding statement.** This could be by showing how your findings are significant. Another way is to relate your conclusion to your introduction.

To summarize, the main parts of your conclusion should be:

- reiterate your problem statement and hypothesis
- being together the main ideas and concepts
- end with a concluding statement

## ■ Revising and editing (and re-editing)

You need to view revising and editing as part of the overall writing process (i.e., not an additional task if you happen to have extra time remaining). Writing as much as possible until you reach your deadline is not advisable: you should give yourself time to read through (and re-read) what you've written.

**Revising** your work is more than simply proofreading for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes: it's about revamping your first draft into a new and improved paper. As you look through your work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Did you answer what was asked?
- Is the focus of your research clear?
- Have you properly introduced and explained all the concepts and theories you discussed?
- Are all your arguments sound?
- Could someone use a counterargument against any of the points you've made?
- Have you included enough sources to support your arguments?
- Have you used the appropriate concepts, theories and terminology?
- Have you included enough of your *own* original thought and ideas?
- Are your sentences clear? Do you need to include more/less words?
- Have you made clear where you've directly quoted a source?
- Are all your sources properly cited?

Some additional tips to revising your work include:

- **Print out your work.** Reading from a paper version can help you to spot mistakes that you may have missed on the screen.
- **Read aloud.** Of course, this is more advisable if you're in the comfort of your own home (fellow students in the library may not appreciate it). Check the flow and meaning of your sentences and paragraphs.
- **Get feedback from your peers, friends and family.**
- **Re-check the paper requirements** and, if possible, have a look over the grading criteria.

Once you've revised your paper and are pleased with the overall content, you can **edit** your work. Editing aims to make your writing more concise, and easier to follow and understand. There are a number of issues that you may come across while attempting to edit your work. Below are a few of the most common ones.

- **Wordiness:** do you need four sentences to describe a concept, or could you only use one? This issue is dealt with in more detail in **"Tips for writing concisely"** (chapter 2, part 4).
- **Repetition:** by reading through your paper in one go, you should be able to see if you repeat any ideas. Consolidate or delete sections in which you repeat yourself.

- **Word choice:** ask yourself whether you've chosen the best word to convey your message. Could you find one which is more concise?
- **Sentence structure:** read through each sentence carefully and consider whether it's well-constructed and comprehensive. Does it clearly state what you intended it to?
- **Don't only depend on the spell/grammar checker:** use your own acumen to decide if a sentence states what you want it to.

Ideally, you should give yourself enough time to forget about at least some of the contents of your paper before you revise and edit it. If you read it straight after you've finished writing it, then you're still too involved in the content and have no chance in appreciating it as a reader might, and, most importantly, less chance in spotting any mistakes.

## ■ Proofreading

The final stage is **proofreading** your paper. This is where you look for any grammatical, spelling and formatting mistakes.

- As with revising, it's advisable to abstain from looking at your work for at least 24 hours.
- Again, print out your work and read through a paper copy.
- Use a pen to point out each word to keep you focused, and think about each sentence carefully, bearing in mind grammar, punctuation, spelling and meaning.
- It can help to read from the last sentence to the first!

Once you've corrected any mistakes, print out the new version and proofread it again! This will definitely require time management, but – as with revising and editing – you should regard proofreading as part of the overall writing process.

## ■ Writing tips

- **Read and write/type at the same time.** Don't find yourself reading and reading without getting anything down on paper.
- **Don't be ambiguous** when you explain something. In other words, explain ideas and concepts clearly, making sure that there's no possible double meaning in your explanations. This may mean that you need to use three sentences instead of two.
- Make sure you **use the words with the correct meaning.** It can be tempting to look up synonyms in the thesaurus in order to vary your vocabulary, but make sure that you use the dictionary to double check what a new word means.
- **Avoid clichés and slang.** You're writing an academic paper, therefore, you should only use formal language. See **"Academic writing style tips"** (chapter 2, part 2) for more information.
- **Avoid personal pronouns,** i.e., "I", "my", "me". This will help make your writing sound more objective. For more guidance on this issue, have a look at **"Active versus passive voice"** (chapter 2, part 6).

- There's no longer any excuse for **spelling mistakes.** Whatever software you use to compose your essay, they'll be a spell checker. *Always* make sure you check your spelling before you submit your work. However, *do not* rely on it exclusively. Thanks to the autocorrect function, you may not notice that the word you wanted has been replaced by another word – spell check won't mark these as errors.
- **Consistency** is also very important. This refers to:
  - how you choose to format your headings
  - the font you use and the size (for the main text and for headings)
  - whether you use US or UK English spelling

  Being consistent may feel like additional work, but, if you're hoping to get published one day, you'll be expected to pay attention to details like this.
- Back up your arguments using a range of **sources.** This is an academic piece of writing and so you'll be expected to use academic sources. See **"Sourcing academic materials"** (chapter 1, part 2) for more guidance.

## ■ Formatting tips

These are only *general* formatting tips. Make sure that you follow any specific guidelines provided by your professor or supervisor.

- Include a **cover page** that at least states the title of your paper, your name, your professor's or lecturer's name, the name of your course, and the deadline date.
- If you decide to use **tables and/or figures,** make sure they're relevant to your topic. In other words: don't use them as space fillers.
- Don't forget to add **page numbers.** If you have time, also consider adding a header. This can simply include your name and the title of your essay.
- Unless instructed otherwise, **double space** your text (or at least use 1.5 spacing).
- Use **twelve-point size** for your text. And stick to fonts like **Times New Roman** or **Arial.**
- **Justify** or **align your text to the left** (apart from headings).
- Unless instructed otherwise, use a **paper clip or a plastic folder** to bind your pages. Avoid stapling.
- **Give yourself time** to properly format your paper (it can take longer than you think it will).

# Part 3 Scientific writing: how to write a laboratory report

A laboratory (lab) report is written in order to present and disseminate the methods used in and the results found through scientific experimentation, which usually takes place in a laboratory class or during field work. You're also expected to interpret and discuss your findings, and evaluate the experiment. Below are basic guidelines to follow when organizing and writing such a report.

## ■ Report structure

In scientific writing, **IMRAD** is the most common organizational structure used: **i**ntroduction, **m**ethods, **r**esults **a**nd **d**iscussion. However, you might also be required to provide an abstract (AIMRAD).

### ▶ Title

Your title should be **concise** (not more than 10 words), **factual and straightforward.** Include **significant keywords** used in your particular field. Don't waste words with add-ons like "An investigation about…" and don't use abbreviations.

### ▶ Abstract

In essence, this is a **summary** of your whole paper. It's usually the shortest part of your report, not being more than one or two short paragraphs or around 200 words (but check with your professor or supervisor first as the length required can vary). It should be a **standalone** piece of work, detailing the background of your research, what you did, what you found out, and what your results mean in the wider context. As it's a condensed account of your whole report, it makes most sense to tackle this part last.

Don't include any references, any information that can't be found in your report, or any tables and/or figures (or references to any).

### ▶ Introduction

This is where you **set the scene** of your study. In this section, you should provide your reader with the **overall background** of your research so that they can appreciate its relevance and place it into the wider context of your field. Aim to answer the following questions:

- What's the problem you're investigating?
- What's already known about the issue you're researching? What has already been published? Are there any gaps in existing knowledge?
- What are the key concepts and terms?
- What's the purpose behind your research? What are your specific hypotheses?
- How do you intend to logically approach the topic you're investigating?

Additional tips to tackling your introduction include the following:

- Move from the general – the problem in regard to your *whole field* of interest – to the specific – *your* experiment.

- Make clear links between the following elements: the problem and the possible solution; the question you're asking and your research design; and what's already known about your research area and your experiment.
- Be selective when choosing what literature to include. Don't simply list everything you can find.

By ending your introduction with a brief statement regarding how you'll approach the issue you've described, you provide a natural lead into the following section.

▶ **(Materials and) methods**

You should describe your method(s) in such a way that **others would be able to replicate your research.** This means that you need to include:

- all the materials you used
- how you used them
- where and when the work was carried out (this is more relevant for field work studies)
- all measurements and replications
- a step by step account of the method(s) you used

Make sure you answer all the following questions:

- How did you approach the problem you outlined at the start?
- What did you use (e.g., materials, equipment, subjects, etc.)?
- What steps did you take?

If you followed a specific procedure taken from a report or laboratory book, you can refer your reader to this text as opposed to writing out the method in full. However, if you modified the instructions in any way, these alterations should be described.

If you found any weaknesses in your method(s) and/or materials, don't leave these out: you should consider how these could have affected your results, and what you could do to rectify them in the future. Instead of undermining your work, acknowledging any flaws will enhance your findings.

▶ **Results**

In this section, you should provide a summary of your data. However, even if you have a large volume of results, you should only include results that are **most relevant to your research.** Concentrate on significant trends, patterns and differences.

Concise and coherent ways to present your results are through tables and/or figures. More guidance on constructing and organizing these can be found in **"How to create tables and figures"** (chapter 6, part 2). You can decide whether it makes most sense to provide your findings in chronological order or by using another form of logical progression.

Be careful not to interpret your results in this section – that's what you'll need to do in the following section. However, it's worth adding here that **you don't need to have a separate results and discussion section: you can combine the two** by interpreting your findings as you introduce them. In fact, some disciplines expect you to integrate these sections.

- **Discussion**

  This is the section in which you **analyze and interpret your results.** Be careful not to simply repeat your findings. As well as discussing your own findings, you should relate them to the wider body of research in which they belong. This allows you to highlight the relevance of your research. You can also include how your experimental design could be improved, and present possible future research based on your outcomes.

  To summarize, aim to answer the following questions:

  - What is the meaning behind your observations? How can you interpret your data in regard to the focus of your research? Consider any patterns and relationships.
  - Based on your findings, do you accept or reject your original hypothesis(es)?
  - How do your results relate to those that came before? Do they agree or contradict? Why could this be the case?
  - What are the theoretical and/or practical implications of your results? Could your findings be extended to other situations?
  - How could you improve the techniques you used?
  - Based on any gaps or uncertainties in your findings, could you suggest any future research?

  Additional tips to tackling your introduction include the following:

  - As with your introduction, start broad – your findings – and become more specific – previous literature and theory, and/or practical implications.
  - Even if you managed to collect a large amount of interesting data, stick to your original research question and hypothesis(es).
  - For each conclusion you make, give evidence.
  - Don't shy away from unexpected results: discuss possible reasons for them.
  -

- **Reference list**

  In your reference list, you should include all materials you cited in your report. For further guidance on referencing, have a look at **"How to reference"** (chapter 4, part 1).

## General tips

- First of all, make yourself aware of any **specific guidelines** provided by your module or institute.
- If you're given a **word count,** check what is and what isn't included in it.
- Aim to be as **clear and concise** as possible. Check out **"Tips for writing concisely"** (chapter 2, part 4) for further guidance on this issue.
- Write in a **formal, academic style.** Therefore, avoid, for instance, slang and clichés. More assistance with this can be found in **"Academic writing style tips"** (chapter 2, series 2).
- Also, **avoid using personal pronouns.** This will make your writing appear more objective. This is dealt with in more detail in **"Active versus passive**

**voice”** (chapter 2, part 6).

- Write mainly in the **past tense.** The only exceptions are when providing the background to your research – which can be in the present tense – and possible future research – which will be, unsurprisingly, in the future tense.
- **Italicize all scientific names** (genus and species).
- When providing measurements, use the **metric system.**
- Make sure to use correct **abbreviations.** And spell out abbreviations in full first unless stated otherwise.
- **Numbers** from one until nine should be spelt out, e.g., five mice, the exception being when they’re connected to a measurement, e.g., 5 cm. Spell out all numbers if they’re at the beginning of a sentence. If you have a list including numbers both over and under ten, you can use express them all numerically, e.g., 14 sheep, 11 cows and 2 pigs.
- Once you have your first draft, revise, edit and proofread your work. More assistance with this can be found in **“How to write an academic paper”** (part 2 of this chapter).

# Part 4 How to write a literature review

As its name suggests, a literature review is where you read and review a range of sources relevant to your particular research. Reviewing previous studies provides you and your reader with an overview of what's already known. They can be a standalone piece, part of a research proposal, or a chapter in a report or thesis, playing a particularly important role in the introduction, research question(s), methodology, discussion and conclusion – so, in essence, the whole thing!

The format of a literature review will vary depending on your discipline. However, there are a number of elements that are essential, no matter what topic you're tackling.

## ■ The underlying purposes

There are a number of reasons behind writing a literature review:

- to place your research within the wider context of what's already known
- to compare and contrast studies on the same topic
- to bring to light different ways in which certain research can be interpreted
- to reveal knowledge gaps and where there's a need for additional research

## ■ The main stages

There are four main stages to writing a literature review:

- formulating the problem you're going to address
- searching for the relevant literature
- evaluating which sources are most significant
- analyzing the sources in regard to your own findings

## ■ Organization

A literature review is composed of four main parts:

- First of all you should provide an introduction, giving an overview of what it is you'll be focusing on and what your main objectives are.
- You'll then need to logically group your sources in regard to particular themes or categories. What a literature review is *not* is simply a description of as many sources as you could find on your topic. The themes you decide on should be connected to your main research question(s).
- Compare and contrast the sources, analyzing how they're different and the same.
- Conclude using those sources which contribute most to your area of research in regard to their arguments and opinions.

## ■ Writing tips

While writing your literature review, there are a number of points worth bearing in mind:

- **Be selective:** this refers not only to the sources you use, but also to what you take from each source. You should always keep your research question(s) in mind.
- **Don't be biased:** it's important to include ideas that don't concur with your own in order to strengthen your arguments.
- **Don't use too many quotations:** quoting directly when a point has been made too eloquently to be paraphrased can be very effective in writing. However, don't quote so often that your own summary and analysis is lost.
- **Relate back to your own research:** it's important to summarize sources, but it's also important to synthesize important elements of these summaries to ensure that the relevance is made clear.
- **Keep your own voice at the forefront:** a literature review is predominantly discussing the work of other people, but it shouldn't be at the cost of your own. Each time you discuss a source, make sure that your own ideas are present, either before, after or both.

## ■ Additional guidance

Help on how to look for sources can be found in **"Sourcing academic materials"** (chapter 1, part 2). For assistance with referencing and paraphrasing, check out **"How to reference"** (chapter 4, part 1).

# Part 5 How to create a scientific poster

For certain modules, conferences and workshops, you may have to create a poster of your work. Of course, these aren't like those you'd find plastering the walls of cinema foyers. They're another way of presenting a project or investigation, combining text and images. Additionally, you'll probably be expected to explain it to an audience or individuals, and, as with other presentations, take questions at the end.

Poster presentations differ from institute to institute. But, in general, all should set out to show: what you did, why you did it, how you did it, and what your findings contribute to the bigger picture. Through your poster, you'll also want to promote your work and engage others.

## ■ Initial points to bear in mind

There a number of points you should bear in mind while constructing your poster:

- **Keep your contents focused:** you'll only be able to include a certain number of key elements so be selective. Only include what you want your audience to retain, and make sure that you express this clearly.
- **Be visually enticing:** the content is, of course, key, but this medium also sets out to be striking to passer-bys so that they're tempted to take a closer look.
- **Make it accessible:** you'll probably have to present your poster, but the rest of the time it'll be left as a standalone piece. Therefore, it should be easy for people to understand independently.

## ■ Design software

A popular way to design posters is by using **Microsoft PowerPoint.** Before you begin designing, format the page size to that of your final poster *first.* If you save this part until the end, you'll probably mess up all of your formatting.

Other programs include Adobe InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator.

## ■ What to include

You'll realize from the start that your space is very limited. A big no-no is filling your poster with text, tables and figures in an attempt to include everything. Less is more. Too much is simply overwhelming. You need to consider your poster from the standpoint of your viewer: they should be able to skim it and easily get the main points you're making.

In order to begin reducing your content, consider the following questions: **what's your take home message?** What do you want your audience to understand and appreciate after looking over your poster? You can then work around this central message, considering all the points laid out before: what you did, why you did it, how you did it, and what your findings contribute to the bigger picture.

Usually, you'll include the following:

- Title
- Authors, collaborators, institutions
- Introduction, background
- Research questions, hypotheses
- Methodology (and materials)
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- Future research
- Acknowledgements
- Contact information

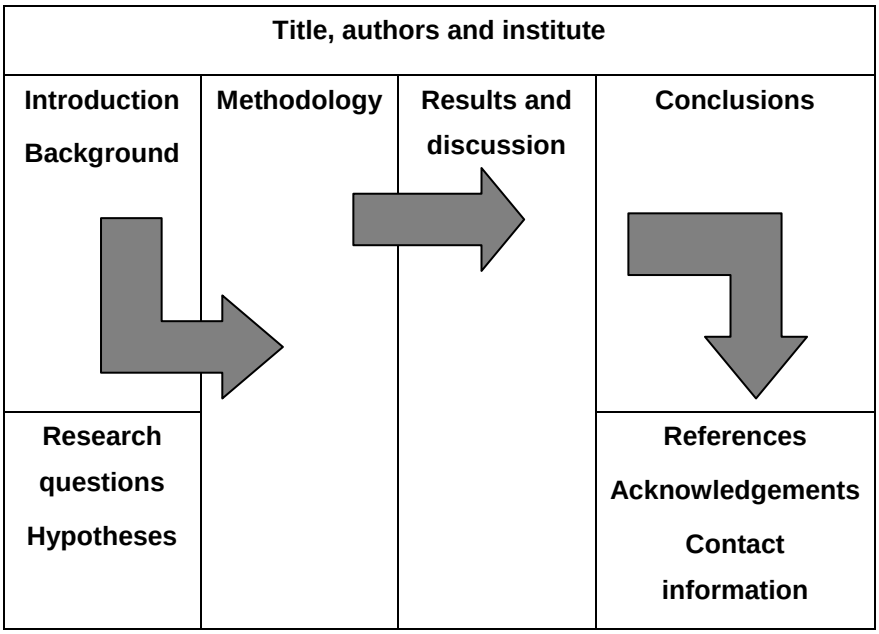
An abstract is not always included, especially as you'll want to conserve space for other components.

## ■ Layout

The dimensions are usually 42 x 42 inches, 42 x 48 inches, or 42 x 52 inches. There are no set rules as to how you should design your poster, but, in general, the material is arranged in a number of columns, usually from three to four.

Be logical with how you sequence the contents: the information should flow from the **left to the right.** Most people will naturally look at the top left corner first. Your viewers should be able to link the parts together without any further explanation (including the use of arrows, numbers, etc.). How you organize your content is very important: if it's hard to follow, people will simply move on to the next poster.

It can help to begin with a sketch, detailing where each of the main components will be placed. For instance, the main outline could be as follows (but, remember that you can also use a portrait format):




The title section is the first part most people will look at. Make it big enough to be

read up to **6 meters away.** And **don't include too many citations:** this will only end up cluttering your poster.

## ■ The text

Remember that a poster is a visual representation of your work. Therefore: **cut back on the text.** As much as possible, use graphs, tables, figures and pictures to get your main messages across. As a general rule, your poster should be composed of:

- 20 - 25% text
- 40 - 45% images
- 30 - 40% empty space (borders around and between sections)

Your wording should be simpler than that you'd use in a paper. If you use long, complex sentences, your audience may not take the additional time to figure out what your poster's about. You want to keep your **wording succinct and straightforward. Bullet points** are an effective way to achieve this.

On the other hand, **avoid overusing acronyms and abbreviations.** Too many will simply confuse and aggravate your viewers.

Also, unlike a written report, use the **active voice.** This is an effective way of keeping your word count down. For more guidance on this issue, check out **"Active versus passive voice"** (chapter 2, part 6).

In regard to **font size,** your text should be large enough to be read from around **two meters away.**

- main heading: 42 point
- section headings: 36 - 40 point
- section text: 24 - 28 point

**Line spacing** is also important. Most of the time, **1.5 spacing** is more than enough. Include a larger space between paragraphs, usually between 80 - 100% of the font size.

**Justify your text.** As your text will be organized in columns, it looks neater than jagged edges.

In regard to **font style,** stick to **san serif fonts.** These are fonts without ("sans") embellishments, and include: Arial, Calibri and Helvetica. It's fine to use a number of different styles in your poster, but stick to **no more than three.**

Use **bold, underlining and color to emphasize points.** Italics can be harder to read, but it's another option. However, don't use them altogether, and don't overuse them: for example, while bold is effective for a few words, whole sentences in bold can be difficult to read.

**Lower caps** are easier to read than UPPER CAPS. Therefore, avoid writing any text – including titles – in all upper.

If your poster is difficult to read then it won't be effective in communicating the information you want to convey. And, as stated before, most people won't stop to try and figure out what this information is.

## ■ The images

Images include figures, tables, photos, pictures, etc. As we've already established, the images you use should take up most of your poster (40 - 45%). In this respect, always consider whether you can represent a point as an image as opposed to words.

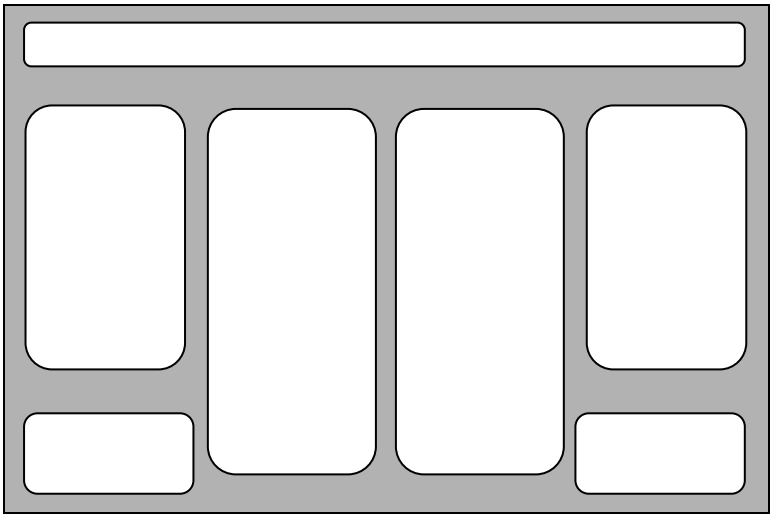
Like the text, you should be able to easily see what a table or figure is representing from about **two meters away.** To help achieve this, get rid of any superfluous information from tables and figures: only keep the essential point(s).

You want to attract viewers, but don't attempt this by using too many colors. In general, stick to no more than **three different shades.** Use color wisely for emphasis and to distinguish different data groups. Avoid patterns.

As with a written report, images should be **self-explanatory**. And, where relevant, don't forget to l**abel all axes and include captions.**

## ■ The background

Empty space is important for increasing your poster's visual appeal, and helps to make the content more readable. Opt for a light background and darker font in regard to sections that include text. Borders, however, can be of a darker hue.



Remember: **the contents should be legible from at least two meters away.** Therefore, avoid busy patterns and the use of too many colors. Instead, use color to highlight and define. Make sure that important information has the greatest contrast.

In the advertising world, a lot of emphasis is placed on color: it effects mood and can hold symbolic meaning. Plus, color blindness – which means that people can't distinguish between red and green – affects 1 in 200 women and 1 in 12 men. Therefore, it's worth carefully considering which colors you're going to opt for.

Lastly: be aware that **on screen, colors will appear lighter than when printed out.** In this respect, opt for a lighter color than you think you'll need.

# CHAPTER 4 REFERENCING

# Part 1 How to reference

Providing sources to support your arguments is vitally important. You also need to cite the sources you use, and provide a list of all these sources either at the end of your writing in a reference list, as footnotes, or as endnotes. If you don't, this counts as plagiarism. For more guidance on plagiarism, have a look at **"How to avoid plagiarism"** (part 2 of this chapter).

## ■ Referencing styles

In order to reference, you first need to choose a referencing style. Each style comes with its own list of instructions regarding how to provide in-text citations and create a reference list. Two of the main styles are listed below.

▶ **APA (American Psychological Association)**

Although originally drawn up for use in psychological journals, APA style is now widely used, including in:

- social sciences
- education
- business
- economics
- numerous other disciplines

More information on this referencing style can be found on the official APA website:
http://www.apastyle.org/

▶ **MLA (Modern Language Association of America)**

MLA style is used mainly in:

- English language
- the humanities, including:
  - history
  - literature
  - the fine arts
  - philosophy

More information on this referencing style can be found on the official MLA website:
https://www.mla.org/

## ■ Referencing management software

In regard to referencing, life has been made much easier now thanks to referencing management software. You no longer have to worry so much about knowing all the rules associated with the style you choose: it does it all for you! All you have to do is choose which style you want it to use at the start. It then helps you to order your citations within the text, as well as create a reference list at the end. There are a number of programs to choose from, and three of the most popular are outlined below.

- **Citavi:** https://www.citavi.com/
  - **Free to use: Baden-Württemberg license agreement (through the University of Hohenheim)**
  - Requires downloading
  - Searches resources worldwide
  - Manages references
  - Analyzes and highlights texts
  - Saves ideas and structures your work
  - **KIM offers training courses**
  - **KIM support online:** https://kim.uni-hohenheim.de/94980?L=1

- **Refworks:** https://www.refworks.com/
  - **Free to use: campus-wide license**
  - No downloading required: Internet-based
  - Organizes and creates a personal database online
  - Formats bibliographies and manuscripts
  - Imports references from a variety of databases
  - **KIM offers training courses**
  - **KIM support online:** https://kim.uni-hohenheim.de/94979?L=1

- **Mendeley:** https://www.mendeley.com/
  - Free to use
  - Need to create an account
  - Requires downloading
  - Securely stores data and accessible across devices
  - Use online or offline
  - Publicly or privately shares reading lists, references or full-text articles
  - Creates groups

**Word of warning:** make sure you check over your citations and references before handing in your work. If you didn't indicate the correct type of source, i.e., that it comes from a journal as opposed to an edited book, you can end up with bizarre automatic interpretations in your reference list!

## ■ Citation tables

As much as such referencing software saves time, there may still be a few moments where you have to know yourself how to write an in-text citation, or what to include, for instance, when citing the work of an author found in another book. But do not worry! Provided here, for APA and MLA, are tables with the main situations should you get stuck.

Make sure to:

- note where parts are in *italics* or "quotation marks"
- note where to use commas and periods
- be careful when using blogs or YouTube videos: only use such material if from sound sources (see **"Sourcing academic materials"** (chapter 1, part 2) for more guidance on this issue)

| Citing books | |
|---|---|
| **General book format** | Surname, First name initial(s) (Year). *Book title.* City of publication: Publisher. |
| **Single author** | Smith, A. (2007). … |
| **Two authors** | Smith, A., & Jones, P. (1996). … |
| **More than two authors** | Smith, A., Jones, P., David, R. T., Harlow, D., & Cornwall, S. (1987). … |
| **Organization** | United Nations. (2012). … |
| **Unknown author** | *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (2015)… |
| **Two or more works by the same author** | Drummond, R. (1997). …<br>Drummond, R. (2001). … |
| **Two or more works by same author, same year** | Drummond, R. (2014a). …<br>Drummond, R. (2014b). … |
| **Author with an editor** | Ciconi, A., & Torres, N. (2013). South America. In P. Grant (Ed.), *State of the world's minorities and indigenous peoples 2014: Events of 2013* (pp. 96-105). London: Minority Rights Group International (MRG). |
| **Author with a translator** | De Cervantes, M. (2005). *Don Quixote*. (E. Grossman, Trans.). London: Harper Perennial. |
| **Editor and no author** | Chatterjee, D. (Ed.). (2011). *Encyclopaedia of global justice.* London: Springer. |
| **Edition other than first** | Freeman, S., & Quillin., K. (2013). *Biological Science* (5th ed.). San Francisco, Benjamin Cummings. |
| **Periodicals** | |
| **Magazine** | Tumulty, K. (2006, April). Should they stay or should they go? *Time*, *167*(15), 3-40. |
| **Journal** | McDermott, M. J. (2012). Constitutionalizing an enforceable right to food: A tool for … *Boston College International and Comparative Law Re…* |
| **Newspaper** | Rasmusson, E. (2014, July 10). Women hold the key to a world with zero hunger. *The Guardian*, pp. 78-80. |

Make sure you include *all* the names

If there's no author given, use the organization

If you don't know the name of the author, use the name of the work

For or more than one, editor use Eds.

Use lowercased letters

For one translator, use Tran.

Volume number

Issue number

Page number

| | |
|---|---|
| **Editorial in newspaper** | Japan's Peaceful Self-Defense (2015, July 17). [Editorial] *Wall Street Journal*, p. A14. |
| **Letter to the editor** | Davey, R. (2015, May/June). [Letter to the editor]. *Washington Post*, 5. |
| **Book or film review** | Kermode, M. (2015, July 1) Self/less review – Tarsem Singh's dopey sci-fi romp [Review of the film *Self/less,* directed by Tarsem Singh, 2015]. *The Guardian*. |
| **Online sources** | |
| **General format** | Author. (Year [use n.d. if not given]). Article or page title. *Larger Publication Title,* volume or issue number. Retrieved on [date] from http://url address |
| **Page from website** | Food and Agricultural Organization (2015). *Investment in agriculture*. Retrieved on July 9, 2015, from http://www.fao.org/investment-in-agriculture/en/ |
| **Page from website with unknown author** | Germany country profile: overview. (2015). *Europe.* Retrieved from BBC News on July 24, 2015, from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17299607 |
| **Image from website** | Picasso, P. (1912). Still life with chair caning. *National Gallery*. Retrieved on 20 July, 2015 from http://www.theartstory.org/artist-picasso-pablo-artworks.htm#pnt_4 |
| **Online book** | Plato (380 BC). The republic. *Project Gutenberg.* Retrieved on 20 July, 2015, from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm |
| **Portion of an online book** | Duellman, W. E. (1961) "Geography of the Herpetofauna." The amphibians and reptiles of Michoacán. *Project Gutenberg.* Retrieved on 20 July, 2015, from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33543/33543-h/33543-h.htm |
| **Article in an online journal** | Chappell, M. J., Wittman, H., Bacon, C. M., Ferguson, B. G., García Barrios, L., García Barrios, R., Jaffee, D., Lima, J., Méndez, V.E., Morales, H., Soto-Pinto, L., Vandermeer, J., & Perfecto, I. (2013). Food sovereignty: An alternative paradigm for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation in Latin America. *F1000 Research*, 2.235. doi:10.12688/f1000research.2-235.v1 |
| **Article in an online magazine/newspaper** | Harris, A. (2015). This video analysis of Looney Tunes characters will make you think differently about them. *Slate Culture Blog.* Retrieved on 14 May, 2015, from http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/07/17/a_video_essay_on_the_artistry_of_chuck_jones_and_the_looney_tunes_video.html |
| **Blog entry** | Boryga, A. (2015, July 14). Born free in South Africa. [Web log]. Retrieved on 15 January, 2015, from http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/14/born-free-in-south-africa/?module=BlogPost-Title&version=Blog%20Main&contentCollection=Multimedia&action=Click&pgtype=Blogs&region=Body |

Don't forget to include the date that you looked at the website (day, month and year)

Use the title of the work instead

Use the name of the artist

| | |
|---|---|
| **Comment/response on a blog post** | Writer's name. (Date of comment). Subject of post. [Web log comment]. Retrieved on (date) from: URL or DOI |
| **CD-ROM** | Discovery Channel Multimedia. (1996). *Beyond planet Earth*. |
| **Email** | Not included in the references |
| **Multimedia sources** | |
| **Video or film** | Hunt, C. J. (Director). (2012). *The perfect human diet* [DVD]. USA: Hunt Thompson Media & ECG Productions. |
| **Podcast or YouTube video** | Chomsky, N. (2015, March 25) "Democracy Is a Threat to Any Power System." [YouTube]. *A conversation with Noam Chomsky*. Retrieved on 16 June, 2015, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2dw7OZD-mg |
| **Lecture or public address** | Giles, N., & Hayman, M. (2015). How can business be a force for good. [Presentation]. *Paper presented at the London School for Economics.* London, UK. |
| **Other sources** | |
| **Dissertation** | Sseguya, H. (2009). Impact of social capital on food security in southeast Uganda (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Graduate Theses and Dissertations. Paper 10747. |
| **In-text citations** | |
| ***Books*** | |
| **Author named in single phrase** | As explained by De Schutter (2014), states also hold extraterritorial obligations |
| **Author named in single phrase with a direct quote** | As explained by De Schutter (2014), states have a "duty to control activities of individual or legal interests within other states" (p. 14) |
| **Author not named in single phrase** | States have a "duty to control activities of individual or legal interests within other states" (De Schutter, 2014, p. 14) |
| **Unknown author** | Civil society in Russia is being quashed (*Deutsche Welle,* 2013) |
| **Unknown page number** | The World Bank states that its "overarching mission of a world free of poverty is as relevant today as it has ever been" (World Bank, 2015, para. 3) |
| **Two authors** | Hurlow and Granger (1992)… or …(Hurlow & Granger, 1992) |
| **More than two authors** | Davids et al. (1987) … or (Davids et al., 1987) |

Also include the producer if stated, after the director: & [producer's name] (Producer)

Always state the page number with a direct quotation (for more than one page, use pp.)

Use the name of the publisher

Count down the paragraphs (use "paras." for more than one)

Use the "and" symbol in parenthesis

| | |
|---|---|
| **Organization author** | United Nations (2010) … Don't forget the period |
| **Authors with the same last name and same year of publication** | Differentiate with the first initial, e.g., (H. Granger, 2015) and (D. Granger, 2015) |
| **Encyclopedia** | Ancient Greek Law had particular traditions (Katz, 2009) |
| **Multivolume work** | Just use the page number and date (not the volume – that goes in the reference section) |
| **Two or more works in same sentence** | Separate them with a semi-colon, e.g., (Preston, 1982; Emerson, 1993) Order either by year (oldest first), or alphabetically |
| **An entire work** | Orwell's "1984" was published in 1949 |
| ***Multimedia sources*** | |
| **Video or film** | Make sure you cite the release date, e.g., The case for an economic system that would decrease financial inequalities is discussed in Michael Bohmeyer's *Money for Free* (2015) |
| **Podcast/YouTube** | Cite the video's/podcast's author name – if known – the title, and the posting date, e.g., A comparison of religion and science are discussed by Brian Cox and Robin Ince in the podcast "Science and Religion" on *The Infinite Monkey Cage* (2012) |
| **Lecture/public address** | Make sure you cite the speaker(s), the year and where the address was given, e.g., How business can be a force for good was documented by Giles and Hayman in an address delivered at a public lecture at the London School of Economics (2015) |
| ***Other sources*** | |
| **Government publication** | Provide the organization and date, e.g., (Ministry of South Africa, 2003) |

# MLA style

| Citing books | |
|---|---|
| **General book format** | Surname, First name (s). *Book title.* City of publication: Publisher, Year. Print. |
| **Single author** | Smith, Adam… |
| **Two authors** | Smith, Adam, and Paul B. Jones… |
| **More than two authors** | Smith, Adam., et al.… |
| **Organization** | United Nations. … |
| **Unknown author** | *Encyclopaedia Britannica*… |
| **Two or more works by the same author** | There's no change in the format – the reader will note that the title is different in the reference list |
| **Two or more works by same author, same year** | There's no change in the format – the reader will note that the title is different in the reference list |
| **Author with an editor** | Grant, Peter. *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014: Events of 2013.* Ed. Antonio Ciconi and Natalia Torres. London, Minority Rights Group International (MRG): 2014. |
| **Author with a translator** | De Cervantes, M. *Don Quixote*. Trans. E. Grossman. London, Harper Perennial: 2005. |
| **Editor and no author** | *Encyclopedia of Global Justice.* Ed. D. Chatterjee. London, Springer: 2011. |
| **Edition other than first** | Freeman, S., and K. Quillin. *Biological Science.* 5th ed. San Francisco, Benjamin Cummings: 2013. |
| **Periodicals** | |
| **Magazine** | Tumulty, Karen. "Should they stay or should they go?" *Time* 20 Apr. 2006: 3-40. Print. |
| **Journal** | McDermott, Michael. "Constitutionalizing an Enforceable Right to Food: A Tool for Combating Hunger." *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35.2 (2012): 543-574. Print. |

No year given

State if printed material

Write out the names in whole, not just the initials, and note the order of the first name and surname

You can just write "et al.", or you can give all the authors in the order they appear

If there's no author given, use the organization

If you don't know the name of the author, use the name of the work

For more than one editor, use Eds.

For one translator, use Tran.

Volume number

Issue number

Page number

| | |
|---|---|
| **Newspaper** | Rasmusson, Elisabeth. "Women hold the key to a world with zero hunger." *The Guardian* 10 July 2014. Pp. 78-80. Print. |
| **Editorial in newspaper** | "Japan's Peaceful Self-Defense." Editorial. *Wall Street Journal*. 17 July 2015: A14. Print. |
| **Letter to the editor** | Davey, Robert. Letter. (2015, May/June). *Washington Post* May/June 2015: 5. Print. |
| **Book or film review** | Kermode, Matthew. "Self/less review – Tarsem Singh's dopey sci-fi romp." Rev. of *Self/less,* dir. Tarsem Singh. *The Guardian* 1 July 2015. Print. |
| **Online sources** | |
| **General format** | Author. *Article or page title.* Main organization, date created. Web. Date accessed. |
| **Page from website** | Food and Agricultural Organization. "Investment in agriculture". *Themes.* FAO, 2015. Web. 18 Aug. 2015. |
| **Page from website with unknown author** | "Germany country profile: overview". *Countries.* BBC News, 2015. Web. 8 Dec. 2014. |
| **Image from website** | Picasso, Pablo. *Still life with chair caning.* 1912. *National Gallery.* Web. 20 July 2015. |
| **Online book** | Plato. *The Republic.* Project Gutenberg, 2008. Web. 20 Nov. 2014. |
| **Portion of an online book** | Duellman, William E. "Geography of the Herpetofauna." *The amphibians and reptiles of Michoacán.* By Duelman. Kansas: University of Kansas Publications, 1961. *Gutenberg.org: Project Gutenberg.* Web. 20 July 2015. |
| **Article in an online journal** | Chappell, Michael J., Hannah Wittman, Christopher M. Bacon, Bruce G. Ferguson, Luis García Barrios, Raúl García Barrios, Daniel Jaffee, Jefferson Lima, Ernesto Méndez, Helda Morales, Lorena Soto-Pinto, John Vandermeer, and Ivette Perfecto. "Food sovereignty: An alternative paradigm for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation in Latin America." *F1000 Research, 2*. 235 (2013). Web. 24 July 2015. |
| **Article in an online magazine/newspaper** | Harris, Aisha. "This video analysis of Looney Tunes characters will make you think differently about them." *Slates Culture Blog*, 17 July 2015. Web. 14 May 2015. |
| **Blog entry** | Boryga, Andrew. "Born free in South Africa." *Lens.* New York Times, 14 July 2015. Web. 26 Jan. 2014. |
| **Comment/response on a blog post** | Writer's name. "Title of the post." *Name of the site.* Site publisher. Access date. |
| **CD-ROM** | "Beyond planet Earth." *Discovery Channel Multimedia.* Multimedia 2000, 1996. CD-ROM. |
| **Email** | Phillips, Andrew. "Re: Economic crisis in Greece." Message to the author. 18 Aug. 2015. Email. |

State if taken from the Internet

Use the title of the work

Don't forget to include the date that you looked at the website (day, month and year)

Use the name of the artist

Or include only the first name and use "et al."

| | |
|---|---|
| **Multimedia sources** | |
| **Video or film** | *The Perfect Human Diet.* Dir. Cottrell James Hunt. Hunt Thompson Media & ECG Productions, 2012. DVD. |
| **Podcast or YouTube video** | Chomsky, Noam. "Democracy Is a Threat to Any Power System." *A conversation with Noam Chomsky*. YouTube, 25 Mar. 2015. Web. 16 June 2015. |
| **Lecture or public address** | Giles, Nick and Erik Eyster. "How can Business be a Force for Good." London School of Economics public lecture. London, UK. August, 2015. Presentation. |
| **Other sources** | |
| **Dissertation** | Sseguya, Ha. "Impact of social capital on food security in southeast Uganda." Iowa State University, 2009. Web. |
| **In-text citations** | |
| ***Books*** | |
| **Author named in single phrase** | As explained by Olivier De Schutter, states also hold extraterritorial obligations |
| **Author named in single phrase with a direct quote** | As explained by Olivier De Schutter, states have a "duty to control activities of individual or legal interests within other states" (14) |
| **Author not named in single phrase** | States have a "duty to control activities of individual or legal interests within other states" (De Schutter 14) |
| **Unknown author** | Civil society in Russia is being quashed (*Deutsche Welle*) |
| **Unknown page number** | The World Bank states that its "overarching mission of a world free of poverty is as relevant today as it has ever been" (World Bank) |
| **Two authors** | Andrew L. Hurlow and Pauline Granger… or …(Hurlow and Granger) |
| **More than two authors** | Davids et al. (11) … or (Davids et al. 11) |
| **Organization author** | United Nations… |
| **Authors with the same last name and same year of publication** | Differentiate with the first initial, e.g., (H. Granger 55) and (D. Granger 20) |

Include the narrator if stated, after the director: Narr. [name].

No year included

Always state the page number with a direct quotation (no "p.")

Use the name of the publisher

Don't include a paragraph number (unless numbered)

Don't forget the period

Only write the page number: no "p." and no comma

| | |
|---|---|
| **Encyclopedia** | Use the title of the encyclopedia, e.g., Ancient Greek Law had particular traditions ("The Oxford International Encyclopaedia of Legal History") |
| **Multivolume work** | Just use the volume number followed by the page number of the citation, e.g., (8: 40) |
| **Two or more works in same sentence** | Separate with a semi-colon, e.g., (Preston 67; Emerson 13) |
| **An entire work** | Orwell's "1984" was published in 1949 |
| ***Multimedia sources*** | |
| **Video or film** | Use the first part of the works' name (or the whole if short) and no publication year, e.g., The case for an economic system that would decrease financial inequalities is discussed in Michael Bohmeyer's *Money for Free* |
| **Podcast/YouTube** | Cite the video's/podcast's author name – if known – and the title name (and no publication year), e.g., A comparison of religion and science are discussed by Brian Cox and Robin Ince in the podcast "Science and Religion", on *The Infinite Monkey Cage* |
| **Lecture/public address** | Make sure you cite the speaker(s), the year and where the address was given, e.g., How business can be a force for good was documented by Giles and Hayman in an address delivered at a public lecture in 2015 at the London School of Economics |
| ***Other sources*** | |
| **Government publication** | Provide the name of the organization only (no publication year), e.g., Ministry of South Africa |

If more than two authors, only include the first author then write "et al."

# Part 2 How to avoid plagiarism

Plagiarism is considered a serious offence in the academic world. And, if you recognize that it involves, in essence, stealing someone else's ideas and making them your own, it's easier to understand why. Today, what with plagiarism checking software, it's not hard to locate. Luckily, it's also easy to avoid – as long as you know what it is.

The referencing style used in the examples given here is APA. Other referencing styles use different formats, but the general ideas provided remain the same. For more information on referencing styles, have a look at **"How to reference"** (part 1 of this chapter).

## ■ What is plagiarism?

### ▶ Using specific words and phrases, i.e., copy and paste

If you take words, a phrase or a few sentences word for word from an author, and don't place them within "quotation marks" *and* provide a citation (including the page number (or paragraph number for APA style) of where the word or phrase was in the original text), this is plagiarism, **verbatim.** This copy and paste handiwork is particularly easy to spot. However, don't think you can get away with simply changing an odd word here or there while keeping the same structure and general language: this is known as **mosaic** plagiarism.

This also includes taking material from *your own* previous work: you can't simply copy and paste from an old essay or thesis that has already been marked, and attempt to pass it off as new (especially if your present professor was the one who graded it before).

### ▶ Using information and ideas

Even if you use your own words – **paraphrase** –, when you use someone else's ideas, concepts, methods, theories, etc., you must cite the author(s). Otherwise, this is plagiarism: you've still taken someone else's ideas and put them forward as your own.

## ■ What isn't plagiarism?

### ▶ General common knowledge

If you use facts that are well-known, be it geographical, political or historical information that is common knowledge in the public domain, you don't need to provide a source. This includes, for instance, that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066, or that Germany is part of Europe.

### ▶ Field-specific common knowledge

This is knowledge that is well-known within the field in which you're writing, for instance, a particular economic theory or scientific method. However, you

need to be sure that this information is, in fact, commonly understood by your readers. You can check this with your professor or supervisor if you're unsure.

**Still unclear as to what plagiarism is? Check out the examples below...**

## ■ Examples of what is (and what isn't) plagiarism

You're given the following as an essay title:

**"Food and nutrition security: the importance and challenges of smallholder agriculture"**

You find a relevant paper published by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and read this paragraph on page 2 of the brief:

"Almost three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and most poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. However, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty."

*Source*: IFAD (2015) *Investing in smallholder family agriculture for global food security and nutrition*. IFAD Post-2015 Policy Brief 3. IFAD, Rome.

**How do you decide to use it?**

**Scenario 1: you decide it's so well-written, you simply couldn't do a better job of wording it and so you copy and paste it from the document.**

*First attempt:*

Almost three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and most poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. However, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty.

**PLAGIARIZED:** no quotation marks, no citation.

*Second attempt:*

Almost three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and most poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. However, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty (IFAD, 2015).

**PLAGIARIZED:** a citation is given, but no quotation marks have been provided, making the reader think that you used your own words.

*Third attempt:*

"Almost three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and most poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. However, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty." (IFAD, 2015).

**This is better.** BUT: the page number was not included.

*Fourth attempt:*

"Almost three quarters of the extreme poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and most poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. However, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty" (IFAD, 2015, p. 2).

**PERFECT:** the citation includes the author, publication year, and page number

**Scenario 2: you decide that you don't want to present this as a whole quote, and so will paraphrase the text instead.**

*First attempt:*

As an IFAD (2015) report states, almost three quarters of the very poor live in rural areas of developing countries, and a lot of poor rural people base their livelihoods on agriculture. But, smallholder agriculture is not equivalent to poverty.

**PLAGIARIZED:** only a few words have been changed. If you think you're being clever by choosing this lazy option then be warned: this will appear in plagiarism software as foul play.

*Second attempt:*

In developing countries, the majority of the very poor – approximately three quarters – reside in rural regions; most of these people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, this does not mean that to be a smallholder is synonymous to being poor.

**PLAGIARIZED:** the text has been paraphrased, but there's no citation provided.

*Third attempt:*

In developing countries, the majority of the very poor – approximately three quarters – reside in rural regions; most of these people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, this does not mean that to be a smallholder is synonymous to being poor (IFAD, 2015).

**PLAGIARIZED:** the text has been paraphrased and a citation added, but the citation is only present at the end of the paragraph. Therefore, a reader could assume that the citation only refers to the last sentence.

*Fourth attempt:*

In developing countries, the majority of the very poor – approximately three quarters – reside in rural regions; most of these people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods (IFAD, 2015). However, this does not mean that to be a smallholder is synonymous to being poor (IFAD, 2015).

**PERFECT:** it's now clear what has been sourced.

*Fifth attempt:*

As an IFAD (2015) brief reports, in developing countries, the majority of the very poor – approximately three quarters – reside in rural regions; most of these people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, this does not mean that to be a smallholder is synonymous to being poor.

**EVEN BETTER:** if you want to take a lot of information from one source, you can simply introduce the paragraph or section as coming from this source, e.g., "According to…" or "As explained in a report published by…". Providing a citation after every paragraph can make your writing look rather untidy.

## ■ In-text citations

In order to avoid plagiarism, it's important to recognize when you need to include the citation of a source within the text. As highlighted earlier, it's not always necessary to do so.

The following table provides a list of different scenarios you may come across during your writing, and indicates whether or not you need to provide an in-text citation.

| Scenario | Yes, you should | No need to |
|---|---|---|
| You write about an idea you've had or a theory you came up with | |  |
| You write about someone else's idea or theory, but you paraphrase it |  | |
| You use figures from a source in order to back up your argument |  | |
| You decide to directly quote a sentence from a source |  | |
| You find an interesting diagram on a website and decide to use it |  | |
| You create a table using data you found through your own research | |  |
| You use a fact that is common knowledge | |  |

# Part 3 How to paraphrase

It can be daunting to reword material, especially if it's already written so eloquently. Of course, you can directly quote a sentence or a few sentences, but only on occasion: you'll have to paraphrase the majority of the material you use.

Paraphrasing basically means writing in your own words. It should reflect your style of writing. Paraphrasing is not, therefore, simply changing a few words here or there. You need to use your own vocabulary and structure *without losing the original meaning.*

Of course, this doesn't mean that you can't use *any* of the words used in the original text. With certain words, known as "common vocabulary", this is not possible, and it's acceptable to reuse these words. This includes technical terms and phrases.

Paraphrasing is also not summarizing. You might end up shortening the length of the original, but this is not the main purpose. You just want to repeat the meaning of the text in your own words.

Writing a passage in your own words also tests your understanding of what you've read. This is important, especially if you're going to have to defend your work at a later date.

## ■ Tips on effective paraphrasing

Here's a little overall guidance on how to paraphrase:

- Read the material carefully and make sure you understand it.
- Note what the main points and concepts are.
- Keeping in mind these main points and concepts, write the material in your own words.
- Read the original text again to make sure you've retained its meaning.
- Cite the source: even if you didn't directly quote from the source, you *must* cite it.

## ■ How notes can help with paraphrasing

You can actually help yourself by the notes you take while reading. If you're someone who likes to highlight or underline important parts of the text, also write notes in the margins, summarizing the parts you've marked out. If you're reading from a website or a book, make sure you don't simply copy down extracts word for word, or copy and paste: get into the habit of taking simple yet meaningful notes, summarizing what you've read.

For more assistance on note-taking, check out **"Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking"** (chapter 1, part 1).

## ■ A few additional tips

If you're stuck on how to proceed, here are a few quick and dirty tips:

- **Change the vocabulary by looking up synonyms:** for instance, instead of "power" use "control", or instead of "farming" use "agriculture" (but, if you use a word you haven't heard of before, be careful that the synonym means what you think it does by checking it in the dictionary first).
- **Change the word order:** for instance, instead of "a rising economy" write "the economy was rising".
- **Change the sentence structure:** combine smaller sentences, or break up a longer sentence.
- **Change the voice from passive to active and vice versa** (check out **"Active versus passive voice"** (chapter 2, part 6) for more information).
- **Quote unique phrases:** you don't need to paraphrase *everything* if you feel a phrase or even a sentence or two are worth retaining exactly as they are.

## ■ Paraphrasing check list

To make sure that you're paraphrasing is sufficient, here's a short check list of points to consider:

- **Did you only change a few words?** Using a few synonyms or adding/subtracting a word here and there does not make the text yours (and can even be regarded as plagiarism).
- **Did you use any word for word sentences or phrases?** If so, make sure you indicated this by using quotation marks, or indenting as a block quote if 40 words or over (see **"How to quote"** (part 4 of this chapter) for more guidance on this issue).
- **Is the meaning still the same?** When you cite a source, you need to retain the meaning for academic honesty.

For more information on paraphrasing and how to avoid plagiarism, have a look at **"How to avoid plagiarism"** (part 2 of this chapter).

# Part 4 How to quote

If you're writing an essay and find a sentence that's written *so* well written that you simply can't paraphrase it, then you need to quote it "as such, and, in your citation, you must include not only the author – and possibly the year – but also the *page number* from which the quote was taken". You can use either "double" or 'single' quotation marks, but always be consistent.

Your referencing style will dictate how you cite quotations. Here, APA and MLA will be dealt with. For more information on referencing styles, have a look at **"How to reference"** (part 1 of this chapter).

With APA, citations *always* include at least the author and publication year, e.g., (Johnson, 1982). With MLA, citations *always* include at least the author, e.g., (Johnson).

If you need to include the page number, for APA style you use:

- **p.** for a single page number, e.g., (Jones, 2003, p. 8)
- **pp.** for more than one page number, e.g., (Jones, 2003, pp. 8-10)

For MLA style, you only provide the page number(s) with no preceding letter(s) or comma, e.g., (Jones 8).

There's also another difference you should be aware of. Sometimes, especially in the case of websites, there are *no* pages. If this is the case and you're using APA, you need to indicate the **paragraph number** instead. This may mean that you need to count down the webpage. You then indicate the paragraph(s) as follows:

- **para.** for a single paragraph, e.g., (Granger, 1996, para. 22)
- **paras.** for more than one paragraph, e.g., (Granger, 1996, paras. 22-32)

For MLA, unless the paragraphs are numbered, you don't provide this information, i.e., you just provide the author(s) surname(s), e.g., (Granger).

And finally: for some documents, e.g., from the United Nations or legal documents, **articles** are used and numbered in the text. This means that, if you're using MLA you can indicate the article number as you did for the page number, e.g., (UN 6). For APA, you need to indicate that it's an article, which you can do as follows:

- **art.** for one article, e.g., (UN, 2012, art. 54)
- **arts.** for more than one article, e.g., (UN, 2012, arts. 54)

**Remember: use quotations sparingly.** If you use too many, you could get accused of not providing enough of *your own* thought processes and ideas.

## ■ Quotes within quotes

If there's a quote within a quote, you need to use the set of quotation marks you didn't use previously. In other words:

- if you used "the double quotation marks when writing a quotation, 'use the single set' for the quote within a quote"
- if you used 'the single quotation marks when writing a quotation, "use the double set" for the quote within a quote'

## ■ Block quotations

If your quotation is composed of **40 words or more** (as a general rule), you should place the quotation in a **block quote:**

> For a block quotation, use a new line and indent the text using the tab key. You *don't* include quotation marks. Once you've finished the quote, end the sentence with the punctuation as used in the original text (e.g., period, exclamation mark, etc.), and then put the citation in brackets, remembering to also include the page number (or paragraph or article number if using APA) of the quotation, i.e., (author, year, p./para./art.) for APA, or (author, page number) for MLA.

After the block quote is finished, resume your writing as before.

## ■ A few quotation rules to bear in mind

There are a number of quotation rules that you should bear in mind while writing.

▶ **Ending quotations**

Don't forget to end the quotation with its quotation mark pair! You may be surprised at how easy it is to do…

▶ **Punctuation**

Whether you put the punctuation inside or outside the quotation marks depends on what punctuation you're referring to. In general:

- colons, semi-colons and dashes go outside
- commas and periods can vary, but tend to be inside
- question and exclamation marks also vary: if they're part of the quotation, then inside; if not (and they're part of your own sentence), then outside

Whatever you decide, be consistent.

▶ **Capitalized and lowercased letters**

Capitalize as the original text does. However, there might be a time when you want to change this, for example, you find this quote by the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter:

> "**T**he greatest deficit in the food economy is the democratic one."

You want to integrate it into a sentence. To do this, you simply use square brackets to convert the capitalized "t" in "the" into a lowercase letter, as follows:

> De Schutter, in his final diagnosis to the Human Rights Council, expressed the need for an overhaul of the current food systems, explaining that "**[t]**he greatest deficit in the food economy is the democratic one" (OHCHR, 2014, para. 5).
>
> *Source*: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2014). *Democracy and diversity can mend broken food systems – final diagnosis from UN right to food expert.* Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

### ▶ Personal communication

What's meant here by personal communication is emails, interviews, surveys, etc. Actually, there's no hard rule to follow in regard to citing this type of material. However, the general consensus is as follows:

> first name initial and surname (unless confidential), "personal communication", followed by the day, month, year it took place
>
> e.g., (P. Schmidt, personal communication, 5 July, 2015).
>
> Or, if confidential, simply:
>
> (personal communication, 5 July, 2015)

### ▶ Mistakes in the original

As with direct quotations of any kind, you should always be true to the material, even if the person misspelled a word or used bad grammar. However, if this is the case, you need to signal it as such so that your reader doesn't think that it's *you* making the mistake. You can accomplish this by writing [*sic*] next to the mistake. For example, say a survey participant writes this in a survey and you want to use it in your thesis:

> "I don't like the idea of my neighbor growing genetically modyfied corn"

When you quote this, you simply modify it as follows:

> "I don't like the idea of my neighbor growing genetically modyfied [*sic*] corn"

If the participant happens to have more than one mistake, then you need to place [*sic*] after each of them, e.g.:

> "I perfer [*sic*] GM crops; I feel that they provide me with more securitie [*sic*]"

This doesn't only apply to personal communication: you can also find such mistakes in official reports, published books, websites, etc.

### ▶ Omitting information

If you want to omit part of a quote because it's not relevant to the point you're trying to make, you can do so by replacing the word(s) with an **ellipsis,** which is the proper term for **…** For example:

> "Massive strides have been made in improving food security**...**Yet 776 million people in developing countries remain undernourished – about one person in six" (FAO, 2015, p. 1)

Instead of:

> "Massive strides have been made in improving food security. **The proportion of people living in developing countries with average food intakes below 2 200 kcal per day fell from 57 percent in 1964-66 to just 10 percent in 1997-99.** Yet 776 million people in developing countries remain undernourished – about one person in six" (FAO, 2015, p. 1)
>
> *Source*: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). (2015). *World agriculture: towards 2015/2030*. Summary report. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

## ■ Another reason to use quotation marks

Quotation marks can also be used to emphasize a word or phrase. For example, if you're introducing a concept for the first time, like "gender mainstreaming" or "human capital". This issue is dealt with in more detail in **"Basic writing tips"** (chapter 2, series 1).

## ■ A couple of final points

- **German to English keyboards**

  You may have noticed that in German, the first quotation mark is at the top and the final quotation mark sits at the bottom of the text, i.e., like „this". Be wary of this if you use a German version of Microsoft Word!

- **Different referencing styles**

  Different referencing styles use different rules for different circumstances. If you have a formatting issue, check online to find out how your referencing style says you should deal with it. For guidance on APA and MLA styles, check out **"How to reference"** (part 1 of this chapter).

# CHAPTER 5 FORMATTING

# Part 1 How to use footnotes and endnotes

Footnotes and endnotes are a way of:

- including additional information
- expanding a thought
- providing background information
- giving your reader further sources they can explore

This doesn't mean that you should use them as a way of shirking properly editing your work – you shouldn't incorporate too many. It also depends on what referencing style you decide to use. Here, only APA and MLA styles will be referred to. For more guidance on referencing styles, check out **"How to reference"** (chapter 4, part 1).

It's important to note that foot- and endnotes can also be used **instead of in-text citations,** i.e., instead of placing the author(s) and publication year in parenthesis for a reference. This means that if you used footnotes, you wouldn't include a reference list at the end of your work because you included the references within the writing. And with endnotes, you would have an "Endnotes" (or "Notes") page instead. Not all referencing styles use foot- and endnotes for this reason, however. For example, the referencing styles highlighted here – APA and MLA – don't. But, Chicago Manual Style, for instance, does. So, make sure to check with the regulations of the referencing style you choose.

## ■ Differences and similarities

The main difference between footnotes and endnotes is:

- **footnotes** appear at the **bottom (or foot)** of the page in which the reference was made;
- whereas **endnotes** appear at the **end** of a piece of work, or a chapter, on a separate page entitled "Endnotes" or simply "Notes". This section is included before your references or bibliography page.

In terms of similarities, both are signified in the text by a **superscript Arabic number,** and the numbers are **ordered sequentially,** e.g.,

> If you wanted to add some additional information at the end of this sentence, this foot- or endnote would be numbered as one.[1] Then, you might want to add some more supplementary information here,[2] so the next foot- or endnote would be numbered two. The foot- or endnote number corresponds to the relevant content.

## ■ Advantages and disadvantages

Choose between either footnotes *or* endnotes: don't use both. To help you make up your mind, here's a table listing the advantages and disadvantages of both.

▶ **Footnotes**

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ A reader only has to look at the bottom of the page to find the corresponding footnote.<br>■ You don't need to include a separate section. | ■ If you include a few footnotes on one page, it can make the page appear cluttered.<br>■ In fact, if the footnote is particularly long, it can take up more space than the main text. |

▶ **Endnotes**

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| ■ As they're located in a separate section, they're not as distracting as footnotes.<br>■ Your reader can easily look over all supplementary material as it's in one space. | ■ A reader has to go to a different page to access the endnote.<br>■ They can be more confusing to use if you have different chapters. |

## ■ APA style rules

APA style doesn't encourage foot- or endnotes (simply because they're expensive for publishers to deal with). However, there are two reasons it states for using them:

- ▶ **Content notes:** these provide your reader with supplementary information, or tell them where they can find additional information.
- ▶ **Copyright permission notes:** these are only necessary if you include a quote of over 500 words, or include material that requires formal permission from the author(s).

In regard to formatting:

> The superscript number should follow a punctuation mark.[1] The exceptions are dashes[2] – then, the footnote number should be placed before not after a dash (and, when it comes to parenthesis, the number should be included within the last bracket.[3])

## ■ MLA style rules

As with APA style, MLA doesn't encourage the use of too many foot- or endnotes. It prefers if they're used for:

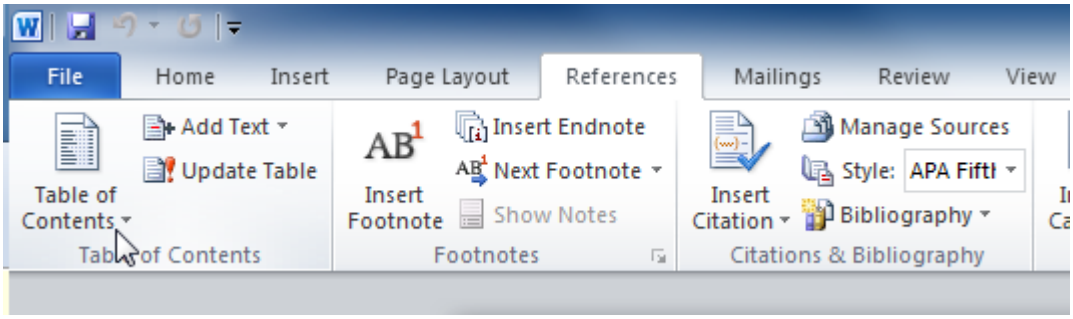
- ▶ **Bibliographic notes:** these are where you provide your reader with other sources they can consult for further information.
- ▶ **Explanatory notes:** these are the same as content notes, in which you provide your reader with additional information.

In regard to formatting:

> As with APA, footnote numbering should only come after a punctuation mark.[1] Apart from with dashes[2] – then the superscript number should come before the dash (and, in the case of parenthesis, inside the final bracket.[3])

## ■ Inserting using Microsoft Word

It's easy to insert foot- or endnotes using Microsoft Word. In the **"References"** tab you'll find the option to include either. Simply place your cursor where you want it included in the text, then click on the appropriate option.



# Part 2 How to create tables and figures

Tables and figures are effective ways of providing information clearly and succinctly. They're mainly used for result and discussion sections, but they can be used anywhere within a report or thesis. Below are a number of points to consider when using and creating tables and figures in your own work.

## ■ General points to remember

There are a few features that apply to both tables and figures.

- Always **introduce a table or figure in the main text first.** This allows your reader to know why it's there. However, don't simply state what it shows: fit what it exhibits into your current description, discussion or analysis.
- As a general rule, you should **capitalize "Table" and "Figure" in your text.** However, if you decide not to, just be consistent.
- **Place the table or figure as soon after its introduction as possible.** Usually, this will simply be at the end of the paragraph in which it was introduced.
- If you can't fit the table or figure on the same page as its introduction, or you refer to it again later on, **state the page on which it appears** for clarity e.g., (Figure 3 on page 18).
- All tables and figures should include a **caption,** which is a brief description of what it shows. This text should make sense on its own and, if you include a list of tables and/or figures, this will be what you use. (This issue is discussed in more detail later on).
- The tables and figures themselves should also be **fully comprehensive.**
- Don't forget to **number all your tables and figures.** There are two main ways in which you can do this. The first is consecutively throughout your thesis, i.e., Table 1, Table, 2, Table 3, etc. The second is by chapter, i.e., for Chapter 1, the tables would be labeled as Table 1.1, Table 1.2, Table 1.3, etc., and for Chapter 2, the tables would be labeled as Table 2.1, Table 2.2, Table 2.3, etc. Whichever style you pick, use the same for both your tables and your figures. And don't forget to **double check their numbering is consecutive** when proofreading your work!
- Where relevant, **specify any measurements.**
- Use **footnotes** to clarify any points, and also to specify sources if you use particular sources for particular data in the table.
- If you're stuck on how to present your tables and/or figures, **use past publications** for inspiration.

## ■ Formatting guidance

Below are a number of basic formatting tips, focusing specifically on font, table and figure captions, and the use of landscape.

- **Font:**
  - The font you choose to use for tables and figures may differ from the main text, as may the font size.
  - Always choose a legible font, and don't go smaller than 10 point if possible.
- **Captions:**
  - Table and figure captions should be consistent, i.e., font, font size, punctuation, use of bold and capitalization.
  - Use single spacing if longer than a line.
- **Landscape pages:**
  - Make sure to keep the margins the same as your portrait pages (especially if you intend on binding your work).
  - You can choose to number the page in the same location as all other pages, or not, leaving it blank, then starting numbering again with the appropriate page number (but, whichever you decide, be consistent).

## ■ Citing tables and figures

In regard to citing sources for tables and figures, outlined below are the three main situations you may come across:

- **You created the table or figure yourself using your own data:** you don't need to provide a source.
- **You took a completed table or figure from another source:** you need to provide the source(s) you used underneath the table or figure, preceded by "Source:"
- **You used data from another source to create a table or figure, or modified a framework or diagram in some way:** you need to provide the source(s) you used underneath the table or figure, preceded by "Adapted from:"

## ■ Additional guidance for tables

This guidance is aimed specifically at creating tables.

- The table caption needs to go ***above* the table.**
- If a table goes **over a page,** you should split the table at an appropriate section and repeat the main headings of the table on the next page, as well as the table's caption followed by **"continued"** or **"cont'd"** (the shortened form). Don't forget that you can change the paper layout to landscape if this enables you to fit the table onto one page.

## ■ Additional guidance for figures

This guidance is aimed specifically at creating figures.

- Figures include **diagrams, graphs, maps, illustrations, art** and **photographs.**
- Unlike table captions, a figure caption goes ***below* the figure.**
- When discussing a figure in the main text, it's possible to shorten "Figure" to **"Fig."** But, you shouldn't do this in the caption.
- When using **graphs,** don't forget to label both axes and include any units.
- All graph elements must be **legible** (as a rule of thumb, at least 2.5 mm).
- If using some form of **graphics** or **photographs,** make sure that the image is as clear as possible.
- As with a table, if a figure goes **over a page,** you should split it at an appropriate section and repeat the figure's caption on the next page, followed by **"continued"** or **"cont'd"** (the shortened form). Don't forget that you can change the paper layout to landscape if this enables you to fit the figure onto one page.

## ■ Table and figure lists

When you compose a large piece of writing, like a thesis, you'll be expected to list any tables and/or figures you included. These lists are placed before the first chapter. Tables and figures are each listed separately, i.e., "List of tables" and "List of figures". Each table and/or figure is listed chronologically with its caption and the page it appears on, e.g.,

Figure 1. The effect of temperature on the rate of photosynthesis……..…….4

# CHAPTER 6 PRESENTATIONS

# Part 1 Tips for presenting

For many people, presenting is a nerve-wracking experience. However, there are a number of actions you can take both before and on the day to help you through.

## ■ Before the day

The following advice is in regard to **preparations:**

- **Prepare.** Know your topic (not only your slides…) as much as you're able. This will be a big boost to your self-confidence.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** There's no such thing as over-preparing for a presentation. The more familiar you are with your material, the more relaxed you'll feel on the day. You shouldn't learn a script word for word, but your presentation should flow, and you should know the order in which your slides will appear. If possible, give a practice run in front of friends or peers. You can even try in front of a mirror or record it. It's definitely worth speaking out loud, even if you only deliver your presentation to a wall!
- Create a PowerPoint presentation and/or visual aids. More guidance on these can be found by reading **"Tips for creating an effective PowerPoint presentation"** and **"Presentation visual aids"** (part 2 of this chapter).
- If you can, **watch other people's presentations.**
- If you find you need help remembering what it is you want to say, **prepare notes or cue cards.** If the latter, number them in case you drop them…
- Prepare and print out any **handouts.**
- **Brainstorm possible questions** you could be asked.

The following advice is in regard to **practicalities:**

- If you're using any form of equipment, bear the following in mind:
  - work out any technical elements before the day, i.e., know how it works
  - technology can fail: bring your presentation on a USB stick in case you need to use another laptop
  - even bring a print out of your slides: at least you can hand it out as a hard copy if it comes to that!
  - work offline if you can: have websites, YouTube videos, etc., ready in offline formats
- Make sure you **know where the room is** that you'll be presenting in, and how long it'll take for you to get there on the day. If you can, visit the venue ahead of the day.
- Know **what time** you'll be presenting.
- Don't forget to give your presentation one final **fact, spell and grammar check.**
- Likewise, **proofread any printed materials** you intend to handout.
- **Save it in at least two formats**, e.g., USB stick, online drive (just in case).
- **Get your outfit ready.** Dress appropriately.
- Make sure you **get a good night's rest.**

## ■ On the day

- **Read through your presentation on the day** you're going to give it. Maybe you'll notice one more mistake, or that a hyperlink is now under construction.
- **Arrive early.** Get used to the environment in which you're going to present.
- **Test any equipment.**
- Make sure you're well **fed and watered.**
- **Turn off your mobile** (or at least make sure it's on silent or flight mode).
- **Prepare a bottle or glass of water** to take up with you in case your throat gets dry. Avoid very cold drinks: these can make your throat close up.
- **Have a timer ready.** It's possible to find one on PowerPoint.
- **Welcome the members of your audience** as they arrive.

## ■ Presenting effectively

- **Assert yourself**

  There are a number of ways in which you can present yourself in a positive and strong manner:

  - **Your posture:** this will depend very much on what kind of presentation you're aiming to give. An upright, still posture is appropriate for a formal presentation, for instance. However, don't be tempted to slouch – standing with your shoulders back will help you to breath and feel more confident.
  - **Your presence:** try and have the confidence to fill the space you have in front of your audience. For example, avoid the urge to hide behind a desk.

- **Connect with your audience**

  There are a number of ways in which you can connect with your audience:

  - **Introduce yourself:** in a university setting this is usually a formality, but it's an effective way to start building a rapport with your audience from the get-go.
  - **Smile:** however nervous you are, smile. This will help you and your audience to relax.
  - **Eye contact:** this is a normal part of everyday communication with others. If you're presenting to a small audience, try and make eye contact with everybody present. If you're presenting to a larger audience, make sure to scan all areas of the room. Don't eyeball anybody! Shift your gaze frequently. If you do have issues with eye contact, looking at people's foreheads is an effective alternative.
  - **Gestures:** as with eye contact, gestures are an everyday part of communication. Use outward gestures that include your audience in what you're saying as well as emphasizing the point you're trying to make. Be animated, but not so much that it's distracting.
  - **Language:** include your audience through your language. For example, you can introduce a slide by stating "As *we* can see from this

slide…". Rhetorical questions are another strategy, for instance "So, what can we take from this?" If you feel comfortable enough (and have enough time) you can include the audience by directing a question at them. This can be a compelling start to a presentation, and also a way in which you can ascertain how much your audience already knows about your topic.

This is also a good place to bring up the use of humor: this can be a great ice-breaker. However, it should only be used if you feel confident enough to do so. Otherwise, it'll just increase any awkwardness already present.

- **Don't turn your back on your audience:** be aware of how the chairs are set up so that you can move yourself accordingly. And don't be tempted to address your slides instead of your listeners.

▶ **Utilize your voice**

Your voice can be used in a number of ways to assist you in conveying your messages:

- **Volume:** make sure you're speaking loud enough for your audience to hear you. If you're unsure if they can, ask the people at the back if you're loud enough. If you have friends present, ask them to give you a sign if you're speaking too quietly (or too loudly).
- **Pace:** it can be very easy to start speaking too quickly when you're nervous. If you're a person prone to speeding up, get into the habit of taking a breath after each sentence, or at least before each new slide.
- **Pitch:** most importantly – avoid speaking in a monotone. This will make even the most interesting of talks sound dull. Engage your audience by speaking in a conversational style.
- **Silence:** there's also a lot to be said for *not* using your voice. A pause can be used to emphasize points. It can also be used to take a deep breath.

▶ **Breathe…**

Now, this might seem like an obvious point to make! But, especially when you're anxious, your breathing can become fast and shallow, which just exacerbates your anxiety. Before you begin your presentation, take a deep breath or two to help ground yourself. When you start a new slide or before answering a question, take a deep breath. Don't feel conscious about pausing momentarily to breath: it really will help you to steady your nerves and focus.

▶ **Remember: it's *normal* to feel nervous.**

When you're in the throes of anxiety, it can be of little help to know that this is "normal". But, it is! Many people feel nervous before public speaking. There are many ways to help you to control your nerves. Two have been mentioned here: practicing your presentation, and learning to manage your breathing. Everybody's different, however, so look online for other practical methods to help you with any presentation jitters.

▶ **Stick to your time limit.**

Don't go significantly under or over the time limit allotted. On PowerPoint there's an inbuilt timer. Otherwise, bring a timer along, or get a colleague or

friend to hold up a five minute warning sign at the back of the room. It's not worth losing marks over a few minutes.

## ■ Questions and answers

The final questions and answers part is feared by many: you're no longer in control of the content! If you want guidance on how to cope with this section, check out **"Tips for dealing with questions and answers"** (part 4 of this chapter).

# Part 2 Presentation visual aids

Visual aids can be of great assistance when giving a presentation. They add a new dimension, and can be more powerful than using words alone. Visual aids can be used at any point of your presentation: it's up to you to decide when the best point is. Below are a few of the more popular aids to consider. Most of those listed would be used most effectively in conjunction with a PowerPoint presentation.

## ■ PowerPoint (or equivalent)

This is possibly the most popular visual aid, hence it's dealt with in detail in **"Tips for creating an effective PowerPoint presentation"** (part 3 of this chapter).

## ■ White/blackboard

If you have a white- or blackboard in the room in which you'll be presenting, this can be an effective means by which to clarify a sequence of points, for example, if you're describing a process or the stages of an experiment. As you describe each part, you can visual your words. What's advantageous about such a medium is that you can rub sections off as necessary (as well as being environmentally friendly). However, if members of your audience are making notes, make sure they have enough time to do so before deleting anything. And, as a couple of last points: make sure your writing is legible, and write in as straight a line as you can.

## ■ Flipchart

A flipchart can be used in a similar way to a white- or blackboard. A major advantage is that you can pre-prepare sheets for any key points you want to make. You can also flip backwards and forwards to recap as needed.

## ■ Handouts

Handouts are useful if you want to provide additional information that wouldn't fit in the time you have to present. You don't necessarily have to give your handout out at the beginning of your presentation – you might find that it makes more sense to provide it in the middle or at the end. Bear in mind: handing it out too early or in the middle of your presentation might be distracting; while, by handing it out at the end, your audience might not bother to look at it at all.

When you provide your handout will also dictate its design. If you give it out at the beginning of your presentation then you might want to consider providing space in which your listeners can take notes. If you give it out at the end, then you could provide a more comprehensive report of your presentation.

Remember that a handout doesn't equate to a print out of your slides!

## ■ Film

A film clip is a great way of explaining a particular point. It could be your own footage – for example, part of your experiment – or someone else's. Make sure that it's relevant, and only show as much as you need to make your point. Be careful regarding time – for instance, if you're only allowed 20 minutes for your presentation, don't show a clip that lasts 10 minutes.

## ■ Props

Another way to chop and change your presentation is by using a prop. For example, you could bring in an artifact, a piece of equipment, or a sample. Make sure it's large enough to be viewed from the front, and robust enough to be passed around your audience. As with handouts, think about when would be the best time to pass it out – remember that when a member of your audience is holding and inspecting it, they're attention will be drawn away from what you're saying.

# Part 3 Tips for creating an effective PowerPoint presentation

Today, PowerPoint is essentially synonymous with presentation. You may have already noticed that Hohenheim professors are very keen on presentations, much more so than writing assignments. Now, whether you regard the reason behind this as being that presentation skills are always necessary for a future career, or simply that they're easier to mark, you'll no doubt have to contend with a few of them.

## ■ Initial points to consider

Before you start compiling your slides, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What is expected from you in this presentation?
- What are the main points you want to put across to your audience?
- What is your time limit? This will dictate how many slides you should include.
- Will there be a questions and answers session?

## ■ General layout

Below is advice to follow regarding the general layout of your presentation:

- **Slide design:** Hohenheim offers its own PowerPoint template which can be accessed at the following website address in either a white or blue design:

  https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/organizingyourstudies

  You're also free to use your own slide design. PowerPoint provides a number of options, or you can start from scratch. Just be sure to bear the following points in mind:

  - keep the design **simple** to make sure that it doesn't detract from the actual point you're trying to make
  - make sure your template allows for **readability**
  - use **contrasting colors** – dark text on a light background is the most common – and avoid using too many shades, as well as red, orange and green text (this is especially worth considering if you think your audience will want to print out your slides – dark backgrounds are going to use up a lot more ink)
  - be **consistent** with elements like background, font and colors

- **Title slide:** your title slide can be as fancy or as plain as you want. However, make sure that any text is clear, and that you at least include the following:

  - the title of your presentation
  - your name
  - your professor's or lecturer's name
  - the name of the module (if relevant)
  - the name of the institute
  - the date of your presentation

You can also incorporate the Hohenheim logo and/or any relevant organization logos.

- **Table of contents:** after the title slide should come your table of contents. You don't need to provide slide numbers, but you should ensure that all chapters and sub-chapters are included.
- **Slide numbers:** all slides should be given a slide number apart from the title slide and the table of contents.
- **Headings:** keep your headings short and concise. Use significant keywords and don't use whole sentences.
- **Font style:** stick to a **sans serif font,** e.g., **Arial, Calibri** or **Trebuchet.** Unlike serif fonts – like Times New Roman or Garamond – they're smoother and so appear less cluttered and easier to read. Avoid using more than two types of font. Lastly, use standard fonts or make sure that the fonts you've chosen are embedded within your presentation; otherwise, if the laptop you use on the day doesn't have them installed, it'll simply use a substitute font which may mess up all your design efforts.
- **Font size:** don't be tempted to go smaller than **22 point** – **24 point** is more ideal. If you're having size issues, simply shorten the text on the slide or use two slides instead of one. For certain tables and figures, a slightly smaller font might be unavoidable, but don't go smaller than **18 point.**
- **Animations:** as with the slide design, don't go crazy with slide animations, e.g., flying images or exploding text. They can be very distracting for your audience, and make your presentation look less professional. Keep any animations you use simple, subtle and consistent.

  Builds – in which lines appear one after the other – is a simple animation style to use, usually from the top or the left. However, be aware that this can slow down your presentation.
- **References slide:** don't forget to include a references slide at the end of your presentation. The font used can be much smaller than that used for the main text.

## ■ Slide contents: text and images

Below is guidance on how to effectively include text and images in your slides.

- Each slide should contain around **60** to **90 seconds** of information. Of course, some will be less and others more. However, this will at least give you an indication of how many slides are expected of you in a presentation of a certain length, i.e., for a 10 minute presentation, seven to nine or ten slides should be enough.
- Limit the amount of **punctuation** and **capitalization** you use.
- **Don't fill up slides with information.** Keeping your font no more than between 22 and 24 point will help you to avoid this.
- Don't use full sentences – **only bulleted information** or **key phrases.** In general, try not to have more than six words per line (bullet point), and no more than six lines per slide. Your audience won't be able to listen to you and read a mini-essay at the same time.

- **Avoid slides which contain *all* text.** The great aspect of using PowerPoint is that you don't only have to use words: you can use a whole range of images. Your audience will be more able – and likely – to follow if they're not having to contend with a slide full of sentences
- Remember that your **slides should complement your talk.** In other words, you shouldn't be reading directly off each a slide as you go. They should be useful for the audience – reinforcing what you're saying – and also for you – providing you with useful reminders of what to say when.
- **Include citations.** Citations can be included in a smaller font. In fact, this is advisable – especially if you have a large number of them –otherwise, they can detract from the main text. Include citations for any:
  - images (e.g., pictures, photos, etc.) that aren't your own
  - data used in tables that isn't your own
  - figures (e.g., graphs) that aren't your own creation
  - direct quotations
  - to back up important points
- **Images,** including pictures and photos, are a great way to brighten up your slides and take up additional space. However, be careful not to overdo it, and, if possible, use the same type of image at least on the same slide. Avoid clichéd clip-art. Make sure that the quality (or resolution) of the image remains when up on a larger screen. If you copied and pasted the image from a website, you only need to provide the website address as the source. And lastly, pay attention to copyrights…

## ■ Slide contents: tables and graphs

Tables and graphs are very effective ways of getting information and data across quickly. To help make the most of these visual tools, here are a few words of advice.

- **Tables**
  - Make sure that if you copy and paste a table, all the elements are still legible.
  - Be careful how many columns and/or rows you include: you don't want to go much smaller than a font of 18 point for tables.
  - As stated before, don't forget to include any citations, unless you used your own data.
- **Graphs**
  - Using different colors will help differentiate columns and lines.
  - Don't forget to include all axes' captions and quantities.
  - Again, unless you used your own data, include citations for all the sources you used.

One last point on referencing tables and graphs: if you modified a table or graph in some way, for example, you reproduced it in Microsoft Excel as opposed to copying and pasting it directly from the source, you should state "Adapted from" and then the source as your citation.

Although a table or graph is a succinct way of getting information across, in a PowerPoint situation you'll only be spending a limited time on one so it's important to get the main message across, especially if you can read a lot from it. One way to

highlight the valuable feature(s) is by using the light function on your PowerPoint remote. If you're not using one of these, or you're one of those people who doesn't want to show their shakiness more than they have to by attempting to control a red pinpoint, then you can highlight the figure/bar/pie chart section, etc., by, for example, using a different color or circling the relevant area.

## ■ Editing

In order to edit your presentation, you'll need to carry out practice runs of it. Ideally, you'll do this in front of some form of audience. Otherwise, find a quiet space and speak it out loud to yourself (or your stuffed toys, pot plants, etc.). This will give you an idea of how long your presentation takes and, therefore, if you need to add or subtract content from it.

## ■ Proofreading

Don't forget to proofread your presentation.

- **Print out your slides:** with a printed version you can find mistakes you may have missed on screen.
- **Get a peer, friend or family member to check it for you:** a fresh pair of eyes is another effective way to pinpoint any additional blunders.
- **When you practice, practice using the slide show option:** it can help to see inaccuracies when they're larger…

# Part 4 Tips for dealing with questions and answers

So, you've survived the actual presentation; now comes the trickier section: the final questions and answers. However, although you can't know what issues will be raised, you can still prepare for this part, as you can for your presentation, helping you to feel more in control of the unknown.

This part is as important as the presentation itself. If your answers are shaky and hasty then your audience will be left feeling unsure about your credibility, no matter how good your presentation was.

## ■ Know the topic's background

It's all very well having a perfect presentation prepared in which you know the contents of all your slides; but, you should also have a good knowledge of the background to what you'll be presenting. You can learn about this while creating your presentation. If you know what your focus is from the beginning, it'll be easier to know what to hone in on. Having this insider knowledge will give you the tools you need to address the main questions put to you, and allow you to provide more concise answers. If, on the other hand, your preparations were ill-defined, this will undoubtedly be reflected in how you respond to questions.

## ■ Prepare for possible questions

Although you can't know for sure what questions will pop up, you can attempt to guess. There are a number of ways in which you can achieve this:

- Consider who will be in your audience, especially in regard to any professors or supervisors: what are they particularly interested in?
- Attend other presentations (especially, if possible, presentations in which the professor(s) and/or supervisor(s) who'll be attending yours are present).
- Get your peers, friends and/or family to watch your presentation and ask you questions.
- Consider the main focus of your presentation: is it the methodology? Or a particular theory? Whatever it is, you'll probably get questions honed in on this part.

## ■ Responding to questions

Despite all your best efforts to prepare for this section of the presentation, nerves can take hold and cause your responses to be less than eloquent. However, remember these following steps on the day, and you should be hitting those answers out of the park.

- **Listen to and understand the question**

  This may seem obvious, but this is the easiest part to mess up. As your brain is still most probably running on overdrive after trying to remember all you

wanted to say in your presentation, it can be easy to misinterpret the question, miss key words, or only catch a few words rather than hearing the whole content.

Make sure you hear the *whole* question. When someone is asking a question off the top of their head, they can change track part way through and so throw you off the course you initially thought they were taking. Therefore, establish that you've understood both the contents and the aim of the question before attempting to answer it. If this means that you need to ask the questioner to repeat their question, then ask them to repeat the question. In fact, a good habit to get into is asking for the question to be repeated. This can help in a number of ways:

- you can double check that you heard the question correctly
- you can make sure that everybody in the audience heard the question
- it gives you extra time to think of an answer

If you're still not sure what they want from you, ask them to clarify their meaning: "Do you mean that you want me to explain about…?" or "Do you mean in relation to…?"

▶ **Pause**

This might only consist of a deep breath, but taking a slight pause can help you to ground yourself and allow you to consider possible answers. If the question was lengthy, your audience won't be expecting you to respond immediately.

▶ **Keep your response focused**

It can be easy to just start spouting out as much information as possible on the area you were asked and end up giving a second mini-presentation, but resist the urge. Keep focused and to the point. If you're unsure of whether you answered comprehensively enough, simply ask the questioner.

▶ **Don't forget the rest of the audience**

Even though only one person asked you a question, don't forget to make sure that the rest of the audience heard it and that you respond to *all* members as opposed to only the questioner.

## ■ Handling those difficult questions…

It may happen that you're asked a difficult question. Don't respond immediately: *think* about how you could reply. By asking the questioner to repeat their enquiry and/or asking for clarification you can give yourself a little extra time to collect your thoughts.

This is where additional slides can come in handy. If you know that there are a few areas of your topic or research that are difficult to explain, have extra slides ready that you can refer to.

It could be that you simply don't know the answer: that's okay! You're not expected to know *everything.* However, avoid responding with just an "I don't know". Instead, say "That's an interesting point – I hadn't considered that before" or "I'm not sure of the answer, but I can get back to you". This shows that you're learning from this experience as well as your audience.

## ■ What to avoid

There are a few pitfalls you should try and avoid during your questions and answers.

- **Don't answer the question you *wish* you'd be asked.** This is a very common ruse of politicians…It'll simply waste time, as the questioner will most probably just repeat their question, and could even end up losing you marks.
- **Don't become defensive.** Questions can put you on the spot, but an aggressive response will make you appear inept. Take a deep breath and remain calm and in control.
- **Don't be tempted to bluff your way through an answer.**
- **And don't lie.** Be honest. If you don't know the answer, you don't know the answer.

# CHAPTER 7 CONCENTRATION AND MOTIVATION

# Part 1 How to avoid procrastination

We've all been there: you're sitting in front of your laptop, the intention being to start that academic paper, scientific report or thesis, but, instead, you end up procrastinating: you just remembered that you need to check your bank balance; you haven't checked your email accounts for an hour, maybe you've received something important; you *will* start writing, but you simply must clean your hard drive first…

Below are a few tips to help you *do* as opposed to dawdle.

## ■ Reasons (and strategies) for procrastination

People can procrastinate for a number of reasons. Below are a few of the main ones, along with strategies to get around them.

- **You're not interested in the topic:** there might be a compulsory module that you just don't care for, but, sadly, you're stuck with it.
  - Sometimes, people don't like a topic because they don't fully understand it. If this is the case, go back to the basics of the subject and see where you're tripping up.
  - Ask your peers if they'd be up for a study session where you could discuss ideas and issues.
  - Try and relate the topic to your own interests and/or current events. Making such associations can help make the topic more appealing.
- **You have trouble getting started:**
  - Have a definite starting time. If it helps, arrange to meet a friend at the library at a certain time.
  - Know where you plan to study. If it's at home, make sure your work area contains only essential items. If you're going to the library, remember all the supplies you'll need.
  - Remember: the sooner you start, the sooner you can finish…
- **You view the task as one unmanageable chunk:** regarding a report or paper as a whole can be overwhelming.
  - Instead, break it down into a list of manageable parts that you can complete one by one.
  - Some people find making a work plan helps to keep them on track. However, make sure that it's realistic; otherwise, it could end up having the opposite effect.
  - Plan what it is you want to achieve each session, and work until you've accomplished this.
- **You struggle with reading and note-taking:** it could be that you lack important studying skills.
  - Check out **"Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking"** (chapter 1, part 1).
  - Look for further guidance online.
  - Set up a study group with your peers.

- **As hard as you try, your mind just wanders…**
  - Only allow yourself to check emails, What's App, Facebook, etc., after a certain period of time, or the completion of a particular task.
  - Block distracting websites with online software.
  - Have a pad or piece of paper on your desk for scribbling down thoughts you have. You can then deal with them later.
  - If you find you're more distracted alone, go the library. If people distract you, find a solitary environment.
  - Take regular breaks. For most people, their brain can only run effectively for certain amounts of time, say half an hour to an hour. Take a ten minute break when you feel your energy levels waning: clean the bathroom, read a few pages of a book, watch a YouTube video. But, be careful not to let your 10 minute break turn into the whole afternoon…

- **As soon as you start, your eyes just begin to close…**
  - First of all: make sure you get a good night's sleep.
  - Diet and exercise really do affect your energy levels so keep an eye on these aspects of your life.
  - Keep well watered: enjoy a coffee, but also keep stocked up on water.
  - Figure out what time of the day you work best.
  - Make sure you have a good air supply: stale, stuffy air will slow down your brain function.
  - Take regular breaks.
  - Mix up your activities: don't simply concentrate on one topic or chapter.

- **You can't concentrate because of personal problems:** if you're suffering from persistent personal issues, from financial and grade worries, to anxiety or depression, you may find that your brain simply cannot block these out. In these circumstances, it might be worth dealing with them as much as possible first.
  - Talk to friends and family.
  - If you're worried about your grades or a particular assignment, speak to an approachable professor or supervisor. If not, you can also contact Katrin Winkler (katrin.winkler@uni-hohenheim.de) or Kerstin Hoffbauer (kerstin.hoffbauer@uni-hohenheim.de) to discuss any general study issues.
  - Contact Hohenheim's Student Counseling Center (Zentrale Studienberatung (ZSB)). Their website address is (in German): https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/institution/zentrale-studienberatung-7
  - Visit your local doctor and ask about counselors and/or therapists in the area. There are English speaking options available.

## ■ General helpful strategies

- Set-up your own **support group.** You could meet with these people in person, or create a group online. Through this, you can discuss any issues. Simply knowing that there are others in the same boat as you can be motivation enough. Be careful not to use it as another procrastination channel though!

- You'll no doubt have to deal with interruptions. There are ways to help prevent some of these, for instance, put your mobile on flight mode, and/or let friends know that you'll be in "hermit mode" that day and to avoid contacting you.
- When you complete a section or goal, reward yourself!
- Try not to stress yourself out: this is not conducive to productivity. This assignment is probably not the be-all and end-all of your life. Do what you can, get assistance where possible, and hand it in on time.

## ■ Additional guidance

Further assistance can be found in **"Ways to improve concentration"** (part 2 of this chapter).

# Part 2 Ways to improve concentration

Even with the best will in the world, sometimes it can be hard to concentrate. Sadly, for most people, motivation does not have an on/off switch. And it's very easy, when lacking that incentive to work, to simply not even bother. However, before you put down that pen and start streaming the next episode of your favorite series, see if these tips don't provide you with the additional impetus you need to get reading and writing.

## ■ Preparations

- **Know *where* you work best.** If it's in the library, prepare your bag with everything you'll need the night before so that when you wake up you're half way ready to go. If it's at home, only have the essentials you'll need on your desk to avoid unnecessary clutter. Avoid working on your bed! That's just asking for trouble…

  When considering this point, it's worth bearing in mind the following questions:

  - When is the study location available? For example, if you're a night owl who works best in the early hours, Hohenheim library wouldn't be ideal.
  - Do you prefer studying alone or in a group?
  - Do you find you're more comfortable studying at a desk, or lying on the floor?
  - Do you work better with a certain amount of noise, or do you need complete silence?
  - In what environment is the lighting, temperature, ventilation, etc., ideal for you?
- **Know *when* you work best.** There's probably a time of the day in which you feel most efficient. Of course, life being what it is, you may not always have the luxury of choosing when you study. But, where possible, choose that time of the day to get your hardest work done.
- **Make sure you're properly fed and watered.** If you work best with a little caffeine inside you, make a flask or a cup of coffee or tea as part of your preparatory ritual. But, don't forget water. Snacks can help keep any cravings at bay. And, yes, if you can, the healthier the better of course: fruit, nuts, etc.
- If you're a person who finds that their mind wanders a lot, and that you have a tendency to remember all those important things you need to do when you're supposed to be working, **keep a note pad next to you** to jot them all down.

## ■ During studying

- **Take regular breaks.** Most people only work most effectively from 30 to 60 minutes. Ideally, during this break (of 10 minutes or so it should be added), you should reflect on what you've read or written. So, for instance, you could do something mundane like clean the toilet, or water your plants. However, if
- you feel you need a complete shutdown, watch a YouTube video, catch up with the news, or read a book.

- **Don't give into mental fatigue, however tempted you might be to use it as an excuse that you're done for the day.** This will pass. However, you will need to *push* past it. Take a break and give your brain a ten minute rest.
- **Viewing your work as one massive block can be very demotivating.** Break your assignment down into manageable chunks that you can complete one by one.
- **If you feel yourself giving into procrastination remember: the sooner you start, the sooner you can finish!** Check out **"How to avoid procrastination"** (part 1 of this chapter) for more helpful tips.

## ■ Helpful habits

- **Exercise regularly:** going for a jog or a bike ride, taking a walk, or doing a little yoga to break up your study period is a great way to get your energy levels up.
- **Sleep enough:** aim to get a good night's sleep (the standard amount is between seven and eight hours). Tiredness seriously negatively affects concentration and motivation.
- **Eat well:** don't skip meals. And when you eat, eat lighter, healthier foods that won't fill you up and make you tired.
- **Drink plenty of water:** caffeine is a great energy booster, but what goes up must come down and you don't want to end up crashing. Therefore, make sure you always keep a liter bottle or a big glass of water on hand.
- **Undertake mind training:** there are plenty of methods online that can help you to improve your concentration. At the end of the day, improving your concentration is akin to learning a new skill.

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