DOING ASSIGNMENTS IN EDUCATION
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FURTHER INFORMATION:

Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development

Faculty of Education, Monash University

www.monash.edu/education/current-students/academic-language-literacy-numeracy-support
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Assignments in the Faculty of Education

In the Faculty of Education, you will have many different assignments. These include:

- Written assignments such as essays, reflective tasks, reports and case studies,
- Oral assignments including both individual and group presentations, and
- Visual assignments such as posters, videos, portfolios and other electronic resources.

While each of these assignment types has distinct formatting requirements, all of these assignments can be approached with the same preparation process as described below.

Assignment preparation process

A: Analysing the question
B: Brainstorming keywords or ideas
C: Conceptualising your ideas and consulting the rubric
D: Database searching (this includes your own notes and records)
E: Effective reading and note taking
F: Figuring out your structure (creating an outline)
G: Get writing and designing (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, arguments)
H: Having a break!
I: Identifying errors (and fixing them!)

You will see that the steps in the process are presented in a linear fashion from A to I. Before we look at each of these steps in detail, it is important to note that this process is not actually linear. Instead, you often have to go back to previous steps in order to complete your assignment. For example, you may be writing the final version of your assignment and then realise you need more information. Then you have to go all the way back to database searching. Consequently, remember that the assignment preparation process is often more recursive than linear. More information about the assignment preparation process can be found here: https://youtu.be/BRjy2NFJpdo.
Analysing the question

In order to appropriately analyse an assignment question, you should follow the following steps:

1. Take note of the due date and word limit.
2. Identify the number of concepts in the topic.
3. Identify the direction or instruction words (words that tell you what to do). The table below provides descriptions for some of the key direction words used in academic assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analyse</th>
<th>Show the nature of something by identifying the essential elements and showing how they are related.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argue</td>
<td>Take one side of the argument and support it with examples and evidence from academic literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Identify characteristics that resemble each other. Emphasise similarities and differences where appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Stress the differences between things, events, problems, or qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticise</td>
<td>Express your judgement about the merit or truth of the factors or views mentioned. Draw conclusions, discussing both the limitations and the good points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Recount, characterise, outline, and relate in sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Examine, analyse carefully, and give reasons for and against, usually with a view to assess how satisfactory something is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Carefully appraise something in relation to a standard, referring to advantages, limitations and costs and benefits as appropriate; come to a judgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>Investigate critically, appraise a subject in detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Clarify, interpret, and elaborate on the material presented. Give reasons for differences of opinion and analyse causes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrate | Use a concrete example, diagram, or figure to explain or clarify a problem.

Reflect | Examine your own experiences, practices and thinking and link it to academic literature.

Respond | Provide your viewpoint on the topic and support it with relevant academic literature.

Review | Examine a subject critically, analysing and commenting on the important or controversial statements.

Summarise | Give the main points or facts in a condensed form.

4. Identify the content words (words that describe what topics you are supposed to discuss). The content words will be some of the keywords you use later to help you search for information.

5. Identify the limiting words (words that limit the scope of your assignment).

6. Look at the connections between ideas → think about how things fit together (or do not fit together).

7. Consider the implications in the topic. If you are able to explain implications well in your assignment you will do better than if you just describe information.

More information about analysing assignment questions can be found here: https://youtu.be/CCbH3JwJk3I.

**Brainstorming keywords and ideas**

After having analysed an essay topic, many students start reading extensively on the subject straight away. However, this can be problematic, as you may get too many results in your search for information, or none at all! Academic databases search for exactly what you type in, so you should spend some time brainstorming keywords that you can use for your research.

Some examples of why keywords are important can be found below.

- If you search for “student”, but the authors of the article used “learner” to describe students, you will not see the article in the results.
If you use the British English spelling of “behaviour”, but the authors of the article used the American English spelling “behavior”, you will not see the article in the results.

You can find excellent tips on identifying keywords to develop an effective search strategy here: http://www.monash.edu/ro/tutorials/searching.

There are many ways you can put your ideas together, and you should use whatever way works for you. Some examples of effective brainstorming techniques are shown in the table below and in this video: https://youtu.be/r-x5HunJFl.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream of consciousness</th>
<th>Writing whatever comes to mind down on a sheet of paper or the computer – almost like a dialogue with yourself. This works really well for people who learn by listening or talking.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullet points</td>
<td>Writing down your ideas in bullet points on paper or on the computer to organise your ideas. This is very useful for people who learn by reading and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock presentations</td>
<td>Put bullet points on slides and reorganise as required. This is useful to help structure your overall argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrix clustering</td>
<td>Organising your ideas in a matrix/table. This is useful to structure arguments within a particular paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind maps</td>
<td>Visually representing and organising information. This works really well for people who are more visual learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conceptualising your ideas and consulting the rubric**

Before you read too much, it is a good idea to do as much thinking and planning around the topic as you can. The benefit of this approach is that right from the start you can begin to get a sense of how your assignment will be structured. It also means you can be more strategic in your reading, rather than collecting a large amount of material that may ultimately have limited relevance to your assignment.

You should also consult the marking rubric for your assignment before you start researching your topic (an example of a rubric can be found on pages 8-9). This will
Sample assessment rubric


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>High Distinction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students embark on inquiry and so determine a need for knowledge/understanding</strong></td>
<td>Identify the key concepts within the task, and determine knowledge required to complete task.</td>
<td>Key concepts from the task not addressed</td>
<td>Limited identification of key concepts</td>
<td>Some key concepts from the tasks identified but in a limited capacity</td>
<td>Most of the key concepts and issues are identified</td>
<td>All of the key concepts and issues are identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Response to task irrelevant</td>
<td>Response to task mostly irrelevant</td>
<td>Response to task contains some irrelevancies</td>
<td>Appropriate response to task</td>
<td>Appropriate response to task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 15 marks</td>
<td>0-6 marks</td>
<td>7-8 marks</td>
<td>9-10 marks</td>
<td>11-12 marks</td>
<td>13-15 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students find/generate needed information/data using appropriate methodology</strong></td>
<td>Gather relevant information from a variety of sources including unit textbook and readings</td>
<td>No evidence of research</td>
<td>Limited evidence of research</td>
<td>Some evidence of research</td>
<td>Evidence of wide research</td>
<td>Evidence of extensive research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Irrelevant theories and concepts are used</td>
<td>Limited number of sources</td>
<td>Satisfactory number of sources</td>
<td>Large number of sources</td>
<td>A broad range of sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sources are mostly old or out of date</td>
<td>A mix of out of date and contemporary sources</td>
<td>Sources are mostly contemporary</td>
<td>Contemporary sources used throughout</td>
<td>Contemporary sources used throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theories and concepts do not clearly address task</td>
<td>Some theories and concepts are irrelevant</td>
<td>Relevant theories obtained from sources</td>
<td>Highly relevant theories and concepts obtained from sources</td>
<td>Highly relevant theories and concepts obtained from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 15 marks</td>
<td>0-6 marks</td>
<td>7-8 marks</td>
<td>9-10 marks</td>
<td>11-12 marks</td>
<td>13-15 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students critically evaluate information/data</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate information based on academic reliability and credibility, currency, and arguments presented.</td>
<td>No sources used to back up concepts, issues, or theories</td>
<td>Sources used to back up concepts, issues, or theories</td>
<td>Limited use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories</td>
<td>Appropriate use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories</td>
<td>Excellent use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poorly presented or misinterpreted information</td>
<td>Sources are not credible</td>
<td>Some sources are not credible</td>
<td>Sources are credible</td>
<td>Sources are highly credible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some poorly presented or misinterpreted information</td>
<td>Information appropriate presented and interpreted</td>
<td>Highly effective presentation and interpretation of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 10 marks</td>
<td>0-4 marks</td>
<td>5 marks</td>
<td>6 marks</td>
<td>7-8 marks</td>
<td>9-10 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Structure and argument logically organised according to the appropriate writing genre (style). Arguments must be supported by relevant evidence.</td>
<td>Assignment does not conform to the prescribed structure</td>
<td>Assignment lacks introductory, body, and/or concluding paragraphs</td>
<td>Assignment not clearly organised into paragraphs</td>
<td>Assignment is mostly accurate</td>
<td>Assignment is clearly organised into appropriate paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Knowledge gained is synthesised, analysed and applied in a cohesive manner which aids the reader’s understanding.</td>
<td>Analysis of information not present</td>
<td>Evaluation of evidence not expressed</td>
<td>Excessive use of quotations</td>
<td>No links between personal experiences and task</td>
<td>Plagiarism evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synthesise and apply new knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of information rarely present</td>
<td>Evaluation of evidence rarely present</td>
<td>Random or excessive use of quotations</td>
<td>Personal experiences not clearly used</td>
<td>Paraphrasing skills require development to avoid plagiarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Appropriate use of discipline specific academic language; accurate spelling, grammar, punctuation; professional presentation; and correct acknowledgement of sources referenced using APA 6th style.</td>
<td>Lay language used</td>
<td>Academic tone not demonstrated</td>
<td>Substantial errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation</td>
<td>Incorrect acknowledgement of sources</td>
<td>Referencing does not conform to APA 6th referencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate knowledge with ethical, social and cultural awareness.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly lay language used</td>
<td>Attempted use of academic tone</td>
<td>Several errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation</td>
<td>Partial acknowledgement of sources</td>
<td>Attempted use of APA 6th referencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 20 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td>0-10 marks</td>
<td>10-11 marks</td>
<td>12-13 marks</td>
<td>14-15 marks</td>
<td>16-20 marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
help you to understand what is expected of you in the assignment, and will also help you to be more strategic when you plan your assignment later.

### Database searching

After you have your keywords and your ideas, you can start searching for information. This can take you quite a bit of time, as you often have to search through many records until you find a sufficient number of sources to get a comprehensive understanding of a topic. As a general guideline, you need between seven and ten references for every 1000 words of your assignment. Always check with your tutor to gauge their expectations.

### Evaluating the reliability of sources

It is important to choose good quality sources for your assignments. This is because your sources are your evidence for the claims you are making. Therefore, the better your evidence, the stronger your argument as shown in the example below.

Imagine I want to say that "the sky is green". By looking outside the window, you will very quickly realise that this statement is not a very good argument, because clearly the sky is blue. How can I make my argument stronger?

- I could say: "The sky is green" with a reference to Wikipedia. This is not very convincing, since Wikipedia is publicly editable so the information is suspect.
- I could say: "The sky is green" with a reference to Einstein. This starts sounding more convincing, because Einstein was a well-known scientist.
- I could say: "The sky is green" with references to Einstein and seven other very famous scientists, each of whom have independently and conclusively proven the sky is green. This argument is much stronger and may make you wonder why you still think the sky is blue.

In each case, I have made the exact same claim. However, because of the quality of my evidence, my argument is much stronger at the end than it was at the start.
In order to determine whether a source is good quality, you need to evaluate:

1. The content of the source: Is it an in-depth examination of a specific topic and does it have data to support the claims made in the text?
2. The authors of the source: Are they subject-matter experts in the field and are they affiliated with an accredited academic or professional institution?
3. The language of the source: Is the language specialised, using technical terms and an academic writing style?
4. The publisher of the source: Has the source been published by appropriate academic or professional institutions?

More information about evaluating these four concepts to determine the reliability of a source can be found here: https://youtu.be/TT1z_00-xww. You can also further develop your skills about evaluating the reliability of sources by completing this online tutorial: http://bit.ly/evaluating-sources-tutorial.

**Searching Education databases**

In most cases you will need to find peer-reviewed or scholarly journals for your university assignments. If you need to do a comprehensive search of the academic literature on your topic, you will need to search an Education database. The most commonly used databases in Education are ERIC, A+, and Scopus.

There is more information about these databases and some searching tips in the Education Library Guide (http://guides.lib.monash.edu/education/databases). There are also excellent tutorials on searching the Education databases here:


If you cannot find the information for your assignment, you can ask a Librarian for help. The Library holds regular drop-in sessions that allow you to go and see a Librarian to help you with searching for information. Details about the days and times can be found here: https://www.monash.edu/library.skills/resources/programs/drop-in.
Effective reading and note taking

After you have found these sources, you need to read them effectively and take good quality notes. This can be very time-consuming, as the articles and chapters that you need to read are often written in complex language using many specialised terms. Remember to read with a purpose – know what it is you want to get out of the article you are reading. Also, make sure you will be able to search your notes several days or even weeks later and still find what you need.

Thinking critically

In order to do well in an assignment, it is important to think critically. This means that you should identify strengths and weaknesses of a text. The process of critical thinking and an example are shown on page 13.

Reading critically

The best way to read critically is to imagine the text as a conversation between yourself and the person(s) who wrote the text. Consider the following things about the source:

1. Identify the main claims of the text. What are the authors trying to convince you of by writing this source?
2. Identify how the authors have made these claims. In what order have they placed their ideas and why? A good way to do this is to look at the headings of each section and the topic sentences of each paragraph.
3. Identify the evidence the authors have used to make their claims. Is the evidence convincing?
4. Identify the theoretical ideas that underpin the claims made in the text.
5. Determine whether there are any assumptions that the authors have made.
6. Investigate the implications of the information from the article. How does it fit with other literature in the field? How does it relate to your experiences?

More information about reading critically and effectively can be found here: https://youtu.be/nMJLBIIc_1g.
Figure 1. The critical thinking process.

**Example of critical thinking components in a text**

[...] Extensive research has demonstrated that participation in a learning community is linked with improved educational outcomes, likely indirectly mediated through increased student engagement (Rocconi, 2011). [...] While this type of collaborative learning is common in various other areas of education, encouraging this type of learning in traditionally isolated doctoral training programmes is still considered novel (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). One area that has received considerable interest in recent years is the establishment of doctoral writing groups as a type of doctoral learning community. Doctoral writing groups are designed to help students develop their academic writing skills and to provide pastoral support throughout doctoral candidature (Haas, 2014). Usually these doctoral writing groups are focussed on a central topic of interest (particularly the development of academic writing skills), and involve the provision of constructive feedback from peers and the group facilitator (Aitchison, 2014; Haas, 2014). This practice can be considered as analogous to the peer review process (Aitchison, 2014).

(Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, & Pretorius, 2017)
You can take notes from your sources in whichever way works for you, but make sure to always distinguish between your ideas and the ideas of others. Also, always make sure to take note of the full reference details of your source in your notes so that you can find it again later if needed.

**Figuring out your structure and creating an outline**

Once you have finished reading your sources, you can start figuring out an outline for your assignment. You can plan your outline in any way that works for you, but make sure that you have a complete plan before you start writing and designing your assignment. This is very important, as a clear and logical structure is one of the key features of a well-presented assignment. Planning and outlining the main ideas you will discuss in your assignment also helps you to formulate good quality topic sentences for your paragraphs.

Plan what you will say in each section of the assignment, making sure that each section will flow logically to the next section. You can use headings and subheadings in your assignment to aid the flow of your writing, but be careful not to overuse headings and subheadings. As a guide, you should have at least two or three paragraphs in a section before you add a new subheading.

**Get writing and designing!**

Regardless of the type of assignment you need to complete, you should write or design it according to the general structure shown on page 15. More information about this general structure can be found here: https://youtu.be/hGfDVkRhQgk.

**Writing the introduction of your assignment**

The introduction of an assignment introduces the topic and provides background information necessary to understand the topic. The introduction should also include signposting to explain the structure of your assignment. Sample introduction paragraphs are shown on page 16.
Writing the body section of your assignment

The body section of an assignment is focussed on answering the assignment question. This is where you put forward your argument in response to the topic, supported with good quality evidence from your sources. It is important to make it easy for your reader to follow your argument. Sample body paragraphs are shown on page 17.
Sample introduction paragraph 1

Teachers in secondary schools are faced with teenagers undergoing a myriad of physical and cognitive changes. These changes can give rise to certain disorders, such as *Anorexia nervosa* and *Bulimia nervosa*, or can cause adolescents to act out, for example in bullying cases. It is of utmost importance for teachers to discern which students are at risk and for schools to implement programs to help these students work through their problems. This research assignment will discuss eating disorders, bullying and cognitive and physical changes during adolescence. Particular attention will be paid to effective school programs to combat these behaviours, as well as teaching strategies to help these students.

(Extract from a student’s assignment, reprinted with permission)

Sample introduction paragraph 2

Professional responsibilities, practice and relationships, in addition to a well-developed and reflective pedagogy, are the cornerstones of teaching as a profession. As such, it is integral to maintain open and collaborative practices with peers, mentors, students and theory to effectively convey skills and knowledge in the classroom. This essay will explore the experiences of pre-service teachers in planning, constructing and presenting a lesson to Year 7 students and to university peers. In assessing the value of this experience, we contend that reflection and critical assessment are valuable practices that aid in the development of appropriate teaching techniques. We will engage in critical reflection of (1) the lesson itself and why the topic was chosen; (2) the lesson preparation, including resources; (3) how the lesson played out and how we were able to respond in ‘real-time’ to challenges faced; (4) how the learners responded, and finally; (5) what insights we have gained regarding professional responsibilities, practices and relationships.

(Extract from a group assignment, reprinted with permission)
Sample body paragraph 1

Currently, 126 schools in Victoria are piloting The Department of Education and Training Victoria’s (DETV) “Respectful Relationships” education program. The RRE is a program that consists of policy documents, interventions and resources, focusing on primary prevention education about GBV (Flood, Fergus & Heenan, 2009). RRE aims to address the root causes of violence against women: gender inequality and rigid gender roles. It is an exploration of power and control, respect and consent in the broader social structures which enforce and normalise gender expectations. RRE examines how adolescent’s ideas are informed and created, and reconstructs them with positive influence (Flood et al., 2009). In my placement observations, it was evident that teaching GBV was a positive experience for most teachers involved. It improved their commitment to addressing issues that do not normally come up in class discussions. Most importantly, students also reported positive experiences with the program. It was clear in their responses that the program allowed the teachers and students to develop positive relationships.

(Extract from a student’s assignment, reprinted with permission)

Sample body paragraph 2

To add to the understanding of the rationale behind the Academic Language Feedback toolkit use in assignment preparation, a discussion of non-reciprocal language use components and their influence on student performance is necessary. According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), these components include language knowledge and strategic competence, as well as accompanying attributes such as topical knowledge, personal characteristics, affective schemata, and cognitive strategies. Bachman and Palmer (2010) argue that awareness of these attributes can facilitate the design of appropriate assessment. Lea and Street (1998) express similar views concerning students’ performance in university assignments, where several complex phenomena (repertoire of discipline-specific linguistic practices, social meanings and identities, personal identity) are at play. In this context, it is important to understand how appropriate individualised feedback and direction for action may enhance students’ skills and confidence.

(adapted from Podorova, 2016)
Writing the conclusion of your assignment

The conclusion section of an assignment is a summary of the information presented in the assignment. The conclusion section often also includes implications for future practice. Sample conclusion paragraphs are shown below.

**Sample conclusion paragraph 1**

Educators can explore real-world ethical issues in the fictional universe of Star Trek. In this chapter we have demonstrated a strategy for teaching the key principles of medical ethics using two episodes from Star Trek: Voyager. A similar strategy can also be effective in many other disciplines in higher education, as the Star Trek universe addresses ethical and moral dilemmas in a variety of spheres including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, artificial intelligence, law and religion. We therefore suggest that Star Trek can be used as an interdisciplinary literary vehicle to encourage students to engage effectively with technical content in a fictional environment.

(From Ford & Pretorius, 2017)

**Sample conclusion paragraph 2**

Learning takes place when students are actively engaged in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for not only providing content knowledge, but also build a democratic classroom where the focus is on participation and the student voice. In the establishment of a democratic classroom, it is important to consider the characteristics of the teacher provided by theorists Glasser, Dreikur and Vygotsky as teachers are directly responsible for their relationships with students. A positive relationship between teachers and the student leads to motivation and prompts a strong sense of security and belonging in the classroom. Engagement from students is also elicited by using the effective strategies of questioning. This assignment has allowed me to establish my own personal image of an effective teacher, and has also taught me skills of using effective questioning and its successful application in the classroom. Through the completion of this assignment, I am now able to identify effective teaching strategies and apply them in future classroom scenarios.

(Extract from a student’s assignment, reprinted with permission)
Guiding your reader through your assignment

It is also important to make sure that your assignment contains clear signposts – words that guide your reader through your document. You can do this in different ways:

- Explicitly stating the points you will focus on in the introduction of your assignment, then discussing these points in the order that you mentioned them in the introduction, and finally reminding your reader in your conclusion that these are the points you discussed in the assignment.
- Using headings and subheadings that indicate what you will focus on in each section of your assignment. Remember not to overuse headings and subheadings.
- Using cross-referencing statements such as “As previously discussed…” or “The next section will explain…”
- Using discourse markers to indicate the flow of ideas. Examples of words you can use in your writing can be found below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To add ideas together</th>
<th>In addition, again, further, moreover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To compare or contrast ideas</td>
<td>Similarly, likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To contrast ideas</td>
<td>In contrast, although, however, on the contrary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To demonstrate cause and effect</td>
<td>Accordingly, consequently, hence, therefore, thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To highlight examples or specific ideas</td>
<td>For example, for instance, in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To summarise ideas</td>
<td>In conclusion, to conclude, to summarise, to sum up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing an academic writing style

You should also complete your assignment in an academic style. To make your writing more academic you should include the following four basic features of style in your writing:

- Impersonal language, except in instances of reflective writing (e.g. when you discuss your experiences on teaching placement),
- Nominalisation (using nouns instead of verbs),
- Formal and precise vocabulary, and
- Cautious language (also sometimes called hedging). The Library has a useful online tutorial with examples of tentative language that you can use in your writing. The tutorial is available here: https://www.monash.edu/rlo/research-writing-assignments/writing/features-of-academic-writing/tentative-language.

Examples of each of these four features of academic style can be found in this video: https://youtu.be/MULsUj34hNw.

Academic English also does not contain phrasal verbs (verbs that have a preposition after them such as “look up”). You should replace phrasal verbs with single word verbs in order to make your work more academic. The table on below provides some words you can use to replace common phrasal verbs in your assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carry out</th>
<th>Undertake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure out</td>
<td>Understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go over</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look back on/think back on</td>
<td>Remember, reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look into</td>
<td>Investigate, examine, address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look up</td>
<td>Research, explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make up/made up of</td>
<td>Comprises, involves, entails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take part</td>
<td>Participate, engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about</td>
<td>Consider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing quality sentences and paragraphs

It is important to make your writing as clear as possible to ensure that your reader can clearly understand your content. In order to do this, it is important to write good quality academic sentences and paragraphs.

Sentences should include both a subject and a verb, and should only have one main idea. Short sentences are easier to read than long ones, but you should vary your sentence lengths. Try to not have sentences more than 25 words long (approximately 2.5-3 lines), as sentences that are too long can become confusing to read.

Paragraphs should have at least three (preferably more than three) sentences. Short paragraphs often do not have sufficient substance, while long paragraphs can lack structure. A well-written academic paragraph follows the TEEEL structure. The TEEEL structure is demonstrated below. More information about TEEEL paragraphing can be found here: https://youtu.be/V6BPBGqGezs.

![Figure 3. TEEEL structure of paragraphing.](image-url)
Writing good quality academic arguments

While the physical structure of your writing is important, the most important part of academic writing is your use of evidence to build an academic argument. A well-supported academic argument is the feature of all high quality assignments.

The features of academic arguments are:

- A clear and unambiguous statement of position,
- Use of appropriate academic evidence to support this position,
- Consideration of contrary arguments,
- Convincing demonstration of the validity of the stated position,
- A clear line of reasoning, and
- Referencing your evidence for the claims you are making.

More information about how to write high quality academic arguments can be found in this video: https://youtu.be/1FJK74tpr4w.

Reflective writing

Reflective writing is a style of writing that is very common in the Faculty of Education. Before you can write a reflective writing assignment, it is important to understand what reflection is and why you are asked to reflect in your assignments. There are many definitions of reflection, but in general they can be summarised as “the ability to purposely explore personal experiences, beliefs or knowledge in order to increase understanding, promote personal growth and improve professional practice” (Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017, p. 464).

You are asked to incorporate reflection into your assignment for three reasons:

- Firstly, reflection helps you to synthesise your knowledge and experiences.
- Secondly, reflection helps you to better understand information.
- Thirdly, reflection helps you to make sense of problems in order to learn from your experiences.
In reflective assignments you are asked to write about your own experiences, linking these experiences with theory. These assignments usually require you to describe a particular episode that you experienced in the past, and then ask you to link this experience to the theories and themes you have discussed in class or seen in the literature. More information about reflective writing assignments can be found in this video: https://youtu.be/0mLC_ueum9I.

An example of a reflection journal entry from a student is shown below. You will see that the author uses pronouns such as “I” and “me” or “my” when discussing personal experiences. This is the key feature of reflective writing. It is important to note, though, that the sections that talk about the literature do not contain personal pronouns. In fact, that part of the paragraph is written in an academic style of writing. This is the challenge when writing reflective assignments – you have to interweave an academic writing style with a more personal writing style.

**Example paragraph from a reflective writing assignment**

My life has been characterized by a large focus on reading and writing early in life, very similar to the mainstream society that Heath (1982) described. In this environment my parents taught me the importance of reading and writing from very early on, “giving attention to books and the information derived from books” (Heath, 1982, p. 52). The book-orientated literacy practices during my childhood had a very dramatic impact on my perception of the world, and indeed my choice of career in adulthood. I believe that the main reason I decided to pursue a scientific teaching career is due to my love for books and knowledge.

(Extract from a student’s assignment, reprinted with permission)

**Tips for writing a reflective assignment**

- Include your personal experiences in your writing, clearly explaining the situation you encountered. When you discuss your own experiences, thoughts, or feelings,
write in a personal writing style. To describe the experience or situation you can use prompts such as “who?”, “what?”, “when?” and “where?”.

- Link these experiences with the theory you discussed in your classroom and the literature in the field. When you discuss literature, write in an academic writing style.
- Demonstrate what you learned from these experiences, and how you will incorporate this new understanding in the future.

**Referencing**

Good quality academic assignments include appropriate referencing. More information about referencing can be found here: https://youtu.be/logOez348II.

There are four main reasons why you should include references in your assignment:

- Firstly, and most importantly, your references are the academic evidence you use to support the claims you make in your assignment.
- Secondly, you show respect for other people’s work by referencing them appropriately.
- Thirdly, accurate referencing helps your reader locate the sources you used.
- Finally, appropriate referencing helps you to demonstrate academic integrity in your work, as you are always distinguishing between your ideas and the ideas of others.

The Faculty of Education uses the APA 6th referencing style (published by the American Psychological Association in 2010). The Monash University Library maintains an up-to-date library guide that shows you how to format various types of sources correctly. The Citing and Referencing Library Guide for the APA style can be found here: http://guides.lib.monash.edu/citing-referencing/apa.
In-text citations

In the main text of your assignment, you should reference the source by indicating the author and year of publication before the full stop in the sentence. There are two types of in-text referencing:

- Author prominent citations include the authors' names in the sentence:
  - Pretorius and Ford (2017) state that…
- Information prominent citations puts the authors' names at the end of the sentence in brackets:
  - It is stated that… (Pretorius & Ford, 2017).

APA 6th referencing has different styles for in-text citations depending on how many authors wrote the source. Templates for information prominent and author prominent in-text citations in APA 6th style are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vygotsky (1978) or (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretorius and Ford (2016) or (Pretorius &amp; Ford, 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three to five authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First citation: Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, and Pretorius (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or (Cahusac de Caux, Lam, Lau, Hoang, &amp; Pretorius, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsequent citations: Cahusac de Caux et al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or (Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six or more authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ford et al. (2015) or (Ford et al., 2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information about formatting in-text citations in the APA 6th style can be found here: [https://youtu.be/weD9a-ZL0AY](https://youtu.be/weD9a-ZL0AY).
In-text citations for ambiguous citations

When you are citing multiple sources from the same author that were published in the same year, it is important to distinguish one source from the author. In APA 6th style you do this by adding an alphabetical letter after the year, as shown below.

Piaget (1972a, 1972b) or (Piaget, 1972a, 1972b)

Sometimes, you may want to reference more than one source that was published by two different authors that both have the same surname. In order to distinguish these two references in the text, you should include the author’s initials in all in-text citations, as demonstrated below.

R. Smith (2005) and E. Smith (2005) or (E. Smith, 2005; R. Smith, 2005)

In-text citations for quotes

When you are quoting the direct words from a source, you should use double quotation marks and also include the page number from that source as part of your in-text citation. You can place the page number after the author and year, or after the quote, as demonstrated in the examples below.

Cahusac de Caux et al. (2017, p. 464) define reflective practice as “the ability to purposely explore personal experiences, beliefs or knowledge in order to increase understanding, promote personal growth and improve professional practice”.

Pretorius, van Mourik, and Barratt (2017) define metacognition as “the students’ ability to engage and monitor the cognitive processes involved in their learning” (p. 390), noting that several strategies can be considered as metacognitive.
When you are quoting from a website, you should reference the paragraph number, as websites do not normally have page numbers. An example of a quote from a website can be found below.

The Department of Education and Training is committed to “ensuring we are giving our kids the education that industries will need, and the skills that employers will expect them to have” (Department of Education and Training, 2017, para. 1).

**Discussing in-text citations in your assignment**

The words you use to describe your references in your assignment are very important as they indicate what you think about the information contained in that reference. Information prominent citations are used to focus on the content, while author prominent citations are used to also place emphasis on the fact that a specific author made that claim. You should use both types of in-text citations in your writing. The following example was developed by Swales (1990) and shows different sentences containing either author prominent or information prominent citations. Take particular note of the underlined words. These reporting verbs change the meaning of a sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author prominent</th>
<th>Information prominent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brie (1988) showed that the Moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td>Previous research has established that the Moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to Brie (1988), the Moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td>It is currently argued that the Moon is made of cheese (Brie, 1988).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brie’s theory (1988) contends that the Moon is made of cheese.</td>
<td>The Moon may be made of cheese (Brie, 1988; but see also Rock, 1989).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reporting verbs

A list of useful reporting verbs that you can use when you want to talk about someone else’s ideas or words can be found below. You can choose to use reporting verbs in either present or past tense, but you should be consistent in your assignment.

| Reporting verbs indicating a positive stance or position (sometimes also accompanied by adverbs such as clearly, convincingly, or persuasively) | Accentuate, affirm, agree, concur, convince, demonstrate, emphasise, establish, highlight, satisfy, show, stress, support, underscore |
| Reporting verbs indicating a neutral stance or position | Add, advance, advocate, argue, articulate, assert, assess, believe, claim, comment, consider, contend, declare, debate, describe, determine, discuss, evaluate, examine, explore, expound, express, hold, hypothesise, investigate, maintain, note, profess, point out, propose, propound, reason, recommend, remark, report, state, suggest, support, think |
| Reporting verbs indicating a negative stance or position | Alleged, challenge, contradict, differ, disagree, discard, dismiss, dispute, dissent, doubt, object, question, refute, repudiate, remonstrate, scrutinise, speculate |
| Reporting verbs to discuss an argument | Based on, embedded in, founded on, grounded in, underpinned by |
Journal articles

To correctly reference a journal article using the APA 6\textsuperscript{th} style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- Title of the article
- \textit{Name of the journal in italic font}
- \textit{Volume number in italic font}
- Issue number (if available)
- Page number
- Digital object identifier (doi) or URL (note that the URL is not hyperlinked in the list of references)

Three examples of correctly formatted journal article references are shown below.


More information about referencing a journal article in the APA 6\textsuperscript{th} style can be found here: https://youtu.be/tpVzWA6_39g.
**Books and book chapters**

To correctly reference a book in APA 6th style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- *Title of book in italic font*
- Place of publication
- Publication company name

An example of a correctly formatted book reference is shown below.


To reference a chapter in an edited book, you need to include the following additional details:

- Title of chapter
- Book editors (initials then surname)
- Page numbers of the chapter

An example of a correctly formatted book chapter reference is shown below.


**Curriculum documents and websites**

Curriculum documents are often published online as a webpage. It is important to remember that you can use information you found on a website, as long as the source is of good quality (such as government websites). To correctly reference information found on a website in APA 6th style, you need to include the following components:

- Author surnames and initials (often an institution or government body)
- Year of publication (usually it is the year next to the copyright symbol ©)
- *Title of website in italic font*
- URL (note that the URL is not hyperlinked in the list of references)
- Optional: In APA 6th style you can include the date you accessed the material online, but this is optional. If you do include the date, you should include it in the following format: dd/mm/yyyy (for example 13/07/2017).

Three examples of correctly formatted references for information obtained from a website are shown below.

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More information about referencing sources such as curriculum documents from a website in the APA 6th style can be found here: https://youtu.be/7zQbnGZecng.
**Translated sources**

If you are able to understand a publication that has been written in another language, you are able to use that reference in your assignment. You reference these types of sources in the same way you would reference other journal articles or books in the APA 6th style. The difference is that you also need to include the following extra detail in your reference:

- Translation of the title in English between square brackets

Two examples of correctly formatted translated works are shown below. Take particular note of how the original language is used in the reference, with the English translation in square brackets after the title.


→ Note that if you are citing a work written in a non-Latin script (such as Chinese, Greek, Japanese, or Russian), the reference must be transliterated into the English alphabet. This also includes the author of the reference.

The in-text references for these types of sources are referenced in the same way as all other sources, indicating the author and the year. The correct formatting of the in-text references for above-mentioned sources are shown below.

Guimard and Florin (2007) or (Guimard & Florin, 2007)

Yasuda (2016) or (Yasuda, 2016)
**Secondary sources**

Sometimes it is necessary to reference a secondary source (a source that discusses information originally published in another source). You should only use secondary sources sparingly. For instance, it is acceptable to use a secondary citation when the original work is in a language you do not understand, or is no longer available for you to read. However, it is not acceptable to use secondary sources simply because you have not read the primary source. It is always preferable to consult the original work.

When you reference a secondary source, you should name the original work in the text before the secondary source. However, only the reference you actually read should be included in the reference list. An example of a correctly formatted secondary citation can be found below.

The Transition to University program was designed to teach transferable skills (Ford et al., 2015, as cited in Pretorius & Ford, 2016).

→ In this example, the person who wrote this sentence only read the Pretorius and Ford (2016) reference. As such, only the Pretorius and Ford (2016) reference would be included in the reference list.

**Reference lists**

The reference list is placed at the end of the assignment with the heading “References”. Some important notes to remember about reference lists in APA 6th style:

- You should only include references in the reference list if you have specifically cited them in your assignment.
- You should organise the reference list alphabetically by the first author’s surname. Remember to keep the authors’ names in the order they were on the source.
- Each reference list entry should have a hanging indentation.

An example APA 6th-formatted reference list is included on the next page.
References


More information about formatting a reference list in the APA 6th style can be found here: https://youtu.be/uq7hYWh0Xdg.

Having a break!

Before you can effectively edit and proofread your assignment, you should take a break. This break does not have to be very long, but should be long enough to clear your thoughts so that you can look at your assignment with renewed interest. This will help you to effectively identify errors that need to be fixed.
Identifying and fixing errors

Before you submit your assignment you should carefully edit and proofread your work. You can use the Academic Language Feedback Guide on page 37 to guide you when you are editing and proofreading your work.

- Editing focuses on the overall structure and organisation of your assignment. You should check your work in terms of the organisation of your ideas (clarity, coherence, and quality of arguments), as well as your academic style and voice.
- Proofreading is focused on finer details. You should check your work for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and the mechanics of referencing.

Below are examples of some of the most commonly confused words and expressions in academic writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors in plurals and singulars</th>
<th>Confused spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Datum (singular) and data (plural)</td>
<td>Affect and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenon (singular) and phenomena (plural)</td>
<td>o When these words mean influence, <em>affect</em> is used as a verb and <em>effect</em> is used as a noun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus (singular) and foci (plural)</td>
<td>o When the words mean something different from influence they are used differently grammatically. To <em>effect</em> (verb) something is to successfully complete it, while a person’s <em>affect</em> (noun) refers to their feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion (singular) and criteria (plural)</td>
<td>Practice and practise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum (singular) and curricula (plural)</td>
<td>o In Australian spelling, the verb uses the “s” and the noun the “c”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research (an uncountable noun – no plural)</td>
<td>Its and it’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information (an uncountable noun – no plural)</td>
<td>o <em>lts</em> is used when you are talking about something belonging to the thing you have already mentioned. <em>It’s</em> is a contraction or a shortened form of “It is”. Remember that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contractions should be avoided in academic writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confused usage</th>
<th>Parallel structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● That and which</td>
<td>● Parallel structure (or parallelism) means using the same pattern of words or phrases to express two or more similar ideas in a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Both these words introduce information that is related to a word or phrase that appeared earlier. <em>That</em> is used when you wish to specify more closely the defining characteristics of the word or phrase (the word or phrase that appeared earlier). <em>Which</em> is used to provide extra information rather than to specify or define.</td>
<td>○ A common parallel structure error in academic writing occurs when listing many items in a sentence (for example “She likes physics, art and doing mathematics”). Make sure that the verbs or nouns match in terms of grammatical form (i.e. “She likes physics, art and mathematics”).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also important to make sure your work conforms to the presentation guidelines specified in your unit guide. If your unit guide does not specify a specific style, you should use the following formatting:

● Arial or Calibri 11pt or 12pt font, Times New Roman 12pt font,
● 1.5 or double line spacing,
● Left-aligned or justified alignment of your text.
The electronic version of the Academic Language Feedback Guide can be found here: http://alf-tool.monash.edu/
**Tips for producing a high quality assignment in Education**

- Answer the question. You can only get good marks if you have answered the question completely and appropriately. This is why topic or task analysis is important.
- Make an argument. A well-presented academic argument is the key feature of any high quality assignment.
- Use evidence. Remember your references are your academic evidence. The better your evidence, the better your academic argument.
- Demonstrate your understanding. Do not just describe the information you read in your sources, demonstrate that you understood what they meant, as well as the implications of the information.
- Structure strategically. A clear and logically structured assignment is easier for your marker to assess.
- Guide your reader/audience. Use signposting language to guide your reader through your argument.
- Edit and proofread your assignment to avoid errors.
- Pay attention to the presentation style that is required in the assignment.

**Additional tips for oral presentations**

- Slides are there to support you and guide your audience so put only important headings, ideas, terms, names and dates on the slides but avoid overloading with text and images. Remember the minimum font size (usually 22). Reading from slides is a big no-no! Slides cannot (and must not) include everything you are going to talk about.
- Rehearse at least once – mainly to time yourself. Doing a 3-minute presentation may be more challenging than having a 2-hour talk.
- Have back-up: your USB device may be incompatible with your class computer so e-mailing the latest copy of your presentation to yourself and/or saving it in virtual space (such as Google Drive or Dropbox) may be a good idea.
- PowerPoint, Prezi or other programs can be your best friend or your worst enemy. Use them with caution – distracting visuals and lack of organisation may ruin your presentation. If you go ahead with sophisticated special effects,
make sure you know your technology – there is nothing worse than losing a slide or not knowing what is coming next during your presentation.

### Additional tips for poster presentations

- Good organisation of materials on your poster is crucial – focus on your message and make sure your poster makes your message clear. Use organisational cues (such as font size, arrows and bullet points) where necessary.
- Use big text and visuals (such as photos and graphs) which are relevant to your theme. The amount of text, visuals and white space should be balanced.
- Show your poster to someone before displaying it in class. The text should be readable from approximately 1 metre away.

### Additional tips for portfolios

- A portfolio in Education is often used as an assessment tool. It is an extended version of a poster – usually a combination of photos, graphs, questionnaire or interview results and reflective writing. Portfolios can be either paper-based or virtual assignments.
- It is important to identify the focus, purpose and audience for your portfolio first and then start collecting artefacts (such as photos, audio recordings, graphs, journal entries, notes, and mind maps).
- Before you submit, make sure your portfolio is a well-structured and coherent document and not just a collection of disconnected student samples and photos. A table of contents or website index will make your portfolio more reader-friendly.

### Additional tips for lesson plans

- You can use numerous lesson plan formats separately or in combination.
- Ask your lecturer/tutor for a template if unsure. The Library also has books with lesson plan templates.
- Remember that your lesson plan or any other class resource should be clear and easy to follow – imagine another teacher who will use it in your absence.
References used in this booklet


Useful resources

Videos to help you improve your academic literacy and language use
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6iYFgJMOjH8dJ1gJlYxXnA

Academic Language Resources Bank Moodle site
http://moodle.vle.monash.edu/course/view.php?id=35611

Face-to-face and online support for academic literacy and language
Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development, Faculty of Education
www.monash.edu/education/current-students/academic-language-literacy-numeracy-support

Monash University Library Research and Learning Skills
https://www.monash.edu/library/skills

English Connect
https://www.monash.edu/english-connect

Books to help you improve your English

