



MONASH
University

DOING ASSIGNMENTS IN EDUCATION

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The authors would like to acknowledge Dr Basil Cahusac de Caux for transliterating
and translating the Japanese text in this booklet.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development

Faculty of Education, Monash University

<https://www.monash.edu/education/students/academic-skills>

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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 steps below.

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 common direction words used in assignments.

Analyse	Show the nature of something by identifying the essential elements and showing how they are related.
Argue	Take one side of the argument and support it with examples and evidence from academic literature.
Compare	Identify characteristics that resemble each other. Emphasise similarities and differences where appropriate.
Contrast	Stress the differences between things, events, or qualities.
Criticise	Express your judgement about the merit or truth of the factors or views mentioned. Draw conclusions, discussing both the limitations and the strengths.
Describe	Recount, characterise, outline, and relate in sequence.
Discuss	Examine, analyse carefully, and give reasons for and against an argument.
Evaluate	Carefully appraise something in relation to a standard, referring to advantages, limitations and costs and benefits as appropriate; come to a judgement.
Examine	Investigate critically and appraise a subject in detail.
Explain	Clarify, interpret, and elaborate on the material presented. Give reasons for differences of opinion and analyse causes.
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, 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 used “learner” to describe the students in their study, you will not find the article in the database.
- If you use the British English spelling of “behaviour”, but the authors used the American English spelling “behavior”, you will not find the article in the database.

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.

Stream of consciousness	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.
Bullet points	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.
Mock presentations	Put bullet points on slides and reorganise as required. This is useful to help structure your overall argument.
Matrix clustering	Organising your ideas in a matrix/table. This is useful to structure arguments within a particular paragraph.
Mind maps	Visually representing and organising information. This works really well for people who are more visual learners.

More information about effective brainstorming can be found in this video: <https://youtu.be/r-xe5HunJFI>.

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 the following two pages). This will 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.

Sample assessment rubric

Adapted from: Pretorius, L., Bailey, C., & Miles, M. (2013). Constructive alignment and the research skills development framework: Using theory to practically align graduate attributes, learning experiences, and assessment tasks in undergraduate midwifery. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 25(3), 378-387. Retrieved from <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE1640.pdf>.

Attribute	Task	Fail (N)	Pass (P)	Credit (C)	Distinction (D)	High Distinction (HD)
<i>Students embark on inquiry and so determine a need for knowledge/ understanding</i>	Identify the key concepts within the task, and determine knowledge required to complete task. Total: 15 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key concepts from the task not addressed Response to task irrelevant 0-6 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited identification of key concepts Response to task mostly irrelevant 7-8 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some key concepts from the tasks identified but in a limited capacity Response to task contains some irrelevancies 9-10 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the key concepts and issues are identified Appropriate response to task 11-12 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the key concepts and issues are identified Appropriate response to task Demonstrates insight and ability to apply knowledge gained to other situations 13-15 marks
<i>Students find/generate needed information/data using appropriate methodology</i>	Gather relevant information from a variety of sources including unit textbook and readings Total: 15 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of research Irrelevant theories and concepts are used 0-6 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited evidence of research Limited number of sources Sources are mostly old or out of date Theories and concepts do not clearly address task 7-8 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence of research Satisfactory number of sources A mix of out of date and contemporary sources Some theories and concepts are irrelevant 9-10 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of wide research Large number of sources Sources are mostly contemporary Relevant theories and concepts obtained from sources 11-12 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of extensive research A broad range of sources Contemporary sources used throughout Highly relevant theories and concepts obtained from sources 13-15 marks
<i>Students critically evaluate information/data</i>	Evaluate information based on academic reliability and credibility, currency, and arguments presented. Total: 10 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No sources used to back up concepts, issues, or theories 0-4 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources used to back up concepts, issues, or theories are not credible Poorly presented or misinterpreted information 5 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories Some sources are not credible Some poorly presented or misinterpreted information 6 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories Sources are credible Information appropriate presented and interpreted 7-8 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent use of sources to back up concepts, issues, or theories Sources are highly credible Highly effective presentation and interpretation of information 9-10 marks

<i>Students organise information</i>	<p>Structure and argument logically organised according to the appropriate writing genre (style). Arguments must be supported by relevant evidence.</p> <p>Total: 20 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment does not conform to the prescribed structure Assignment lacks introductory, body, and/or concluding paragraphs Arguments are illogical Arguments lack evidence No concluding statement <p>0-10 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment does not clearly conform to the prescribed structure Assignment not clearly organised into paragraphs Arguments are mostly illogical Arguments are largely unsubstantiated Conclusion present but unclear <p>10-11 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment conforms overall to prescribed structure Assignment mostly organised into paragraphs Arguments are mostly accurate Arguments do not always flow logically between paragraphs Arguments are sometimes supported with little or unreliable evidence Conclusion present but overly long or confusing <p>12-13 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment conforms to the prescribed structure Assignment is clearly organised into appropriate paragraphs Arguments are logical Mostly clear links between paragraphs Arguments are adequately supported by evidence A succinct conclusion present <p>14-15 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment conforms to the prescribed structure Excellent organisation of ideas into introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs Arguments presented are logical and convincing Clear links between paragraphs Arguments are strongly supported by evidence A highly developed and succinct conclusion present <p>16-20 marks</p>
<i>Students synthesise and analyse and apply new knowledge</i>	<p>Knowledge gained is synthesised, analysed and applied in a cohesive manner which aids the reader's understanding</p> <p>Total: 30 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of information not present Evaluation of evidence not expressed Excessive use of quotations No links between personal experiences and task Plagiarism evident <p>0-15 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of information rarely present Evaluation of evidence rarely present Random or excessive use of quotations Personal experiences not clearly used Paraphrasing skills require development to avoid plagiarism <p>15 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some attempt at analysis Some attempt at evaluation Lacks writer's voice Attempt at using personal experiences as illustrations, but these are sometimes irrelevant Reasonable ability to paraphrase ideas <p>16-20 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reasonable attempt at analysis of information Reasonable attempt at evaluation of evidence Writer's voice mostly present Use of personal experiences as illustrations Good use of paraphrasing <p>21-24 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insightful analysis of information Evaluation of evidence clearly expressed Writer's voice clear throughout Perceptive use of personal experiences as illustrations Excellent ability to paraphrase ideas <p>25-30 marks</p>
<i>Students communicate knowledge with ethical, social and cultural awareness.</i>	<p>Appropriate use of discipline specific academic language; accurate spelling, grammar, punctuation; professional presentation; and correct acknowledgement of sources referenced using APA 6th style.</p> <p>Total: 10 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lay language used Academic tone not demonstrated Substantial errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation Incorrect acknowledgement of sources Referencing does not conform to APA 6th referencing <p>0-4 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly lay language used Attempted use of academic tone Several errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation Partial acknowledgement of sources Attempted use of APA 6th referencing <p>5 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly discipline-specific language used Academic tone demonstrated, but inconsistent Few errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation All sources are acknowledged Mostly correct use of APA 6th referencing <p>6 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discipline-specific language used Academic tone mostly correctly demonstrated No errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation All sources are acknowledged Correct use of APA 6th referencing <p>7-8 marks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of discipline-specific language used throughout Academic tone correctly demonstrated and consistent No errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation All sources are acknowledged Correct use of APA 6th referencing <p>9-10 marks</p>

Additional comments:

Database searching

After you have your keywords and you have brainstormed 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 and in this video: https://youtu.be/Wug_MN91Gog.

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 has 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/TTIz_00-xww. You can also further develop your skills about evaluating the reliability of sources by completing this online tutorial: <https://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. 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. However, you should always use the database that is most relevant to the topic you are researching. For example, if you are looking for research related to the wellbeing of school students, you may also need to search some of the Psychology databases (such as PsychINFO or Medline).

More information about the databases that are available for Monash University students can be found here: <https://guides.lib.monash.edu/education/databases>. There is also an excellent tutorial that provides tips for searching the Education databases here: <https://guides.lib.monash.edu/education/tutorials>. If you cannot find the information you need for your assignment, you can also 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/help/meet-with-a-librarian>.

Effective reading and note taking

After you have found the sources for your assignment, you will 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 source you are reading. Also, make sure that you will be able to search your notes days or even weeks later and still find what you need. More information about reading effectively can be found here: <https://youtu.be/DjcUFc5LwyY>.

Reading and thinking critically

In order to do well in an assignment, it is important to read critically. This means that you should identify strengths and weakness of the sources you are reading. The best way to read critically is to imagine the text as a conversation between yourself and the author(s). 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?

Critical thinking also means that you should think more deeply about what you are writing in your assignment. To demonstrate this, an example of how the critical thinking process has been implemented in a piece of written text is shown on the next page. More information about reading and thinking critically can be found in this video: <https://youtu.be/beSPtQ2sNe0>.

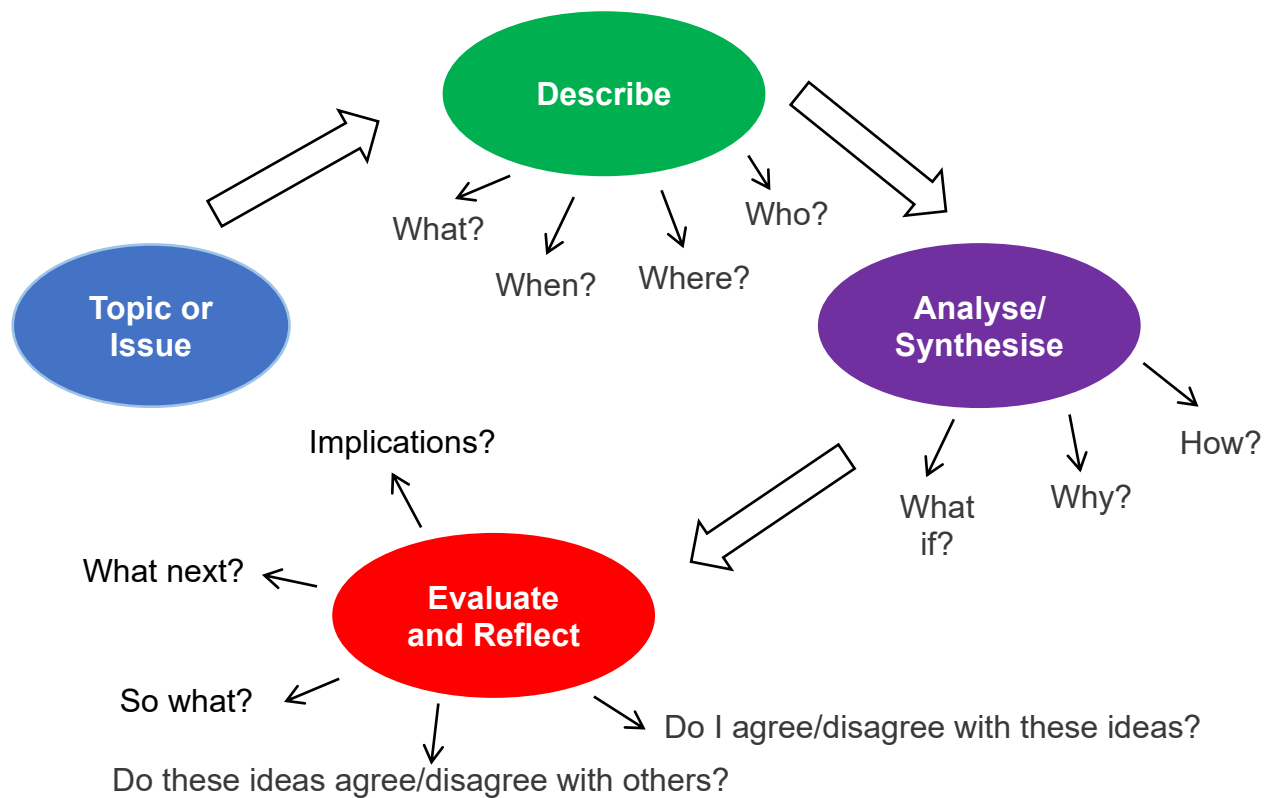


Figure 1. The critical thinking process.

Example of the critical thinking process in a piece of written 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 that you 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. Regardless of the type of assignment you need to complete, you should organise it according to the general structure shown below and in this video: <https://youtu.be/hGfDVkRhQgk>.

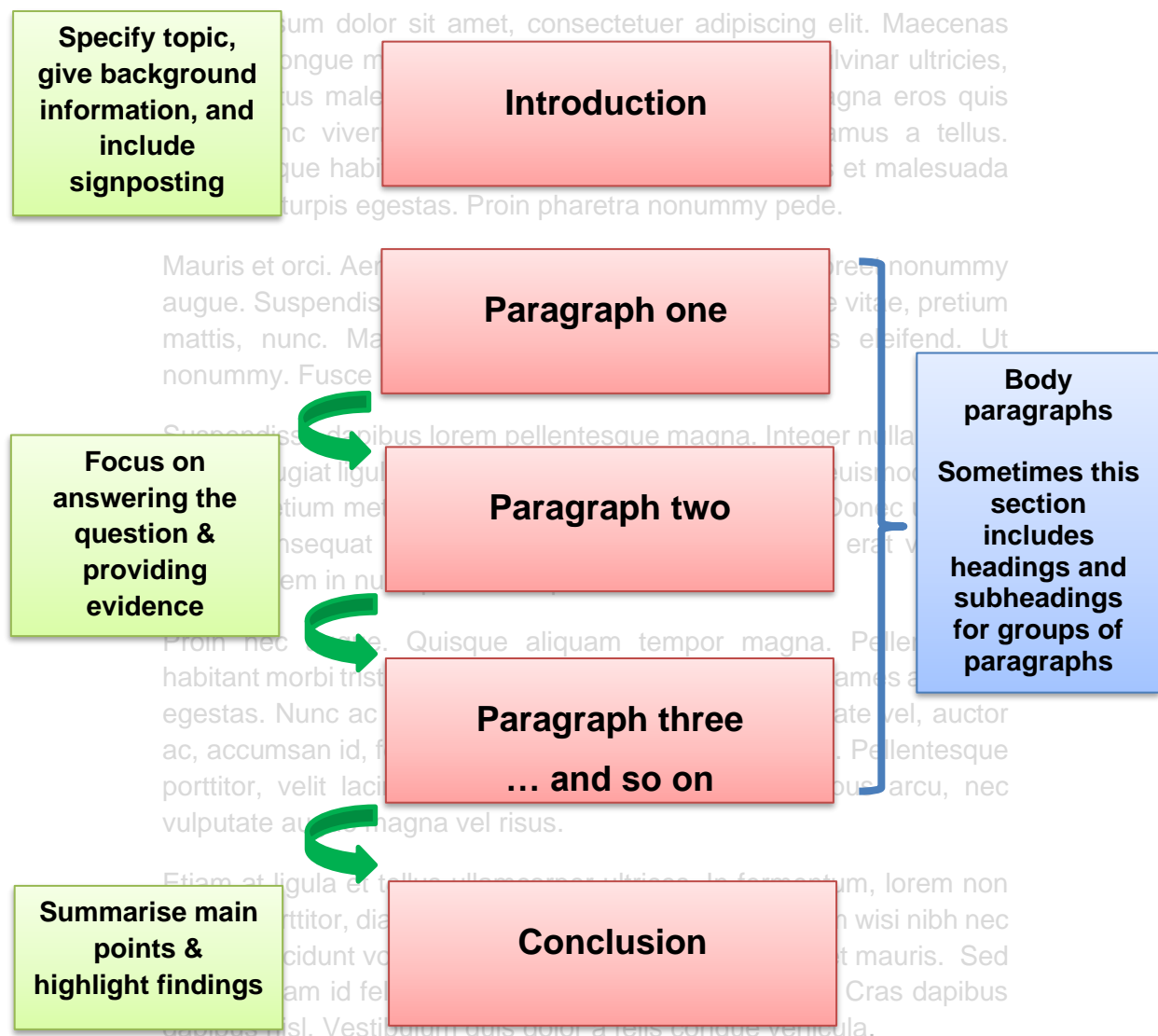


Figure 2. General structure of an assignment at university.

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 every section of the assignment, making sure that each section flows 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 these 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!

This section of the booklet provides detailed tips and examples about writing academic assignments. This includes writing quality paragraphs, making strong academic arguments, communicating in an academic style, as well as referencing appropriately. A quick guide that summarises the most important components of this section of the booklet can be found here: https://youtu.be/7_wqwltsAmU.

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 (for example, “In this assignment, the author discusses X, Y, and Z”). This is important, as it helps to guide your reader through the complex arguments that you will be making later in the document. Example introduction paragraphs are shown on the next page.

Writing the body section of your assignment

The body section of an assignment is focussed on answering the assignment question. As such, the body paragraphs are where you put forward your argument in response to the topic, supported with good quality evidence from your sources. Example body paragraphs are shown on page 16.

Example 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)

Example 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)

Example 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)

Example 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. Example conclusion paragraphs are shown below.

Example 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.

(Ford & Pretorius, 2017)

Example 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 important to make sure that your assignment contains clear signposts throughout the text to guide your reader. 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.

To add ideas together	In addition, again, further, moreover, furthermore
To compare or contrast ideas	Similarly, likewise
To contrast ideas	In contrast, although, however, on the contrary
To demonstrate cause and effect	Accordingly, consequently, hence, therefore, thus
To highlight examples or specific ideas	For example, for instance, in particular
To summarise ideas	In conclusion, to conclude, to summarise, to sum up

Developing an academic writing style

You should complete your assignment in an appropriate formal style. To make your writing more academic you should include the four basic features of style described below. Examples of each of these four features of academic style can be found in this video: <https://youtu.be/MULsUj34hNw>.

- Impersonal language, except in instances of reflective writing (e.g., when you discuss your experiences on teaching placement),
- Using nouns instead of verbs where possible (also called nominalisation),
- Formal and precise vocabulary, and
- Cautious language (also sometimes called hedging). The Library has a useful online tutorial with examples of cautious 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>.

One other feature of academic English is that it does not contain phrasal verbs (verbs that are followed by a preposition). You should replace phrasal verbs with single word alternatives in order to make your work more academic. The table below provides some words you can use in your assignments to replace common phrasal verbs.

Carry out	Undertake
Figure out	Understand
Go over	Review
Look back on/think back on	Remember, reflect
Look into	Investigate, examine, address
Look up	Research, explore
Make up/made up of	Comprises, involves, entails
Take part	Participate, engage
Talk about	Discuss
Think about	Consider

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 only have one main idea. Short sentences are easier to read than long ones, but you should vary your sentence lengths. Try to avoid sentences that are more than 25 words long (approximately 2.5-3 lines), as sentences that are too long can become confusing to read. Remember that sentences should include both a subject and a verb to be complete. More information about basic sentence structure in English can be found in this video: <https://youtu.be/4uyagMRw2Sc>.

Paragraphs should have at least three (but preferably more than three) sentences. Short paragraphs often do not have sufficient substance, while long paragraphs can lack structure. To write a quality academic paragraph, you can follow the TEEEL structure, as demonstrated below. More information about TEEEL paragraphing can be found here: <https://youtu.be/V6BPBGqGezs>.

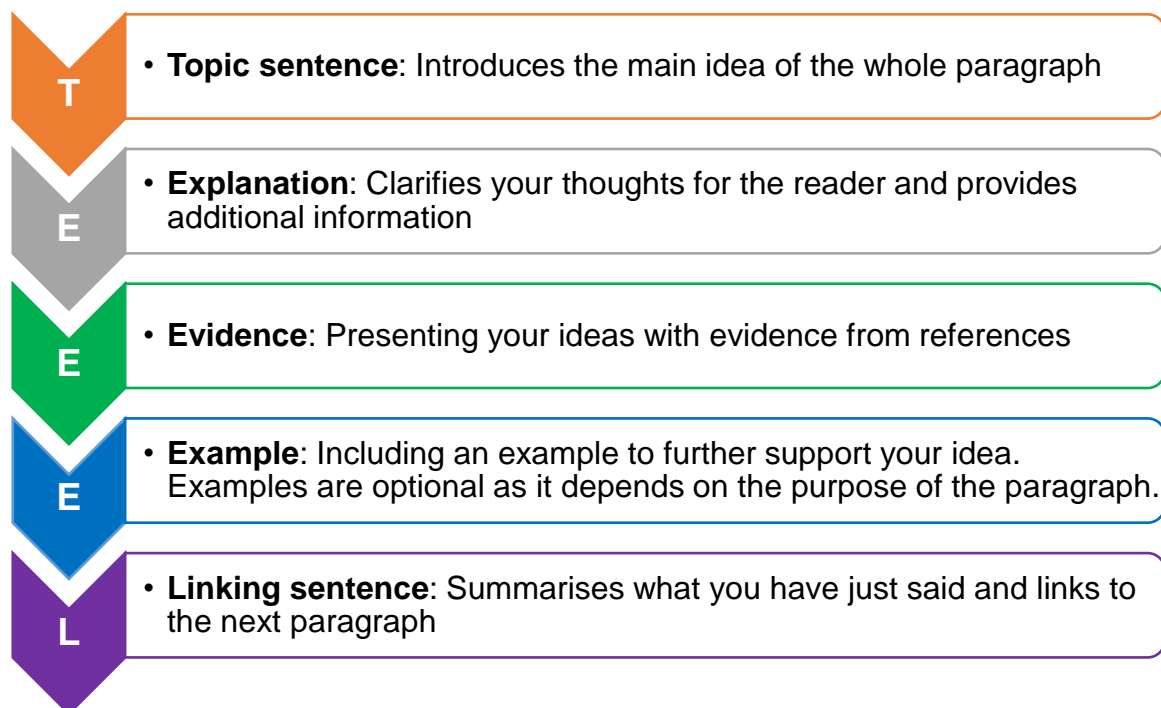


Figure 3. TEEEL structure of paragraphing.

Writing 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 argument is the feature of all high-quality academic assignments.

The features of strong academic arguments are:

- A clear and unambiguous statement of position,
- Use of appropriate academic evidence to support this position,
- Consideration of contrary arguments,
- A convincing demonstration of the validity of the stated position,
- A clear line of reasoning, and
- Appropriate referencing.

More information about how to write strong 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 reflections into your assignments for three main reasons. Firstly, reflection helps you to synthesise your knowledge and experiences. Secondly, reflection helps you to better understand information. Finally, reflection helps you to make sense of problems in order to learn from your experiences. This video provides a summary of reflective writing: https://youtu.be/0mLC_ueum9I

In reflective assignments, you are asked to write about your own experiences and link 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. You can use the following prompts to help you reflect in your assignments:

What happened? → What did you do? → What were you thinking and feeling? → How do you feel now? → What worked well? → What could you have done better? → How can you modify your practice in the future?

(adapted from Pretorius & Cutri, 2019)

Remember to link your experiences to the theory you discussed in your classroom and the literature in the field. When you discuss your own experiences, thoughts, or feelings, you should write in a personal writing style using appropriate personal pronouns (such as “I” and “me” or “my”). When you discuss literature, write in an academic writing style. This is the challenge when writing reflective assignments – you have to interweave an academic writing style with a more personal writing style. An example of a reflection journal entry from a student is shown below.

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)

Recently, several PhD students in the Faculty of Education wrote reflections about their research journeys in the book [Research and Teaching in a Pandemic World](#). These reflections are excellent examples of appropriate academic reflective writing and are freely available to Monash University students through the Library.

Referencing

Good quality academic assignments include appropriate referencing. A quick guide 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.
- Thirdly, accurate referencing helps your reader locate the sources you used.
- Finally, appropriate referencing helps you to demonstrate academic integrity in your work, because you are always distinguishing between your ideas and the ideas of others. More information about demonstrating academic integrity in your work can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2kJ1y2Z>

The Faculty of Education uses the 7th edition of the APA style. For those students who have used the APA 6th style in the past and have to move to the new APA 7th style, the following list provides a description of the most important changes that have occurred. This information can also be found here: <https://youtu.be/s-KJ0eow9rw>

1. In-text citations have been simplified. For all sources that have three or more authors, you can now only include the first author's surname followed by et al.
2. You no longer need to include the location of the publisher in book references.
3. The number of authors included in an entry in the reference list has changed. For a work with up to 20 authors, include all the names in the reference. When the work has 21 or more authors, include only the first 19 names, an ellipsis, and the final name.
4. DOIs are now listed as hyperlinks and the label "doi:" is no longer needed.
5. URLs are now listed as hyperlinks and "Retrieved from" is no longer needed.

More information about all the referencing rules described in the rest of this section of the booklet can be found in the APA publication manual and in these videos: <https://bit.ly/36CdJEc>. The APA also has an excellent blog with many additional

examples which can be found here: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples>

Using references in your text

You should reference sources in your main text 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, such as "Lau and Pretorius (2019) state that..."
- Information prominent citations put the authors' names at the end of the sentence in brackets, such as "It is stated that... (Lau & Pretorius, 2019)".

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 words you use to describe the references in your text are very important as they indicate what you think about the information contained in that reference. The following example 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. A list of useful reporting verbs that you can use to discuss others' ideas or words can be found on the next page.

Author prominent	Pretorius (2019) <u>demonstrated</u> that reflection is important when studying a PhD.	According to Pretorius (2019), reflection <u>may</u> be important when studying a PhD.	Pretorius' theory (2019) <u>contending</u> that reflection is important when studying a PhD could be disputed because...
Information prominent	Previous research has <u>established</u> that reflection is important when studying a PhD (Pretorius, 2019).	It <u>could be argued</u> that reflection is important when studying a PhD (Pretorius, 2019).	Reflection <u>may</u> be important when studying a PhD (Pretorius, 2019), but discipline content has more value because...

<p>Reporting verbs indicating a positive stance or position (sometimes also accompanied by adverbs such as clearly, convincingly, or persuasively)</p>	<p>Accentuate, affirm, agree, concur, convince, demonstrate, emphasise, establish, highlight, satisfy, show, stress, support, underscore</p>
<p>Reporting verbs indicating a neutral stance or position</p>	<p>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</p>
<p>Reporting verbs indicating a negative stance or position</p>	<p>Allege, challenge, contradict, differ, disagree, discard, dismiss, dispute, dissent, doubt, object, question, refute, repudiate, remonstrate, scrutinise, speculate</p>
<p>Reporting verbs to discuss an argument</p>	<p>Based on, embedded in, founded on, grounded in, underpinned by</p>

You can use reporting verbs in either present or past tense. It is important, however, to make sure you are consistent with your tenses in your sentences to avoid confusion. You should also be aware that changes in tense in a text can convey additional meaning to the reader. For example, if you start a paragraph using past tense verbs and then switch to present tense verbs later in that paragraph, it could convey to your reader that you agree more with the second part of your paragraph than the first part. As such, be careful with your tense choices.

Formatting in-text citations

To reference a source with one or two authors, you can use the following examples of author and information prominent citations as templates.

One author: Vygotsky (1978) or (Vygotsky, 1978)

Two authors: Pretorius and Ford (2016) or (Pretorius & Ford, 2016)

APA 7th three or more authors: Pretorius et al. (2019) or (Pretorius et al., 2019)

When you are citing multiple sources from the same author that were published in the same year, it is important to distinguish these sources from each other. 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. You can distinguish these two references in the text by including the authors' initials, as demonstrated below.

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

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 use the following examples as templates.

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

Metacognition can be defined as “the students’ ability to engage and monitor the cognitive processes involved in their learning” (Pretorius, van Mourik, & Barratt, 2017, p. 390).

When you are quoting from a website, you should reference the paragraph number, as websites do not normally have page numbers.

The Department of Education and Training (2019) note that “all Victorian government schools get assistance to help students with disabilities or developmental delays” (para. 14).

Formatting reference lists

Once you have included a reference in the text, you must also include references in an end-of-text reference list. The reference list is placed at the end of the document (before any appendices) with the heading “References”. You should only include references in the reference list if you have specifically cited them in your text. The list is organised alphabetically by the first author’s surname. Remember to keep the authors’ names in the order they were on the source – you should just organise the list itself alphabetically. Each reference list entry should have a hanging indentation.

An example of a correctly formatted APA 7th reference list is shown on the next page.

References

- Cahusac de Caux, B. K. C. D., Lam, C. K. C., Lau, R., Hoang, C. H., & Pretorius, L. (2017). Reflection for learning in doctoral training: Writing groups, academic writing proficiency and reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 18(4), 463-473. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2017.1307725>
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- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes*. Harvard University Press.

Formatting journal article references

To correctly reference a journal article, you need to include the following components:

- Authors' surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- Title of the article
- *Name of the journal in italic font*
- *Volume number in italic font*
- Issue number
- Page number
- DOI or URL (hyperlinked in APA 7th)

Two examples of journal article references in APA 7th style are shown below.

- Cahusac de Caux, B. K. C. D., Lam, C. K. C., Lau, R., Hoang, C. H., & Pretorius, L. (2017). Reflection for learning in doctoral training: Writing groups, academic writing proficiency and reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 18(4), 463-473. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2017.1307725>
- Lam, C. K. C., Hoang, C. H., Lau, R. W. K., Cahusac de Caux, B., Chen, Y., Tan, Q. Q., & Pretorius, L. (2019). Experiential learning in doctoral training programmes: Fostering personal epistemology through collaboration. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 41(1), 111-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2018.1482863>

Formatting book and book chapter references

To correctly reference a book, you need to include the following components:

- Authors' surnames and initials
- Year of publication
- *Title of book in italic font*
- Publication company name
- DOI (if available, hyperlinked in APA 7th)

Two examples of correctly formatted book references in APA 7th style are shown below.

Pretorius, L., Macaulay, L., & Cahusac de Caux, B. (2019). *Wellbeing in doctoral education: Insights and guidance from the student experience*. Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9302-0>

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes*. Harvard University Press.

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

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

Two examples of correctly formatted book chapter references in APA 7th style are shown below.

Hoang, C. H., & Pretorius, L. (2019). Identity and agency as academics: Navigating academia as a doctoral student. In L. Pretorius, L. Macaulay, & B. Cahusac de Caux. (Eds.), *Wellbeing in doctoral education: Insights and guidance from the student experience* (pp. 143-151). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9302-0_12

Pretorius, L. (2019). Prelude: The topic chooses the researcher. In L. Pretorius, L. Macaulay, & B. Cahusac de Caux (Eds.), *Wellbeing in doctoral education: Insights and guidance from the student experience* (pp. 3-8). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9302-0_1

Formatting website references

You can use information you found on a website, as long as the source is of good quality (such as government websites). Always make sure that the website is the best source for the information you are trying to convey. To correctly reference information found on a website, you need to include the following components:

- Author surname 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 (hyperlinked in APA 7th)

Two examples of correctly formatted website references in APA 7th style are shown below.

Department of Education and Training. (2019, October). *Starting school for children with additional needs*. State Government of Victoria.
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/additional-needs/Pages/disability-starting-primary.aspx>

National Institute of Mental Health. (2018, July). *Anxiety disorders*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health.
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>

Formatting curriculum document references

Curriculum documents are usually published online as a page on a website. As such, you reference them in the same way as other websites. You will need the following:

- Author surname 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 (hyperlinked in APA 7th)

Two examples of correctly formatted curriculum document references in APA 7th style are shown below.

Department of Education and Training. (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.

<https://www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework-0>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2016). *Victorian Curriculum Foundation-10: Mathematics Level 2*.

<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/mathematics/curriculum/f-10#level=2>

Formatting references that are not in English

If you can understand a publication that has been written in another language, you can use that reference in your text. You reference these types of sources in the same way you would reference other journal articles, books, book chapters, websites, or curriculum documents. The difference is that you also need the following additional information in the reference:

- A translation of the title in English between square brackets.

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

Two examples of correctly formatted translated works in APA 7th style are shown below.

Einstein, A. (1905). Zur elektrodynamik bewegter körper [The electrodynamics of moving bodies]. *Annalen der Physik*, 322(10), 891-921.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/andp.19053221004>

Yasuda, T. (2016). *Kanji haishi no shiso shi* [The intellectual history of Kanji abolition]. Heibonsha.

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. Examples of how to correctly format in-text citations can be found on pages 26-27.

Formatting references to 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 very sparingly. For instance, it is acceptable to use a secondary citation when the original work is in a language you do not understand or when it 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 in-text 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.

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.

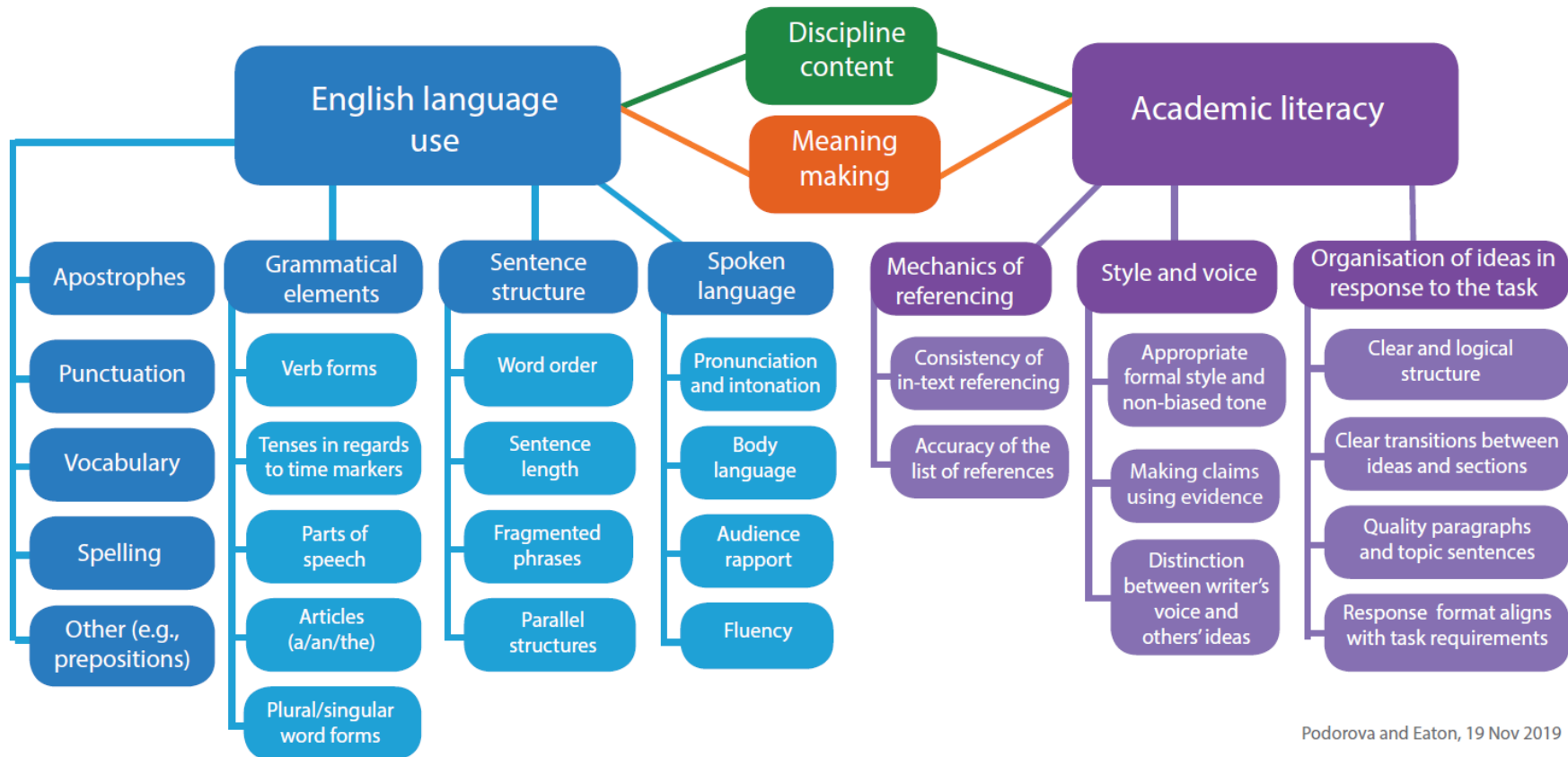
Identifying and fixing errors

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

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

Errors in plurals and singulars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Datum (singular) and data (plural) • Phenomenon (singular) and phenomena (plural) • Focus (singular) and foci (plural) • Criterion (singular) and criteria (plural) • Curriculum (singular) and curricula (plural) • Research (an uncountable noun – no plural) • Information (an uncountable noun – no plural)
Confused spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affect and effect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When these words mean influence, <i>affect</i> is used as a verb and <i>effect</i> is used as a noun. ○ To <i>effect</i> (verb) something is to successfully complete it, while a person's <i>affect</i> (noun) refers to their feelings. • Practice and practise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In Australian spelling, the verb uses the "s" and the noun the "c". • Its and it's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Its</i> is used when you are talking about something belonging to the thing you have already mentioned. <i>It's</i> is a contraction or a shortened form of "It is". Contractions should be avoided in academic writing.
Confused usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That and which <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Both these words introduce information that is related to a word or phrase that appeared earlier. <i>That</i> is used when you wish to specify more closely the defining characteristics of the word or phrase that appeared earlier). <i>Which</i> is used to provide extra information rather than to specify or define.

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION GUIDE



Podorova and Eaton, 19 Nov 2019

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. The electronic version of this guide can be found here: <https://alf-tool.monash.edu/>

Parallel structures

- Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words or phrases to express two or more similar ideas in a sentence.
 - 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”).

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 11- or 12-point font, Times New Roman 12-point font,
- 1.5 or double line spacing,
- Left-aligned or justified alignment of your text.

Tips for producing excellent assignments in Education

- Answer the question. You can only get good marks if you have answered the question completely and appropriately. This is why task analysis is important.
- Make an argument. A well-presented academic argument is the key feature of any high-quality assignment.
- Use evidence. Remember that your references are your academic evidence. The better your evidence, the stronger your academic argument.
- Demonstrate your understanding. Do not just describe the information you read, demonstrate that you understood the meaning and implications of the content.
- Structure strategically. A clear and logically structured assignment is easier for your marker to assess.
- 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. Slides cannot (and must not) include everything you are going to say in your presentation.
- The minimum font size for slides is usually 20-point font. Avoid overloading the slides with text and images.
- Rehearse your talk before you have to present in class.
- Have a back-up plan: 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) is 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 decide to use 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 headings, font size, arrows and bullet points).
- 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 can be either a paper-based or virtual assignment. It is an extended version of a poster – usually a combination of photos and graphs, questionnaires or interview results, as well as reflective writing.
- 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 samples and photos.
- A table of contents or index will make your portfolio more reader friendly.

Additional tips for lesson plans

- 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.
- 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.

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Extra resources to help you improve your academic language and literacy

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6iYFgJMOjH8dJ1gJIYxXnA>

Moodle: <https://learning.monash.edu/course/view.php?id=8720>

Academic Language, Literacy and Numeracy Development, Faculty of Education: <https://www.monash.edu/education/students/academic-skills>

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

Books to help you improve your English:

Azar, B. S., & Hagen, S. A. (2009). *Understanding and using English grammar* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.

Foley, M., & Hall, D. (2012). *MyGrammarLab (Advanced)*. Pearson Longman.

Hewings, M. (2012). *Advanced grammar in use: A reference and practice book for advanced students of English* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R. (2011). *English grammar in use (intermediate)* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.