

# Assignment Types

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August 2015



Academic Writing Guide Part 2 – Assignment Types: This section outlines the basic types of written assignments, providing structural elements and examples.

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# Assignment types

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## 1. Essay Writing

### 1.1 What is an Academic Essay?

- It is a sustained piece of writing that answers a question or task.
- It introduces a thesis statement\* (your answer to the assignment question) then expands it with reasoned argument. (\*[See Academic Writing 1 – 3.3.1. Introduction](#))
- It supports the thesis, point-by-point with evidence.
- It puts forward relevant examples, supporting evidence and information from academic texts or credible sources.

### 1.2 Essay Preparation ([See Academic Writing 1 – 2. Getting Ready to Write](#))

#### 1.2.1 Planning

- Start as early as possible. You need time to read, research, think and write.
- Helping to plan – [Assignment Survival Kit](#)
- Define the question and identify the instruction words. ([See Academic Writing 1 – 2. 1.1 What is the assignment asking you to do?](#))
- Analyse the task, identify key words, and your approach.
- Write an essay plan. A plan is a good way to start to organise your ideas and structure your essay. ([See Academic Writing 1 – 3.2 Why plan?](#))
- Plans can take many forms. Try different techniques to find the one that works for you.
- After you've done more research and developed your ideas have another look at your plan. You may want to make changes.

#### 1.2.2 Researching the topic ([See Academic Writing 1 – 2.2 Reading for research](#))

Reading for research is vital to essay writing because your thesis and arguments rely on the academic work of other writers and researchers.

- Start your research reading early. Use skimming and scanning techniques to pre-read texts and find out if they are useful. This allows you to get through a lot of material quickly. When you need to find specific information such as a name or a date, you can scan the text. When you scan, you do not actually read the text; instead you search for a particular item. You can also scan a text to identify the sections that are important for you.
- To gain an overall impression of a text, you can skim the text. The technique involves reading the title, the first paragraph, the first sentence of each of the body paragraphs and the last paragraph. Also look at any graphics in the text. By skimming a text you can decide if it's relevant and you can prepare yourself for a more detailed reading of

the text. Since you have already gained an overall impression, your detailed reading will be more meaningful.

- Read with purpose. (See [Reading for Research – 2. 2. 2 A reading checklist, 2. 2. 3 Read actively](#))
- Start with the suggested reading list,
- Use the library catalogue to find more material through topic and subject searches.
- Make notes from the readings (See [Reading for research – 2. 2. 4 Why take notes?](#))

### 1.3 The Writing Process (See [Academic Writing – 3. Writing](#))

#### 1. 3. 1 Tips for effective writing

- Plan your assignment first. (See [Academic Writing 1 – 3.2 Why plan?](#))
- Balance. Include a range of information and viewpoints not just evidence that agrees with what you are arguing. Examine different or opposing views, evaluate differing arguments, explain why one argument is more convincing than another and how they relate to the conclusion your essay arrives at.
- Write the body of the essay first. Once you know what your essay is about then write the introduction and conclusion.
- Keep referring back to the question or task as you draft your essay.
- Order the paragraphs logically so that the argument flows.
- Fresh eyes. Put the essay aside for a few days before editing it. Ask someone else to read it and give you feedback.
- Check that each paragraph contains one main point, followed by a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. (See [Academic Writing 1 - 4. Checklist for Writing & Editing Assignments – 4.1 Academic writing: paragraph level](#))

#### 1. 3. 2 Structure (See [Academic Writing 1 – 3. 3 What is the structure of an essay?](#))

##### Introduction

The introduction is a broad statement of your topic and your argument and is about 10-20% the length of your essay. Introduce the topic area(s) with a general, broad opening sentence (or two). Answer the question with a thesis statement. Provide a summary or 'road map' of your essay (keep it brief, but mention all the main ideas).

##### Body

The body of your essay is where the majority of the marks are given. It is a series of linked paragraphs that develop your argument. Here you show the results of your research, evidence, relevant examples and authoritative quotes. If your question has more than one part, deal with each part of the question in separate sections.

##### Conclusion

Your conclusion restates your answer to the question, sums up your argument, includes a final, broad statement (about possible implications, future directions for research,

qualifications). It's a review of the essay so NEVER introduce new information or ideas in the conclusion.

### Reference List

All academic essays MUST contain references. Referencing protects you from accusations of plagiarism. The referencing style used at UTS is Harvard UTS except for Teacher Education – APA and Law - AGLC.

### 1. 3. 3 Editing the essay (See Academic Writing 1 – 3.4.2 Editing)

All essays need editing. Poorly edited essays are an easy way to lose marks. It's best to edit after a break of a few days. It gives you time to think and you re-read the work with fresh eyes. You may find you need to do more research. When you are satisfied with your draft make a final check:

- Have you answered the question? Have you followed all instructions and guidelines?
- Is your argument balanced, well researched, the evidence relevant and supportive?
- Does the structure have a clear introduction, body and conclusion?
- Does each paragraph have a clear main point that relates to your argument? Are the paragraphs arranged in a logical sequence?
- Revise sentences. (See Academic Writing 1 - 4. 2 Academic Writing: sentence level; Academic Writing 3 – Grammar 5. Sentence Structure)
- Check punctuation and spelling. Use a good dictionary. Check transition signals. (See Academic Writing 1 – 3. 5 Usage and grammar, Academic Writing 3 – Grammar 4. Punctuation)
- Is the reference style consistent? Are all quotes and paraphrases referenced?
- Have you met the word limit?
- Proofread your final draft carefully. Read it aloud. (See Academic Writing 1 – 4.8 Proofreading)

### 1. 3. 4 Handing the essay in

The assignment isn't finished until you've handed it in. READ the assignment guidelines in your course outlines, find out how your lecturer/tutor want assignments presented and follow their directions.

- Due date. Submitting late will mean you lose marks.
- Find out if you need to submit a hardcopy: where and to whom. Or a softcopy in UTS Online dropbox.
- Put the essay into turnitin.
- Use the correct cover sheet.
- Make sure your essay is formatted correctly. (Font, spacing)
- Staple your essay in the top left-hand corner.
- Keep an extra copy for yourself.

Adapted from the following source:  
 The Learning Centre, University of New South Wales 2010, *Essay Writing – The Basics*,  
 viewed 12 July 2012, <<http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/pdf/essay.pdf>>.

## 2. Report Writing

A report usually analyses or describes a problem or incident.

Different types of reports have different purposes: research, scientific (including lab reports) and business reports. No matter the topic they usually focus on conveying information with a clear purpose, to a specific audience. The information in a report is often collected from research, or from the analysis of data and issues.

Two questions before you start:

What is the **purpose**?

- Is it to **collect data** and present the findings?
- Is it to **analyse** a situation or activity?
- Is it to **review and evaluate** the literature on a topic and **identify** issues?
- How much **detail** needs to be included in the report?

Who is the **audience**?

- Your lecturer is main audience for any assessment task but you need to write the assignment as a 'real' task, e.g. imagine you are actually writing a consultant's report for a company and that your lecturer is the key client.
- Who will read the report? What are their needs, e.g. information, ideas, motivation etc.

### 2.1 Report Structure

- Abstract – a summary of the report's contents. (**For more detail see 6.2 Abstracts**)
- Introduction:
  - An overview of the report.
  - A clear description of your aims and objectives, and the context of the problem or situation.
  - The scope of your investigation as well as any limitations.
  - If needed, a brief historical background (with subheadings) of significant events leading up to the present investigation.
  - If the explanation of the context is too long, make it a separate section and call it Background/Context/Definitions/Key Terms.
  - If you need to provide an analysis of existing research, make a separate section titled Literature Review.
  - Use the present tense to outline the problem and your aims.
  - Use past tense to describe events that have occurred when giving background information or context.

- **Methods**
  - List the procedures and process undertaken in your investigation in clear order. If necessary, use subheadings like Sample, Instruments.
  - For a technical report, you may need to include descriptions of materials, equipment and resources.
  - Use the past tense as the events of the research are over.
  - Unless you are told to write in first person, choose impersonal sentence structures such as passive constructions, e.g. '20 students were selected randomly to form the sample group' instead of, 'I selected 20 students randomly to form the sample group.' (**See Academic Writing 1 – 3. 5. 2 Active and passive sentences, 3. 5. 4 Tense, 3. 5. 5 Voice**)
  
- **Findings/Results/Data**
  - Present your information in a clear and logical sequence.
  - Label and number charts, tables, graphs and pictures consecutively. Check with your lecturer re the correct labels e.g; figures tables or charts.
  - If you have a large amount of empirical results, include them in an appendix.
  - Use the past tense and passive construction to describe what was found. (**See Academic Writing 1 – 3. 5. 2 Active and passive sentences, 3. 5. 4 Tense, 3. 5. 5 Voice**)
  
- **Discussion/Analysis**
  - This section is like a short essay – it is a connected series of sentences that explain and argue your interpretation of the evidence. (**See Academic Writing 1 – 4. 2 Academic writing: Sentence level; Academic Writing 3 – Grammar 5. Sentence Structure**)
  - When you discuss the ongoing situation revealed by your investigation, use the present tense. Check with your lecturer re what tone this section needs: personal or impersonal.
  
- **Conclusion**
  - This section is like the conclusion of an essay – it gives the overall purpose of the report, steps taken, overall findings and point of view. (**See Academic Writing 1 – 3. 3. 3 Conclusion**)
  
- **Recommendations/Implications**
  - If the purpose of the report is to recommend actions based on the findings, list them here in sequence.
  - Use the past tense to review the report's findings. Make comments using the present tense.
  
- **References**
  - Prove you have researched the area.
  - Show your ideas are supported by other academic research.
  - Make clear what ideas and information are yours and what are from your research.

- Observe copyright and avoid accusations of plagiarism by acknowledging and crediting the work of others.
  - Make sure that you understand and use the referencing style prescribed by your faculty.
  - Only include references that you have used in your assignment (i.e. those that you have cited in your assignment).
- Appendices
    - An appendix is extra material included at the end of the report for the audience to consider.
    - Put material in an appendix if it is not essential in the body of the report, or is so lengthy that it interrupts the flow.
    - Appendices may include the evidence you base your findings on (e.g. statistical calculations or data from another source).
    - Title and number all appendices (e.g. Appendix A, Appendix B), and list them in the table of contents.

Adapted from the following source:

Morley-Warner, T. 2000, *A guide to writing in a university context*, Centre for Research and Education in the Arts, Sydney.

## 2. 2 The difference between a Report and an Essay

<b>A Report</b>	<b>An Essay</b>
Presents information	Presents an argument
Is meant to be scanned quickly by the reader	Is meant to be read carefully
Uses numbered headings and sub-headings	Uses minimal sub-headings, if any.
May not need references and bibliography/reference list	Always needs references and bibliography/reference list
Uses short, concise paragraphs and dot-points where applicable	Links ideas into cohesive paragraphs, rather than breaking them down into a list of dot-points
Uses graphics wherever possible (tables, graphs, illustrations)	Rarely uses graphics
May need an abstract (sometimes called an executive summary)	Will only need an abstract if it is very long, or if your lecturer asks for one specifically
May be followed by recommendations and/or appendices	Seldom has recommendations or appendices





Adapted from the following source:

Academic Skills Centre, University of Canberra 2012, *Report Writing*, accessed 4 February 2013, <<http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/writing/reports#difference>>.

### 3. Different Types of Reports

The standard report structure as described in the section above forms the basis of most report writing. Check with your tutor for specific instruction on variations of this format.

#### 3.1 Technical Reports

Technical reports are used in industry to communicate technical information. These reports help businesses make decisions, for example, in selecting and purchasing equipment, or finding solutions to technical problems. Engineering and applied sciences subjects often set assignment tasks that require technical report writing. Eg: solve a design problem; investigate and evaluate the solutions to an environmental problem; develop a program or an information management plan for a specific issue or company.

Two questions before you start:

Who is the **audience** and what is the **purpose** of the report?

- Audience and purpose determine how technical your language and concepts will be.
  - Briefing managers – they will have a good broad understanding of the issues.
  - Providing technical background information for lay people associated with the project – they may have little knowledge.
  - Making recommendations to technical supervisors – they will have detailed knowledge of their specialist area.

The aim of a technical report is to:

- Draw theory and real world situations together.
- Present information in a structured and accessible format.
- Communicate information quickly and easily – using figures and diagrams to present data
- Allow selective reading using numbered headings and subheadings

You should always check with your tutor for the structure they require. However a basic structure of a technical report includes the following:

- Title page
- Summary (Check to see if you need an Abstract and Executive Summary)
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures and Tables
- Introduction
- Middle sections with numbered headings (i.e., the body of the report)
- Conclusions

- References
- Appendices

Source: Language and Learning Online, Monash University 2013, *Writing technical reports*, Accessed 4 February 2013, <<http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/engineering/technical-report/index.xml>>.

Example of a [Technical Report](#) from Writing @ Colorado State University

### 3. 2 Business Reports

Business reports are practical learning tasks where you apply the theories you have been studying to real world (or realistic) situations. Reporting financial information, marketing and management strategies and issues to others is an important component of business studies.

Your assignment question usually sets out the type of information to include in your report and the steps you should follow. Refer to the structure as described in [2.1 Report Structure](#) for a guide on the layout you should use. As always, check with your tutor for specific instructions on structure.

Here are some examples of questions and suggested approaches. ([See Academic Writing 1 – 2.1 for definitions of instruction words](#))

#### 3. 2. 1 Accounting and Finance

A typical question from [accounting and finance](#):

- Carry out a thorough analysis of the company's **earning power**.
- Evaluate from your analysis the **profitability** of the company.
- Comment on what you believe to be the **prospects** of the company.
- Make **recommendations** to improve the company's performance.
- Identify two other resources to **enhance** your analysis.  
(Adapted from Huseman, Galvin and Prescott, 1991)

#### 3. 2. 2 Marketing

A typical question from [marketing](#):

- Analyse the **business buying behaviour** and **consumer buying behaviour** of a specific company in the retail industry.
- Evaluate the effect of these behaviours on the company's **marketing strategy**.
- Make **recommendations** to improve the company's marketing strategy in relation to one or both of these groups.  
(Adapted from Huseman, Galvin and Prescott, 1991)

### 3. 2. 3 Commerce

A typical question from **commerce**

- Identify the **employee relation problems** being experienced by the company.
- Describe the **strategies** in place in similar companies to address these problems.
- Make **recommendations** to improve the company's employee relations problems.  
(Adapted from Huseman, Galvin and Prescott, 1991)

In the above examples there are **separate, yet related tasks**, and this will be reflected in the **structure of the report**: information will be divided into sections with headings (for example, Recommendations), and the sections will follow a logical progression.

Some of the material in this unit is adapted from Woodward-Kron, R. (1997) *Writing in Commerce: a guide to assist Commerce students with assignment writing*, (Revised edition), Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, The University of Newcastle, pp. 25-31.

Source:

Learning Development, University of Wollongong 2000, *Report Writing*, viewed 15 June 2012, <<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/report/index.html>>.

### 3. 3 Field Reports

Physical settings, time and spatial relationships are usually important in field trips and reports.

#### 3. 3. 1 Preparation – before you go into the field

- What is the purpose of the field trip and the report?
- Ask your lecturer what they expect.
- Read preliminary texts and recommended readings.
- Be familiar with major theoretical frameworks, important observations.
- Know what data you need to collect. Plan the aims, types of observations and possible implications.
- For group reports - organise how your group will collect data (eg; one person to take photographs, one to make sketch maps, two to take notes from talks, etc.)

#### 3. 3. 2 Identify the main issue – why are you going into the field

- What major theories, methodology, techniques, and or practical knowledge are being tested or illustrated?
- Relate your field observations to the main issue in the course.

#### 3. 3. 3 Taking notes in the field

- Make sure you have the right equipment: pens/paper/graph paper/camera

- Include something in photos to indicate the scale, and keep notes on photos: where taken and why.
- Look. Listen. Collaborate with friends.
- Record place names, time and date, names and titles (job positions) of speakers (check spelling).
- Label sketches and plans to record spatial and visual information, note proportions and approximate size of structures or map scales alongside.
- Label tables with column and row headings and graphs with axes and titles, include the unit with all measurements

### 3. 3. 4 Report format

- Experimental fieldwork - introduction-methods-results-discussion format.
- Observational data - make a logical "story" leading to your conclusions. Introduction, setting out the purpose of the fieldwork, sub-sections with background information (location of area, geology, topography, vegetation, climate, geological history, recent history etc.).
- Review relevant literature on the topic.
- Describe methods to collect the data, then present, interpret and discuss it.
- For trips involving many locations, it may be easiest to organise the background information, data, and interpretation by site, but then draw all the sites together in a general discussion at the end.
- Do whichever involves least repetition of information and makes the report easiest for the reader to understand and follow.
- Use descriptive subheadings to make the information easy to find.

### 3. 3. 5 Data presentation

- Two types of data:
  - **Experimental** – an effort has been made to control or eliminate variables/factors that are not the subject of study.
  - **Observational** – no attempt made to control or eliminate any influence, and some influences may not even be known. Any conclusions about causal relationships will be quite tentative.
- Data can be presented as tables, graphs, photos, diagrams, sketches, maps, transects, quadrants, or interviews. Include all the relevant information –titles, scales, units of measurement, keys to colours and shading, labels, acknowledgment if the figure is based on a published source.
- Make use of computer-based graphing or drawing applications.

### 3. 3. 6 Discussion

- In your discussion you argue the conclusions drawn from the data and/or possible explanations for observations made on the trip. This relates your observations to the theory covered in the unit.

- Eg: for a trip to look at regional geology, discuss how each observation either supports or is inconsistent with the published tectonic history.
- Can you draw inferences from your observations?
- Refer to the literature on the subject.
- Critically evaluate data collection methods - what are the assumptions, limitations and usefulness of different methods?
- Don't be over-critical. Sometimes compromises may be necessary between a greater number of less accurate measurements made over a large area and fewer, more accurate measures.
- If you have serious reservations about the data, then explain what results you expected to see, and why, so that the examiner has evidence of your clear understanding and thinking.

### 3. 3. 7 Conclusions and recommendations

- Depending on the purpose and format of your report, you may have a separate conclusions section to summarise the major findings.
- If the study and report are intended to solve a problem, you will also have recommendations (as any professional report would).
- State the implications of your findings in practical terms.
  - Eg: "Soil erosion problems in the catchment are related to salinisation, loss of structure due to low organic matter and low vegetation cover. It is therefore recommended that tree cover be restored in the upper catchment, and that the lower catchment be managed with longer rotations including green manure crops such as lupins."

Source:

Academic Skills and Learning Centre, Australian National University 2009, *Field trips and field reports*, viewed 15 June 2012,  
 <[https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/handout\\_pdfs/Field%20trips%20and%20field%20reports%20\[new\].pdf](https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/handout_pdfs/Field%20trips%20and%20field%20reports%20[new].pdf)>.

### 3. 4 Writing a lab report (scientific)

The format of the traditional scientific report is – introduction, method, results, discussion.

- Show evidence of your ability to interpret evidence (in this case, data) and relate the interpretation to the theory of the academic discipline.
- Your audience is the marker, they know more than you do about the subject, but you must still show your understanding of the content area, your skill in explaining observations and thinking about their implications.

### 3. 4. 1 Differences between aims and hypotheses

- Hypotheses are always testable aims are not.
  - An **aim**: "To show where transpiration occurs."
  - The **hypothesis**: "Transpiration occurs mainly through the leaves."
- Writing a statement of the hypothesis for an experiment is a good test of whether you understand what the experiment is about.
- The hypothesis is usually stated at the end of the introduction.
- Hypotheses can be rejected (disproved) but can never be proved. No experiment can ever look at all possible occurrences of a phenomenon, you can never be sure that there are no exceptions.
  - Example of a disproven hypothesis: "Temperature has no effect on enzyme activity".
  - A statistically significant result will allow you to make a definite statement in the discussion; "Increases in temperature above 37°C result in lower enzyme activity".

### 3. 4. 2 The introduction

- The introduction argues why the hypothesis was formulated and is plausible, and maybe also why the method was designed and should work.
- Purpose of Introduction is to:
  - Establish your knowledge of other's work - rely on previous research in the published scientific literature. Use the UTS Harvard system to cite these references.
  - Demonstrate understanding of this experiment.
  - Relate experiment to theory.
- State hypothesis of experiment (not the same as the aim).
- Survey, synthesise and critique relevant literature. Formulate hypothesis in relation to literature, if it is not given. **(See Academic Writing 1 – 2. 2 Reading for research)**
- Your writing will report, describe, define, explain, argue, predict, criticise, evaluate, justify, refer, hypothesis. **(See Academic Writing 1 – 2. 1 for definitions of instruction words)**

### 3. 4. 3 Materials and methods

This section is probably the easiest to write, you may wish to do it first.

- This shows your knowledge and understanding of method.
- If the method is given in detail in the lab manual you may be allowed to simply refer to that. Check with your lecturer.
- If you do need to write it up, make it better than the manual. Eg; include information from pre-lab talks, reduce the amount of detail.
- Any changes to the method should be recorded.

### 3. 4. 4 Results

The results section presents meaningful data in terms of the hypothesis. Raw data is usually confined to an appendix. E.g.; “the enzyme activity levels calculated from colorimeter readings, not the actual colorimeter readings.”

- Report findings - usual formats for results are means and standard deviations, and tables or graphs. Summarising masses of individual readings makes them easily understood.
- Demonstrate appropriate data presentation - converting data into forms that make it accessible shows your understanding of the experiment.
- Demonstrate use of analysis (statistical and by format of tables) – all tables and graphs have a legend explaining what is shown. Label all graph axes, table row and column headers. Refer to them in the text. Eg; “Table 1 summarises the effect of temperature on enzyme activity.”
- Distinguish observation from inference - your observations (which may be accurate) and your interpretation of them (which may be more problematic) are in separate sections.

### 3. 4. 5 Discussion

- This will probably be the longest section, most of the marks will be allocated for this section – spend time on doing it well.
- Demonstrate interpretation skills – explain what it all means, what you infer from the results.
- Show the relationship of results to existing theory.
- Here you argue that the results do (or do not) support the hypotheses.
- You may also explain (through new hypotheses) any results or observations which were unexpected, or the fact that no results were obtained. You may refer to other literature to do this and suggest further hypotheses and experiments.
- You can get a good mark for an experiment that did not "work" as expected. Don't blame poor experimental technique for the scientific implications of your results. You will need convincing explanations that demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theory.
- Your writing will infer, explain, argue, predict, criticise (self and others), evaluate, justify, and refer. (**See Academic Writing 1 – 2.1 for definitions of instruction words**)

Source:

Academic Skills and Learning Centre, Australian National University 2009, *Writing a Lab Report*, viewed June 15 2012,  
<[https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/handout\\_pdfs/Field%20trips%20and%20field%20reports%20\[new\].pdf](https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/handout_pdfs/Field%20trips%20and%20field%20reports%20[new].pdf)>.

## 4. Reviews

### 4.1 The language of a critical review

A critical review of an article, or a literature review of a number of articles will mean you are referring to the works of others. Use this 'checklist' to vary the phrases you use in your writing and to let the reader know your opinion of the work you are referring to.

- Stating your own position on a topic or subject
  - The aim of this paper/essay is to...
  - The argument in this paper...
  - The perspective presented here is...
  - I argue...
  
- Stating the view of another person
  - Smith claims that...
  - Smith's argument is that...
  - Smith's conclusion is that...
  - According to Smith...
  - From Smith's point of view/perspective...
  - The point of Smith's article/paper/book is that...
  - The substance of Smith's article/paper/book is that...
  - Smith's work/data leads him to conclude...
  - Some theorists, such as Smith, argue that...
  - It is argued by theorists, such as Jones (2009) and Smith (2010), that...
  
- Attributing a view to another person (when you are not quite sure)
  - Smith's claim seems to be that...
  - Smith seems to be claiming...
  - Smith's argument seems to be that...
  - The point of Smith's argument appears to be that...
  
- Drawing a conclusion using the work of others
  - Using Smith's work it is possible to show that...
  - From Smith's work it can be determined that...
  - One possible consequence of Smith's work is that...
  - Developing Smith's work to its logical conclusion shows that...
  - When Smith's argument is analysed it can be seen that...
  - Analysis of Smith's data demonstrates that...
  
- Disagreeing with the views of others
  - The argument advanced here is opposed to that of Smith...
  - Problems arise in Smith's work [when it is noted that]...
  - Smith's argument/data is flawed because...
  - Contrary to Smith's argument...
  - In contrast to Smith's argument...
  - Smith's data/argument/conclusion do/does not follow because...
  - It does not seem to follow from Smith's argument that...



- Agreeing with the views of others
  - As Smith argues...
  - This is also Smith's view...
  - Following from Smith's argument...
  - Smith's view is persuasive because...
  - Smith is right in so far as...
  - Not unlike Smith, I am suggesting/arguing...
  - Along the lines of Smith, I argue...
  
- Pointing out assumptions
  - This assumes that...
  - Smith assumes that...
  - Smith's assumption is that....
  - The point being assumed here is that...
  - Smith's view depends on the assumption that...

## 4. 2 Critical Book or Journal Review

A critical book review of a book, a book chapter or a journal article is not the same as a book review in a newspaper written for the general reader.

### 4. 2. 1 Producing a critical review of a book or journal

The audience for your review is your marker who is an expert in the discipline. This task is to show them your critical assessment of the author's ideas and argument.

#### Step 1: Get to know the text you are reviewing

- Examine the title, the table of contents and any preface or introduction to gain an idea of the central focus and the coverage of the book/article. In books, the preface will often explain the author's reasons for writing it.
- Skim quickly through the whole book/article. Read the opening sentences of paragraphs; look at the tables, illustrations or other graphic materials.
- Closely read the first chapter/introduction. It should contain the main issues and the author's theoretical or conceptual framework.
- Do the same for the final chapter/conclusion. It should cover the author's conclusions and summarise the main reasons why these conclusions have been reached.
- Read the whole text thoroughly to develop. Think about the basis you'll use to critically review it.

#### Step 2: Decide which aspects of the book you wish to discuss in detail in your review

Follow the assignment directions.

- What are you being asked to critically evaluate – the theoretical approach, the content or case studies, the selection and interpretation of evidence, the range of coverage, and/or the style of presentation?
- Discuss the main issues examined by the author.
- You may be able choose a particular issue that is particularly relevant to you and the course, even though it is not the main issue for the author.

### **Step 3: Deepen your understanding of the issues that you will be focusing on**

- Reread the sections of the book/article that are relevant to your chosen issues.
- Make notes of the main points and identify key quotations.
- You may need to read other articles or books connected to your topic, to provide supporting evidence or alternative theoretical models or interpretations of data.
- For books you can read other reviews of the book in recent academic journals to find out how the book has been received within the discipline.
- Use the Library's E-Resources and databases to find reviews in academic journals. Use these reviews to support your own evaluation. Don't copy or imitate them.

#### **4. 2. 2 Writing and structuring the review**

Follow the advice of your lecturer and structure your review to fulfil the assessment criteria and the assignment questions.

- Correctly identify the book/article details (author, title, date of publication, other significant details, e.g.; it is originally a French edition, etc.),
- State the major aspects of the book/article you will discuss and the purpose of the review.
- Give a brief summary of the range, contents, and argument of the text.
- You may be asked to summarise books chapter by chapter, but if it's a short review (1000-1500 words) usually just pick up the main themes. This section should be about a third of the total review.
- Critically discuss 2-3 key issues raised in the text. This section is the core of your review. Make clear what the author's argument is before you criticise and evaluate it.
- Use evidence from the text to support your criticisms. You may also use other texts. You can point out gaps in the author's coverage, but don't criticise a writer for not doing something they never intended to do.
- Your conclusion should evaluate the overall contribution that the book/article has made to your understanding of the topic. You can also talk about its place in the discipline and set it in the context of other writings in the field.
- Provide a reference list or bibliography of your sources that you have referred to. Use the correct referencing style.
- Use these points as a checklist to assess the final draft of the review.

An example of a book review plan taken from a course at the Australian National University. It demonstrates how asking questions can help shape the structure of the review.

Example : A book review in Gender Studies (length: 1,000 words)

I would like all students to prepare a short critical book review. ... Some questions to ask yourself:

- Who am I writing for?
- What shared knowledge and values am I assuming?
- Why does any of this matter?
- Why should anyone believe me?
- What are my reasons for thinking the way I do?
- What is my evidence?
- Formal qualities:
  - Evidence of understanding the book's basic terminology and argument.
  - Conceptual clarity.
  - Consistent and logical argument supported by evidence.
  - Independent judgement.
  - Coherent structure.
  - Lucid sentence and paragraph construction.
  - Correct bibliographic citations.
  - Adherence to word limit.
- Content:
  - A summary of the book's scope and argument
  - An assessment of the book in its own terms (i.e., how well does it do what it sets out to do?)
  - An assessment of the book in your own terms (e.g., is the topic worthwhile?)
  - Does the book deal with the topic in the best way? How could it be improved?

Source:

Academic Skills and Learning Centre 2009, *Writing a book review*, Australian National University, viewed June 15 2012,

< <https://academicskills.anu.edu.au/resources/handouts/writing-critical-book-review> >

## 5. Case Studies

A case study provides a description of a particular practice e.g. a business problem, scenario or situation, which is then critically analysed/reviewed/evaluated using the relevant theory. Case studies are assignments that unite theory and practice.

In a case study, you will -

- Apply selected theories through simulated problem solving and decision-making.
- Learn by doing instead of just listening to lecturers or reading.

### 5. 1 Writing a case study

Follow the assessment criteria and assignment tasks. Confirm with your lecturer questions of structure and format.



### 5. 1. 1 Writing a case study in report format

If your case study is being structured as a formal case report it may follow this format: These headings/sections, may be numbered:

- Letter of transmittal – A business letter putting the report in context, containing information not included in the report (e.g. due dates) and contact information. Check with your tutor, as it is not always required.
- Title page
- Executive summary (**For more detail see 6.3 Executive Summary**)
- Table of contents
- Introduction or case background
- Body of the analysis
- Alternative solutions
- Conclusion/Recommendation(s)
- Implementation plan (if requested)
- References List
- Appendices – Information that is necessary but too lengthy to fit in the report, e.g. maps, large graphics, computer print outs, etc.

Source:

Summers J & Smith B 2003, *Communication skills handbook*, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Qld.

### 5. 1. 2 Writing a case study in essay format

Your case study may be prepared in essay format with an introduction, body and conclusion.

It is important to present the analysis of the particular case in relation to the theory and the best practice that stems from that theory.

The following table contains a paragraph from a case study that demonstrates analysis of a case along with notes to highlight important points.

<b>Excerpt from a case study demonstrating analysis of a case</b>	<b>Note how:</b>
4.3 Nature of Organisational Design and Design Principles	The numbering of the heading indicates that this section is from a report
ABC Mission has a matrix organisational design because it incorporates the following six design principles: specialisation, departmentalisation, chain of command, span of control, centralisation and decentralisation and formalisation (Robbins, Millet & Walters-Marsh 2004, p. 474). ... (remainder of paragraph omitted).	Note how this section is introduced, even when there is a heading.
<p>The span of control at ABC Mission is one where there are dual lines of control (Robbins, Millet &amp; Walters-Marsh 2004, p. 475).</p> <p>In the Aged Care business at ABC Mission, there are two Regional Directors, one for Western Region and one for Northern Region (see Appendix 3 for the organisational chart for ABC).</p> <p>While staff within each department have their respective managers heading the department, the two Regional Directors often request tasks/information from staff within these support departments. While there is the potential in this sort of structure for role conflict, unclear expectations and role ambiguity from having to report to two bosses (Robbins et al. 2004, p. 475), the issue of staff reporting to more than one boss does not seem to cause problems at ABC Mission. Therefore it seems that the dual lines of control in the organisation work well.</p>	<p>Note how this paragraph:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Makes a statement i.e. judgment about the case in relation to one of the theoretical concepts.</li> <li>- Explains how this theory is evidenced in the case under study - provides further theory &amp; demonstrates how this theory applies to the case.</li> <li>- Draws the ideas presented in the paragraph to a logical conclusion i.e. one that connects with the judgment made in the beginning sentence.</li> </ul>
(paragraph omitted)	
(another paragraph omitted)	
(beginning of paragraph omitted) ... So in the case of ABC Mission, there is evidence of a matrix organisational design which appears to be effective for this organisation.	Note too how this section is drawn to a logical conclusion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This example has been provided to demonstrate features of academic writing only and so is not intended to be an example of appropriate and/or accurate content and references.</li> <li>• Thanks to the student who gave us this sample of text to modify and use.</li> </ul>	

Source:

Southern Cross University Academic Skills Development Unit 2010, *Writing a Case Study*, viewed 3 January 2013, <[www.scu.edu.au/academicskills/download.php?doc\\_id=3688](http://www.scu.edu.au/academicskills/download.php?doc_id=3688)>.

## 6. Other Types

### 6.1 Reflective Journals

A reflective journal is a personal record of your progress, your changes in thinking about a subject or a topic. Although it's a more informal style of writing than other academic assignments, you might need to submit it for marking. Most journals require regular entries, over a period of time. Your reflective journal can also be the basis of an essay or report.

- Check the assessment criteria. If you need to submit the journal make sure you structure it and write clearly so it can be read easily.
- If it is for yourself, but you will need to use it for an essay or report, make sure that your writing makes enough sense for you to refer to it.
- Consider the following when writing a reflective journal:
  - Describe events and your experience – What did I do/hear/see?
  - Interpret and evaluate the events from your perspective – What do I think about it now? How does it relate to other things that I know? Explain your experience; reveal your new insights, connections with other learning, your hypotheses, and your conclusions.
  - Reflect on how this information will be useful to you – What questions do I have?
  - Have I changed how I think about the situation? Where do I go from here?
- If you have been given specific questions or tasks to perform, use these as headings to help organise your writing.

Adapted from the following sources:

Morley-Warner, T. 2000, *Academic writing is... A guide to writing in a university context*, Centre for Research and Education in the Arts, Sydney.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Study & Learning Centre 2009, *Reflective Journals*, viewed 15 June 2009, <<http://www.dlswb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/>>

### 6.2 Abstracts

- Most research articles and reports have an abstract. An abstract is an overview of the entire text. It is sometimes called a synopsis.
- An introduction leads the audience to the body of the text. An abstract is a text about a text – it provides a commentary on the text that follows from beginning to end.
- It is a short, half- to one-page summary. Each new sentence introduces new information, providing a concise summary without paragraphing.
- It is usually written impersonally.
- Write your abstract after the article/report is completed and you have an overview of the whole text.

### 6. 3 Executive summary

In the business world executives have a concise outline of the main points in a report, indicating where in the report to locate more detailed information.

- The summary may be several pages for a long report, with headings and dot points or numbered points.
- The summary should be concise and not involve too much fine detail. It should make commentary on the main points only and follow the sequence of the report.
- Like the abstract, write it after the report is completed, once you have an overview of the whole text.
- It is the first page of the report and is not numbered..

Adapted from the following source:

Morley-Warner, T. 2009, *Academic writing is... A guide to writing in a university context*, Association for Academic Language and Learning, Sydney.

### 7. Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The annotation informs the reader of the relevance, accuracy and quality of the sources cited, and provides a foundation for further research.

- An annotated bibliography may be a separate task, or it may be part of a report.
- The references may be from your reading list or from your own research on a topic.
- Consider the relevance of each text to the context of your task.
- Write for an audience that has not read the text. Give a concise overview of it for the purpose of using it to investigate an issue
- Tell your audience:
  - The strengths and weaknesses of the text.
  - Its place in, and its relationship to, the field of research in the topic.
  - How it contributes to the field of research.
  - Whether the information is sound, logical and well researched.
  - Whether it is broad and balanced.
  - The intended audience.
  - The aims and theoretical bases of the text.
- Structure of annotated bibliography:
  - Full bibliographical details of the text using the correct referencing system and organised in alphabetical order.
  - Summary – retell the main points, identifying the particular theoretical or political perspective on which it is based. Be concise.
  - Critique – evaluate briefly. Who is the intended audience? Is it useful and relevant for this topic? On what assumptions is it based? Does it have a particular bias?

- Annotations vs. Abstracts:
  - Abstracts are purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes.
  - Annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

Adapted from the following sources:

Morley-Warner, T. 2009, *Academic writing is... A guide to writing in a university context*, Association for Academic Language and Learning, Sydney.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Study & Learning Centre 2009, *Annotated Bibliography*, viewed 15 June 2009, <<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/annotated-bibliographies>>.

## 7.1 How to write an annotated bibliography

Stem Cell Research: An Annotated Bibliography Example (using UTS Harvard Referencing).

Bush Stands Pat on Stem Cell Policy 2001, television program, CNN, 17 August

Notice that in this example, I use a variety of sources: a book, a scholarly journal, and a television program. Using a variety of sources can help give you a broader picture of what is being said about your topic. You may want to investigate how scholarly sources are treating this topic differently than more popular sources. But again, if your assignment is to only use scholarly sources, then you will probably want to avoid magazines and popular web sites.

Holland, S. 2001, *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy*, MIT Press, Boston.

After a brief summary, it would be appropriate to assess this source and offer some criticisms of it. Does it seem like a reliable and current source? Why? Is the research biased or objective? Are the facts well documented? Who is the author? Is she qualified in this subject? Is this source scholarly, popular, some of both?

The length of your annotation will depend on the assignment or on the purpose of your annotated bibliography. After summarizing and assessing, you can now reflect on this source. How does it fit into your research? Is this a helpful resource? Too scholarly? Not scholarly enough? Too general/specific? Since "stem cell research" is a very broad topic, has this source helped you to narrow your topic?

Senior, K. 2001, 'Extending the Ethical Boundaries of Stem Cell Research', *Trends in Molecular Medicine*, vol. 7, pp. 5-6.

Not all annotations have to be the same length. For example, this source is a very short scholarly article. It may only take a sentence or two to summarize. Even if you are using a book, you should only focus on the sections that relate to your topic.



Not all annotated bibliographies assess and reflect; some merely summarize. That may not be the most helpful for you, but, if this is an assignment, you should always ask your instructor for specific guidelines.

## 7. 2 Examples of an annotated bibliography

Cho, S. 2000, 'Selflessness: Toward a Buddhist Vision of Social Justice', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 7, pp. 25-35.

This article deals with developing a Buddhist theory of social justice. It explores the Buddhist theme of 'selflessness' and discusses how this can be used as a basis for such a theory. Cho discusses the theoretical contradiction in Buddhism between being socially engaged and pursuing a goal of individual salvation. The article is good as a source because it applies Buddhism to modern times and modern issues. It also discusses the challenges modern citizenship brings to Buddhism theoretically. It is relevant to the rest of the sources as a result of this. Despite attempts by Cho to explain the theory behind the aspects of Buddhism, some broader background knowledge is helpful to better explore some of the specific Buddhist ideals he raises. Furthermore, one of the most interesting points that Cho raises, that of social engagement versus individual enlightenment, is not developed as fully as it could have been and would be useful to pursue.

McFarlane, J.K. 1973, 'Standards of care—what do we mean by care?' *Nursing Mirror*. 143(23), 40–42.

The article examines the meaning of the word 'care' within a nursing context. The responsibility of nurses to provide care is legitimised in numerous documents, and the author goes on to identify key concepts related to nursing care. In particular, these concepts include assisting, helping and giving a service; offering this service to people who need help with daily living activities and to others who are affected by health deviations or illness of some kind. Moreover, the nurse's caring role is legitimised by the patients. Finally, the article concludes by relating how these concepts are put into operation by using the steps of the nursing process—assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating the patient's need for nursing care. The main limitation of the article is that all of the research was exclusively conducted in large city hospitals. Therefore, while the article is useful for an analysis of nursing care, the limitations of its research base will require some adaptation to meet the needs of this assignment that requires a commentary on services in both city and country area hospitals.

Notice that the bibliographic information above is proper UTS Harvard format (use whatever style is appropriate in your field) and the annotations are in paragraph form. Note also that the entries are alphabetised by the first word in the bibliographic entry. If you are writing an annotated bibliography with many sources, it may be helpful to divide the sources into categories. For example, if I were putting together an extensive annotated bibliography for stem cell research, I might divide the sources into categories such as ethical concerns, scholarly analyses, and political ramifications. For more examples, a quick search at a

library or even on the Internet should produce several examples of annotated bibliographies in your area

