Technical Tips for Writing Academic Assignments

A Practical Guide

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

B.Sc.   Bachelor of Science Degree
et al.   abbreviation of the Latin *et alia*. It means 'and the others'
etc.   abbreviation of the Latin *et cetera*. It means 'and the rest'
HE   Higher Education
ibid.   Abbreviation of the Latin *ibidem*. It means 'in the same place'
i.e.   Abbreviation of the Latin *id est*. It means 'that is'
IMO   International Maritime Organization
LMS   Learning Management System
MBA   Master of Business Administration Degree
M.Sc.   Master of Science Degree
PDF   Portable Document Format
RQ(s)   Research Question(s)
TNR   Times New Roman
URL   Uniform Resource Locator commonly known as a web address
US   United States
VLE   Virtual Learning Environment

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Technical Tips for Writing Academic Assignments

Notice of Terms of Use

While the advice given in this pamphlet 'Technical Tips for Writing Academic Assignments' has been developed using information currently available, it is intended purely as guidance to be used at the user's own risk.

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The publication has been prepared to deal with the subject of 'Technical Tips for Writing Academic Assignments'. This should not, however, be taken to mean that this publication deals comprehensively with all of the issues that will need to be addressed or even, where a particular issue is addressed, that this publication sets out the only definitive view for all situations.

Advice, guidance, rules, regulations, policies and procedures from the learning Institution in which the user is enrolled, or will enrol, always has precedence.

Why, and who needs them?

Good questions: this pamphlet grew out of my experience as a face-to-face and distance learning tutor on Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), Master of Science (M.Sc.) and Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes. Hence the references throughout of 'dissertations' and 'degrees'. I soon came to realise that students were either not finding the information they needed from their Institution's Programme Handbooks, or if they did, weren't paying it sufficient attention. I reasoned that if all the technical stuff was in one, easily accessible location, it may help.

My own experience as a student in the Higher Education (HE) sector was another motivator. Often, learners who don't have a formal, traditional, university academic background (including myself) may have missed out on some of the basic requirements of technical academic presentation. These are second-nature to career academics and so often get overlooked with assumptions such as 'everyone knows you don't mix fonts in an essay', or 'it's obvious you'd include page numbers and a footer with your student name and reference number'. Well, the truth is that many mid-career learners are <u>not</u> aware of these expected conventions.

It's more than likely that the information *will* be buried in your Programme Handbook (though surprisingly not always) or on the website of the Institute in which you're learning. But, as I've said, sometimes the pages are difficult to find and access. The idea

of this pamphlet is that you can keep it at your side, on your device or in print, and keep it as a ready reference.

Critical evaluation and questioning are the cornerstones of academic enquiry. So it's legitimate to ask, 'why do I need Technical Tips for Writing Academic Assignments?' The short answer is if you've had senior year, sixth form, or college education or been to university you may not.

But if, like many of us, you left school at 16 and went straight to sea or into another job, it's quite likely that much of your academic development has been focussed on professional, vocational and technical issues.

The professional demands of your job may have included report writing or presentation skills which you have practiced and become accomplished at over many years. But academic writing is different. It has a structure, a pattern, a plan - and readers expect to see certain established conventions being observed. So, the following bullets aim to answer the 'why?' question:

- If the scaffolding isn't right there's not much hope for a strong building. And the scaffolding for an assignment is everything that follows below. The grammar, syntax, vocabulary, layout, and prezentation. Occasional glitches and mistakes – we all make them – can sometimes be forgiven - but the higher the standard of the programme you're following (undergraduate, bachelor's, postgraduate or doctorate), so the aspiration towards achieving a 'publishable' standard becomes more imperative. The occasional spelling mistake can be overlooked, but if they become excessive they will distract your reader and may even impact on meaning. No doubt you spotted the mistake in this paragraph and most of you will have done a double-take, re-read the sentence to verify your perception and then may even have tut-tutted. You don't want that happening in any of your writing.

- Adopting conventional rules in your work means that readers won't struggle to understand the layout. They'll be familiar with the overall plan and can concentrate on the content.

- Following a tried and tested route map for dissertations means you're less likely to miss out important stuff. Likewise, conventional chapter and section headings will keep you focussed and prevent scope-creep. That's where you end up talking about ship construction in China when you're supposed to be concentrating on manning on North Sea Ferries (or whatever).

Before starting, remember all universities and learning Institutions have their own rules. Some of these will be rigid and applied right across the university; some may be departmental and changed from year to year. Some prescribe requirements to a high level (for instance, stipulating font styles and margin widths); all should have their own Programme Handbooks and guidance on structure, layout, referencing systems to be used and other technical aspects. Finally, you may have an academic supervisor or tutor who will stipulate a certain method.

Whatever your situation, clearly the guidance given below must be read in conjunction with your Institution's rules and guidance. The latter takes precedence where there's any contradiction.

So, these tips represent the nuts and bolts of the work upon which you're embarking. The comments are address specifically to students writing degree assignments but the principles apply to all forms of academic writing.

A special note about Referencing

To do justice to this properly would need an entire pamphlet on its own. So only the most basic points are covered here. This is justifiable since there is masses of information on referencing available on line and there will be entire chapters devoted to the topic in your Institution's Programme Handbook.

The crucial point to take on board is that the requirement to reference is not a 'may' but a 'shall'. You will be penalised if your refencing is not up to scratch.

There are two main systems in use – Oxford and Harvard – and in my experience most Institutions recommend (and in some cases, stipulate) the latter.

The key to effective referencing is consistency so whatever your chosen method, stick to it. **But in any case, and before setting pen to paper**, have an early discussion with your tutor since there is likely to be a preferred method and you need to know that before you start. See page 18.

Feedback

Some of the guidance below is, of course, subjective (i.e. my own personal preference) and you may have perfectly viable alternative styles. If you wish to submit feedback on them, or anything else in this pamphlet, it would be useful and informative to receive your comments. Please always include your contact details. Also, it would be good to know if you write as a student or teacher.

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Before starting to write

1. Read and re-read the assignment brief meticulously, highlighting key words.

2. Answer the brief that has been set, not the one you would have preferred. So if it asks for two examples of something or other, give two only. You get nothing extra for adding another. In any case, the extra one may not even be read by the examiner and it certainly won't be marked. It's a waste of your time and an indication that either you didn't understand the brief or, worse, chose to ignore it.

3. Note the submission deadline and devise a plan, allowing sufficient time for thinking, research, reading, planning, writing, proof-reading, revision and submission. Allow for professional, personal and domestic time constraints. Allow contingency time for computer problems, poor internet access and anything else that may impact. If you're working on a distance learning programme, don't get caught out by different time zones. If you think you may miss a deadline, contact your tutor straightaway. Missing a deadline without prior arrangement is usually considered a 'fail'. Check your Institution's regulations.

4. Know the marking scheme. Your tutor uses this to grade your work so it makes sense to ensure your submission hits the right notes and addresses all the elements that will be awarded marks.

5. Observe the word limit. Assignments that are excessively short or long may be penalised or even fail. A common leeway is +/- 10%. Check with your tutor. Avoid under- or over-running by careful planning and the allocation, at the outset, of 'word-count budgets', to each section or chapter.

6. Tables, graphs, figures and pictures are not usually included in the word count. Neither are title pages, indices, contents pages, appendices, footers, headers and other rubric. Bracketed references aren't included either though clearly it's impractical to count the actual words in all the brackets throughout an assignment. Hence the leeway given.

7. Scope your work and justify it. The maritime industry is astonishingly broad in its reach and you can't possibly write about everything in a 3000-word assignment answer, or even a doctoral thesis, come to that. So, provided the assignment brief allows leeway, scope down to a manageable and realistic topic area. You should discuss this at a very early stage with your tutor. Word limit is, in itself, a legitimate justification for restricting your scope.

8. Back up your work continuously on at least two devices, external hard drives or memory sticks as well as in a different geographic location. Email it to yourself and also to someone in the family, or a friend, and ask them to keep a file. Investigate cloud storage: it's a great option. If you have access to a printer, run off a hard copy from time to time. If the worst comes to the worst, you can hire a transcription service to re-type it.

9. Keep your discarded or cut material in a separate file – it may be useful in a later assignment.

10. Don't submit an old version by mistake, so be meticulously careful in your dating and file-naming system.

11. Assume you will get hacked/your hard drive fails/there is no internet connection/your laptop falls over the side or under a bus/the airline loses your bags/your dog eats the memory stick. It may not happen today, tomorrow, next week or next month…but one day it will.

12. Unfortunately, most Institutions **will not accept** computer, technical problems or lost data as acceptable excuses for a late submission.

13. You're writing an academic dissertation, report or essay, not a newspaper article, so avoid 'journalistic', dramatic, humorous or sensationalist writing. To see what I mean, take any article from today's newspaper and critique the style. Notice how most news writers will adopt the so-called 'inverted pyramid' style of writing which is designed to grab the reader's attention. In this way, most newspaper articles can be cut at the end of any paragraph (which they may have to be, in the interests of space) and the piece will still make (some sort) of sense.
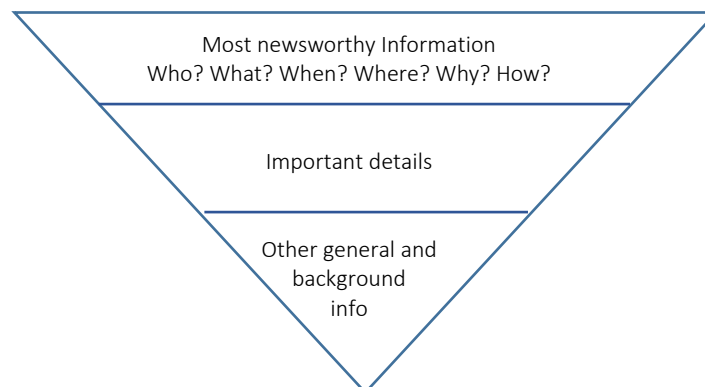
Figure 1: The journalist's inverted pyramid style of writing – avoid at all costs. (Wikipedia, 2017)

This is exactly opposite to the academic style expected. Here, you must present your arguments carefully, supported by evidence, word by word, line by line, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph until it culminates in a conclusion (which will often be tentative). Your writing may even seem boring – but you're writing an academic essay - not trying to sell newspapers.

The model of 'beginning - middle - end' is as old as story-telling itself and remains a good design for our purposes. We're not looking for dramatic sentence construction. Quite the opposite: reasoned, logical and considered is what you should be aiming at.

Beginning: This is where you say what you will be saying.

Set the scene, paint a picture, signpost the work ahead. (See Para. 15 on page 10). Outline your Research Objective and Research Questions (RQs). Avoid too much detail. If it's a dissertation, state your position in the research and why the research is important to do. The length of the introduction should be commensurate with the section, chapter, essay or dissertation.

Middle: This is where you will say it.

It's the main part where, depending on which chapter we're talking about, you will outline your arguments; discuss the literature; introduce, justify and critique the theory; discuss and theorise your choice of methodology and method; show your findings and analysis. All of these criteria will be framed against your RQs and main objective.

End: This is where you say what you've said.

It is where you 'draw the threads together[1]'. The Golden Rule in a conclusion is that you *never* introduce new material. It would be like a crime writer suddenly bringing in a new suspect on the last page of a novel. It would confuse and dismay rather than elucidate and explain.

If you do discover new material right at the end – and that often happens – then you have a choice: either omit it altogether or edit the relevant section in the body of the dissertation. Your decision will be influenced by (a) the importance of the newly-discovered material and (b) word count.

What you must never do is just stick it in and hope no one will notice. (We will).

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[1] It's risky using the figurative expression (*idiom*) – 'drawing threads together', but I think it's justified in this case because (a) the meaning can be looked up easily on the internet and (b) this pamphlet is not an academic dissertation. If it were, the expression would not be used. (See Paragraph 31).

14. This model of 'beginning, middle and end' works both within sections and chapters as it does to the overall dissertation itself. The model below illustrates this:

Chapter 1: Introducttion	Chapter 2: Literature Review	Chapter 3: Methodology/Method	Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis	Chapter 5: Conclusion
• Beginning • Middle • End	• Beginning • Middle • End	• Beginning • Middle • End	• Beginning • Middle • End	• Beginning • Middle • End

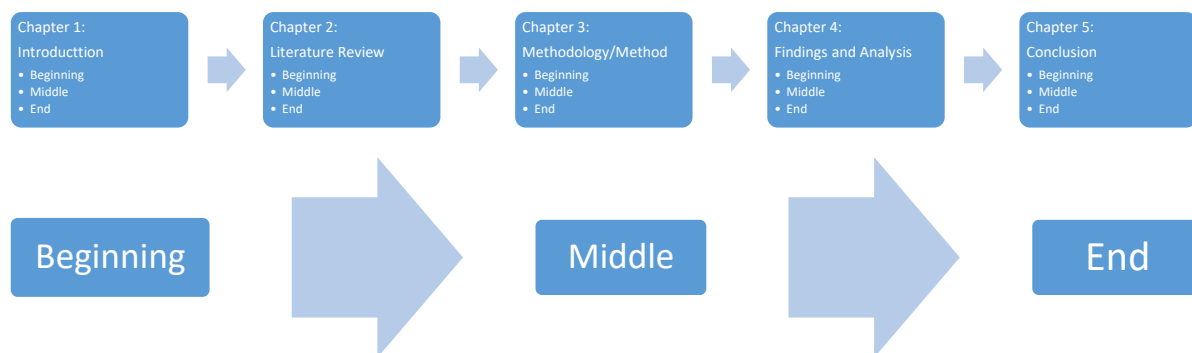**Beginning** → **Middle** → **End**

Figure 2: Showing how the basic design model works within <u>and</u> across the dissertation. (Haughton, 2017)

15. The Chapter headings in Fig. 2 are illustrative. Refer to your Programme Handbook for specific guidance in your Institution.

Link each of the major sections and chapters with sentences (or even a short paragraph) that concludes (at the end) or introduces (at the beginning). So, for instance at the end of a chapter you might write 'This chapter has discussed this, that and that. The chapter following will move on to explain this, that and that'. Then, when the reader turns the page he/she would see: 'The last chapter said this and that. This chapter will move on to address this and that..'.

This technique is sometimes called 'signposting'. It leads the reader through your dissertation and keeps them on track. Remember, if you've spent several months (or even years) producing tens of thousands of words you will be fairly intimate with the structure, layout and presentation. Not so your reader who is coming to this for the first time. Not only that, but your dissertation is just one in a pile on the marker's desk. So make the reader's work as easy as possible and provide those signposts which will be effective aids to navigation.

16. Review your writing critically and you will find you can reduce words in nearly every sentence (without any loss in meaning) by rearranging the syntax, using different forms of words or simply by leaving out the waffle.

or...

> Critically review your work to reduce the word count. Rearrange syntax, use alternative forms and omit waffle, but not content.

The second version is nearly half the length of the first, saving 17 words. Do this exercise with all your writing.

17. Read the following examples of a typical dissertation paragraph[2]. Which do you think is most effective? Why? Read them through the eyes of the *reader* not the writer and jot down some notes about each example.

Once you've done that, compare your observations with mine which you will find at the end of this pamphlet.

Example 1.

Manila is definitely the most important city in the world for seafarers. Since the 1980s the Government in the Philippines has followed a strategy to increase its seafaring population. About a third of the world's seafarers come from the Philippines which translates into about 300,000 personnel. There are nearly 200 training schools and colleges across the country and all the major shipping companies and manning agencies have offices in Manila.

Example 2.

About a third of the world's seafarers (c. 300,000 personnel) originate from the Philippines (Jones, 2014). There are nearly 200 training Institutions across the country (Patel, 2009) and every major shipping company and manning agency is represented in Manila (Williams, 2015). This accords with the Philippine Government's 30-year strategic goal of increasing its seafarer population (Smith, 2010). It may therefore be strongly argued that Manila is one of the most important centres for seafarers in the world.

18. Adopt an ethical approach for everything you write. If your content is confidential you may anonymise your work. You can use code words or make up false names so that no individuals or companies can be identified. You will need to explain this.

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[2] These paragraphs are illustrative and fictitious.

19. Include a neat title page at the beginning of your assignment. Name, student number, Unit Reference, Assignment title and word count. If you can, download the Institution's logo and design the page effectively. Make it look good and create an effective first impression – it's the only chance you'll get.

20. Insert page numbers and your name and number in the footer or header.

21. Pay attention to layout. Leave wide margins, typically 4 cms on the left and 2.5 cms on the right. This allows space if subsequently you want to print off, and file, a hard copy.

22. Use 1.5 or double-line spacing.

23. Use a consistent font throughout and make sure it's regular and easily readable. Times New Roman (TNR), Arial or Calibri are good examples. Size 12 is good - like this.

24. Use only black font throughout. If your work has to be downloaded and photocopied, coloured fonts may not reproduce well.

25. Use *italics,* underlining, CAPITALS and **bold** fonts with extreme caution. They are very occasionally useful to draw attention to something important ***but*** if you over-use them they become *most* distracting and so INTERFERE with the **flow** of your story.

26. In academic writing there's no requirement to shock or surprise your reader (other than through academic argument, of course), so there should be no need for exclamation marks!

27. Essays and dissertations must be written in a grammatically correct, prose form of English.

28. Do not insert web-links into the body of your submission in the hope that these will be followed by your marker. They won't be. All the work you want assessed must be in the submission. Complete Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) are, of course, required in the Reference List – more on that later.

29. *Which personal pronoun should you use in your writing?* A very good question and one that you must discuss with your tutor or supervisor as soon as possible. Your Institution may require a proscribed style giving you no choice.

    In programmes where much of the writing (particularly postgraduate) is qualitative and based on students' own experience it's common to see work written in the first person. For example: 'I did this', 'I observed that' or 'in my view…'. If you adopt this style you still need to be objective in your observations and meticulous in your use and critique of relevant theory. If the dissertation allows, and it's appropriate, you could even discuss your choice of pronoun within an ontological or epistemological framework.

Many academics, particularly in the scientific community, will insist on a 'third person' style, for example: 'it was observed that…' or 'it may be argued that…'.

You can of course mix the two styles by presenting your evidence in the first person and making your conclusions in the third.

In all cases, have an early discussion with your tutor and make sure you're on the right track.

30. Write in short sentences that are constructed properly and grammatically correct. Don't make your paragraphs too long. Look at the overall design of each page and make it attractive and pleasing to the eye. If you do this it will have a direct impact on the ability of your reader to absorb the information.

31. Avoid idiomatic, slang, popular or clichéd expressions. Examples of these could be: 'cool', 'OK', 'splitting hairs', 'the elephant in the room', 'as pleased as punch', describing something old as a 'dinosaur'. These expressions – while lively – may only be understood by someone who speaks English as their first language *and* who has a keen understanding of contemporary, colloquial language. They may *not* make any sense to a foreign reader. In fact, they may do just the opposite and lead to misinterpretation, a lack of understanding and so, frustration.

32. Tables, graphics and figures are often useful to explain a point. But blurred, badly-focussed or skew-whiff 'cut and pastes' or scans of someone else's work won't do. You must create the graphics and tables so they are well presented, legible and, above all, effective. Don't simply plonk a picture or graph in because you think it might impress. The picture must *inform* and *add to* the meaning in the text. You should refer to it *in* the text and it will serve to amplify and illustrate your point.

33. American English spellings are fine (particularly if that's what you normally use) but whatever you choose – be consistent throughout. Don't switch backwards and forwards from American to British (or any other) English during the assignment.

But it's also important to respect names so, for instance, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is spelt with a 'z' even when the dissertation is written in British English. If you then use the word 'organisation' elsewhere, outside of the IMO's title, and you're writing in British English, revert to 's'.

34. 'Jargon' is professional language, words, expressions or abbreviations and acronyms that you use at work but which a reasonably intelligent lay-person or non-professional would not understand. Jargon is important and necessary shorthand for those in the know. But it's not much good if your reader can't understand it. So even common words like 'bilge', 'bitt' and 'bulkhead' would need to be explained. If you must use jargon, make sure you have defined what it means - in lay terms.

35. Appendices are not part of an assignment and not assessed. They should be reserved for useful stuff that may be worth referring to. Examples could include: a question

schedule devised as part of your research; a list of dense data; complicated spreadsheets.

36. Label and title all tables and graphics. Include the data source even when it's you that designed it. Include an index of tables and figures at the beginning.

37. If you're planning to add a complicated spreadsheet (or other graphic) that can't be read or deciphered, don't. Find another way of getting your point across.

38. In Word, set up new styles so you just need to click on a section to change it.

39. Avoid using the ampersand sign (&), even in the reference list.

40. Avoid using the forward slash (/) to separate words.

41. Numbers up to twelve should be spelt out in words, in full. Thereafter, use numerals, e.g. 153, 6000.

42. Write formally and don't abbreviate or elide words like 'do not', 'should not', 'will not' (into *don't*, *shouldn't* or *won't*).

43. Avoid the abbreviation 'etc.'. It stands for the Latin '*et cetera*', means 'and the rest' and is a lazy way to end a sentence. The reader cannot read your mind and so will not know what you have left out. If there is more to say, say it. If there isn't, then close the sentence.

44. Close up extra spaces between   words, sentences or after commas , and full stops   . (not like this).

45. Justify text to the left. (not like this).

46. Always use 'single inverted commas' for quotes.

Apostrophes and homophones

47. Learn how to use apostrophe's. To study this in detail you need to download a guide from the internet or buy a textbook. However, there are some common bloopers to avoid:

    i.   Straight plurals do not get an apostrophe. So, for instance, if you're writing about cargo ships in the 1960s there is no apostrophe in 1960s. *And the word 'apostrophes' in the first line of this section should not have one.*

    ii. The same applies to Certificates of Competence (CoCs), Statutory Instruments (SIs), potatoes, tomatoes, or anything else that are simply plurals.

    iii. Apostrophes are used to denote possession. So for instance, the binoculars of a particular Captain are referred to as **the Captain's binoculars**. Note the apostrophe comes *before* the 's'.

    iv. If there were more than one Captain this is signalled by writing: **the Captains' binoculars**. Now the apostrophe comes *after* the 's'.

    v.   Apostrophes also indicate the missing letters when we abbreviate (e.g. **can't** for 'cannot', **you're** for 'you are', **they're** for 'they are'). However, since a dissertation is a formal piece of work, you **won't** be using apostrophes in this way. An exception would be if you were reporting **someone's** direct speech. In that case it would be acceptable – but you would of course put the quote inside 'inverted commas, like this'. This separates it from your formal writing.

    vi. English is full of irregularities. When we abbreviate that part of a ship known as the forecastle, the proper word should be **fo'c's'le.** But over the years this has become foc'sle and sometimes the apostrophe's missed out altogether - focsle. This is just one of the many quirks in the language. Don't worry – you're not expected to know the ins and outs of foc'sles – but the basic points in i to v are useful to remember.

48. Beware homophones. These are words that have the same sound but which are spelled differently and have different meanings. Make sure you use the correct version. There are hundreds of examples, but here are some common ones to explain the concept:

    - their, there, they're
    - your, you're, yore, yaw
    - to, two, too
    - prey, pray
    - pair, pear, pare
    - mail, male
    - ceiling, sealing
    - source, sauce
    - saw, sore, soar
    - tail, tale
    - sale, sail
    - ware, wear, where

Bullets, 'Hanging Text', Acronyms and Spelling

49. Bullet points do not need to be written in prose. Neither do numbered paragraphs which have just single words, and other forms of writing in shorthand. They are sometimes useful so you may include them - sparingly. There are no hard and fast rules about how many bullet lists you may include, or how long they should be. However, if you're beginning to think you've used too many then you probably have! Keep to some basic rules: the first of which is to recognise that 'bullet' language is not formal prose so doesn't need to comply with normal grammatical rules:

   • you could start lines lower case to make that point obvious;
   • indent the lines and leave a double space before and after the list;
   ❖ avoid fancy bullet icons – they distract;
   • be concise and keep the lists short;
   • use a semi-colon at the ends of the lines and a full stop at the end.

50. Avoid 'hanging text' - titles or sentences. That's where you get just the title, or perhaps a line of text, at the end of a page before continuing the paragraph on the next. If it's a new chapter then it's usually better to start it on a new page. Use 'Insert Page Break' so that the format is fixed even if you insert or delete text later.

   In general, pay meticulous attention to the physical layout and presentation of your work.

51. Acronyms must be written out in full at their first introduction. Even the everyday ones. After that you can use just the acronym. For example:

   'New York is in the United States (US). Altogether, there are fifty states in the US.'

   This applies just as much in the title of your essay, report or dissertation as it does in the body of text.

52. Use the spell-checker and get your work proof read by a *critical friend* (i.e. not a close relative who may simply smile sweetly and say how lovely it is…).

53. Look back at the spacing between the paragraphs above. A couple of extra line spaces have somehow snuck into the layout. Scan your pages for these irregularities and correct them. Paying attention to this level of detail makes a difference.

Plagiarism

54. **Plagiarism.** The importance of avoiding this cannot be overstated. Find full details on your Institution's website. **Plagiarism is cheating**.

Briefly, you must not copy any material or ideas from any other source without acknowledging and citing that source. It is one of the most serious academic misdemeanours you can commit and, depending on the scale of copying and other circumstances, may lead to a failed dissertation – or worse.

You may (and should) of course quote words, sentences and even short paragraphs BUT the words must be inside 'single inverted commas, like this' (Smith, 2015:34) and the page must be referenced – the *exact* page.

The full reference (in this case for Smith, 2015) would be in the list of references at the end.

In many Institutions, dissertations are uploaded to 'computer assisted plagiarism detection' (CaPD) software programmes such as Turnitin, iThenticate or Dupli Checker. These are incredibly powerful and compare your work against tens of thousands of web pages, journals, text books *and* other students' submissions from universities and Institutions across the world. Copied words and sentences are highlighted in colour and the original sources are listed.

If material has been cut and pasted from <u>any</u> source it will be detected and exposed.

Please, please take special care to make sure none of your work is copied without acknowledgment. You may wonder why I have spent so long in emphasising this point. Regrettably there have been proven cases of plagiarism in the past which have resulted in a fail.

Referencing

55. How awkward does page 17 look?. The title at the bottom is stranded and should have been moved to the top of this page. This is an example of 'hanging text' mentioned above. Let's start again…

Referencing

56. Referencing needs an entire pamphlet to itself. The best advice is to check out your Institution's website or Programme Handbook or do your own research on line. There are numerous sources for information. You can download referencing software that will build your reference list automatically. Personally, I've found that keeping a separate Word.docx file up to date and inserting every reference as I use it in the correct place, works well. Just cut and paste the file into your essay at the end.

57. There are two fundamental systems, Oxford and Harvard. Many institutions (but not all) prefer or even stipulate the Harvard Referencing System. Some places allow you to choose the system you prefer. If you *are* given a choice, the crucial thing to remember is 'be consistent'. Don't mix and match the systems.

58. Some of the more important points to bear in mind are in the following few sections and describe the method required by the Harvard Referencing System.

59. Every single word, quote or sentence that you use from another source must be acknowledge or cited in the body of the text. You do this by 'putting the word or quotes inside single inverted commas, like this' (Smith, 2015:45) and including the last name only, year of publication and exact page number in brackets directly afterwards. If you prefer, you can use this layout: (Smith, 2015, p.45). Your choice.

60. If you are generalising an argument and not using the precise words, you would indicate this by referencing the last name and year only (Smith, 2015), like this. If you'd introduced the thoughts of several writers, you would include them all (Smith, 2000; Jones, 2015) in chronological order.

61. If the book you are referencing is written by two authors: 'give both names like this' (Smith and Jones, 2015:78).

62. If the book or article has more than two authors: 'simply reference the first name, like this' (Smith et al., 2015). ['et al.' is the abbreviation for the Latin '*et alia*' meaning 'and the others']. Then list all the authors in the Reference List at the end – see below.

    Note that the word 'et' does not get a full stop since it is an entire word. However, 'al.' *does* attract a full stop because it's a contraction of 'alia'. See 'ibid.' in the next paragraph which follows the same rule.

63. Avoid using '*ibid.*' (which stands for the Latin '*ibidem*' meaning 'in the same place') as a short cut for a reference. It's lazy and makes more work for the reader.

64. References *must* be dated. Just think about it - what's the point of quoting someone or referencing a purported 'fact' if you don't know when it was claimed? The shelf-life of knowledge is getting shorter and shorter so, for all we know, there may have been more recent research published.

For this reason, never use the abbreviation 'n.d.' meaning 'no date'. I'm afraid if the really good source you've found doesn't have a date, you're just going to have to dig deeper and research one that has.

65. If you leave words out of a quote indicate it with an ellipsis (three dots), like this… If you add your own words [to aid the meaning] put them in square brackets.

66. If your quotation is longer than a sentence it may be:

'…separated from the text like this in a separate paragraph.' (Jones, 2015: 45)

Leave a paragraph spacing at the top and bottom of the quote and indent the quote's margins slightly. Finally, you can in this instance, break the consistency rule by making the font a little smaller, to make it stand out and to make it very clear that this is a quote.

67. All references in the body of the dissertation or essay must be listed at the end in alphabetic order of authors' last names. Pay close and detailed attention to the information you present together with its layout, punctuation, consistency of fonts (design and size).

68. The information required in the List of References is:

- Author(s) last names and initials (no first names);
- Year of publication;
- Title;
- Place of Publication;
- Name of Publisher.

69. If there are multiple references from the same author, list them chronologically.

70. If there are multiple references from the same author in the same year, differentiate them thus:

Smith, J. (2017a). *Introduction to Dissertation Writing.* Place. Name of Publisher.
Smith, J. (2017b). *Dissertations Continued.* Place. Name of Publisher.
Smith, J. (2017c). *Beyond Dissertations.* Place. Name of Publisher.

71. All references, including websites, Journals, newspaper articles and other media are to be included in the same list. Do not categorise your references into different sorts of media.

72. To reference a website, quote the full URL address together with the date you accessed it.

73. To reference an academic journal, quote the full Title as well as the Volume, Edition and page numbers.

74. Indent the second and subsequent lines of the list of references when they run on to two or more lines.

75. Check out the reference lists in any appropriate academic text book or academic Journal to see how it's done and copy the system meticulously. Some people italicise the title – up to you – but the main message is to be consistent. The better you get at it, the easier it will be to see a misplaced full stop – and these *will* be noticed and pointed out.

The Reference List

You must include a list of references at the end of your submission. All references will include:

- the author's (or authors') last names and initials only;
- the year of publication;
- the full title (usually in italics);
- the city or town of publication;
- the name of the publisher;

The list MUST be in alphabetic order of last name(s). Also:

- avoid the '&' sign and / symbol;
- use initials only, no first names;
- use consistent size and style of font throughout;
- pay meticulous attention to the detailed punctuation in each line (position of commas, full stops);
- be consistent;
- if you have two publications by the same author, put them in chronological order;
- websites must be given in full, together with the date last accessed;
- indent the second and subsequent lines of the ref list so it's easy to skim read;
- If you maintain a separate word.docx file for your references it's easy to insert new references in the correct alphabetic place as you come across them. Simply insert the file at the end of your dissertation when you're finished. There are software apps that create lists automatically. They don't always get it right, so use them with caution.

Example extract:

Alimo-Metcalfe, B. and Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2006) Leadership in public sector organizations. Chapter 10 in *Leadership in Organizations* edited by Storey, J. (2006). Oxford: Routledge.

AMBA – see 'Association of MBAs'

Association of MBAs. (2010) Website address: http://www.mbaworld.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=152&Itemid=76 [accessed 23/12/10].

Avolio, B. and Bass, B.M. (1988) *Transformational Leadership, Charisma and Beyond,* in Hunt, J.G., Baliga, B.R., Dachler, H.P., and Schriesheim, C.A., (Eds), *Emerging Leadership Vistas* (Lexington, MA. D.C. Heath). pp 29-49.

Ayer, A.J. (1959) *Logical Positivism.* New York: Free Press.

Barber, B. (2007) The Leadership Paradox: Can school leaders transform student outcomes? *School Effectiveness and School Improvement.* Vol. 18 (1) pp 21-43.

Barker, R.A. (1997) How Can We Train Leaders if We Do Not Know What Leadership is? *Human Relations*. Vol. 50 (4). pp 343-362.

Barker, R.A. (2001) The Nature of Leadership. *Human Relations*. Vol. 54 (4) pp 469-494.

Bass, B.M. (1990) *Bass and Stodgill's Handbook of Leadership.* Third Edition. London: The Free Press.

Becher, T. (1996) The learning professions. *Studies in Higher Education*. Vol. 21 (1) pp 43-55.

Personal Reflection

You may be asked to reflect on your own learning as part of the assignment. Check with your tutor to find out what they want – but it's often something in the region of 300-400 words.

Your Institution should provide guidance to steer you through this part of the assignment but, if this is absent, these few notes may help.

You may be unfamiliar with the concept of reflection and even question its worth. Nonetheless there is considerable evidence which supports reflection as a means to: deepen your learning; promote more effective assimilation of new material; and to create a period of calm in what can otherwise be a very hurried and hectic process. So even if you're not required to write reflectively it's a good idea to practice it anyway.

There is a considerable canon of literature that theorises and seeks to explain the advantages and benefits of 'reflection'. You are writing an academic submission so analysis and theory are important.

Search for reflective (and reflexive) learning to read more on this topic.

In future reflective exercises, discuss and critique this theory, framing it against your own empirical evidence.

In order to encourage thought, these questions are offered as a way to get started. They're not prescriptive, so please don't assume you have to work through them one by one. They're provided only as a guide to the sorts of things you may typically wish to include. But this is *your* reflection, so write it as you wish.

Be candid and write from the heart. You may, of course, write this section in the first person.

In relation to the programme you are following, and with direct reference to this assignment:

- in overall terms, what have you learned?
- what did you find easy and what was hard? Why do think this was?
- have you improved your study skills? If so, how? If not, do you want to? What might you try?
- have you been surprised during the past few months? What by?
- are you thinking or doing anything differently in your job because of your learning? What?
- will your experience on this module influence the way you study in future? How?
- to what extent has this module impacted on your personal and professional development? How do you know?
- How easy or difficult has it been to write this reflection?

Notes on the examples in Paragraph 17

Make your own notes on the effectiveness of the two paragraphs before reading on.

Example 1 starts with the conclusion - since you haven't presented any evidence yet this can't be right. Also, the first sentence is very bold and positive. It leaves no room for doubt and you need very strong evidence to be so sure.

Worse, not a single one of the 'facts' is supported by any evidence whatsoever. The reader has no idea where you got this information from and you may have just made it up.

The second example builds the arguments block by block, sentence by sentence. Each claim is referenced properly and the reader is now able to follow these up (they would all be listed at the end as on the preceding page) and so make up their own minds about the strength of your evidence.

In Example 2 the conclusion is logically place after all the evidence. Also, it's not as strong as in Example 1. 'Strongly argued' is not the same as 'is'. The words leave room for challenge and debate and don't force you into a position that may be difficult to defend.

However, I'm still left with a lingering doubt: I don't see how the facts that are quoted in the paragraph necessarily mean that Manila is an important city for seafarers? There's still something missing which, if included, would make that link.

If you want to have a go, try redrafting the second example and add a sentence or two which may provide that link. Email your suggestions to me at info@haughtonmaritime.com

Pre-submission Check List

I'm no great fan of check lists – but sometimes they provide a useful reminder that you've done what you're supposed to have done. Add anything else that you feel is important.

	✓
The assignment meets the requirements of the stated brief and/or answers the question(s).	
I have kept within the required scope and the work is relevant, appropriate and current.	
All assertions, opinions, views and 'facts' are supported by robust evidence.	
The word limit has been observed.	
Chapter or Section headings are logical and clearly indicated.	
The assignment is correctly referenced throughout in accordance with my Institution's requirements.	
All figures, diagrams and pictures have their sources acknowledged.	
The submission is presented neatly with a title page.	
Best endeavours have been taken to ensure correct use of English and grammar.	
The work has been proof-read and spell-checked.	
There is a comprehensive list of references in the approved manner, at the back.	
My name and student number is in the footer.	
The assignment is paginated.	
Date assignment submitted:	
Date assignment received back:	
Grade awarded:	
Action Plans for future work:	

Submission of Assignments

76. Tutors will not normally expect or accept full drafts to read before you submit the final one for assessment. The reasons are obvious: it would constitute a form of 'double' or 'pre-marking' which would be unethical and give you an unfair advantage over other students. Another reason is that it effectively doubles the marker's workload, which is unsustainable.

77. What *is* usually acceptable is to send *extracts* of sections from your work, perhaps an overall plan or a section of a chapter or the reference list, for example. These extracts will usually be sufficient for the tutor to be able see that your writing is on the right track and that you're conforming to the academic style required.

78. Of course, anything you send in advance gives you and the tutor a great platform from which to launch a tutorial discussion. Check with your tutor now as to what they're expecting and willing to accept before submission of the final draft.

79. If you're attending college you may be required to submit a hard-copy. This may be a formal process where your work is submitted via an office and date-stamped, or you may be required to 'post' your work in a specific location by the deadline.

80. If you're submitting online it should usually be as one complete document. Institutions vary in how this should be done. Some want a Word.docx, others a PDF.

81. The formatting of e-documents sometimes gets corrupted when you attach them to emails. Tables, bulleted lists, footer and header measurements and margins may not be received as you intended. One way to avoid problems is to convert your work into a PDF before uploading.

82. Document *size* can also be a problem if you're working at a distance with poor internet connectivity or upload restrictions. Sometimes, Institutions will require you to upload to a propriety cloud-based programme (e.g. Dropbox Pro, OneDrive, WeTransfer) which should alleviate the size issue.

83. Most Institutions require you to submit formal work to the Programme Administrator or Secretary, i.e. not direct to your tutor. This is so the work can be logged in, date stamped, copied and then distributed to the correct marker. Work is usually returned to you by the same route.

84. All this information should be in your Programme Handbook. If anything needs clarification, do it now and certainly don't wait till the deadline.

Assignment Feedback

85. Your assignment should be returned within a stated deadline. Many Institutions set their markers typically a 28-day marking period, but this may be different in your case, so check.

86. Most work at degree level is moderated or second marked by a second tutor.

87. The assignment will be returned with formative feedback. The tutors' remarks should highlight the areas where you have performed well: this will enable you to strengthen those aspects even more. Their comments will also help you see where the assignment fell short of the requirement and what you can do in future work to improve your grade.

88. It's always a good idea to arrange a tutorial soon after you've had your feedback. Ambiguities can be resolved, misunderstandings cleared up and action plans formulated for the next assignment. The tutorial can be an effective closure to the previous assignment.

89. If your assignment fails to meet the required standard, your Institution will have a policy outlining the next steps. The assignment may be 'referred' or 'failed' and this will depend on the mark or grade you were awarded. In every case, maintain close contact with the Programme Administrator and ascertain what options are available.

…and finally

There've been numerous instances throughout this pamphlet where you're advised to talk to your tutor or academic supervisor. This is crucial.

Your tutor is one of your most valuable resources so never hesitate to contact them or send them questions. That's what they're there for.

In my own experience of many years' tutoring on face-to-face and distance learning programmes I've repeatedly encountered students who, for whatever reason, fail to engage until *after* they've submitted a below-par assignment. So much could have been put in place if only they'd bothered to attend tutorials, pick up the phone or send a quick email.

At degree, and particularly at Master's level, you're expected and required to shoulder responsibility for much of your own learning (the clue is in the word 'Master'). Your supervisor will be available to offer support, advice and guidance, but they cannot impose it. This would undermine the very process of nurturing academic independence and an enquiring mind which, *inter alia*, the degree is intended to foster.

If you're studying in an Institution, attend faithfully all your face-to-face tutorials. Plan in advance by preparing an agenda and make a list of things you need to sort out. If you get stuck between tutorials, don't wait for the next one: make sure you have a communication channel.

Tutors lead busy lives: much of the responsibility for contacting them, and so drawing on their expertise, rests with you. Take control of your learning.

If you're studying on a distance learning programme you don't have to be on your own. Find out early about the arrangements for contacting your tutor and get in touch right at the start of the process, just to establish communication. Check the systems work.

E-tutorials (by phone or Skype) are tremendously effective. As with face-to-face meetings, make sure you prepare in advance and send a preparatory email to your tutor so that you can decide mutually acceptable expectations and outcomes. Time zones, public holidays, working patterns and internet cost and availability mean we all have to plan carefully.

You'll probably be logged onto a 'Learning Management System' (LMS) or 'Virtual Learning Environment' (VLE) so there'll be opportunities to engage with tutors and fellow students in chat rooms or on a weblog. Use these methods, as well as your own social media apps, to communicate. You'll find that many of your concerns are shared by your colleagues and fellow students. Talking them through is one way to try and arrive at solution. You may be able to arrange group online seminars, known as 'webinars'.

If you've just started getting to grips with academic writing, the way ahead can appear daunting. However the very fact that you've enrolled on a programme (and have read this far in the pamphlet) speaks volumes for your high levels of motivation. They will buoy you up throughout the process.

The personal and professional rewards of study are immeasurable and undoubtedly worth striving for.

Good luck and I wish you every success in your academic writing.

Dr Chris Haughton
Preesall, 2017
info@haughtonmaritime.com

References

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