Academic Writing Skills

School of Business

A resource of useful examples

Prepared by:
Dr Glenice J Wood
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The following material is provided as an example of the standard required in academic writing for the undergraduate programs of the School of Business, University of Ballarat. It is essential that you check with individual lecturing staff to ensure you are meeting their particular requirements for each assessable task.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with sufficient guidelines to assist you understanding the expectations of academic writing. For each topic area, an example has been provided on the facing page.

Please note that the citation method employed throughout this booklet is the APA style, which is recommended for subjects in the areas of Business/Management. Please refer to the General Guide for the Presentation of Academic Work for further information. [www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/learning_support/generalguide/](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/learning_support/generalguide/)

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- Title page
- Abstract, Synopsis or Executive Summary
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
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- Appendices
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- Plagiarism
- Notes on essay format and report format

If you have any queries about the presentation of your academic work, please speak to your lecturer during the delivery of the unit prior to submission of your work.

Dr Glenice Wood
Deputy Head of School
(Learning & Teaching)
School of Business
University of Ballarat
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1 Title Page:

Each piece of written work should have a separate cover-sheet or title page. This should include the title of the piece of work, your name and student number, the unit number and name of lecturer, and the date of submission.

(See following page for example).
TIME MANAGEMENT

NAME:

STUDENT NUMBER

UNIT NUMBER: JN601

UNIT NAME: MANAGERIAL SKILLS

LECTURER: GLENICE WOOD

TUTOR: MAREE GREIG

TUTORIAL GROUP: WEDNESDAY 4:30 PM-6:30 PM

DATE SUBMITTED: WEDNESDAY 18 AUGUST 9:30 AM
Abstract, Synopsis or Executive Summary:

Essays, reports, research or major studies, and some other assignments should always be preaced by an abstract or synopsis. This should be on a separate page, and should be between 100-150 words and be written in connected English prose (i.e. not in dot point style).

An abstract or synopsis is NOT a table of contents, nor is it an Introduction. It is a summary or précis of the whole work, outlining the problem being investigated, the main argument, and the results or conclusions reached. When used with a report of a research study, it may include a brief statement of the method or procedure used. It needs to be factual and precise.

(See following page for an example).

An Executive Summary is usually defined as: Executive summaries are provided for business reports that include conclusions or recommendations intended to be executed (acted on). In a “real life” setting, such reports would be presented to an organisation’s executives. An executive summary includes the actual recommendations made in the report and the reasons (in brief) why these were made. Executive summaries are often formatted in sections with numbered headings.

Further information relating to Executive Summaries can also be found at www.businessdictionary.com/definition/executive-summary.html

Various theories have been proposed to account for the fact that women make up a very small proportion of senior managers. For example, the person-centred theory has suggested that such disparity in the numbers of men and women who achieved senior management positions was due to significant sex differences in behaviour and attitudes. (Morrison and von Ginlow, 1990). However the Social Role theory (Eagly, 1987) perspective, which hypothesised that differences in social behaviour occurred because of a traditional division of labour, societal expectations, and the subsequent different skills and beliefs being acquired by men and women. In addition, this theory predicted that as men and women filled more similar roles, their behaviour would become more similar, and “sex differences would tend to erode” (Eagly and Wood, 1999, p 4133).

This study explored this possibility with 507 Australian middle managers (351 males and 156 females) drawn from Australian industry divisions. Perceptions of various managerial competencies, and attitudes toward promotion requirements to senior positions were analysed to ascertain if sex differences in managerial men’s and women’s behaviours and skills existed in these areas.

The results substantially supported the social role theory prediction. Male and female middle managers who had expressed similar aspirations to more senior positions exhibited similar self-reported behaviour and skills, when these areas were within their control. The implications of these findings on the disproportionate numbers of women in senior management are considered.
Table of contents:

Where an essay or report is organised under section or chapter headings, a table of contents should be provided. This should be on a separate page, should list each section, and show on which page that part of the work begins.

(See following page for an example).
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Introduction:

The best introductions get to the point quickly and capture the reader’s interest. They should not leave the reader guessing about your purpose and direction; but should provide a concise statement of your idea or set out clearly the direction and argument you will be developing. It is often a good idea to begin with a general statement, than move to the details in the body of the essay, and return to the general in the conclusion. A good rule of thumb: “this is so/ this is why this is so/ hence it is supportable that this is so”. (Source: adapted from Bate & Sharpe, 1996 (pp.16-18). (See the following page for an excerpt from the Bate & Sharpe book, with an example of one Introduction).
STRUCTURING THE INTRODUCTION, BODY AND CONCLUSION

At the time of writing your outline you should also consider how to structure the introduction, body and conclusion of your essay.

Introduction

1 The best introductions are those that get to the point quickly and capture the reader’s interest. They do not leave the reader guessing about your purpose and direction; rather they provide a concise statement of your thesis or they establish clearly the lines of discussion, analysis, description, comparison and so on that you will be developing. Beware of building up all the details so as to arrive at a general statement in the conclusion; it is better to let your reader know what you are going and where you are going from the start. Often the best way to begin is to open with a general statement, then move to the details in the body of the essay, and return to the general in the conclusion. The basic movement is something like: this is so/ this is why it is so/ hence it is supportable that this is so.

In your introduction, avoid including general information that has no obvious relationship to your theme; repeating the whole essay topic; apologising for deficiencies in what is to follow; and making promises that the essay will not fulfil.

Some essay topics do not call for a clear thesis statement in the introduction. Instead they may invite you to establish the contexts of discussion, identify the subject of the essay, or clarify your understanding of the topic itself. In the following example, the writer heads straight into providing information that identifies the subject.

**Topic**
Analyse and discuss Rembrandt’s landscape etching *The Three Trees* in terms of its subject, composition and historical context.

**Introduction**
*The Three Trees*, signed and dated 1643, is Rembrandt’s largest, if not most impressive landscape etching. Though its size is a mere 213 x 280 mm, the evocative use of light and shade, and the combination of realism with pictorial dramatics, lend the etching an illusionistic monumentality that has led many to compare it to the virtuosity and quality of a Rembrandt painting.


The above is taken from this textbook, which is an excellent resource book for academic writing.
In the body of your essay, list all main points that will develop what you have set up as your introduction. You should aim to select from your reading and notes the points that are relevant to your theme and develop your argument. Imagine a thread weaving throughout the essay linking the introduction to the body and the conclusion. “The most common reasons for the body of an essay to fail are: straying from the theme; trying to say too much within a given word limit, or padding and repeating to meet the word limit; failure to give proper emphasis and balance to all parts of the essay topic; and illogical, confusing sequencing of material”.

(Source: adapted from Bate & Sharpe, 1996, p.20). (See the following page for one example of the body of an essay).
Body

In outlining the body of your essay, you will be concerned with listing the main points that will develop what you have set up as your introduction. Your aim should be to select from your reading and class-notes only those points that are relevant to your theme and develop your thesis. The most common reasons for the body of an essay to fail are: straying from the theme; trying to say too much within a given word limit, or padding and repeating to meet the word limit; failure to give proper emphasis and balance to all parts of the essay topic; and illogical, confusing sequencing of your material.

Many students find that the most useful way to outline the body is with paragraph topics. Since paragraphs are units of writing dealing with a key idea or new aspect of an idea, you can select those ideas that are most relevant, and then determine the order in which they will appear and be developed. Paragraph topics can be expressed in a word, a phrase or a sentence in your outline. Major and minor points can be indicated for each paragraph, as can the evidence you will use or the references you will cite. If you are unable to come up with enough ideas to develop your essay topic, this process can alert you to the need for more reading, research or thinking. All paragraph topics should be selected for the outline in terms of how they relate to the theme and develop the thesis, and how they progress logically towards your conclusion.


The above is taken from this textbook, which is an excellent resource book for academic writing.
6 Conclusion:

The conclusion should follow logically from what you have set up and promised in your introduction, and from what you have outlined as the main ideas to be developed sequentially in the body. It should ‘tie’ the whole work together. A conclusion usually consists of one final paragraph, and generally should bring together the different parts of the essay and supports its main message. Aim for a conclusion that adds strength to and supports what has already been written, and do not leave questions hanging by raising new issues.

(Source: adapted from Bate & Sharpe, 1996 pp. 20-21). (See the following page for one example of a Conclusion).
Conclusion

Your conclusion should follow logically from what you have set up and promised in your introduction, and from what you have outlined as the main ideas to be developed sequentially in the body. A conclusion usually consists of one final paragraph. Sometimes two or three paragraphs are appropriate if several qualifications need to be made. Generally, a conclusion should bring together the different parts of the essay and support its main message. It should not leave the reader with an impression that you have suddenly run out of ideas. Aim for balance between an ending that is too abrupt and one that rambles. Like the introduction, the conclusion can take many different forms. The main consideration is the final impression you want to leave with your reader. You may wish to stress the main point or summarise several important points, but avoid merely repeating a point made earlier, especially in shorter essays. Aim for a conclusion that adds strength to and supports what has already been written, and do not leave questions hanging by raising new issues.

The above is taken from this textbook, which is an excellent resource book for academic writing.
Citation in the body of the work:

The APA or “name/date” system is preferred in some disciplines the School of Business. At the appropriate place in the text, the source is indicated by stating, in brackets, the surname(s) or the author(s), the publication date, and if appropriate, the page number(s) being quoted or referred to. References in the text should correspond with entries in the list of references at the end of the piece of work (see section 10, page 20).

Examples of correct citation are as follows:

- As indicated in recent research (Jones, 2000), follow up interviews needs to be made…
- A common belief (Jones & Smith, 2001) was that…
- Several texts (Adams, 1998; Cummings, 2002; Granger, 2001) have concluded…

For less usual citations, please refer to the General Guide for the Presentation of Academic Work provided by the University of Ballarat (see page 34 of the General Guide).

(See the following page for an example of citation in the body of an essay, or report).
2.2 Individual Characteristics Of Business Women

2.2.1 Motivation and Success

Attempts to isolate factors leading to success have historically been difficult. An Australian case study looking at success factors in small to medium enterprises involved in high technology, concluded that strength of the partnership between two (male) founding members, based on trust and respect was most significant (Warren & Hutchison, 2000). Such a finding may have implications for understandings of small family business. Most studies, however, focus on individual motivations and perceptions of success and they also problematise both the definition of success as well as the characteristics that might be associated with it (Marlow & Strange, 1994).

Gilligan, a feminist psychologist, says that a defining feature of women's business is the 'intimate integration between the business and the social' (cited in Baines & Wheelock, 1998, p.18). Self-employment is as much a life strategy as a business strategy (Richardson & Hartshorn, 1993; Moore, 1999). It can be a household response to the effects of economic restructuring on a peripheral labour market' (Wheelock, 1997, p.163). Many studies suggest that women's motivations are different to those of men and also that their views of success may differ (eg. Moore, 1999; Still & Timms 2000). Some authors have even argued that women have a fear of success (Horner 1972). However, Marlow and Strange (1994) argue that definitions of success traditionally used in small business research, like profitability and turnover are inappropriate to the study of many ventures and what should be taken into account is what the original motivations and aims are. They argue that a major aim of many women is to reconcile the competing demands of waged and domestic labour and that if they manage to achieve this by undertaking business ownership, they have been successful. This discussion has led to debate about typology of female entrepreneurship.

Goffee and Sease's (1985) typology of female entrepreneurs recognises the classic entrepreneur committed to individualism and self-reliance and others committed to traditional, often subservient, gender roles. Recognition of difference within females is sound but a finer .....
8 Appendices:

It is possible to include in an appendix bulky material, which may support your argument, but is not appropriate (or convenient) to include in the body of your essay or report. For example, questionnaires or raw data may be included, if appropriate in an Appendix.

(See following page for an example of how an Appendices index page should be written up).
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9 Acknowledgements:

People who have given assistance should be acknowledged, in a simple and concise statement of acknowledgement. This is often necessary, for example, when interviews or focus groups have been conducted to gather data for a report or research project.

(See following page for an example).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped in this research in terms of their willingness to attend meetings and to fill out the survey. Special thanks must go to those busy women who gave their valuable time.

Thanks must especially be given to the members of the Steering Committee for their encouragement, enthusiasm and practical advice: Linette Penhall (DSRD Ballarat), Fiona Davey (City of Ballarat), Dr Mandy Charman (NRE); Alice Dwelly (DSRD) and to Kathy Coultas (DSRD) for instigating support for the project.

Neroli Sawyer undertook the survey data entry and helped greatly with analysis. Jill Blee and Leanne Spain gave clerical support and telephoned potential respondents. Kara Hodgson, School of Business, helped with formatting of the report and Monika Heim with management of finances.

Council staff in the ten Local Government areas were very helpful providing maps, community and business lists and setting up meeting venues. Other people have helped give out surveys or alerted those who may have been interested in being part of the research include Pauline Fort (BRACE), John Maguire and Dot Carpenter (Ballarat); Bev Blaskett (Gordon) Dennis Witmitz (Executive Officer, Horsham and District Commerce Association, Horsham), Mary Ashdown (Hepburn), Joan Bennett (Nhill), Geoffrey Gray (Pyrenees), Margaret Hill (CWA Horsham), Donna Lindner (Dimboola), Kay Macaulay (AIG), Joe McLelland (CEC Rainbow), Michelle Morrow (Moorabool), Jen Murray (Central Highlands Rural Counselling Service), Jo Postlethwaite (St Arnaud), Rosemary Robertson (Bacchus March Village), Jodie Ryan (Ballarat DSRD), Jenny Stewart (Warracknabeal) and Mark Troeth (CEC Nhill).
10 Reference List:

The appropriate manner of preparing a list of References is to compile all of the citations mentioned throughout the essay or report into an alphabetically ordered list at the back of the work. The format when referring to books should be as follows:


When referring to journal articles, the following is appropriate:


When the author is unknown, the title may be used as follows:


For less common examples of entries into a list of References, please refer to the General Guide for the Presentation of Academic Work,

www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/learning_support/general

(See the following pages for examples of appropriate APA style of referencing in a Reference list).
REFERENCES


Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999c) Small Business in Australia, 1321.0, ABS.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999d) Special Article – Employment Generation by the Small Business Sector, Australia Now - A Statistical Profile Industry Overview Year Book Australia, 1301.0.


Craig, R. (c1990) Partners or Helpers - farm wives and decision making. CVAH: unpublished paper.


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11 Electronic Citation:

Increasingly, students have the opportunity to access material from electronic data bases. Such material must be acknowledged appropriately. The following page sets out some examples of electronic citations. In addition, some style guides, such as the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001), include a useful section on Elements of references to on-line information on pages 268 – 281.
**CITATION AND REFERENCING - APA STYLE**

**Websites**
Although material located via the Web may present itself in many formats, the APA manual (2001, p. 269) indicates that:

- **at a minimum**, a reference of an Internet source should provide a **document title or description**, a **date** (either the date of publication or update or date of retrieval), and a **URL**. Whenever possible, identify the authors of a document as well.

The following examples represent the more commonly used formats for referencing websites. For more examples and further information, please consult [www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/is/library/research/citation/apa/readings.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/is/library/research/citation/apa/readings.shtml) for the APA style.

<table>
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<th>Type of Source</th>
<th>Example</th>
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This information has been taken from the following University webpage: [http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/is/library/research/citation/apa/websites.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/is/library/research/citation/apa/websites.shtml)
Academic writing requires that you draw on the ideas and writing of other people. Consequently, you are expected to acknowledge all of the words and ideas that you have quoted or discussed in your own writing. If this is not done, you may be accused of plagiarism, which can carry heavy penalties – particularly in University settings.

Presenting someone else’s ideas or writing as your own is a form of dishonesty that undermines a fundamental principle of scholarship: “ideas are to be shared, borrowed with acknowledgment, but not stolen” (Bate & Sharpe, 1996, p.39).

Some students plagiarise quite inadvertently because they are unfamiliar with the concept, or do not know how to cite the sources they use in their own writing. Clearly following the guidelines set out in sections 7 (Citations in the body of the work), and 10 (Reference List) will ensure that students are protected from accusations of plagiarism in their writing.

The following page elaborates on the distinction between quoting, paraphrasing and plagiarism.
QUOTING AND PARAPHRASING VERSUS PLAGIARISM

When taking notes, paraphrases or summaries can be combined with verbatim quotes but always use quotation marks for direct quotes. It is too easy later to forget that certain phrases belong to other writers and so be guilty of plagiarism. An author’s ideas, even if stated in other words, need to be acknowledged.

Plagiarism is generally defined as the deliberate incorporation in an essay or paper of material drawn from the work of another person without acknowledgement. The penalty for plagiarism is high: in some departments it results in a failure for the essay and sometimes an automatic failure in a course. Yet a narrow line often separates plagiarism from good scholarship. In scholarly writing, it is nearly always essential to refer to the work of others. Since essay writing, assignment or project is individual work, it is important to document any indebtedness in the appropriate way.

A quotation from the paragraph above, for example, might be acknowledged in the following way:

Anderson and Pool (1993) state that “... a narrow line often separates plagiarism from good scholarship.”

A paraphrase of the same idea, on the other hand could be acknowledged as follows:

A subtle distinction often exists between plagiarism and good scholarship (Anderson and Poole 1993).

The correct use of quotations and accurate referencing in acknowledging the work of others, detailed further in Chapters 9 and 12, are evidence of scholarly writing.

Introduction
These notes are designed to advance your knowledge of essay format and report format, to highlight common errors of presentation in these two formats, and to develop your ability to present information effectively, especially in an academic context.

Key features of essay format
The essay is a ‘literary’ form. It is useful for writing on a theme and developing ideas around a comparatively unified topic. The structure of an essay is not made explicit – internal headings are not used for essay format. As a ‘literary’ form, sentence structure in essays is often a little more complex. Sentences are longer rather than shorter. Diagrams and point form are rarely used. The essay is a widely used academic format because it is useful for developing and expressing ideas on a topic.

Key features of report format
By comparison, report format is more ‘instrumental’ and pragmatic. It is used, quite literally, to report – typically on a situation or state of affairs. It is widely used in a practical management context. Its structure is made obvious through headings and sub headings. Transmitting information, rather than developing abstract concepts, is a primary aim, so sentences are comparatively short, and diagrams and point form are widely used.

Conventional construction of reports
The University of Ballarat General Guide for the Presentation of Academic Work gives detail on the conventional construction of reports, based on the ‘IBCAR’ framework, that is: introduction, body, conclusion and recommendations. Note that while the terms ‘introduction’, ‘conclusion’ and ‘recommendations’ are often used as headings in report writing, the term ‘body’ is never used. Your task may make some adaptation of the ‘IBCAR’ framework appropriate - but remember it’s the ‘CAR’ (conclusion and recommendations) that most students fail to adequately develop.

A numbering system (such as that used in the General guide) and/or a table of contents can be used in report format to help retrieve specific material quickly. These features are not used for essay format, which does not have explicitly specified sections.

The synopsis
Both formats benefit from a synopsis. In report format this is usually called a summary (or executive summary). In essay format it is usually called an abstract. The synopsis gives the reader ‘the essence’ of your argument or material. It is not a defacto introduction – DO NOT add any material additional to the body of your work. Write (or rewrite) the synopsis when you have finished your work. JUST SUMMARISE WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN. Because it is expected this summary will consist of your own words, and because all material drawn from other authors will be fully referenced in the body of your work, you are not obliged to reference within the synopsis.
For essays or short reports, the synopsis should be presented as a single paragraph, of approximately 100 to 300 words, on a separate page. For longer reports an ‘executive summary’ outlining the substance and recommendations in brief can run to several pages, but this is not typical of student reports, where the report is not intended to be actioned.

Acknowledging source material
For all academic work, or any time when the work of others is used, acknowledge all sources. This includes the ideas of others as well as direct quotations. This means: you are not in effect, ‘stealing’ ideas or words; it gives credibility to your work; it ‘showcases’ your reading; and it helps you (or others) trace material. For more information on acknowledging source material, refer to the General guide for the presentation of academic work. Generally, for management writing, the APA ‘name-date’, system should be used. It is more modern and streamlined than footnoting or endnoting. Use the APA style for your list of references.

Strictly speaking, with the APA style, only a reference list, rather than a bibliography, should be provided. A bibliography is, literally ‘a list of books’ (and other sources) that you have read in the course of preparing for your assignment. A reference list is a list of what you have actually referred to. The APA style implies ‘if you haven’t actually cited it in the body of your work, it isn’t important enough to mention’. Generally, the use of both a reference list and a bibliography is redundant and a stylistic error.

Grammar, spelling, punctuation and layout
The following tips could help improve your essay or report. Reading your work out loud can often help pick up grammatical errors. Use the spellchecker on the word processor to help pick up spelling errors, but look out for errors the spellchecker won’t pick up- correctly spelt words used incorrectly (e.g. their/there). When using punctuation marks, make sure the sequence is word-punctuation mar-space-next word. Generally, don’t leave spaces before punctuation marks.

Figure out where you want to start a new paragraph and indicate it clearly. Leave a line (‘fully blocked’ style like this sheet) or indent the first line of your paragraph. Be consistent and don’t start some sentences in a paragraph on a new line (creating a kind of ‘half paragraph’). Leave good margins and decide if you’ve ‘left enough white’ – modern readers don’t like too much text on a page.

Style of presentation
The ability to present information effectively is a valuable one. The ability to follow a particular format or style is an important academic skill which has relevance in other, non academic, areas. Using a style guide (a set of presentation rules) such as the University of Ballarat General guide for the presentation of academic work is fiddly, and possibly boring, but it is not difficult. It helps develop skills in the presentation of information as well as improving your chances of getting a good grade. Use it.

These notes were prepared by Lindon Marks. Lecturer in management.