



WRITING GUIDE

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BY DR NEAL WADDELL



THE UNIVERSITY
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THE WRITING PROCESS

We use our brains when we read and write.¹ So that's the first thing we should be aware of when we begin writing: how do we form ideas into words and how do readers make sense of what we've written. Our brains contain a specific section that organises communication from words into statements so that we can make meaning and understand others. This writing guide is based on an understanding of how we convert ideas into words and then how we can organise those words effectively so that readers have the best chance of understanding what we mean.

Before anything else, remember that having nothing to say because you haven't properly researched cannot be masked by going on and on in words. Most professional writers know that, if empty words are written in a document, there will be little worthwhile to read.

From Word to Clause to Sentence to Paragraph

We write by combining words to form clauses such as, *I did not work yesterday*, which combine with other clauses (as well as phrases) to make sentences such as:

After all, I did not work yesterday because I was sick.

Sentences combine to make paragraphs and then paragraphs combine into documents, whether for academic, professional, or personal communication. At university, this 'writing process' begins with developing a vocabulary that fits your course's content. This process should not be seen as simply an event where you write something. When you're studying at university, you learn a lot of new words for which you have to know the meaning (e.g., *supply chain management* or *leverage*). Quite frankly, you cannot bluff your way through this. You need to read and understand, particularly through writing notes. This is part of the task in the preparation stage, which is the beginning of the Writing Process.

Three Stages

The *Writing Process* covers the time from when you start to think about a written assignment to when you finish it. Undergraduate students often don't manage their time well. Being a good writing time manager means allocating equal time to the three stages of the writing process: Preparation, Drafting, and Reviewing. In spite of the good sense of spending equal

¹ Fuller information to that used in this UQBS Assignment Writing Guide can be found in the publication: McKenna, B., Thomas, G., Waddell, N., & Barry, M. 2007. *Corporate communication: Effective techniques for business*. (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Thomson, Social Science Press.

time on these stages, many students tend to spend much less time on Preparing and Reviewing, preferring, as they commonly see it, to just do the writing.

The following page outlines what you should do to work through the full Writing Process.

Preparation

1. In this first important stage of writing, you pre-write or plan your document. For example, preparing a research paper would involve collecting and selecting your information and then planning and organising it. A vital part of Preparation is to remember that you cannot plan and organise your writing until you understand your writing's *Purpose, Audience, and Form*.
 - a. *Purpose* — what is the paper meant to do? In business writing, this is called the *brief*. Are you meant to *investigate, explain, describe, justify, criticise*, (critically) *analyse*, or *plan*? Purpose also determines how you begin your essay as exemplified on page 7, below. In announcing your purpose, it is better to use action verbs, such as the italicised words above to say what you will do, rather than verbs like *discuss*, which can be weak.² Once this is done, devise a writing structure that clearly allows you, as the writer, to provide the big picture, that is, the main features or functions of your purpose, in a logical order.
 - b. *Audience* — for whom are you writing? At university, you will obviously be writing for your lecturer, but you will, at times, be required to mimic a business situation (e.g., a report for a client or a plan for your CEO).
 - c. *Form* — based on your purpose and what you know about your real or supposed audience, be certain you know the form that your writing is to take. Ask yourself: is it an analytical paper (or essay), a report, or any other of the forms mentioned so far. Then, be certain what structure and language are suitable to the writing.

Drafting

2. This second stage entails writing your first draft, and then revising that draft (at least once, preferably twice) before enhancing the style. At this stage, you prioritise your ideas according to a format and structure (although we often need to deviate from the plan, which is okay). The drafting stage is an exercise in making your paragraphs work for you to carry your story to your audience. Below in this guide is advice on how to structure paragraphs (see page 23), and ways to connect them (see page 12).

Reviewing

3. The reviewing stage is obviously important, but even more so for academic writing where the credibility of your findings will be assessed. However, students often think that checking their work simply means running their word processor's spelling and grammar checkers. In real terms, reviewing consists of three distinct activities:
 1. *Revising* — the overall organisation and logic of the document.
 2. *Editing* — the design at paragraph level so that textual connections are clear.
 3. *Proofreading* — the fine attention to detail of visuals and language.

Because reviewing your work is the last stage of the Writing Process, we discuss it more fully towards the end of this Writing Guide (see page 26).

² See, McKenna et al, (2007: 181–183).

Research

Part of the preparation stage of the Writing Process, particularly at university, involves collating enough data or information, on which to base your argument. Even informal writing is researched to some degree. For example, when writing a personal letter, you might look at previous communication or read other people's versions of the things you want to talk about. When renowned author, Dr Samuel Johnson said in the 18th Century that writers would read half a library before they wrote one book, he may have been exaggerating. He was nonetheless implying that most good writing needs to learn from other authors.

UQ is proud of its research-intensive tradition and currently rates as one of Australia's top-3 universities in this regard. Academic staff members of UQBS continually aspire to see their papers published and to achieve international reputation for their research. Therefore, it's unsurprising that much of the academic writing that students do at UQBS is based on research. Student writing at university most often draws from one of two types of research:

1. **Primary research** — original research such as that gathered by PhD, advanced masters, or honours students.
2. **Secondary research** — the type gathered from research already published in academic writing from journals or books etc.

If you are a student doing a coursework program, that is, as an undergraduate or coursework masters student, it is unlikely that you will be involved in primary research. Your reader (assignment marker) will rather be looking for you to gather secondary research from relevant academic readings, generally known as *sources*. The ideas you derive from these sources are compared and clearly written, mostly in your own words, so that you can respond to the nature of the thesis topic or question directing your assignment.

It is important to realise that, unless in cases where academic writing is done by some author who is prominent enough to give their own opinion, most scholars need research to support their arguments. Some students begin their essays with an assertion like:

Everybody knows that China is becoming an uncontested superpower.

This may or may not be true. If you were to research this topic in one of UQ's research databases, you would find many relevant points of view, not just *yes* or *no*. However, in most cases, those authors would have supported their arguments using either primary or secondary research. For a start, beginning with *Everybody knows* is naïve in academic writing but, more importantly, you cannot say that everybody knows these things are true because everybody does not. For advice on how to use and support an opening generalised statement such as this, see the exemplar of *Beginning your Essay* on page 7.

That is not to say that you have no chance to offer something of your own to the argument you are making. For example, you might say something like:

China has undoubtedly become a super power in the last 15 years (Author, date; Author, date) both economically (Author, date) and strategically (Author, date). Whereas Author (date) claims this dominance is uncontested, Author (date) sees the USA remaining in the

contest for supremacy, particularly because of its political domination. However, with the sheer weight of economic capital, China will probably supersede America as the world's superpower at some time (Author, date; Author, date; Author, date). Guided by this view, this paper therefore reviews the world financial situation in light of China's dominance.

In other words, your secondary research has provided a basis from which you draw your own conclusions, take them in a specific direction, and thus give your own voice.

So which are the most appropriate 'sources' for secondary research?³ Let's answer this by reviewing the most common mistakes that students make in choosing research items:

1. **Using general dictionaries, instead of finding professional definitions** — although regular dictionaries usually define words or terms in your paper, they may not pinpoint the technical or professional specifics as used in your university studies.
2. **Confusing what 'journals' means** — the term, *journal*, is used in a specific sense at university to mean academic journals in that they are peer-reviewed (also called 'refereed') by scholars.⁴ These are considered to be the best source of up-to-date research. The three uses of the term, *journal*, are:
 - a) Trade publications (also called "professional publications, e.g., *Energy Business Journal*): often provide very recent technical and practical information.
 - b) Magazines (e.g., *Time*, *The Economist*): should mainly be used for topical information and comment.
 - c) Peer-reviewed (e.g., *The Academy of Management Journal*): academic analysis.
3. **Using only your textbook instead of also searching more specific academic books** — although your set textbooks are of great value to introduce and generalise a course, you will write in a much more informed way if you also use other books and journals covering more specific parts of your course. Ask your lecturer or read your course profiles; many provide lists of such reading material.
4. **Using Internet sources that may not be reliable sources of information** — because anyone with a computer and a little technical knowledge can set up a website, you need to discern research material that is reliable. For example, this can be found on university or government sites, or those of certain scholarly, statistical, or public interest sources. All UQ libraries provide such links.
5. **Using newspapers and magazines as reliable sources of information** — those of quality can be sources for basic factual data, rather than for sustained analyses of events or ideas.

³ After reading the advice that follows, if you still doubt the validity of any of your sources, ask your lecturer.

⁴ High quality peer-reviewed journals can sometimes take two or three years to be published as they usually require evidence gathering, writing up, blind review by referees, revision, resubmission, and final editing.

What You Will Be Expected to Write

It is difficult to estimate either how many papers that you'll write as a student with UQBS, or the different forms that writing will take. It all depends on what you study and how many courses are involved. It is certain, however, that you will be expected to write in a variety of forms irrespective of what your studies entail.

You may write research papers (commonly called an essays)⁵ around some business case or topic; you may also be expected you to write a business or marketing plan, a report or proposal, or a critical analysis of some business system.

Each of these writing types comes with its own format and objectives which are expressed using a particularly type of language. These means of expression have been developed over many years from the way that different professional bodies and communities represent the way they do things. Depending on the areas in which you study at UQBS, be it Accounting, Human Resources, Finance, or Marketing, etc, you will have a different purpose for your writing and this purpose will be realised by following one or any of the following objectives:

- To recount or tell what happened.
- To document a sequence of events and evaluate their significance in some way.
- To solve or resolve a problem or crisis by evaluating a series of events that caused them.
- To instruct the reader on how to make or do something.
- To report information about an event or circumstance.
- To explain how and why something occurs.
- To present an argument in favour of a proposition.
- To discuss an issue from a number of different perspectives before reaching a conclusion.

The objective or objectives that underlie your writing's purpose will be determined by what is required in each course — your course profile outlines these requirements. Obviously, these purposes and their related objectives apply to all students taking those courses in any one semester. However, a second set of objectives applies to you as an individual student: that is, those that you set yourself for all of your written assignments. Writing objectives are determined by, as objectives of any plan do, measurable outcomes and timelines against which you complete the different stages of writing. Like most projects in the real business world, setting objectives is a highly efficient means to achieve good results.

⁵ We use the term *essay* here in the sense now widely used in universities to refer to general academic writing endeavours. We do acknowledge, however, that *essay* once specifically referred to a composition on a single subject, usually based on the personal view of the author.

Writing Academic Essays

Basically, an essay broadly follows the common, three-part communication model:

1. Introduction

- a. State directly what your essay is going to do:

In this paper, I show that the export performance of a firm depends on its R&D capabilities, technology transfer, and entrepreneurial characteristics.

This says clearly what your essay is going to do. Moreover, it prepares the reader for the paragraph structure that will elaborate the aspect of the firm's R&D capabilities, technology transfer, and entrepreneurial characteristics. The opening paragraph usually also contains some contextual information. For example, if you were writing an essay about the possible re-regulation of banks, your opening paragraph would probably contain some contextual information about the world's current financial setting and the impact of the big banks on the world economy.

- b. By the end of the first paragraph, readers should know what you intend to argue, and how you intend to support these arguments in the following paragraphs.
- c. You should put readers in context before providing the specifics.

2. Body

- a. Each paragraph must relate to the central argument or thesis that you outlined in your introduction; elaborate each point or claim with logical argument and evidence that you acquired from the pre-writing stage.
- b. Remember that an academic argument cannot be merely stated; it must be supported with evidence from a reliable source.
- c. Sometimes, you will be expected to include some differing viewpoints in your essay. If you do, then signal this with words like *however*, *on the other hand*, *in contrast* ...

3. Conclusion

- a. This reflects the purpose stated in your introduction, but in a much richer sense.
- b. It is richer because you will have elaborated your argument points throughout the body of the essay.

As with any writing, when you begin an essay, you may be faced with a phenomenon known as 'writer's block', which affects all writers at some stage. It affects students who do not write very much or are out of practice and occurs when you become hesitant or anxious about writing. It could be that writers tend to expect too much, and therefore become too critical of themselves, or may simply procrastinate. For any of these reasons, writers may simply be scared of failing. Obviously writer's block is most common when writers begin their work. What follows is an exemplar of how you might start your essay, that is, the introduction (1st paragraph) followed by the literature review (2nd paragraph), which are both crucial to academic research writing.

Beginning Your Essay: An Example

*Introduction*⁶

Since the 1980s, Australian employees have increasingly worked for organisations that expect them to work long hours (Bollinger, 2008; Haddin, 2007; Johnson, 2008).⁷ Therefore, this paper [*investigates–evaluates/analyses*]⁸ the contemporary expectation in organisations that employees will work long hours. I ask if this expectation is a factor of the organisations, or the employees who work in them. To that end, the broad research into this expectation is assessed, particularly that concerned with the (lack of) clarity with which long working hours are written in formal conditions of employment. Moreover, I argue that the practice of working long days is simply understood by employees as normal to their work.

*Literature Review*⁹

The belief that employees in organisations were bound by formal work agreements between managers and unions was first questioned by Hauritz & Siddle (1979). Since then, research into working hours has paid more attention to the influence of work culture on employee behaviour (Clarke, 1998; Watson, Katich, & Ponting, 2000; Lee, 2006).

Much of this research considers working hours as it relates to what managers expect of their staff. More recently though, research has increasingly looked at the impact of work time on managers in terms of what their executives expect (Clarke & North, 2009).

Most assignments in coursework degrees concentrate more on reviewing literature, that is, secondary research, than doing their own primary research. Literature Reviews are therefore important to master. This sample shows the objective: to compare/contrast other views.

Note how most of the writing uses words (sometimes called *lexical ties*, because they ‘tie’ the sentences to each other; see examples underlined) to link the writing’s points.

Can you use first person (i.e., *I*, *me*, *we*, or *us*, see example using the first person pronoun, *I*, in the first paragraph)? Some courses (often from the social sciences) allow this. Others do not (often those from scientific disciplines). It is very important to check with your lecturer.

The above exemplar suggests a way of beginning your essay after completing most of your reading. The literature review begins the organisation of your arguments. One of the worst mistakes students make in writing essays is to not actually develop an argument. Students

⁶ This heading is used to demonstrate this exemplar; however, you may or may not use the heading, *Introduction*, depending on what is required in your course (ask your lecturer).

⁷ Many assignments will begin with a statement of purpose saying (“This paper [verb]...”). It is often a good idea to begin with a generalised (sweeping) statement like this previous sentence. It sets the theme for your paper. However, you must reference it if you do, as you see in this example).

⁸ Choose action verbs that show what your paper will do (such as these verbs in italics) rather than using verbs like “considers”.

⁹ This example literature review is fictitious and the research it contains should not be used in any way whatsoever. Note too, that you may or may not be required to use the heading, *Literature Review* (ask your lecturer).

may gather large amounts of relevant information, but then fail to form their own response to the essay question. By the time you have completed your essay, you will probably have refined your central argument a number of times. You should complete the final draft of the introduction last, after you have completed the rest of the essay.

Writing Reports

The report¹⁰ is the most common genre of writing in business situations apart from letters although they may take many different forms, depending on their purpose and the context in which they are written. Whatever their purpose and context though, reports provide information for readers and, if necessary, recommend action or actions that follow from the information. Since the collapse of Enron Corporation in the USA in November 2001, and the HIH collapse in Australia in March of the same year, annual reports and corporate financial disclosures have been the focus of much government, corporate, and public attention.

Reports should be accurate and honest so that readers can respond and act appropriately and, essentially, solve problems. Reports require the writer to gather information or data, analyse that data, and then, if necessary, recommend a consequent course of action. In general, then, the report should include some or all of the elements listed below. That will depend on what types of report you are expected to write (see following example).

<i>Letter of Transmittal</i>	Letter to the person who commissioned the report but not part of the report itself. The letter demonstrates how the report fulfils the client's brief; refer especially to the report's conclusions and recommendations.
<i>Frontispiece</i>	Simply the (old-fashioned) term referring to your report's cover page that indicates its title, producer, intended audience, and its date.
<i>Table of Contents</i>	For all reports to indicate the sections and back matter such as references and appendices. Number all sections but the summary and appendices.
<i>Executive Summary</i>	See advice on (executive) summary in section (below), <i>Components of Writing</i> .
<i>1. Introduction</i>	[Begins the Report proper (see <i>Introduction to Recommendations</i>)]. See advice on introductions in section (below), <i>Components of Writing</i> .
<i>2. Method(ology)</i>	Outlines the way in which the data used in the report were obtained. Shows readers that your data are both reliable and relevant to the report, and also that you have obtained these data in an appropriate way.
<i>3. Analysis</i>	Sometimes combined with conclusions; however, analysis is what happened, while conclusions are what can we deduce from this?
<i>4. Discussion</i>	Used to interpret the facts from <i>Analysis</i> ; not always included.
<i>5. Conclusions</i>	How those facts are significant; see advice on conclusions in <i>Components of writing</i> .
<i>6. Recommendations</i>	What should thus be done; see advice on recommendations in <i>Components of Writing</i> .

¹⁰ For greater detail, see *Report Writing*, in Chapter 11 of McKenna, et al. 2007. *Corporate communication: Effective techniques for Business*. (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Thomson, Social Science Press.

<i>References</i>	Details any references that have been used in the body of the report.
<i>Glossary</i>	If needed, a reference list of technical terms that may need explanation.
<i>Appendices</i>	Contains extended material that would otherwise clog up the body of the report, thereby taking up too many pages of the report itself.

Components of Writing

Within all of these forms of writing, there are commonly a number of smaller components¹¹ that are either shared or used exclusively. We consider some of those components now that apply to academic and/or business writing. We begin with summaries, which are commonly called executive summaries in business, or abstracts in academic writing.

Summaries

Although summaries precede the actual document they are writing, many students confuse them with introductions. Yet, summaries and introductions do an entirely different job:

- *Introductions* INTRODUCE the body of the document.
- *Summaries* SUMMARISE the writing in the actual document but are separate from it. They take different forms: commonly, an *Abstract* in academic essays or a *Summary* for business document such as reports, proposals, or plans. Sometimes it is called an *Executive Summary* because it provides executives or managers in businesses with a way of obtaining vital information without having to read the entire document. What follows is an example of an Executive Summary from a fictitious report:

The Accounting Department recommends that Plato Travel Consultants purchase a new operating system for its ProfTel Mini-computer.¹² Plato purchased the *ProfTel* product in 2003 to replace an obsolete and failing *Rexroth* computer system. However, the new *ProfTel* computer has never performed one of its key tasks successfully: generating weekly accounting reports based on the expense and revenue data fed into it.¹³ When Plato accounting personnel use it for this purpose, the computer reports that there is insufficient internal memory.

Our analysis of this problem revealed two main problems:¹⁴

1. The operating system, BT/Q-91 uses the computer's internal memory wastefully.
2. The *SuperReport* program used to generate accounting reports is too cumbersome to create report within the current memory limitations.

Consequently, we evaluated three possible solutions:¹⁵

1. Buying the BT/Q-101 system upgrade at a cost of \$9,500. It would double the useable space and speed calculations.

¹¹ As well as writing essays and reports outlined above, advice can be found in McKenna et al. (2007) on business forms that you may be required to write at UQBS, such as employment applications and résumé (Chapter 8), proposals (Chapter 10), manuals (Chapter 12), PR writing (Chapter 13), and speeches (Chapter 15).

¹² The previous sentence summarises the *Introduction* of the Report.

¹³ The previous sentence summarises the *Data* and *Analysis* of the Report.

¹⁴ This sentence and the two that follow summarise the *Findings* of the Report.

¹⁵ This sentence and the three that follow summarise the *Conclusions* of the Report.

2. Writing a more compact program in *PRIME*, costing \$11,000 in labour.
3. Revising *SuperReport* to prepare the overall report in small chunks, at a cost of \$10,000. *SuperReport* currently runs small reports successfully.

The Accounting Department recommends the first alternative: buying a new operating system, because it will solve the problem for the least cost. The minor advantages of writing a new program in *PRIME* language (Option 2), or of revising *SuperReport* (Option 3), are not sufficient to justify their cost.¹⁶

Summaries should be the last thing you write, they should not include any material not present in the Report, and they should be less than 10 per cent of total word length of Report.

Abstracts

Having seen an example of a business summary, here is an Abstract, which is the way that academic articles summarise their work. Abstracts provide for researchers an easy guide to the research question, what the paper seeks to show, how they achieve their finding, and conclusions they draw. See this example:

This study investigates the value relevance and incremental information content of deferred tax accruals reported under the 'income statement method' (AASB 1020 *Accounting for Income Taxes*) over the period 2001–2004.¹⁷ Our findings suggest that deferred tax accruals are viewed as assets and liabilities. We document a positive relation between recognized deferred tax assets and firm value using the levels model, while the results from the returns model suggest that deferred tax liabilities reflect future tax payments.¹⁸ The balance of unrecognized deferred tax assets provides a negative signal to the market about future profitability, particularly for companies from the materials and energy sectors and loss-makers.¹⁹

[Note: For referencing details of the article containing this abstract, see original document: Chang, C., Herbohn, K., & Tutticci, I. (2009). Market's perception of deferred tax accruals. *Accounting & Finance*, 49: 645–673.]

This academic article does not summarise its research method; but it is explained fully in the body of the article. Academic abstracts do vary according to what the Journal requires.

Introductions

All forms of writing use some kind of Introduction. Generally though, an introduction should explain what you intend to argue and how you intend to support these arguments. See the example of an Introduction on page 7 (above).

Literature Reviews

To check how literature is reviewed, see how most articles in academic journals review the available literature within or closely after the article's introduction. Here is an example.

¹⁶ The previous two sentences summarise the *Recommendations* of the Report.

¹⁷ The previous sentence summarises the *Research Question* of this academic paper.

¹⁸ The previous two sentences summarise the *Conclusions* of this academic paper.

¹⁹ The previous two sentences summarise the *Findings* of this academic paper.

Considerable attention has been given to the study of customer dissatisfaction associated with low to moderate levels of anger from failed service encounters (e.g., Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; McColl-Kennedy and Sparks 2003; Smith, Bolton, and Wagner 1999; Tax, Brown, and Chadrashekar 1998). Research in behavioral psychology and organisational behavior has demonstrated that when individuals experience anger they exhibit a tendency to attack the target verbally and/or non-verbally (Deffenbacher et al. 2002; Fitness 2000). Bechwati and Morrin (2003) found that enraged customers, in their desire for vengeance, are willing to choose rival brands at higher prices in order to “get even” with firms that have “wronged” them. Anger in customers has consistently been shown to result in nonconfrontational behaviors, such as exiting, boycotting, negative word of mouth, and complaints to third parties, all of which have a negative impact on the organisation (DeWitt and Brady 2003; Keaveney 1995; Smith and Bolton 1998; Stephens and Gwinner 1998). But extreme anger can lead to more overt behaviors that may result in damage to the organisation’s property and/or emotional and physical harm to persons, including frontline employees, other customers, and even the customers themselves (Fullerton and Punj 1993; Harris and Reynolds 2003, 2004).

[Note: For referencing details of the article containing this abstract, see original document: McColl-Kennedy, J. R., Patterson, P. G., Smith, A. K., & Brady, M. K. 2009. Customer Rage Emotions: Emotions, Expressions and Behaviors. *Journal of Retailing*, 85: 222-237.

There are two literature reviews illustrated in this Guide: see the fictitious example on page 7 above and this real one from a prestigious marketing journal. Note though that this journal uses a different referencing system than that used in this Guide.

Method(ology)²⁰

The method section outlines the way in which the data contained in a paper were obtained in, for example, a business document; in an academic document, the method would also describe what kind of analysis technique you have used (e.g., statistical or linguistic, computer-assisted or otherwise). The method section therefore functions to show that your data are both reliable and relevant to the report, and also that you have obtained these data in an appropriate way.

Conclusions²¹

If recommendations are the most important part of a business document, the conclusions that support them are also very important. Conclusions have two main objectives:

1. To tell the reader what the facts and data contained in your report mean, that is, what you have CONCLUDED from them.
2. To establish the significance of the material you have presented.

Therefore, in the conclusion stage, always ask yourself: *what does all this mean and why is this important?* Remember the importance of making your explanations clear in terms of the reader. Like summaries, the conclusions section should not introduce new material.

²⁰ We use the term *method* here knowing that, in much academic writing, the method section is called *methodology*. Strictly speaking, this is a misnomer because methodology is rightfully the *study* of method, not method itself. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that this usage is firmly entrenched in the language of academic publication.

²¹ Used in some form in most professional and academic writing.

Recommendations²²

This is the section that the business client is paying for. If a report has been commissioned, then it is likely that there is a problem or an issue that needs to be dealt with. If the client knows that there is a problem, the client is really asking for expert advice and therefore expects you to *recommend* something positive and viable.

Your recommendations actualise your conclusions and so should state a clear and achievable course of action. It is useless to offer vague recommendations, such as ‘something must be done’. Also futile is to recommend action that is impractical in terms of budget or time.

EASY-TO-READ WRITING

So what do we need to be aware of so that we can write like the examples given above? We need to know something about how language works and how it fits together. Therefore, the next few pages advise you on how to write correctly by providing essential grammar rules. There are also useful guidelines for writing in an easy-to-read style. But first, let’s review some of the most common writing errors that students make.

The Ten Most Common Writing Errors that Students Make

The following list of the 10 most common errors that students make helps to put into context the advice about writing style and English grammar that follow. In their writing at university, students are often guilty of:

1. **Structuring poorly** — structure is crucial to arguing your case. You now know that you need to structure using the introduction–body–conclusion sub-sections. You must have a clear and strong opening paragraph, so that as you write you keep thinking about how the current paragraph is doing the job you set out to do.
2. **Assuming the reader knows what you mean without explanation** — you can not assume that readers share your knowledge when you write. When you make a point, ask yourself how you would respond to their question: “How do you know that?”
3. **Providing summaries of other authors’ ideas without explanation** — it is inappropriate simply to summarise what another author says without some elaboration.

Student example	Problem
<p><i>Morley explores the differences between postmodernism as a cultural style, and post-modernity as a period. In doing this, the article also highlights similarities between the characteristics of postmodernism and Marxism.</i></p>	<p>In the second sentence of the example, we learn nothing substantive about the similarities or differences provided by Morley.</p>

²² Used in business documents, particularly report and proposals.

4. **Making sweeping statements:** Avoid making sweeping statements that are not qualified. Because the world is not a simple place, it is likely that unqualified statements, that is, those that do not explain their conclusions, will be inaccurate.

Student example	Should Read
<i>Political manipulation of symbols creates cultural perceptions that change society.</i>	Political manipulation of symbols help to shape our cultural perceptions and so can change society.

5. **‘Announcing’ quotations** — avoid presenting quotations that announce themselves. Instead, let them merge into your own text. A really bad example is:

Student example	Problem
An article by P. Smith and N. Kwan in <i>The Journal of Advertising</i> was interesting because it goes on to explain	The crucial information has still not been put after 19 introductory words. Bibliographic information properly belongs in the reference list, not in the body of your essay.

In most cases, it is better to open your sentence with the idea not the author, as in the following example sentence where the author leads the sentence:

Student example	Should Read
Cao and Wei (2009) argue that vesting requirements and bankruptcy risk can lead to significant value discounts.	Vesting requirements and bankruptcy risk can lead to significant value discounts (Cao and Wei, 2009).

6. **Using the word ‘quote’ or ‘quotation’ anywhere in your essay** — do not say, for example, “This quotation shows . . .”, simply because any quotation does not show. Instead, say that the author (by name) *argues, proposes, surmises, suggests*, and so on. As the writer, you need to do the work of explaining or interpreting a quotation. Simply compiling a series of quotations will not write the essay.
7. **Using large or too many quotations** — as far as possible, avoid large or many quotations. Instances of quotations taking up whole paragraphs are becoming more common because many students do not understand the art of paragraph writing. Therefore, remember these guidelines:
- Never quote another author’s words by themselves without any of your own.
 - When using another author’s view, the best thing to do is paraphrase (i.e., rephrase) them, rather than quote them verbatim (i.e., word for word).
 - Whether you paraphrase or quote words directly, you must always attribute another author’s words by conventional referencing.
 - If a long quotation is important enough to use in full, remember the ‘three-line new-line’ rule: that anything of more than three lines should begin on a new line.

8. **Writing waffle sentences** — the section below on *Style* gives advice about keeping your sentences easy to read. However, you should remember that busy lecturers dislike padding (i.e., words that say nothing) and have a laser-like capacity to detect it. If your sentence is not advancing the proposition of your essay, leave it out.

Student example	Problem
<i>Kumar uses the chapter to represent many different thoughts on the usage of the term and the meaning with regard to our society. Many researchers over the years have analysed gender and language...</i>	The sentences in the example are purely and simply waffle and add little to the essay's case. Leave them out.

9. **Using the wrong tense when referring to research** — use the historic present tense when referring to an author saying something, or when referring to your sources, because anything previously written continues as the living word. You should write: *Barbour asserts that ...; Glaser and Strauss hold that grounded theory is undeniable; The unions maintain that ...; or Henry Mintzberg talks about ...* .

This is so, except if you are identifying historical aspects of particular authors. In the following sentences, the past tense of the writing is pertinent to the sense of the sentence:

- *When Freud described the world of dreams as having their origin in real spiritual excitation, he was talking about what was believed in pre-scientific days.*
- *Taylor wrote in response to the growth of major industrial work systems.*
- *Einstein conceived of Relativity while working as a Patents Officer in Bern.*

10. **Including your personal capabilities in your essay analysis** — lecturers and tutors are aware that some of the material studied and researched by students at university will challenge and test them. Nevertheless, do not include comments about your intellectual struggles in your essay, as these students did:

Student example	Should Read
<i>I found this article ... hard to understand as there are many theorists and ideas involved.</i>	<i>The article is fairly easy to read and the reader is not bogged down with long-winded explanations and confusing economic references.</i>

Style: Eight Guidelines

Writing style considers authors' use of language for their audience. A good writing style takes into account how readers read. Style does not describe what writers *must* do, but what they *should* do to write clearly and precisely. The following eight guidelines are proven ways to enhance the readability of your writing:

1. **Keep a good balance between verbs and nouns**— because *verbs* (the action of a sentence) are so important, don't overpower them with too many *nouns* (the people or

things involved in the action). When you turn verbs into nouns, you limit the action of their sentences.

- a. Instead of, *We have a belief that ...*, write, *We believe that ...*.
- b. Instead of, *The accounts are a good source of information for investors*, write, *The accounts inform investors well*.

In other words, strengthen your sentences by converting some nouns to verbs.

2. **Use active not passive voice as much as possible** — active voice means following a subject–verb–object flow in sentences and is thus much clearer because the subject (doer) begins sentences. Although some sentences may need to be in the passive voice, aim to write two out of every three sentences in active voice.
 - a. Instead of, *You are advised by me*, write, *I advise you*.
 - b. Instead of, *Shares are bought by investors*, write, *Investors buy shares*.
3. **Use words as signposts** to connect sentences to sentences, and paragraphs to paragraphs and so provide easy reading. Signposts [also called *lexical ties*] clarify (e.g., *for example*), add (e.g., *furthermore, as well*), concede (e.g., *nevertheless*), sum up (e.g., *in conclusion*), contrast (e.g., *on the other hand*), verify (e.g., *in fact*), show cause (e.g., *therefore*). However, there are many others signposts or lexical ties that you can use.²³
4. **Do not use there and it, in the form of there is/are/was and it is/was too many times** — when used in this way, particularly at the beginning of sentences, *there* and *it* become *dummy* pronouns, in that they do not say who or what is performing the action of the verb *is* or *was* etc. If you say, *There have been reports etc*, you are not being clear.
 - Instead of, *There have been reports that our profits are rising*, find the agent of the actions and write, *Reports by Roth Research Inc. indicate that our profits are falling*.
5. **Write sentences of the best length for clear reading** — try not to write sentences that are either too long or too short. Because readers are less likely to remember what you have written if the sentence is too long, about 25 words is the best sentence length. Therefore, do not try to say too many things in the one sentence; don't be afraid to use full-stops.
6. **Be definite in professional writing; don't hedge information** — a statement such as:

Chinese consumers could possibly behave differently this year.

 says very little because of the *hedging* (underlined). Try writing so that you inform the reader of possible effects and outcomes. Instead of this above example, write:

The behaviour of Chinese consumers will [outline some probably changes] if their Government [state the action].
7. **Do not use and, but, or so too much when writing sentences** — they join statements of equal value. Sometimes it is better to use joining words like *because, although, despite* etc, which allow you to show which of the joined statements is more important: Instead of:

We have just begun sales but we should still profit well this year.

write: *Although we have just begun sales, we should still profit well this year.*

²³ See McKenna et al. (2007: 89–90).

In this example, the underlined clause is shown to be more important because the clause beginning with *Although* is made a condition of the underlined clause. The writing is thus more interesting and easier to follow.

8. **Do not use:**
- a. pretentious words, such as, *impecunious circumstances* (use *short of money*); *inclement weather conditions* (use *bad weather*); etc.
 - b. too many words, such as: *due to the fact that* (use *because*); *At this point in time* (use *now*); *Until such time as* (use *when*); *I find it within my capacity to undertake the research* (use *I can do the research*); etc.
 - c. words that unnecessarily modify others, such as: *end product*; *future plans*; *another alternative*; *recur again*; *prove conclusively*; *10 am in the morning*; etc.
 - d. words that say the same thing more than once in a sentence, such as, *biography of her life*; *pregnant mother to be*; *full and complete*; etc

Grammar: Ten Rules

Many students worry about the rules of grammar. Rather than strict rules, think about writing in terms of *standardised conventions* that have developed historically to become Standard English. Learning to communicate this way allows us to write clearly and persuasively for a professional audience. Using Standard English also allows writers to establish a relationship with this audience.

What follows are just 10 of the grammar rules that we assume will be most useful for you to know for your work at UQBS. We know them well because they are the ones that are most commonly misused by students. We begin with the most common student error:

1. **Do not confuse *its* with *it's*; they are used completely differently** —
 - a. The pronoun, *its* is always used to show ownership:
The firm increased its profits this quarter. or
The firm reduced its investment).
 - b. The term, *it's* is always shortens the phrase, *it is*. This is similar to the way that *they are* shortens to *they're*; Remember, *it's* never owns anything, as in:
It's a good year for investing.
2. **Subjects must agree with verbs** — we generally get this right as in:
The manager works hard and *The managers work hard*. However, there are some tricky issues:
 - a. The previous example shows that singular English verbs often use an “s”, while singular English subjects mostly do not. However, some plural-sounding nouns: *news*, *mathematics*, *physics*, *politics*, are singular, and would thus be written:
Politics is a difficult game.

- b. Singular subjects joined by *and* usually need plural verbs (sentence i), while singular subject joined by *or* (or *nor*) usually need singular verbs (sentence ii):
- i. *Vesting requirements and bankruptcy risk lead to major value discounts.*
 - ii. *Vesting requirements or bankruptcy risk leads to major value discounts.*
- c. *One, each, either, neither, everyone, everybody, no one, someone, somebody, anything* all take singular verbs:
- Each business knows that everybody is vulnerable during a financial crisis.*
- d. Most collective nouns generally need singular verbs:
- The raft of changes looks set to make a difference.*
The list of investments has been sent.
3. **Use the right tense and mood with verbs** — the three primary tenses are *present*, *past*, and *future* but there are many variations on these.
- a. How you write the verbs depends on whether the action is simple, continuing, or whether it has been completed:

He stated [simple past] that the machine had been operating [continuing past perfect] well prior to the overhaul, but is now breaking [continuing present] down.
 - b. *Should* is used to indicate obligation or duty:

I wonder if you should attend with the other stakeholders).
 - c. *Would* expresses habitual action:

The banker would always plan his strategy before meeting the shareholders.
 Or a hypothetical situation: *The banker would invest if the price were right.*
 - d. Be careful of irregular verbs. They are the most common English verbs — note that, of them, *to be* and *to have* are the most frequently used. Irregular verbs do not take the *-ed* ending for their past forms. Some do not change:

put (present tense), *put* (past tense), and *put* (past participle). Others change, e.g., *buy* (present tense), *bought* (past tense), and *bought* (past participle). Such verbs can also be irregular in other ways.
 - e. When writers desire to express a wish, or uncertainty about what they are saying, they use what seems like a plural verb (e.g., *were*) even when the subject is singular:

I wish I were CEO; or If I were CEO.
If the banks were to be re-regulated, there would be less reckless lending.
4. **Avoid poorly connected sentences** — this occurs in two ways:
- a. When sentences/clauses are just joined together without any help, often when the subject of each sentence is the same:

Time is tight the last date to begin is 3 August. The underlined sentence should be joined by *and*, a semi-colon (;), or even a full-stop.

- b. When a comma does the work required of a full stop. The sentence:
The firm invested much, it knew that the results were crucial.
 should be: *The firm invested much. It knew that the results were crucial*
5. **Avoid sentence fragments** — they occur when words are written as a sentence and yet the verb or subject is missing. Even when there is a verb, the so-called sentence may not make sense on its own:
Not many attended the meeting. As the CEO was generally difficult.
 The underlined words thus form a sentence fragment; it would be correct simply as:
Not many attended the meeting as the CEO was generally difficult.
6. **Place word/s that modify (i.e., change meaning) next to the word/s they modify** — this is essential for clear meaning.
- a. Avoid *dangling modifiers*: They occur when some set of words does not sensibly modify anything in its sentence. In the sentence,
Investing in the new company, the evidence pointed to lucrative returns.
 the underlined words do not appear to modify anything because no-one clearly performs the *investing*. You can correct this by simply adding the missing ‘investor’:
Investing in the new company, I could see that the evidence pointed to the returns being lucrative.
 Note though that there are other ways that this meaning could be conveyed.
- b. Adverbs that limit meaning (e.g., *almost, even, just, only, merely, and simply*) should also be close to the verb they modify. The adverb *only* is very commonly misplaced; You will see that *only* means something different in these sentences:
Only I wanted to invest in the new company.
I only wanted to invest in the new company.
I wanted to invest in the new company only.
- c. Phrases also need to be next to the words they modify. Consider the confusion in the following sentences. In the first, a reader could not tell if it were He became CEO, or his boss died aged 35. In the second, was it the bonus or the man who was larger?:
He became the CEO when his boss died at the age of 35.
The firm paid a bonus to the man unexpectedly larger than first thought.
7. **Do not confuse adjectives with adverbs** — remember,
- a. adjectives modify nouns: *It was a profitable firm;* [“firm” is a noun]
- b. adverbs modify
- verbs: *The market peaked quickly [peaked is a verb].*
- adjectives: *It was a really profitable firm [profitable is an adjective], and*
- other adverbs: *The market peaked really quickly [quickly is an adverb].*
8. **Use PRONOUNS correctly** — pronouns are one part of the English language that writers find significantly difficult to use correctly. They are nevertheless very important because mastering them can assist clear and more interesting writing. This is because pronouns

stand in the place of nouns, allowing the writer or speaker to state things without always using the noun. Because pronouns can be difficult to use if English is your second language, remember these pronoun conventions:

- a. Pronouns are different if they are the subject (*I, he, she, we, they*), or the object (*me, him, her, us, them*) of the action of a sentence or clause:

He and she invited them and me to the stockholders' meeting.

- b. When pronouns follow prepositions (e.g., *to, from, between*, etc), they are used as if they are objects:

He gave the money to her and me.

She divided the funds between them and us.

- c. Reflexive pronouns are those ending in *-self* or *-selves*, such as, *themselves, myself, herself*, etc. They should only be used to *reflect* the subject of the sentence.

I found myself a job at a firm that now finds itself on Fortune 500.

The investors gave themselves enough chance to succeed.

However, there is a tradition in English of using reflexive pronouns for emphasis:

It was Bill Gates himself who invented the software.

The accountants themselves decided to boycott the meeting.

- d. Although pronouns are very useful, they should not be allowed to confuse your reader about which actual person or thing is being referred to. Confusion in the sentences below occurs because there is no certainty of what pronouns, *them* (in the first sentence), or *it* (in the second) refers to:

Recent studies have exposed the key strategies for increasing profits to the extent that many businesses now benefit from them.

IT removed the pirated software from the old computer, thereby getting rid of it.

- e. Problems writing *WHO* and *WHOM* correctly occur because of uncertainty about whether you are using the pronoun as a subject or object. Remember these tips:

- i. Use *who* if it is a subject of a verb:

He is the one who invested the most.

In this sentence, *who* is the subject of the verb, *invested*.

- ii. Use *whom* if it is the object of a verb:

He is the one whom I knew would invest the most.

In this sentence, *whom* is the object of the verb, *knew* and subject, *I*.

- iii. Use *whom* if it is the object of a preposition:

To whom did you give the promotion?

In this sentence, *whom* is the object the preposition, *To*.

The agreement was made between you and whom.

In this sentence, *whom* [along with *you*] is the object of preposition, *between*.

A good way to test yourself is to find the verbs first; then ask *who* before the verb. Always use *who* or *whom* for people and *which* or *that* for things.

- f. Pronouns used in comparisons after conjunctions *than* and *as* always take pronouns that are used as subjects, such as *I*, *he*, *she*, *we*, *they*:

The business is doing better than we. (not *us*)

That investor is as good as she at predicting the market.

This occurs because *than* and *as* begin what are known as elliptical clauses, so-called because the verbs (*are* in the first sentence and *is* in the second) are missing. A good way to test yourself is to add the verbs to the clause and try the sentence then. The pronouns will then become obvious.

9. **Do not confuse *there*, *their*, and *they're*** — these are said the same way but mean very differently; NOTE, your spell-checker will not distinguish them or indicate a wrong use:
- THEIR is the possessive version of the pronoun *they*:
Their increased profits in 2010 have insured that their future is secure.
 - THERE has two distinct meanings, first, to indicate where something is, as in, *Do not put your money there*; and second, as a *dummy* pronoun, which replaces the subject of a sentence, as in, *There is a new market developing.*
 - THEY'RE is commonly used to shorten *they are*, as *can't* does *cannot*, or *it's* does *it is*. Generally, these contractions should not be used in academic writing.

10. **Use *that* to avoid making the object of the preceding verb unclear** — noun clauses are introduced by the word, *that*, as in the example:

I hope that your business is successful.

The words after *that* form a noun clause which is the object of the verb, *hope*. However, sometimes when *that* is omitted, it can lead to confusing statements:

I see the director is investing in the CBA.

Here, the object of the verb *see* appears to be *the director*. But this is not so: the writer cannot literally *see the director*. What is seen is the content of the noun clause beginning with *that*:

I see that the director is investing in the CBA.

Punctuation

There is little doubt that punctuation falls within the general strategy of writing: That authors should do whatever is possible to make their writing as readable as possible. Punctuation's sole purpose is to organise words in a way that the reader can better understand what the writer means to say. Consider the importance of punctuation to the meaning in the following simple sentence:

Woman without her man is nothing.

Woman! Without her, man is nothing.

Table 1 contains a summary of the punctuation marks you might use in your UQBS studies.²⁴

Name	^	Description	Example
Apostrophe	‘	Looks the same as single quotation mark (see below). It indicates: a. A letter is missing b. Ownership (also see ‘its’ example on page 17)	a. <u>Don</u> ’t do that; it <u>can</u> ’t be. b. This is the <u>CEO</u> ’s best chance to grow the <u>members</u> ’ dividends.
Brackets	() []	a. Aka <i>parentheses</i> ; encloses extra material in sentences not essential to understanding. b. Square brackets: for a writer to insert own material into a sentence.	a. See the title under this table. b. The manager said to the Chinese delegation that time is tight [this metaphor is not translatable].
Colon	:	a. Introduces explanations or a series of examples. b. Used before a list with or without dot points.	a. To achieve, you need effort, accuracy, and luck. b. See examples throughout this Writing Guide.
Comma ²⁵	,	a. Widely used to separate: words, phrases and clauses at the start and within sentence; 2 or more adjectives modifying nouns or adverbs modifying verbs or; and items in lists. b. Also used at the end of a statement before quotations marks or when a statement is interrupted by explaining quotations.	a. There are numerous, varied examples throughout this Writing Guide. b. “I have not finished,” said the accountant, “preparing the tax report for the next meeting.”
Dashes ²⁶	– —	a. An <i>En</i> -dash: used for numbering instead of <i>to</i> . b. An <i>Em</i> -dash: separates text that represents a sudden shift in thought or focus.	a. 1994–2001 or pages 28–42. b. See examples throughout this Writing Guide

Table 1: Common Punctuation Marks (in alphabetical order)

²⁴ A full description of punctuation marks and their use can be found on pages 64–77 in the publication: McKenna, B., Thomas, G., Waddell, N., & Barry, M. 2007. *Corporate communication: Effective techniques for Business*. (2nd ed.). South Melbourne: Thomson, Social Science Press.

²⁵ See the specific advice on the *serial comma* at the end of this summary table.

²⁶ Note the comments about using *Em* and *En* dashed on the next page.

Name	^	Description	Example
Ellipsis	...	Indicates that words have been left out of the material that you have quoted, at times when not all of a quotation is relevant to the point you are making or when you simply want to shorten a sentence. [Note that ellipses should be used with a space either side of them.]	Smith (2009) asks, “How can tax be made equitable for all citizens ... when governments favour those whom they see as supporting employment.”
Exclamation mark	!	Used when you want to show strong emotion or emphasise a declaration; do not overuse because they will lose their effect. Generally, you would not use exclamation mark when you write academic assignments.	Wow! The return was wonderful!
Full stop	.	Called a <i>period</i> by Americans, commonly used to end most sentences.	You can see many examples of full-stops ending sentences throughout this Writing Guide
Hyphen	-	Links two or more words or word parts: a. Prefixes to prevent confusion or double vowels. b. Compound terms. c. Spelled-out numbers under one hundred.	a. <i>re-sent</i> rather of <i>resent</i> or <i>re-lay</i> instead of <i>relay</i> ; or <i>re-evaluate</i> . b. <i>half-baked</i> ; <i>heads-up</i> . c. <i>Seventy-seven</i> ; <i>twenty-one</i> .
Question mark	?	Used after a direct question. N.B., do not use when a question is reported in indirect speech.	<i>The CEO asked me if I'd seen the latest dividends.</i>
Quotation marks	“” “	Also called inverted commas; may be written as single or double marks, depending on choice or what the institution you write for expects — primarily used to show you are quoting the exact words of another write or speaker.	There is an old English proverb that says, “Look after the paragraphs and the sentences will look after themselves.”
Semicolon	;	Don't confuse with commas; semicolons work differently to separate: a. Two related but independent clauses. b. A complex series of items, especially those that contain commas.	a. We worry about assets; this year looks good for profit. b. I went to Perth with Lesley, the CEO; her PA, Yuki; and our accountant, Alex.

Table 1 (cont.): Common Punctuation Marks (in alphabetical order)

Many student writers worry about punctuation because so many rules seem to apply to it. However, the rules are sometimes flexible. Table 1 advised on ways to use commas but they are one branch of punctuation not bound by strict rules. In fact, many writers use them to indicate pausing in sentences much more than others, often depending on the author's style. Writers also face other issues of punctuation, such as, whether to use brackets instead of commas, when to use hyphens to join words, or what is the correct type of dash.²⁷ Therefore, writers have some discretion about using certain punctuation.

²⁷ On *Microsoft Office* emails, it is practically impossible any more to use an *Em* symbol (i.e., —) to make dashes for the conventional reason stated in Table 1. It now defaults to an *En* dash (–), which is half as long.

One type of comma though, the *Serial Comma*, is very important. It is best recognised as the one used immediately before conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, or *but* that are used to make lists of three or more items as in the sentence:

The student asked the lecturer for information about the set text, the course notes and their folder, and the course profile.

In general, serial commas generally better represents the natural flow of the sentence. But, more than this, they also reduce ambiguity, as seen in two ways in this example: First, the serial commas clarifies the double use of *and* to combine, *the course notes and their folder*, as one list item, and second, it separates those two items from *the course profile*.

Writing Paragraphs

Paragraphing is an integral part of the Writing Process where you combine words to make phrases, phrases to make sentences, and sentences to make paragraphs. As we said at the beginning of this Guide, the Writing Process should not be seen as simply an event where you write something. Your most important objective is to make clear meaning. Note this effective paragraph from the academic article by:

Gooty, J., Gavin, M, & Ashkanasy, N. M. 2009. Emotions research in OB: The challenges that lie ahead. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30: 833-838.

The point here is that, when we theoretically treat all negative (or positive) discrete emotions as functionally the same, we lose sight of the fact that different processes drive each of them, and that different outcomes can result from them too. And²⁸ when we measure discrete emotions but combine them into overall negative (or positive) dimensions for analytical purposes, we lose the ability to tease apart these differences. Either way, our understanding of emotions suffers.

This paragraph is effective because it begins by stating its point directly, that is, losing the awareness of emotion (main clause), which is preceded by the theoretical conditions that cause this loss of sight (adverbial clause). It then extends that assertion by developing its ‘loss of sight’ theme with another two main and subordinate clauses. The paragraph ends by restating the point of the paragraph with another summary sentence.

Managing Paragraphs

There is an old English proverb that says, “Look after the paragraphs and the sentences will look after themselves”. So let’s assume that you have selected words, built them into sentences, and are set to write the meaningful paragraphs that are essential to academic writing. This is important at university because you usually have to propose something and then defend it by assembling various sets of ideas to support the proposition.

We further assume that you have clarified your writing’s purpose early in your document, and are about to write your paragraphs. Therefore, you need to be careful to:

²⁸ Beginning a sentence with *And* or *But* is an issue for many students who have previously been taught that this is wrong. In fact, it is correct to use *and* and *but* in this way. Some people may say that, because *and* and *but* are conjunctions, they need to join clauses. However, when they begin sentences, they are *conjuncts* linking ideas.

1. Make the topic of each paragraph clear.
2. Ensure that your explanation is relevant to the topic sentence.
3. Clearly link each sentence in the paragraph.

There are many available models or patterns that writers use to organise their paragraphs but the UQ Business School Writing Guide suggests the **TRI(T) model**. It is the most familiar pattern and arguably the most useful. The TRI(T) model stands for:

T = Topic

R = Restricted development

I = Illustration, and

(T) = the not-always-used restatement of the Topic.

For example, consider TRI(T) in terms of this paragraph:

Very little success has been found in developing a theory of the meaning of work. *This seems unusual given that ‘work’ has always been central to human survival. Work was traditionally defined as any human effort adding use value to goods and services.* This definition, however, says little about the current escalation of part-time, at the expense of full-time, work. **The inability to find a common meaning of work occurs despite broad international research.**

Topic (see first **bolded** sentence) is a general statement about the information to be discussed. You may ask why topic sentences head the paragraph. Simply, doing this ensures a reader's understanding.

Restricted development focuses the information in some way by limiting the broad Topic into a particular sub-topic (see the two sentences in *italics*).

Illustration (sometimes called *elaboration*) supports the restricted focus by adding relevant material. The Illustration often gives examples in providing evidence, logical argument, and/or analogies (see underlined sentence). The Illustration *clinches* the Topic.

The optional **(T)** stands for **re-stated Topic**. In longer paragraphs, a modified version of the Topic often summarises the whole paragraph (see second **bolded** sentence).

Now, let's look again at the above example above in this section by Gooty et al. (2009) to show how the TRI(T)²⁹ organising model can vary:

The point here is that, when we theoretically treat all negative (or positive) discrete emotions as functionally the same, we lose sight of the fact that different processes drive each of them, and that different outcomes can result from them too. *And when we measure discrete emotions but combine them into overall negative (or positive) dimensions for analytical purposes, we lose the ability to tease apart these differences.* **Either way, our understanding of emotions suffers.**

²⁹ Note that there is no **I** for Illustration in this paragraph, obviously because the clause, “The point here is that...” introduces a summary of what has gone before including (we assume) research examples.

Referencing

Earlier in this Guide (see page 3, above), we indicated the absolute necessity of using research in the making of academic arguments. It follows then that being able to reference is essential because it records the research behind your analyses. Referencing involves noting what you use in the course of your paper and recording a list of those readings at the end. To help you with your referencing, here are three general problems that students often find:

1. As students advance their university careers, they will be required to record their research in a number of referencing styles depending on their field of study and for which publications they write. Indeed, there are hundreds of different referencing styles used throughout the academic and literary worlds. Academic journals require the authors who submit articles to them to write in one of these styles, with some journals even devising their own unique style.
2. Many of these styles vary greatly — some use given names, some initials; some use *p.* for page numbers, some use colons; some use *Vol.* and *Iss.* for *volume* and *issue*, some just use numbers; some use *Sentence case* to write titles, some use *Title Case* for them; while some use brackets, bolding, italics, spacings, and other effects. All styles are meticulous, some more than others, but each journal nonetheless requires submitting authors to follow the referencing style meticulously.
3. Many students say that they use *Harvard* for referencing. However, such an assertion this is not clear because there is no such thing as an official referencing style used by Harvard University. The term, *Harvard style*, was first used in the 1920s to refer to the Author–Date method of referencing used by Harvard University. Before then, much referencing had been done using footnotes. The problem is that, nowadays, there may be anything up to 15 different referencing styles loosely called *Harvard*, and yet they can vary greatly in the ways mentioned in the previous dot point.

So what referencing style can you use for writing assignments in UQBS courses? If you are an undergraduate or coursework Masters student, UQBS asks you to use the *Harvard*-type referencing style used by the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ).

You can view this style in two places: first, through the UQ SS&H Library on the website <http://www.library.uq.edu.au/training/citation/academymanagement.pdf>; and second, in a hard-copy *Use-It Guide* available in the SS&H Library.

Finishing Your Writing

It was natural to begin this Guide by discussing the Writing Process. We did this because it represents the range of activities involved in assignment writing. Preparation is the first stage before you put together a draft form of your work. Once you are happy with your final draft, you need to review it to make sure it complies with the Business School's academic standards and presents to your assessor credible findings. In this age of technology, students tend to rely on spelling and grammar checkers to identify writing errors. Be aware that such checkers may draw your attention to errors but do not always suggest solutions successfully. Checkers rely on writers having their own skills in grammar and style so that they can choose whether a suggested solution is correct, or which one is better in a matter of choice. In fact, to review your writing effectively, you need to go through three stages:

1. **Revising** is concerned with the overall organisation and logic of the document.

Therefore, when you revise, you should:

- a. put ideas in order.
- b. keep readers' understanding in mind.
- c. choose the right format/design for the message.
- d. look for gaps in detail or the underlying research.
- e. cover the major goal of the document, that is, to *solve, describe, analyse, justify, and/or explain*.

The main purpose of your first revision should be to ensure that the essay does what it claims that it is doing, and that the paragraphs following the introduction can be seen to contribute to the overall argument or thesis. Using paragraphs effectively is discussed in full on pages 23–24.

2. **Editing** is a question of style and clarity at sentence and paragraph level so that the connections are clear in the text. Therefore:

- a. Locate style problems quickly (see Sheet 5).
- b. Edit for a forceful style by ensuring your writing is active with strong verbs.
- c. Be sure you say what you mean and mean what you say.
- d. Strive for clarity by revealing the logic of your thinking to your reader.
- e. Ensure you have use signposts to reveal your logic.

3. **Proofreading** is very close attention to detail; concerned with the typographical and visual layout of the document and the technical aspects of its language. Therefore:

- a. Know the conventions of English and be consistent.
- b. Know what typographical and visual aspects are needed and be consistent.
- c. Avoid cramping your writing by not allowing sufficient white space.
- d. Beware of spell- and grammar-checkers; they draw attention to obvious errors and 'typos' but none of them is perfect.

Final Study Tips

1. ***Distinguish everyday English from academic English*** — the Guide has stated the importance of being able to write suitably for different academic requirements and, therefore, different audiences. You will play different roles of YOU in your student life. With your student colleagues, you will use your own contemporary version of English and express it on text messages and emails using a type of efficient shorthand that, most often, will not be suitable for writing assignments.

The point is that describing text messages necessarily informal and academic writing as necessarily formal does not do justice to either form of writing. We would prefer to go back to our earlier description of the ‘Writing Process’ as an exercise in matching the ‘form’ of writing to ‘audience’ and ‘purpose’. If the purpose called for it, you could write a formal text message on your phone and an informal essay in an academic publication. Just remember that this Guide has spent more time on encouraging to write for your reader, and that will generally mean writing in plain English.

2. ***Be wary of certain recently emerging trends to use English either semantically or grammatically wrongly*** — here are six to watch out for:

- a. Don’t confuse *alternative* with *alternate*:

alternative means *other*:

This is an alternative business plan.

alternate means *every other*:

I go to work on alternate days.

- b. Don’t confuse *disinterested* with *uninterested*:

Whereas *dissatisfied* and *unsatisfied* are identical in signifying the opposite of *satisfied*, *disinterested* means something completely different from *uninterested*.

While *uninterested* means having no interest, or being indifferent, *disinterested* means impartial, or unbiased like a judge or umpire should be.

Even though you may be uninterested in that dispute because you find it boring, I would like a disinterested person to judge who is right.

- c. Don’t confuse *fewer* with *less*:

less modifies nouns you can’t count:

There is less investment this year.

fewer modifies nouns you can count:

There are fewer investors interested.

- d. Don’t mistake plural words ending in “a” with singulars:

phenomena is plural for *phenomenon*:

There is a phenomenon (or, are several phenomena) common at university.

criteria is plural for *criterion*:

One criterion is (or, Several criteria are) important in this list.

- e. Don't confuse *versus* with *verses* even though they sound the same:
- versus* means against: *Jamal versus Sarfras looks like a great contest.*
- verses* is the plural of *verse*: *There are only two verses in the Australian national anthem.*
- f. Don't confuse *incidents* with *incidence*, even though they sound the same:
- incidents* is the plural of *incident* *Several incidents occurred in the Board Room when shareholders disputed the CEO's assertions.*
- incidence* means the rate of occurrence or influence *The incidence of financial collapses in banking peaked in 2008.*

In recent times, more people unaccountably seem to be increasingly using the term, *incidences* instead of *incidents*, even though it is harder to say and would only be used rarely.

3. **Follow course profiles closely** — take particular note of course profiles; they outline what work is expected of you in each course you take, including:
- Timetables
 - Assignments
 - How they are to be submitted
 - Forms of assessment.
- However, if there is something there that you don't understand or feel is missing from your course outline, ask questions of your lecturer as soon as you can in the semester.
4. **Submit written assignment correctly** — obviously, you will generally be expected to submit written assignments according to a deadline stipulated in your course profile. Such submission can occur in a variety of ways for UQ Business School courses, some requiring hard copies, some allowing electronic submission. The most important thing of all is to check these details in courses profiles and ask your lecturer or tutor if you are unsure. You could be expected to submit written assignments:
- at the BEL Faculty Recourse Centre in hard copy
 - in Blackboard via the *Turnitin* system
 - in class
 - electronically.
5. **Ask questions** — it cannot be said enough times that students should ask questions. A student career is meant to be very engaging. Being a student means understanding much information, following many schedules, and meeting many deadlines. Don't be afraid of asking questions, particularly in tutorials. That is the place to ask question and try things out; it is better to make mistakes in tutorials than in exams.