

Academic Stepping Stones:

A Guide to Academic Writing



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Chapter One: Academic Writing

Types of academic writing (formats)

- A number of different types of written assignments are set in the Waikato Management School, including essays, reports, critical reviews/critiques, case analysis, proposals, and reflective pieces.
- You need to learn how each type is different. Key differences are **purpose**, **audience**, and **format** (layout/structure).
- Despite format differences, the basic processes you follow to complete any type of assignment are roughly the same.



How can you be sure what is expected?

- Read your paper outline carefully, especially the assignment instructions.
- Look at the marking schedule/rubric for the assignment to see how the marker will mark the assignment.
- If you are unsure, check with the tutor or lecturer for that paper.

General expectations of your academic writing:

- Your assignment will answer all parts of the assignment question.
- Your ideas will be arranged in a logical structure.
- You will communicate your ideas clearly, in grammatically correct sentences with minimum errors in spelling, punctuation or layout.
- You will demonstrate to the marker that you understand key ideas related to the topic – definitions, theories, models, etc.
- You will demonstrate that you can apply these understandings to real life situations through case study analysis, or specific examples.
- Your writing will demonstrate your critical ability to analyse, evaluate, and compare; you will look at both sides of an issue, examine advantages and disadvantages (strengths and weaknesses, limitations, etc.) and attempt to reach a significant conclusion.
- Your writing will reflect the reading that you have done on your topic.

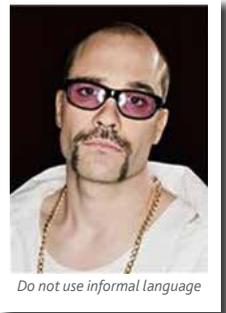
Academic Writing

- You will use APA referencing correctly. All ideas that are not your own (most of your ideas will be generated by your reading!) will need to be referenced in the text and also in your References list at the end of the essay. Any words that you quote directly from a book, journal or other source will need to be placed in quotation marks ("...") with **in-text** and **end of text** references. (For more help, see the section on APA referencing). This expectation is extremely important so take careful note of it.

How is academic writing different from other forms of writing?

Here are some key points that distinguish academic writing from other types of writing you might be familiar with:

- Academic writing is reasonably formal; the language you use should be precise in meaning.
- Generally, you do not use informal language, text language, abbreviations, slang or colloquialisms.
- You will write verb forms in full, not contracted form: for example, "do not" instead of "don't" and "they are" rather than "they're".
- Usually your writing will be in complete, grammatically correct sentences.
- Generally, the language you use is neutral, not heavily emotive or judgemental.
- Mostly you will write without using the first person expressions "I", "me", "mine", "we", "our", "ours" unless you are writing a reflective piece where the teacher has asked you to express personal feelings and describe personal experiences. Instead of writing "our business partners" use a more precise noun; for example, "this company's business partners". Avoid using "you" and "your" also. Instead of addressing the reader as "you", again be more specific – say "Marketers need to be target customers", rather than "You need to target customers."
- Academic writing has a purpose (to persuade, to dissuade, to put forward a point of view, to convince, to clarify, to offer relevant information, and so on). Be clear about your purpose in each assignment. Think about who would read the piece, what knowledge and language they would bring to their reading, and what sort of evidence they would find credible.
- Academic writing usually follows a format (essay,



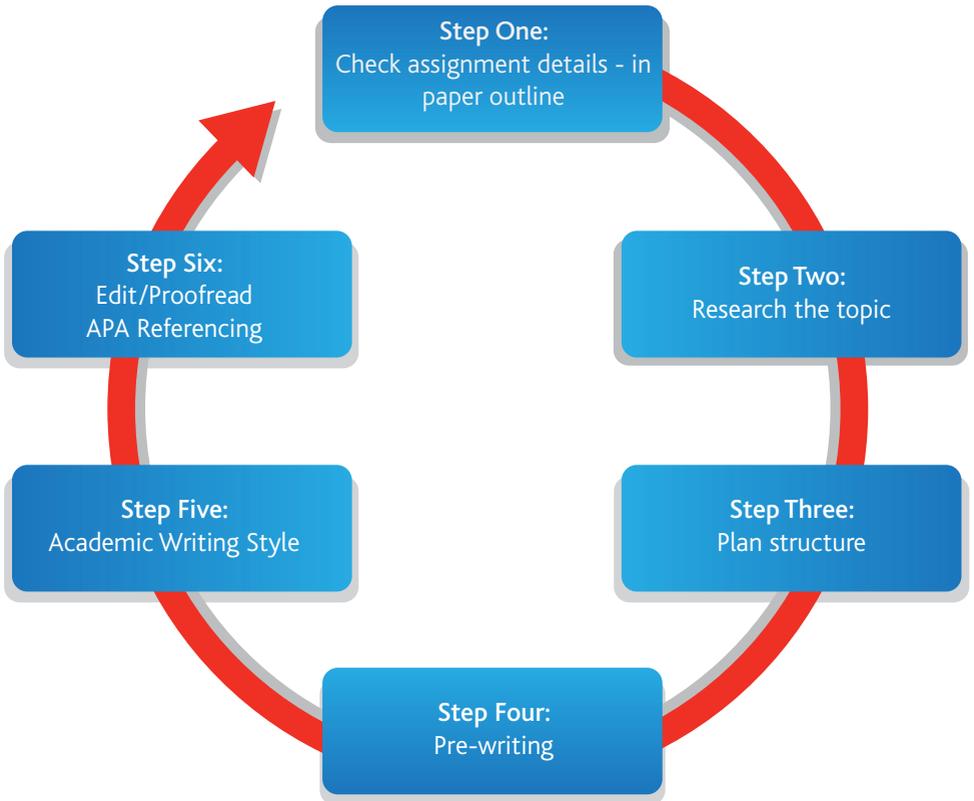
Academic Writing

report, and so on) and relies on referenced evidence to reinforce its ideas.

- As an academic writer you must impress the reader as being well-informed about your subject, intelligent, logical and fair in looking at all sides of an issue
- Academic writing usually refers to research and ideas from other writers as a way of building a convincing argument
- Write to express your ideas clearly, not to impress the reader that you know a lot of “big words” or jargon.

Chapter Two: Academic Stepping Stones

Figure 1: Academic Stepping Stones



As can be seen in Figure 1, there are common processes that should be observed when producing a piece of academic writing. Each of the six steps involved in the process, as shown above, should be carried out, regardless of the type of assignment you have been asked to produce. These six steps can lead you towards academic success

Common processes involved in all academic writing

Step One: Check assignment details – in paper outline/paper summary

- Read paper outline/paper summary carefully
- Choose the assignment topic (if you have a choice)

Academic Stepping Stones

- Identify keywords/phrases and check new vocabulary
- Identify and break down all task requirements
- Check the marking rubric
- Check word limits

Step Two: Research the topic

- Read and use the text book/course readings
- Check the library catalogues
- Search the university online databases/use keyword searches
- Find up-to-date academic journal articles
- Check the internet using Google Scholar
- Do not use Wikipedia as a referenced source, only for initial information
- Do not use a Google search
- Remember to record resource details, so you have them for later use

Step Three: Plan the structure

- Plan the structure according to the paper outline/marketing rubric
- See Chapter 5: planning

Step Four: Pre-writing

- Brainstorm ideas. (You could possibly create a simple mind-map)
- See Chapter 5: pre-writing

Step Five: Academic writing style

- Use appropriately formal writing/vocabulary
- Present your Waikato Management School work in a professional business style

Step Six: Edit/Proofread. APA Referencing.

- See: Hot tips on proofreading – Chapter Ten
- Check the word count – make sure you are within the limit (approximately 10% above or below the word limit usually)
- See Chapter 4 for APA referencing

Note: If you are still confused or need further explanation you can do the following:

Academic Stepping Stones

- Discuss with your lecturer/tutor in their office hours (see paper outline)
- E-mail your question/outline to your tutor or lecturer and ask for brief feedback to make sure you are on the right track
- See Language and Learning Development online resources at:
www.management.ac.nz/langlearn
- Make an appointment to see Language and Learning Development

Make sure you keep on task, and give yourself enough time to ensure that your mark reflects the effort you put into the assignment.

Watch submission dates and times, so your assignment is not penalised for a late submission.



Chapter Three: Researching a topic

When you begin an assignment, you will already know something about your topic from your classes and previous reading. The next step is to start thinking about what you don't know and forming some questions. To find answers to these questions you need to research, using books, journals and online sources of information.

Library

The library is always a good place to go when you start doing research. The link below is a useful guide from the University of Waikato library to teach you how to find material related to your assignment topic: <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/library/study/guides/>

The librarian(s) who have specific responsibility for Management School students are always very helpful too. Contact them at the university library if you need more help.



Online resources

An excellent information source is the online journal articles and databases, where you can find up-to-date academic information, which will be useful for your research. A peer-reviewed article is considered to be the best type of academic resource available. Do not use Google searches or Wikipedia, as these are not considered to be academic sources of information; however, it is satisfactory to use Google scholar.

Keeping track of your resources

While researching for an assignment, it is very easy to lose track of your resources. For this reason, make a note of the details for each resource from the very beginning. Keep this resource list as a file on your computer and add to it as you work on the assignment.

The important details that you need to note are listed below; refer to these when you are building in-text and end-of-text references:

Researching a topic

Always record this information from all sources - you never know when you might need it!

You could record the information on paper, on cards, or as a Word file.

Always double-check to make sure that all details are correct.

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You could record the information on paper, on cards, or as a Word file.

Always double-check to make sure that all details are correct.

- AUTHOR'S NAME (full details) – family name, plus initials (Names of all authors if more than one)
- DATE OF PUBLICATION
- FULL NAME OF BOOK OR JOURNAL (Title & Subtitle)
- TITLE OF ARTICLE, CHAPTER OR ESSAY
- PAGE NUMBERS for chapter, essay or article
- PUBLISHER & PLACE OF PUBLICATION = city (only for a book)
- JOURNAL VOLUME NUMBER; also issue number if relevant
- PAGE NUMBERS for direct quotations & citations
- WEB ADDRESS if you are using an Internet source, or DOI if the item has one
- ISBN NUMBER, CALL NUMBER, SOURCE (e.g. UOW Library, interloan, personal library, etc.) that you got the book or journal from (this is not needed for References, but you might want to find the book or journal again in the library)



Chapter Four: APA Referencing

Referencing is required

In academic writing, referencing is not optional – **it is required!**

Failure to reference or to reference correctly is a serious academic misdemeanour and could lead to charges of plagiarism and punishment that can affect your grades or your continued enrolment at university.

APA Referencing System

A number of different referencing systems exist. In the Waikato Management School you will almost always use a system called APA referencing (American Psychological Association). The APA system is a set of rules for acknowledging the sources (journals, books, online material, etc.) that you have used in writing your assignment. Every idea and every direct quotation that you incorporate into your writing must be referenced in the text, and all sources must be added to an alphabetical list at the end of your assignment.

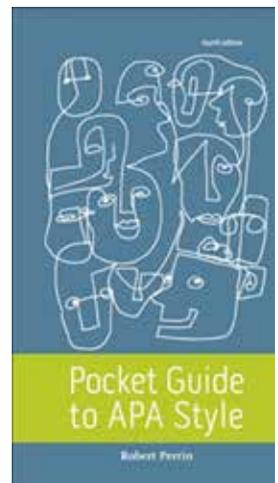
The University of Waikato define plagiarism as “presenting as one’s own work the work of another, and includes the copying or paraphrasing of another person’s work in an assessment item without acknowledging it as the other person’s work through full and accurate referencing; it applies to assessment presented through a written, spoken, electronic, broadcasting, visual, performance or other medium” (University of Waikato Calendar (2012).

To be sure of the rules in APA, see the University of Waikato’s Library online fact sheet on <http://www.waikato.ac.nz/library/study/guides/referencing.shtml>

You can also read the University of Waikato’s Library Quick Guide to APA Referencing below: http://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/51632/APA_Referencing_6th_ed.pdf

For a fuller understanding of the rules, see Robert Perrin’s very useful *Pocket guide to APA style* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Additionally, you could also check the Language and Learning website and view the Learning to Succeed Powerpoint presentation on APA referencing at: www.management.ac.nz/langlearn



Chapter Five: Essay

The essay

The essay is a common format for academic assignments but is seldom used in working situations. Reports are more common in work life. Through planning and writing essays for your university courses, you develop very useful skills:

- Clear thinking and logical arrangement of your ideas
- Research skills
- How to use evidence to build a convincing argument
- Clear written communication



An essay has three parts:

- Introduction (about 5-10% of your total word count)
- Body (about 80-85% of total word count)
- Conclusion (about 5% of total word count)

When writing an essay, you go through 3 stages:

Pre-writing stage

The Pre-writing stage takes up time, so get started early on the assignment, and is the most important stage where you:

- » think about the question
- » identify key words and concepts
- » decide what you already know about the topic
- » ask questions
- » read to gather ideas and evidence
- » clarify your ideas
- » plan a structure for your ideas.

Sample question:

Describe the notion of the product life cycle, and discuss how this idea might be helpful to marketers. (1000 words)

Some possible starter ideas for this essay include:

What is the product life cycle? Definitions? Is there a theorist associated with the term? Does everybody believe in this concept? What practical uses would it have for marketers? What disadvantages or problems might be associated with this concept?

Writing stage

Writing - working to the plan you have developed, you can fill in the 3-part structure to complete the first draft of your essay.

Post writing stage

Post-writing – now you can look critically at what you have written and improve on the first draft. Edit the content (what you have said) and then start to proofread and correct (how you said it) until you have a polished final draft.

Writing a strong introduction

An introduction is funnel-shaped. It begins broadly by opening up your topic in a general way. Using key words, the introduction narrows to a clear outline of the main ideas to be covered in the essay – the thesis statement – this is the “nutshell” statement that sets out your main ideas in response to the topic. This gives you and your reader a ‘map’ that the essay will follow as the main ideas develop.

What does a good introduction do?

- it provides a broad background to the assignment
- it introduces the key terms in the first few sentences
- it narrows down to a thesis statement
- it gives the reader a clear idea of your stance in relation to the topic (agree, or disagree, or agree but..., etc.)
- it is no more than 5% -10% of your total word count
- it is usually only one paragraph long.

Essay

The essay extract below is a good example of an introduction with a clear thesis statement (underlined in the example) and use of key words.

Essay Question: Explain why a company should practise CSR.

Introduction:

With the development of a global economy, business can no longer focus just on reaping benefits from customers as they might have done in the past. A business now needs to show social responsibility as well as profit, thereby gaining the advantages of public trust and good reputation. Using case studies, this essay identifies stakeholder groups and their different needs which the company should meet in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Developing body paragraphs

The body of your essay is divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph states and then develops one main idea. Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence that announces the main idea for that paragraph. Sometimes you might feel that the paragraph also needs a conclusion sentence that sums up the key idea and/or links to the next sentence. A one-sentence paragraph is NOT a paragraph because it does not develop the idea that it states.

Check that all your key ideas raised in the introduction (and in the essay question) are developed in the body of the essay.

What does a good paragraph have?

- it begins with a topic sentence that clearly states the main idea for that paragraph
- it focuses on one main idea only; if you want to discuss a new main idea, begin a new paragraph
- after the topic sentence, the paragraph carefully develops and expands on the main idea by explaining, defining, citing examples, giving appropriate evidence, and so on (by definition, you cannot have a 1- or 2-sentence paragraph because there would not be sufficient development of the major idea in such a short space)
- it links to the next paragraph, either because the next paragraph states and develops a similar idea (e.g. A second way in which this concept is useful to marketers is ...), or because it states and develops an idea that contrasts in some way with the ideas already discussed
- each paragraph might conclude with a summary statement.

Writing an effective conclusion

An effective conclusion to your essay restates, very briefly, the key ideas from the body. No new ideas are introduced into the conclusion. By checking that you have included ideas from all your topic sentences you can build a strong conclusion.

What does a good conclusion do?

- It restates the main argument – go back to your thesis statement to check that you can now restate this main claim in slightly different words
- It summarises the main points that contributed to your thesis – go back to your topic sentences to check that you have summarised all the main ideas; they may be summarised in a different order to the order you used in the body of the writing
- Sometimes, it ends with a simple statement that looks ahead in some way to highlight the significance of the argument – for example, a brief comment on how useful the argument might be. This is often difficult to do; just summarising the main points might be sufficient
- It forms no more than 5% - 10% of your total word count (preferably closer to 5%)
- It must not introduce any new idea; if you suddenly think of an important new idea at this stage, you must rewrite your thesis statement to include the idea, and then develop a paragraph around this idea within the body of the essay. If it is an interesting, but not a really important idea, throw it out!

Your essay must express your thinking in your own words; do not attempt to produce a patchwork of other writers' ideas.

Timeline for writing an essay

Make sure that you have enough time to cover all the processes involved in each of the writing stages. Also, you do need to spend time proofreading your work, and you may refer to the hot tips on proofreading at the end of this book.

Chapter 6: Reports

Reports

Because reports are used more frequently than essays in the business world, you will often be asked to write reports as part of your academic assessment.



Important differences between essays and reports

	ESSAYS	REPORTS
PURPOSE	To argue an idea convincingly	To describe, analyse, reach conclusions, and give recommendations for particular actions
FOCUS	You argue your view but also consider others' arguments.	Look at time, place, groups, etc., related to your subject.
	Start with a thesis statement and prove that claim	Keep an open mind until all the evidence has been gathered as a basis for your conclusions and recommendations
AUDIENCE	A broadly informed audience	A particular group or groups – CEO, Manager, clients, stakeholders, government agency, etc.
FORMAT	3-part format with topic sentences and sentences organised into paragraphs	Sections format, using headings/subheadings, numbering, bullet points, graphics, appendices, abstract or executive summary, etc.
LANGUAGE	Academic	Neutral, factual.

Important similarities between essays and reports

	IN BOTH ESSAYS & REPORTS
LOGIC & LINKAGE	Your ideas are logical and linked together in a smooth, flowing manner.
USE OF RESEARCHED EVIDENCE	All points made in your report or essay are supported by evidence (proof) that can convince your reader of the truth of your ideas.
USE OF APA REFERENCE	All ideas, evidence and direct quotations are referenced to the original source.
CORRECT USE OF GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING	Careful rewriting and proofreading should result in work that is 100% correct.

Purpose of a report

To provide information from research, in order to understand, inform, arrive at conclusions and offer recommendations.

Audience for a report

Depending on the context, your audience could include the following: your marker, classmates, work team mates, manager, CEO, shareholders, stakeholders, clients, government officials, or the general public.

What would your audience expect to find in the report?

The language, layout and graphics that you will use to communicate your message will depend on the audience you will expect to read your report. For example, a specialist audience will understand technical language but a non-specialist audience will need clarification. All readers will appreciate uncluttered communication.

Sections in a report

These are the parts of a report; each section from Introduction on is numbered (1.0, 2.0, etc.), and subsections are also numbered (1.2, 1.3, 2.1, etc.); the sections in **bold** form the main part of the report:

- Covering letter to whoever commissioned the report
- Title page – title, your name and date

Reports

- Executive summary of main points only, or abstract if outside a business context
- Table of contents showing all headings, subheadings, etc., and page numbers.
- **Introduction**
- **Discussion**
- **Conclusions**
- **Recommendations**
- References
- Appendices (if used)

The order of the sections can vary. Sometimes Conclusions and Recommendations come before the Discussion so that a busy executive can read your key points first; check with your marker which template they would like you to follow.

Language in a report

In every report, the language used should be:

- Factual and clear
- Neutral (no value judgements)
- Impersonal (no personal pronouns)
- Colourless (no similes or metaphors)
- Using key words, headings, sub-headings, bullet points and numbering

Graphics in a report

Graphics can summarise your points, create a powerful impact, and eliminate unnecessary words, so make use of graphics in your report. These include:

- Tables – with columns and rows – label as Table 1, Table 2, etc.
- Figures (graphs, maps, photographs, models, any other graphic that is not a Table) – label as Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.
- Give all graphics a title and state the source as an in-text reference.

Reports

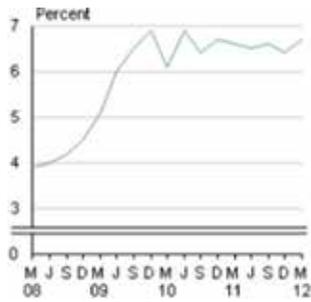


Figure 4. Unemployment rate seasonally adjusted. Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/income-and-work/employment_and_unemployment/HouseholdLabourForceSurvey_HOTPMar12qtr.aspx/

- Don't just place a graphic in the middle of text without explanation; spend a few lines explaining the significance of the graphic so that it becomes an important part of your discussion.



Chapter Seven: Critical Reviews

Critical review of an article

Teachers might use similar terms such as “critically assess”, “critically analyse” or “critically evaluate.” They might also refer to a “critique”, a “critical review” or a “mini literature review” of more than one article.

What does it mean to “be critical”?

Being critical does not mean taking a negative view! Being critical means you demonstrate a questioning mind. You take a total view of a topic and try to see it from all sides before reaching a conclusion. You do not accept what the writer has to say until you have evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the piece and compared it with other writing on the same subject.



These are key points to consider when critiquing articles:

- What are the articles’ strengths?
- What are the articles’ weaknesses?
- What do they add to the existing knowledge about the subject?

Why does a marker set you a critique assignment?

- So you can show you understand basic language, concepts and theories in your study
- So you can test the ideas and theories against the ideas set out in the article
- So you can show your critical skills
- So you can show your ability to communicate your ideas effectively in writing

Useful words for critique writing:

WHO?

- Who is writing this? What is their background and philosophical stance?

WHAT?

- What is the writer actually saying? What assumptions does the writer make? What could other people argue against this point of view? What are its strengths or positive points? What are its weaknesses or negative points?

WHEN?

- When was this piece written? What else was happening in the subject area/in the world at that time?

WHY?

- What was the writer's likely purpose – what were they trying to achieve? Why should I believe what is written – how convincing is the writer's evidence?

WHERE?

- What was the context for this writing? Where does the piece fit with other writers' research and ideas on the topic?

If the article is describing a particular **research project**, ask yourself:

- What was the objective of the research (what were the research questions?) and did the research achieve its objective?
- Did the researcher choose a suitable methodology to achieve their purpose?
- Was the research thorough?
- Did the researcher interpret their research data correctly?
- Were the researcher's conclusions justified on the basis of their findings?
- What were the limitations of the research?

Beginning to write a critique:

- Read the article carefully – more than once
- Briefly summarise the main ideas
- How do the ideas in the article fit with your learning in class?
- Make a list of strengths and weaknesses
- Check the marker's instructions: if they have set a structure to follow, do so; otherwise, plan a strong layout for your ideas.

A suggested logical structure for your critique:

- A brief introduction – give broad background to your topic
- Give a brief summary of the main ideas in the article – what was the writer saying?
- Critique the ideas; this is the major part of your review and you might group the ideas under different subheadings
- Only if there is anything really important to say, and you have spare words, you might critique key aspects of the writing style

- Write a brief conclusion.

Referencing in your critique:

Follow the marker's requirements regarding referencing. If you are critiquing one article only, it is usual to set out all the bibliographical details at the top of the first page, in APA style. Then, if you are quoting from the one article, cite the author's name, the date and the page number (if pages are shown) as in-text references.

If you are including references to other writers, make a References list at the end of the text, following APA style.

If you are critiquing a number of pieces of writing, as in a literature review, build your References list at the end of the critique and also give in-text references.

Chapter Eight: Case Study

What are case studies?

Case studies are “stories” about situations or events. Case studies can be:

- Short or long, and simple or complex
- Fictional, as the writer may be trying to emphasise a particular point
- True accounts, and can include quotes or dialogues from people who are actually involved in the case.



Why use a case study?

Case Studies are useful because:

- They can give students an in-depth understanding or “big picture” view of an organisation, which is broader than what they can gain from reading a text book
- They provide real-life practical examples of situations to give students some practical experience
- They allow students to show their understanding of theories or models, and how to apply them to a real situation.

Analysing cases.

There are several things to consider when analysing a case:

- When you read a case you should analyse, evaluate, critique and synthesise
- Consider how the theories relate to the case: how could you apply them?
- Identify the key issues/problems and the possible causes; consider alternatives
- Look at the case from different perspectives, for example, as a manager, employee, customer, supplier, competitor, government agency, etc.
- Use a tool such as SWOT or STEPP analysis; consider both internal and external factors
- Suggest some possible solutions/recommendations; an action plan with a timeline is useful

Case Study

- There is no right or wrong answer; justify your analysis with evidence.

Case study formats

You might be asked to use different formats when presenting a case study, such as:

- Report
- Essay
- Short answers to specific questions
- Oral presentation
- Group presentation
- An answer(s) to an exam question

Chapter Nine: Literature Review

What is a literature review?

A literature review is basically a summary of key ideas found in the literature on your subject (books, journals, electronic sources, etc.).



A **descriptive literature** review is a very basic form of review; it only describes the material available on the topic; a **critical literature review** is more common – it assesses the usefulness of the literature, makes comparisons, and synthesises many ideas from various sources.

Why write literature reviews?

- To better understand theories, key ideas, debates and research in the field of study
- To compare and evaluate the ideas gathered from different pieces of literature
- To identify how other researchers have researched the topic, and to consider their methodology and interpretation
- To help you define the area that you might research
- To clarify your research objectives and questions
- To help you choose appropriate methodology
- To help you interpret your results.

What do you write a literature review on?

Your teacher might suggest reading material and ask you to base a literature review on that material.

You might be given a topic and be asked to find your own reading material.

Steps for a literature review will involve:

1. Deciding on the topic, which might involve narrowing down a broad topic
2. Finding material relevant to the topic
3. Reading the literature carefully and taking notes on key ideas

Literature Review

4. Developing a structure around key headings which state the most important ideas in the literature (remember, the headings arise from the literature – don't work to some preconceived pattern of headings)
5. Sorting the ideas from the literature into the key headings and thinking about connections between pieces of literature, for example, which writers agree on this idea, and what they disagree about. Look for similarities and patterns in the literature. These could be based around themes, times and common understandings
6. Looking at arguments or debates in the field, and seeing who agrees and disagrees with the key ideas
7. Evaluating the data critically, judging the weaknesses and strengths from all sides.

Writing up your literature review

The structure of the literature review should have three main parts: Introduction, main body, and conclusion. It should also have a References list.

Introduction

The introduction should be brief and general, and may be written up as the final step. It should briefly outline what the main issues or themes are that have been identified from the research topic, and why they are significant. The introduction should also explain the content, structure and scope of the literature review.

Main body

The main body should be divided up into sections that are based on the key themes or categories that you have identified from the literature. Each section may have subheadings, and should be paragraphed accordingly. You may need a summary at the end of each section, to show the connection between paragraphs.

Conclusion.

The conclusion should have three parts: highlight the main points that you have identified from the literature; identify any gaps that you have found in the literature; and, suggest the possibility of further research on the topic.

The References list.

The References list must include every source cited in your writing, according to the APA guidelines (refer to Chapter 4).

Chapter Ten: Tricky grammar & tricky words

Ambiguity

There is always the chance that the reader will misunderstand what you have said. To limit this possibility, look hard at what you have written to see if your words could carry a different meaning to the one you intended; for example:

"The company only realised a profit after four years" (they realised it but didn't pay out?) or

"The company realised a profit only after four years" (it took the company four long years to realise profit?), or

"The company realised a profit after only four years" (they realised the profit in a reasonably short time?).

Try to see your writing from the reader's point of view.



Transitional words & phrases

Certain words and phrases can link sentences and even paragraphs so that your ideas flow more smoothly. Try to use different transitional terms to make your writing interesting. Two ways in which we most commonly use transitions are:

- To add to the idea: **"Another** advantage of stock rotation is..."; A **second** strategy for this firm to gain competitive advantage would be..."
- To move in a different direction: **Regardless of the benefits of wage fixing...**"; "The company has become dominant in the NZ market in the last decade; **however**, it has made limited gains in the international marketplace."

Weak verbs

Verbs control the strength of an English sentence because they convey precise meaning; for example, think about the different meaning conveyed by each of these verbs:

Dr Maelin found a genetic link to breast cancer. Dr Maelin discovered a genetic link to breast cancer. Dr Maelin identified a genetic link to breast cancer.

Tricky grammar and tricky words

Three weak verb families are the **do**, **have** and **get** families. Try to find a more vivid verb to replace these words. For example:

To **do** research = to **carry out** or to **conduct** research.

Avoiding common errors in written English

Research shows that people make only a limited number of errors in their writing but that they make the same errors over and over again.

Look at the errors to learn how to eliminate them from your own writing.

The 22 most common errors



Error 1: Sentence fragments

Explanation: Sentence fragments are sentences which lack a main subject and verb and so they do not make complete sense on their own.

Examples of sentence fragments:

Walking across the zebra crossing towards the Waikato Management School. Who was doing this? This is not a full sentence because there is a missing subject and an incomplete verb. Correction: **Melissa was** walking across the zebra crossing towards the Waikato Management School.

I don't watch that programme. **Because it's not funny.**

The phrase beginning "Because..." is incomplete; it needs to be part of the first sentence.

Correction: I don't watch that programme because it's not funny.

Because I'm allergic to nuts, I can't eat nut chocolate.

For more help with understanding sentence fragments, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/fragments.htm>

Error 2: Run-on sentences and comma splices

Explanation: Whereas fragments are **incomplete** sentences, **run-on sentences** contain two or more **inadequately** joined sentences. You may, for example, have used a comma to join the sentence parts (i.e., a comma splice) when a stronger piece of punctuation was needed.

Avoiding common errors in written English

Examples of run-on sentences:

Three of my friends are studying in Wellington **one is at Victoria University and two are at Massey**. Correction: Two of my friends are studying in Wellington. One is at Victoria University and two are at Massey. **OR** Two of my friends are studying in Wellington; one is at Victoria University and two are at Massey.

Waikato Management School students come from a wide variety of countries **for example many of them come from Asian countries**.

Correction: Waikato Management School students come from a wide variety of countries; for example, many of them come from Asian countries. **OR** Waikato Management School students come from a wide variety of countries. For example, many of the WMS students come from Asian countries.

For more help with understanding run-on sentences, go to

- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/runons.htm>
- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/runons.htm#splice>

Error 3: Non-parallel construction

Explanation: When you create a list of points within a sentence, or when you use bullet points, it is important that all the elements in the list share a “**parallel**” grammatical structure (**parallelism**). For example, if you express the first idea in your list as a **noun**, then all the other ideas within that list should also be expressed as **nouns**.

Example of a lack of parallel construction:

Financial reports should have five important characteristics: reliability, relevance, **be comparable**, **easy to understand**, and materiality.

Corrected parallel sentence:

Financial reports should be: reliable, relevant, comparable, easy to understand and material.

For more help with understanding parallel construction, go to

- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm>

Error 4: Lack of subject-verb agreement

Explanation:

The subject and verb in a sentence must **agree in number**. Hence, if the **subject** of your sentence is **singular** e.g., "the boy", the **verb** must also be **singular** e.g., "laughs".

If the **subject** of your sentence is **plural** e. g., "the girls", the **verb** must also be in the **plural** form e.g., "laugh". In other words, the subject and verb must "agree". If they do not agree, they appear to the reader to be fighting each other and this lack of agreement interferes with the reader's ability to understand what you have written.

Example of lack of subject-verb agreement:

The **leftovers** from the meal **was** scattered all over the restaurant table.

Corrected sentence: subject-verb agreement:

The leftovers from the meal **were** scattered all over the restaurant table.

For more help with understanding subject-verb agreement, go to

» http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/sv_agr.htm

Error 5: Problems with "the" or "a" / "an"

Explanation: Although native speakers of English rarely have problems with the correct usage of the words "the" and "a" / "an", non-native speakers can find these words problematic. In particular, it is important to understand how the inclusion or omission of "**the**" can affect the **meaning** of what you write.

For more help with understanding the correct use of "the" or "a" / "an", go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/determiners/determiners.htm>

Error 6: Misrelated participles/dangling modifiers

Explanation: Using words like "working" and "based on" can help to make your writing flow smoothly. However, you must carefully construct your sentences when you use such modifiers (past and present participles). If the modifier does not relate correctly to the word it modifies, you will create a **dangling modifier** and probably confuse your reader. Look at the example below:

Avoiding common errors in written English

Example of a dangling modifier:

Based on the survey, the committee developed a plan.

This sentence actually means that **the committee** was **based on** the **survey**, which is impossible. The sentence, needs to be constructed differently to make good sense, for example:

The committee developed a plan [which was] based on the survey.

Here it is clear that the plan was based on the survey, an idea that makes perfectly good sense.

For more help with understanding misrelated participles/dangling modifiers, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/modifiers.htm#danglers>

Error 7: Unnecessary shift in verb tense

Explanation: There needs to be a logical reason for any shift in verb tenses and so you should avoid moving from the past to the present tense or vice versa for no good reason.

Example of faulty verb sequence:

Soap **cleans** well but I **preferred** body wash.

Corrected sentence:

Soap cleans well but I prefer body wash.

Here the mixing of present and past tenses would confuse your reader.

For more help with understanding shift in verb tense, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/consistency.htm>

Error 8: Faulty comparison

Explanation: You need to ensure that any comparisons you make compare **similar** things. You should **not**, for example, write:

This year's profits were higher than **last year**.

Because you are, in fact, comparing "profits" with "year", two things which are not similar.

Avoiding common errors in written English

You could, however, write

This year's profits were higher than **last year's profits** [were].

or **This year's profits** were higher than **last year's**.

or **This year's profits** were higher than **last year's were**.

If you choose the second or third construction, you must take great care to add the **apostrophe** in the right place.

Error 9: Lack of pronoun agreement

Explanation: Many people find it hard to use pronoun agreement correctly. For example, they write sentences like "**Every company** should have **their** own policies on HR." However, this construction is wrong because "every company" is a singular form and "their" is a plural form. As a result, the two words do not "agree".

Correct sentence: "**Every company** should have **its** own policies on HR."

For more help with understanding pronoun agreement, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns.htm>

Error 10: Unnecessary shift of grammatical person

Explanation: You need to be careful not to shift from one grammatical "person" to another. If, for example, you begin your sentence with "we", do **not** then shift to "you", as in the sentence below:

When **we** have a heavy workload, **you** tend to stay late at work.

The sentence should state:

When **we** have a heavy workload, **we** tend to stay late at work.

Error 11: Misuse of a demonstrative pronoun

Explanation: The demonstrative pronouns "this", "that", "these", and "those", should refer back to nouns. Demonstrative pronouns should not be used to refer back to **whole sentences** or **clauses**. From your writing, it should be clear to the reader what "this", "that", "these" or "those" refer to, for example "That factory..." "These changes..." etc.

Avoiding common errors in written English

For more help with understanding the correct use of the demonstrative pronoun, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns1.htm#demonstrative>

Error 12: Misuse of a reflexive pronoun

Explanation: Confusion often arises over the correct use of the reflexive pronouns: "*myself*", "*yourself*", "*himself*", "*herself*", "*itself*", "*ourselves*", "*yourselves*", "*themselves*". It is not, for example, correct to write:

The manager and **myself** attended the meeting.

The correct word to use here is "I", but some people are unsure whether to use "I" or "me" (See Error 13 below.) and so they use "myself" instead.

For more help with understanding the correct use of reflexive pronouns, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns1.htm#reflexive>

Error 13: Confusion over pronoun case

Explanation: Many people are unsure about the rules governing "case" in English. The case of a pronoun changes depending on whether the word is the subject or the object of a verb. For example, some people do not know whether it is correct to write:

The manager and **me** went to the meeting.

or

The manager and **I** went to the meeting.

If you remove the other person from the statement, you would never say, "~~The manager and~~ Me went to the meeting." Here, "I" forms the subject of the sentence and is doing the action together with "the manager".

The manager and **I** went to the meeting.

In this sentence – "The manager asked me to prepare an agenda for the meeting" – the manager is the subject and is doing the action (asked) to me, so me is the object in this sentence.

For more help with understanding the correct use of pronoun case, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/cases.htm>

Error 14: Vague, ambiguous or incorrect pronoun use

Explanation: It is important that a pronoun has a **clear** and **unambiguous** antecedent [word to which it refers]. Your reader must be clear what "it" or "they" refer to; in very poor writing "it" could refer to several things but only one will be your intended meaning. For example, in the sentence "Jason's car could not be repaired because the insurance assessor hadn't approved the repair, and it caused huge problems for Jason", the pronoun "it" could refer to the fact that the car hadn't been repaired, or it could refer to the fact that the insurance assessor hadn't given approval.

For more help with understanding pronouns go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns1.htm>

Error 15: Problems with "there are " or "it is" at the beginning of a sentence

Explanation: A sentence needs a clear subject and so beginning a sentence with **vague** terms such as "there are" or "it is" can confuse your reader. Avoid using "There is", "There were", "There was" and "There are" at the beginning of sentences – make the "is", "was", "are" or "were" the main verb in your sentence; for example "There is a large cinema complex in the mall" becomes "A large cinema complex **is (is situated)** in the mall."

Error 16: Problems with prepositions

Explanation: If you are a non-native speaker of English, you may find it hard to choose the correct preposition to convey your intended meaning. Unfortunately, there are no simple rules to ensure that you always choose the right preposition. You can improve your understanding of how native speakers of English use prepositions by **reading** widely and **listening** to how people use them when they speak.

However, native speakers also sometimes misuse prepositions by confusing them with conjunctions.

For more help with the correct use of prepositions, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/prepositions.htm>

Error 17: Wrong word/confusables

Explanation: Sometimes you may confuse the meaning of words which sound similar, or you may use words without fully understanding their meaning. Use a dictionary whenever possible to check both familiar and unfamiliar words.

For more help with the word choice/confusables, go to

Avoiding common errors in written English

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious.htm>

Also, read the later section on Confusable words.

Error 18: Misspelling

It is important to spell words correctly to ensure that your reader understands your intended meaning. People most often misspell familiar words through force of habit so always check the spelling and meaning of words. Also, two major spelling systems exist for English: the British and the American systems. You must use one system **consistently**. In other words, do not spell "organisation" with an "s" in one sentence and then with a "z" in the next.

N.B. The University of Waikato expects you to use the **British** spelling system, except when you are quoting directly from a source which uses American spelling.

For more help with spelling, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/spelling.htm>

Error 19: Misuse of the apostrophe

Explanation: Misuse of the apostrophe is a deeply engrained problem which you must eliminate from your writing if you want people to see you as well-educated. Sometimes people add an apostrophe when it is not required, and sometimes they leave it out when it is required. It is important to learn the rules which apply to the use of the apostrophe in English and it is particularly important that you understand the difference between "its" and "it's".

For more help on the correct use of the apostrophe, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/apostrophe.htm>

Error 20: Misuse of a comma or pair of commas

Explanation: It is important to use commas correctly as they are a way of ensuring that your meaning is clear to your reader. A large number of rules apply to the use of commas in written English and you need to follow them.

For more help with understanding the correct use of commas, go to

» <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/commas.htm>

Error 21: Incorrect use of a colon or semicolon

Explanation: It is important to know how to use punctuation marks such as colons and semi-colons, particularly in business writing. These punctuation marks help to join or separate

Avoiding common errors in written English

ideas within sentences so that your reader can understand what you have written.

For more help with understanding the correct use of punctuation marks, go to

- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/semicolon.htm>
- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/colon.htm>

Error 22: Misuse or unnecessary use of capital letters

Explanation: You need to have a good reason to use a capital letter in English, but many people scatter them through their writing simply because they think that makes particular ideas important.

Three of the most common uses of capital letters (also called upper case letters) are at the beginning of a sentence (*Today is a day of meetings.*), at the beginning of reported speech (*Mario said, "This situation is intolerable!"*), and for proper nouns which name people, days and months, countries, places, organisations, etc. (*New Zealanders, Japanese culture, Dr Ellen Berryman, Tower Insurance, Wednesday, November*)

Note that the seasons do not take capitals – autumn, winter, spring, summer

For more help with the correct use of capital letters, go to

- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/capitals.htm>

Confusables & appropriate word choices

Introduction

Writers often confuse English words that sound alike but have quite different meanings. Some of the most commonly confused words are listed below. The sentences in italics give examples of how we use these words. The word list in smaller print shows words made from these root words.

This list uses the following abbreviations for parts of speech:

n = noun, v = verb, adj = adjective, pro = pronoun, prep = preposition,

con = conjunction, adv = adverb

If you are unsure of the meaning of any of the words used in these explanations, you should check a good English dictionary or thesaurus.

accept (v) /except (prep, con, sometimes v) acceptance, acceptable, exception, exceptionable

I accept your kind invitation. (I am pleased to receive your invitation)

All the women except Marie sat the exam; Marie was in hospital. In this sentence "except" is a preposition.

Everyone will receive a raise except those who received a raise last month. (Most people will receive a raise but not those who received a raise last month). In this sentence "except" is used as a preposition.

access (n or v) /assess (v) accession, accessible, inaccessible, assessment, assessor, assessable

I cannot access my mailbox because I have forgotten my password. (I cannot reach or get to my mailbox). Here "access" is used as a verb.

This door gives us access to the garden. (This door gives us a way to reach the garden.) Here "access" is used as a noun.

Confusables & appropriate word choices

The examiner must assess the assignments and give a grade to each assignment. (The examiner will decide the value of each assignment.)

access (n or v) – see above / **excess (n or adj)** excessive, exceed; access -see above

You will need to pay a penalty charge if you have excess luggage. (excess = extra, more than needed or allowed, too much). Here "excess" is used as an adjective.

They ate as much food as they could, and the excess was given away. Here "excess" is used as a noun.

adverse (adj) / averse (adj) adversity, adversary, aversion, avert

The adverse weather led to the cancellation of the games. (The unfavourable weather led to the cancellation of the games.)

The medication had an adverse effect, making the patient even sicker. (The medicine had a bad effect on the patient.)

Matiu is averse to making any changes. (Matiu does not want to make any changes.)

advice (n) /advise (v) advisor, advisory, advisable, inadvisable

The directors can ask their lawyer for advice. (They can ask their lawyer for suggestions.)

She will advise them what they should do. (She will suggest what they might do.)

affect (v) /effect (n, sometimes v) effectual, effective, ineffective, effectively

Alcohol and drugs affect humans' ability to drive safely. (Alcohol and drugs influence humans' ability to drive safely.)

The effect of bleach is to whiten fabrics. (The way in which bleach acts on fabrics is to whiten them.) Here "effect" is used as a noun.

The new laws will effect a change in the tax system. (The new laws will bring about or cause a change in the tax system). Here "effect" is used as a verb.

allude (v) /elude (v) allusion, elusive, elusion

Later in my speech I will allude to the costs involved in this proposal. (Later in my speech I will refer to the costs involved in this proposal).

Confusables & appropriate word choices

The criminal managed to elude the police for some days. (The criminal managed to avoid capture by the police for some days).

allusion (n) see "allude" above / **illusion (n)** illusory

The theatre lights created the illusion of moonlight. (The theatre lights created the unreal impression of moonlight).

I was under the illusion that our new manager had come from Dunedin. (I had the mistaken idea that our new manager had come from Dunedin).

alternate (v or adj) /alternative alternation, alternately, alternatively

The theatre manager will alternate the films shown at the cinema. (The theatre manager will change the films shown at the cinema). "Alternate" is usually used as a verb.

Every alternate post was painted yellow. (Every second post in a row of posts was painted yellow). Here "alternate" is used as an adjective.

Some rock musicians lead an alternative lifestyle. (Some rock musicians lead an unconventional lifestyle.) Here the word is used as an adjective.

Unable to take 201 in B Semester, Anne looked for an alternative paper. (Unable to take 201 in B Semester, Anne looked for another option). Here the word is used as a noun.

among (prep) /between (prep)

Frano had to choose between two options: to play rugby or to attend his sister's wedding. (Frano had two options to choose from.)

All the team members talked among themselves. (Here, among tells us that there were more than two members in the team.)

amount (n) /number (n or v) numerous, innumerable, amount to (= verb)

A small amount of timber was needed to build the shed. (A small quantity of timber was needed...).

The fundraiser raised a large amount of money to buy equipment for the school. (The fundraiser raised a large sum of money....) Amount is used for uncountable quantity.

The sum collected for the charity amounted to \$758 000. (The amount collected for the charity came to a total of \$758 000).

Confusables & appropriate word choices

Only a small number of people – 144 - bought tickets for the concert. (Not many people bought tickets for the concert.)

The Watsons have increased the number of cows on their farm from 950 to 1500. **Number is used for countable quantity.**

analysis (n) /analyse (v) analyst, analyses (the present verb form) analyses (the plural of analysis), analytical, analytically, non-analytical

Chemical analysis showed high levels of chlorine in the tap water. (Chemical tests showed high levels of chlorine in the tap water).

Kim is ready to make an analysis of her data. (Kim is ready to make sense of her data).

Chemists will analyse the water to check lead levels. (Chemists will conduct tests on the water to check lead levels).

appraise (v) /apprise (v) appraisal

An insurance assessor will appraise the value of the house. (An insurance assessor will estimate the value of the house).

Please apprise your client that she will need to sign the contract before 4:00 p.m. (Please inform your client that....)

assent (n or v) /ascent (n) ascend, ascension

Do you assent to this arrangement? (Do you agree with this arrangement?)

Will you give your assent to this arrangement? (Will you give your approval to this arrangement?). In the first sentence, "assent" is used as a verb; in the second sentence, "assent" is used as a noun.

The steep ascent to the top of the hill is exhausting for elderly people. (The steep climb to the top of the hill....)

complement (v or n)/ compliment (v or n) complementary complimentary

The full complement of soldiers has now arrived from Australia. (The full quota of soldiers has now arrived from Australia). Ice cream is a delicious complement to apple pie. (Ice cream is a delicious accompaniment to apple pie). In both these sentences "complement" is used as a noun

Confusables & appropriate word choices

Sharon chose red flowers to complement her black dress. (Sharon chose red flowers to go with or to complete her black dress.) Here "complement" is used as a verb.

James complimented his partner on the delicious meal. (James said nice things about the delicious meal to his partner.) Here "complimented" is used as a verb.

Tara received many compliments about her new hairstyle. (Tara received many nice comments about her new hairstyle). Here "compliments" is used as a noun.

coarse (adj) / course (n, sometimes v) coarsely, coarseness

The coarse material of her woollen skirt felt scratchy. (The rough material of her woollen skirt felt scratchy). Coarse is an adjective meaning rough or unprocessed (coarse language, coarse features, coarse food, coarse behaviour, etc.)

Programme advisers can help you to plan your course. (Programme advisers can help you to plan your study programme). In the course of the semester Pete completed 15 assignments. (In the whole of the semester Pete....). The horses raced around the course. (The horses raced around the track). In these sentences, course is a noun.

The Waikato River courses through the centre of Hamilton City. (The Waikato River flows through the centre of Hamilton City.) Here "course" is used as a verb.

council (n) / counsel (n or v) councillor, counsellor, counselling, counselled

The university council meets throughout the year. (The university governing body meets throughout the year).

The Hamilton City Council is elected by city rate payers. (The governing body of Hamilton city is elected by city rate payers.)

Susan ignored her mother's counsel. (Susan ignored her mother's advice). Here "counsel" is used as a noun.

Doctors are able to counsel patients about treating health problems. (Doctors are able to give patients advice about treating health problems).

credible (adj) / credulous (adj) / creditable (adj) credibly, credibility, incredible, credulously, incredulous, incredulously, creditably

The captain gave a credible explanation for the team's loss. (The captain gave a believable explanation for the team's loss).

Confusables & appropriate word choices

Hera was so credulous that she believed all of Tim's lies. (Hera was so easily fooled that she believed all of Tim's lies).

Mike's creditable performance in his undergraduate study earned him a scholarship. (Mike's very good performance in his undergraduate study earned him a scholarship.)

criteria (n) /criterion (n)

Criterion is the singular noun, while criteria is the plural form.

To help them select the best candidate, the appointments committee used several criteria: skills, experience, personality and qualifications. (The appointments committee used several measures: skills, experience....)

Ms Zostra felt that price was the most important criterion when choosing a new car. (Ms Zostra felt that price was the most important consideration when choosing a new car.)

defuse (v) /diffuse (adj or v) diffusion

The manager defused the difficult situation by apologising to the upset client. (The manager reduced tension in the difficult situation by apologising to the upset client).

The diffuse branch stores in smaller cities are controlled from head office. (The spread-out branch stores in smaller cities are controlled from head office). Professor Duncan felt the student's essay was too diffuse. (Professor Duncan felt the student's essay was too wordy). Here "diffuse" is used as an adjective.

It is important to diffuse information about the product to all retailers. (It is important to distribute information about the product to all retailers). Here "diffuse" is used as a verb.

delusion (n) /illusion (n) - See allusion/illusion above; delude, deluded, delusive

Your idea that you will become the CEO of this company is a delusion. (Your idea that you will become the CEO of this company is a seriously mistaken notion).

deprecate (v) /depreciate (v) deprecation, deprecatory, depreciation, depreciatory non-depreciation

The student president deprecated the university's decision to raise all student fees. (The student president criticised the university's decision to raise all student fees).

As they become older, cars usually depreciate in value. (As they become older, cars usually decrease in value).

devise (v) / device (n)

The marketing group met to devise a launch for the new product. (The marketing group met to plan a launch for the new product).

A key is a device for opening a lock. (A key is a tool for opening a lock).

discreet / (adj) discrete (adj) discreetly, discretion, discretionary, non-discretionary, discretely

Sami acted in a discreet manner so that her client did not feel offended. (Sami acted in a tactful manner so that her client did not feel offended).

Pancakes are made by combining several discrete ingredients: sugar, eggs, butter and flour. (Pancakes are made by combining several separate ingredients: sugar, eggs, butter and flour).

disinterested (adj) / uninterested (adj)

As a disinterested individual, he was happy to chair the shareholders' meeting. (As someone who had no financial interest in the company, he was happy to chair the shareholders' meeting).

Being uninterested in watching rugby, Meilani went to bed when the game came on television. (Feeling no excitement or interest in watching rugby, Meilani went to bed when the game came on television),

dissent (v or n) / descent (n) dissension, dissenting, dissenter, non-dissenting, descend, descending

Several board members dissented with the chairperson's proposal. (Several board members opposed the chairperson's proposal). Here "dissented" is used as a verb.

Most members of the jury felt the defendant was guilty but one jury member expressed her dissent with this conclusion. (Most members of the jury felt the defendant was guilty but one jury member expressed her disagreement with this conclusion). Here "dissent" is used as a noun.

To make the descent from the top of the tower you must walk down 480 steps. (To make the trip down from the top of the tower, you must walk down 480 steps.)

draft (n or v) / draught (n or adj) drafted, draughtsman, draughty

The planner produced a draft for the new building. (The planner produced a suggested design for the new building). Here, "draft" is a noun.

Confusables & appropriate word choices

The architect drafted a design for the building. (The architect drew up a first stage design for the building). It took them a long time to draft a new constitution. Here "draft" is used as a verb.

The door slammed shut as a cold draught of wind blew through the room. (The door slammed shut as a cold gust of wind blew through the room). Here, draught is a noun.

The **draught horse** pulled a wagon loaded with barrels of **draught beer**.

In these sentences, draught is used twice to differentiate the type of beer

(draught beer is drawn from a tap, not from a bottle) and the type of horse (a draught horse is a generic name for breeds that are particularly strong and used for heavy work). "draught beer" and "draught horse" are called compound nouns

draw (v or n) /drawer (n)

I will draw you a map of the central city. Here "draw" is used as a verb.

A draw was held to find who had won the raffle. (A selection was held to find who had won the raffle.) Here "draw" is used as a noun.

The documents are in the top drawer of the desk. (The documents are in the top pullout compartment of the desk.)

effective/ efficient/ efficacious (all adj)

Can you find the most effective way to solve this problem? (Can you find the best way to solve this problem?)

An efficient method saves time and money. (The best way to do something saves time and money.)

The doctors think that this medicine is efficacious. (The doctors think that the medicine would heal the patient.)

elicit/ (v) illicit ((adj) illicitly

A market survey could be used to elicit consumers' opinions about a product. (A market survey could be used to find out consumers' opinions about a product.)

It would be unethical for a financial adviser to engage in illicit financial dealings. (It would be unethical for a financial adviser to engage in illegal financial dealings.)

Confusables & appropriate word choices

eminent (adj) / imminent (adj) eminently, eminence, imminently, imminence

The speaker at the graduation was an eminent lawyer. (The speaker at the graduation was a well-known lawyer.)

Because bad weather looked imminent, they hurried back to the car. (Because bad weather looked likely, they hurried back to the car.)

except (v, prep or con) / expect (v) expectation

Do you expect your friend to be at the lecture? (So you think your friend will be at the lecture)

fewer (adj) / less (adj)

few and fewer are used for countable items; less is used for uncountable items.

Fewer people are getting married before the age of 25. (Not so many people are getting married before the age of 25.)

I have fewer problems with my new computer than I had with my old model. (I don't have as many problems with my new computer as I had with my old model.)

This car consumes less petrol than the older model did. (This car does not consume as much petrol as the older model did.)

New Zealanders drink less vodka than Russians do. (New Zealanders do not drink as much vodka as Russians do.)

flare (n or v) / flair (n)

The search and rescue team looked for any flare sent up by the lost sailors. (The team looked for a bright distress signal sent up by the lost sailors.)

As the wind blew the ashes of the fire, new flames flared up. (As the wind blew the ashes of the fire, new flames appeared.)

Asha has a flair for fashion design. (Asha has a talent for fashion design.)

formally (adv) / formerly (adv) formal, informal, informally, former

The suggestion will be formally considered at next week's meeting. (The suggestion will be seriously considered at next week's meeting.)

Confusables & appropriate word choices

She was formerly the head of Nursing Studies at Massey University but is now retired. (She was previously the head of Nursing Studies at Massey University but is now retired.)

its (pro) / it's (pro + v) = it is/it has

The dog licked its paw.

It's time to turn the clocks forward for Daylight Saving. (It is time to turn the clocks forward for Daylight Saving.)

It's been ages since we visited you. (It has been ages since we visited you.)

later / latter latterly

Because Brian wanted to finish the report before he left work, he caught a later train home.

Sheila looked at apartments in Parnell and Newmarket; she was attracted by the great shopping in the latter suburb. (Sheila looked at apartments in Parnell and Newmarket; she was attracted by the great shopping in the second town.)

lend (v) / loan (n) / borrow (v) lender, lent, borrowed, borrower

Please lend me your car so that I can meet my friends at the airport.

Thank you very much for the loan of your car.

Students may borrow material from the university library for a limited period.

loath (adj) / loathe (v) loathsome

They were loath to sign the contract until they knew they had the finance (They were reluctant to sign the contract until they knew they had the finance.)

I loathe the taste of broccoli. (I hate the taste of broccoli.)

moral (n or adj) / morale (n) immoral, morality, amoral

"Moral" relates to ethics, to our sense of right or wrong; "morale" relates to a positive feeling in an individual or in a group.

If a story has a moral, it is intended to teach us an important lesson. The moral of this story is we need to help other people who are experiencing difficulties. (If the story has an important message, it is intended to teach us an important lesson.) The important understanding we

Confusables & appropriate word choices

can learn from this story is to help other people who are experiencing difficulties.) In these sentences “moral” is used as a noun.

A moral decision involves choices between good and bad outcomes. (An ethical decision involves choices between good and bad outcomes.) Here “moral” is used as an adjective.

The staff barbecue was a good way to improve staff morale after such a difficult time. (The staff barbecue was a good way to help staff to feel more positive after such a difficult time.)

pedal (n or v) / peddle (v) pedalled peddler

If you press on the small foot pedal, the machine will start up. Here “pedal” is used as a noun.

If you pedal very quickly, the wheel will also spin very fast. Here “pedal” is used as a verb.

My grandfather used to peddle goods from door to door. (My grandfather used to sell goods from door to door.)

He was arrested by police for attempting to peddle illegal drugs. (He was arrested by police for trying to sell illegal drugs.)

personal (adj) / personnel (n) personally, impersonal, impersonally

All personal property should have the owner’s name on it. (All property that belongs to an individual should have the owner’s name on it.)

All the personnel in that department have overseas experience. (All the staff in that department have overseas experience.)

practical (adj, sometimes n in everyday language) / practicable (adj) impractical, impracticable

The team leader preferred practical suggestions to theoretical discussion. (The team leader preferred suggestions that were sensible and immediately useful.)

The trainee spent three weeks in a factory on a practical. (The trainee spent three weeks in a factory gaining real-life experience.)

The plan was not practicable because there were no funds available. (It was not possible to put the plan into action because there were no funds available.)

practice (n) / practise (v) practitioner, practising, non-practising, unpractised, practised, practical

Confusables & appropriate word choices

The dental practice and the law practice stood side by side on the main street. (The dental office and the law firm stood side by side on the main street.)

Hours of practice made them the best competitors in the case competition. (Hours of training made them the best competitors in the case competition.) In these sentences “practice” is used as a noun.

She practises as a vet in Wellington. (She works as a vet in Wellington.)

The group members practised until they could give a perfect presentation. (The group members trained repeatedly until they could give a perfect presentation.)

Here “practises” and “practised” are used as verbs.

prescribe (v) / proscribe (v) prescription, proscription – see below

Your doctor might prescribe antibiotics for you. (Your doctor might write out a script for the pharmacist to give you some antibiotics.)

New Zealand's commercial laws proscribe insider trading. (New Zealand's commercial laws make insider trading illegal.)

prescription (n) / proscription (n)

Most prescriptions for healthy living include healthy diet and adequate exercise. (Most advisory outlines for healthy living include healthy diet and adequate exercise.)

There is a proscription against bringing animals into the country unless they have been quarantined first. (There is a ban against bringing animals into the country unless they have been quarantined first.)

principal (n or adj) / principle (n) principled, unprincipled, principally

The school principal welcomed all new students. (The head of the school welcomed all new students.)

He is one of the principals in the firm. (He is one of the senior partners in the firm.)

Here “principal” is used as a noun.

Patient comfort is a nurse's principal concern. (Patient comfort is a nurse's main concern.)

His principal aim seems to be making lots of money. (His main aim seems to be making lots

Confusables & appropriate word choices

of money.)

Here "principal" is used as an adjective.

Democracy is a principle valued in many countries. (Democracy is a key idea valued in many countries.)

raise (v or n) / rise (v or n)

They used a tractor to raise the van out of the ditch. (They used a tractor to lift the van up out of the ditch.) Here "raise" is used as a verb.

Several employees asked for a salary raise. (Several employees asked for a salary increase.) Here "raise" is used as a noun.

The sun will rise at 5:55a.m. (The sun will come up at 5:55 a.m.) Here "rise" is used as a verb.

There has been a rise in the number of immigrants to Australia. (There has been an increase in the number of immigrants to Australia.) Here "rise" is used as a noun.

rational (adj) / rationale (n) irrational, rationally, irrationally, rationalise

After considering all the facts, the committee made a rational decision. (After considering all the facts, the committee made a decision that was sensible.)

Competition from rival products provided the rationale for reducing the cost of our toothpaste. (Competition from rival products provided a reason for reducing the cost of our toothpaste.)

register (v or n) / registrar (n) register, unregistered, registry, registration

All runners must register before the race. (All runners must put their names down before the race.) Here "register" is used as a verb.

Please write your name in the register. (Please write your name in the list.) Here "register" is used as a noun.

A new university registrar has been appointed. (A new university record keeper has been appointed.)

rain (n or v) / reign (n or v) / rein (n or v)

Rain fell during the game, making the field slippery. Here "rain" is used as a noun.

Confusables & appropriate word choices

It could rain this afternoon. Here "rain" is used as a verb.

The emperor's reign lasted for 18 years. (The emperor's period in power lasted for 18 years.) Here "reign" is used as a noun.

Queen Victoria reigned for over 60 years. (Queen Victoria exercised power for over 60 years.) Here "reigned" is used as a verb.

A leather rein is used to control a horse. Here "rein" is used as a noun.

The chairman reined in the speaker who had talked for too long. (The chairman controlled the speaker who had talked for too long.) Here "reined" is used as a verb with the preposition "in".

role (n) / roll (n or v) unroll

Ms Patel's role is to manage the local office. (Ms Patel's job is to manage the local office.)

Who played the leading role in that movie? (Who played the leading part in that movie?)

A roll was taken of all those who attended the meeting. (A list was made of all those who attended the meeting.) *Katy ate a bread roll with her soup.* In these sentences "roll" is used as a noun.

Please roll up the charts. Here "roll" is used as a verb.

sought (v) / sort (v or n) "sought" is the past participle of the root verb "seek", unsought, sorted, unsorted

For three months the directors sought a new CEO. (For three months the directors searched for a new CEO.)

During her job appraisal, Karina sought a pay increase. (During her job appraisal, Karina tried to gain a pay increase.)

After sorting the responses, the secretary put them into folders. (The secretary grouped the responses and then put them into folders.) Here "sorting" is a verb.

Customers enjoy this sort of advertisement. (Customers enjoy this kind of advertisement.) Here "sort" is used as a noun.

stationary (adj) / stationery (n) non-stationary

Confusables & appropriate word choices

I hurried to catch the bus which was stationary at the bus stop. (I hurried to catch the bus which was standing still at the bus stop.)

The office administrator ordered stationery, including paper for the printers, pens and staples. (The office administrator ordered writing and office supplies, including paper for the printers, pens and staples.)

there (adv) / their (pro) / they're (pro + v = they are)

Please put the furniture over there.

Italians are voting for their new prime minister.

They're planning a holiday in Hawaii.

to (prep) / too (adv) / two (n)

He travelled with his wife to Argentina.

The parcel was too heavy for her to lift easily. I was too late to catch the plane.

Two heads are better than one! Two babies born at the same time to the same mother are called twins.

were (verb) / we're (pro + v = we are) / where (adv)

I was living in Auckland; they were living in Hamilton.

We're all living in Rotorua now.

Please tell me where I can buy a new fishing rod. Where is the baby?

weather (n) / whether (con)

It is difficult to dry clothes during wet weather.

She asked her employer whether she could take time off to go to the dentist. (She asked her employer if she could take time off to go to the dentist.)

who (pro) / whom (pro) "whom" is being used less often in modern usage; when used, "whom" often takes a preposition such as "with", "by", "for" and so on

Do you know who is playing the piano? Who has been here today?

Confusables & appropriate word choices

To **whom** did you give your report? For **whom** did you write the report? With **whom** were you speaking? By **whom** was this picture painted?

who's (pro + v = who is or who has / whose (pro) = who does it belong to

Who's coming to the rugby game tonight? (= Who is coming to the rugby game tonight.)

The person who's won the prize is Caroline. (The person who has won the prize is Caroline.)

Whose car is that? (Who owns that car? = a sense of belonging to)

The neighbour whose house was burgled has reported the theft to the police.

More useful online information about common confusables can be found on the links below;

- » http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious/notorious_frames.htm
- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious.htm>
- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious2.htm>
- » <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/notorious2.htm#quizzes>
- » <http://www.wsu.edu/%7Ebrians/errors/advice.html>

Useful references for writing

All of these titles are available from the university library.

Emerson, L. (2009). *Writing guidelines for business students*. South Melbourne, Victoria: Cengage Learning.

Manalo, E., Wong-Toi, G., & Bartlett-Trafford, J. (2009). *The business of writing: Written communication skills for business students*. (3rd ed.). North Shore, NZ: Pearson, Prentice Hall, 2009.

Perrin, R. (2012). *Pocket guide to APA style* (4th ed.). Boston, MA Wadsworth: Cengage Learning

Summers, J. & Smith, B. (2010). *Communication skills handbook*. Milton, Queensland: John Wiley & Sons.

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Hot tips on proofreading

1. Read your writing aloud. Pronounce each word carefully, checking for typing errors or words accidentally left out. Look at every letter of every word. Look at word endings.
2. If using a computer, try reading off the screen, one line at a time, before moving to the next line. Use the cursor to highlight each word to help you concentrate.
3. It helps to enlarge the size of the font just for proofreading.
4. Before making changes on-screen print a hard copy to identify errors in spacing, spelling, and correctness.
5. If proofreading a printed copy, use a ruler, or place your finger under the word to help to focus on one word at a time
6. Ask a friend, classmate or colleague to read over the piece.
7. Double-check the spelling of all names, and check the accuracy of dates, costs, quotations, references, etc.
8. Leave some time before you start proofreading the piece of writing. If you have only just finished writing, you might be too tired to see any errors; a break allows you to proof-read with a fresh pair of eyes.
9. Use any spell-check or grammar-check aids on your computer, as well as dictionaries, a thesaurus and any other grammar or referencing aids that you have access to.





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