

STUDYING AT UWS

STUDENT LEARNING UNIT

University of
Western Sydney
Bringing knowledge to life



ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning 2014

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An introduction to writing at university, originally published by the Academic Development Unit at the University of Western Sydney in 2000, and reprinted by the Learning Skills Unit in 2002.

Reaching for Success resource booklet compiled for the Academic Preparation Program, 2003 published by the Learning Skills Unit, Office of the Dean of Students, UWS.

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UniStep-Making the transition to university study, resource booklet compiled for UniStep course 2004, published by the Learning Skills Unit, Office of the Dean of Students, UWS.

Academic Induction program resource booklet, a collaborative project of the Learning Skills Unit, Office of Dean of Students and Tourism & Hospitality Management Programs, School of Management August 2004.

References and further reading:

Brick, J. (2006). *Academic Culture: A Student's Guide to Studying at University*. Sydney: Macquarie University.

Cottrell, S. (1999). *The Study Skills Handbook*. London: Macmillan.

Marshall, L. A. & Rowland, F. (1981). *A Guide to Learning Independently*, Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Volet, S. E. & Kee, J. P. (1993). *Studying in Singapore - Studying in Australia: A student perspective*. Murdoch University Teaching Excellence Committee Occasional Paper No. 1

www.uws.edu.au/students/lisu/

http://edit.usq.edu.au/opacs/ALSONline/for_students/communication/academic_style.htm

CONGRATULATIONS

DEAR STUDENT,

Congratulations on your decision to study at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and welcome to a great experience. Your experience of studying as an international student in Australia will be exciting but perhaps slightly challenging at first. Since you are coming from another country and a different academic environment, adjusting to the academic culture in Australia may present some difficulties at first. For example, knowing what your lecturers expect from you in class and how you are assessed in your course and understanding different types of assessments might involve learning and developing new study strategies and skills.

This Studying at UWS booklet and the International Academic Preparation Program have been developed to familiarise you with your new academic culture and prepare you to study at UWS. Knowledge and skills developed in the process of reading the booklet and your active participation in this program will assist you in your transition to university in Australia.

The first section of the booklet (**Studying at UWS**) introduces you to the academic culture of higher education in Australia. This section also lists some challenges of studying at university and shows you how to cope with them. It also includes useful tips from other

international students from previous years.

The second section (**Academic Literacy**) is about academic reading and writing. It explains the role of critical analysis and academic literacy. The third section (**Assessment Tasks/Assignments**) gives you an overview of some of the most common ways students are assessed at university. This section explains various assessment tasks (**assignments, essays, exams and class presentations**) that are to be completed to pass different subjects. The fourth section (**Preparing an Assignment**) takes you through various steps of assignment preparation including question analysis, planning, reading and note-taking, using academic sources, referencing and avoiding plagiarism. The fifth and final section (**Students' concerns and getting assistance with problems**) provides some important self-management tools such as Time and Stress management. It also lists some useful sites and support services which are available to students.

We wish you success in your studies and hope that your learning experience at UWS is pleasant and positive.

Good luck with your studies!

Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning

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To access online resources to develop your academic skills visit <http://tdu.uws.edu.au/languagelearning>

SECTION 1: STUDYING AT UWS



STUDYING SUCCESSFULLY AT UWS

TIPS: HOW TO STUDY SUCCESSFULLY AT UWS

Studying at university

University study is a pursuit of knowledge and learning achieved by independent and engaged learning (through critical thinking, academic reading, writing and discussions) in your chosen discipline.

All students as they enter university and get adjusted to the rules and regulations (conventions) of higher education culture experience some kind of culture shock. However, for international students, the experience can be more intense as they come from another country, another culture and sometimes from a different language background.

There are some steps you can take to help you through the initial phase of this transition. The following section can help you too.

Get familiar

Find out more about your university, your course and whatever is new and may be unfamiliar.

Now read the following paragraphs and see whether words and phrases from the above list are understood more clearly. The academic environment of your university (**uni**) may seem very different to what you have experienced in your country, and the teaching and learning practices in your course may daunt and confuse you.

What do the following words and phrases, mean to you?

- » lectures and tutorials
- » vUWS and online learning environment
- » uni, units and unit outlines
- » independent learning
- » discipline and discourse
- » reading lists
- » texts and articles
- » group work and group assignments
- » oral presentations
- » assignments
- » referencing and plagiarism

For example, your **lectures and tutorials** might present an unfamiliar scenario. You may also be confused about your own responsibilities as a student.

Lecture & tutorials

Usually for each subject (unit) in your course, there is a lecture and a tutorial that you need to attend every week.

Lectures

Lectures are delivered in large lecture halls where sometimes, you will be part of a crowd of three to four hundred students. Lecturers introduce new topics and give information about your subject in their lectures. They may make use of a **PowerPoint presentation** (a slide show) to deliver their lectures. Prior to their lecture, they usually put their lecture notes online and expect you to go to **vUWS** (a website for your unit) to access them. You need to do the reading before class to be able to follow what your lecturer says. Because of the large number of students in your class, your lecturer may never even get a chance to personally talk to you or ask/answer any questions. However, these lectures are available as ilectures afterwards on your vUWS site.

Tutorials

In contrast to your lectures, your **tutorials (tuts)** have a smaller number of students (30 to 40), but can be more challenging than your lectures. Unlike lectures where you usually sit quietly, listen to your lecturer, and take notes, in tutorials you are expected to contribute to **discussions**, ask/answer questions, **work in groups** with other students and present your own ideas. You are expected to read your prescribed or suggested readings (texts) for each unit to participate in your tutorials. You may have to **post** ideas on vUWS and **discuss online** (on vUWS) with other students. In your tutorials, you get a chance to work with other students in small groups. Sometimes you have **group assignments** where each student needs to contribute. You also present individual or group presentations in your tutorials.

Reading

To gain knowledge and understanding of your subject, you do a lot of reading in every unit. In some units, you will have a **text book** (a book for a specific subject) which is covered during the semester. You also read articles and book chapters from a **reading list** (a list of suggested and prescribed readings included in your unit outline). You have to find these readings yourself from the library, or from the internet. Sometimes, you can buy a **Reader** (a collection of readings already compiled in a book) for your unit. Scholars who are experts in your discipline (area of study) are authors of your readings. They are your **sources**

of information. Usually, to write good assignments, you are expected to read **widely** by going beyond your textbook and suggested readings.

Writing

Your own writing (your **text**) reflects your deep understanding of your subject. In your assignments, you are required to present a **critical analysis** (a discussion and an evaluation) of the studied material. You should take a position (your argument) and support it by providing **evidence** from your readings. While you give this evidence, you must **refer** to (mention the sources of information in your text) those authors whose words and/or ideas you borrow/use. If you fail to reference properly you can be accused of committing **plagiarism**. While referring to these writers you use a particular **referencing** technique in your writing, for example **APA** or **Harvard** style.

Academic discourse

In your assignments, you are expected to make use of your **academic discourse** (language, vocabulary, terms and concepts of your discipline) to show your understanding of your discipline. You are also expected to write in an academic manner, which is very different from the informal style of language used every day.

Independent learning

Finally, whether you are a graduate or a postgraduate student at university, you are responsible for your learning. Even though your **teachers** (at UWS, you usually use their first name) and your **class mates** (fellow students) can help you adjust to UWS, you are required to progress in this new academic environment yourself. You have to be an independent learner and take responsibility for your own learning.

Your participation in exams and in your assignments is your own responsibility. You have a **unit Learning Guide** (a document about your unit) **which includes an outline** for each unit to get information on lecture topics, weekly schedule of teaching, suggested books and readings, exams and assignments, **marking criteria** (explanation of how you are marked) et cetera. For any such information, rather than asking your teachers you should check your unit Learning Guide. It will either be given to you in your first lecture or you will access it from vUWS (Blackboard). On your vUWS

site your lecturers also post messages giving you crucial information regarding your assessments, exam details et cetera. Check it regularly. To do well at university, you will need to learn and adapt to the values of higher education in Australia. As you can see, in each unit, your lecture, tutorial and your readings are all important. Knowledge that you gain in your lectures and your tutorial discussions, and what you learn from your readings gives you a deeper understanding of your subject.

ACTIVITY: Has the above text given you a picture of the academic requirements in an Australian university? Write down three important points you have learnt.

Now read the next paragraph which is also about requirements of higher education, but it is an academic text. Both the language and the structure of this text are quite different from that of the conversational style of the text that you have just read.

To become independent learners students need to develop three levels of skills. These skills are; generic study skills, study skills related to specific content, and metacognitive learning skills (Biggs, 2003). Biggs defines generic study skills as 'ways of managing time and space' (2003, p. 93). These skills include, time-management, keeping track of deadlines, prioritizing, taking notes, developing effective presentation skills, referencing correctly,

and the skills for effective e-learning. Study skills that relate to particular content include reading for meaning, not detail, underlining key words in passages, taking notes properly by capturing the main idea of several sentences in one's own words, using concept maps to derive a major structure, composing essays according to pre planned structures, and using review and revisions. Metacognitive skills include 'those self-management skills that are focused on what the learner does in new contexts' (Biggs, 2003, p. 94), and the development of strategies to solve problems, learn from experience, learn independently of a lecturer, self-evaluate and self monitor.

(Paragraph modified from Allan, J. and Clarke K. Nurturing Supportive Learning Environments in Higher Education through the Teaching of Study Skills: To Embed or Not to Embed? *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 2007, Volume 19, Number 1, 64-76 Available @ www.isetl.org/ijtlhe)

ACTIVITY: Write three qualities that students need to develop to succeed at university, for example, independent learning

Minimising the effect of change

By being a proactive learner (with some academic preparation before hand), you can meet the expectations of your tutors and supervisors.

Two things that will assist you in this process are:

- A. knowing the requirements of studying at a university
- B. making the best of your existing skills.

Knowing the requirements of studying at a university

Independent learning

You are required to be an independent learner at university. Your teachers assist you to understand the topics you have to study and provide feedback on your assessments. However, it is your responsibility to understand and complete what is required of you – within the set time.

Get all the information about your classes, weekly topics, assessments, and timelines yourself! Your unit Learning Guide is a very good source of this information. Read it thoroughly!

Critical thinking & critical analysis

Critical thinking does not mean that you criticise others, but it makes you a rational, objective and informed individual rather than being an opinionated and subjective (personal) person in your thinking.

Critical analysis means you apply rational thinking (breaking into parts, comparing, evaluating) to understand and link your readings and lecture material and while writing your assignments, making use of a similar analytical way to show your own position. You not only describe and reproduce what you have learnt but you use your knowledge and understanding to comment on it. You are required to take a **critical and analytical approach** to the topics being studied in your subjects, and show evidence of critical literacy (ability to use critical thinking while reading and writing) in your assessments.

TIP: Develop independent and critical thinking skills, learn to explore and discuss issues and concepts, ask questions, participate in class discussions and make your own reasoned analysis of the topics you study.

Listening and taking notes in lectures

You need to keep a record of what you learn as you learn it (in lectures and readings). *Keep a set of notes that you can use while preparing assignments*

and revising for exams. In lectures, instead of trying to copy down everything that your lecturer says, listen for the most important points being raised and include some supporting information for each point. *Remember your final exam questions are mostly based on the information given in your lectures.*

TIP: Reading and preparation before the lecture will help. Your unit outline can tell you about the topic and the readings for that week.

Participating in tutorials

Tutorials help you to integrate the information and points introduced in lectures with your own study of that subject. These sessions are built around many activities to clarify your ideas about a topic and to sort out misunderstandings and problems in your work. Your active participation will assist you to understand the material covered by the lecturer, and give you an opportunity to discuss issues and to ask questions.

TIP: Learn to be a good listener, engage with the topic being discussed. Come prepared!

When participating in tutorials:

- » Stick to the topic being discussed and avoid asking questions about things you should have read or checked for yourself.
- » Listen to the comments of other students and the answers the lecturers/tutors give. Sometimes they will raise important points that may not have occurred to you.
- » Think of at least one brief item to contribute to the discussion – a thought, a question, a piece of information or a comment – write it down and speak clearly.

Learning to work in groups

Group work is a significant part of university study. Group work is an opportunity to develop teamwork and communication skills which can also be applied beyond your studies. Group sizes can range from two to five people. You may be assigned to a group or you may be able to choose your partners.

TIP: Learn to work efficiently with your group members. Follow the agenda, time line and rules set by the group and do the task/s allotted to you.

E-learning – learn to work online (with vUWS)

Most of the UWS courses will have an online component delivered via vUWS (a web-based course delivery tool). Access to vUWS is from the UWS home page by clicking on Blended learning/ (vUWS) login page <https://vuws.uws.edu.au/>. You access the student portal by clicking on <https://myuwsauth.uws.edu.au/form.php>

TIP: Check your student email and vUWS site everyday. Use the UWS Library site to find information about the referencing style used in your course Ask for help and practise with someone who has some IT (Information Technology) know-how (knowledge). Attend one of the Education Technology Program (ETP) sessions or find out more from www.uws.edu.au/hall

ACTIVITY: Identify the strengths and skills you already have (put a tick) and the areas where you need to improve (put a circle).

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Communication skills | |
| Working independently | |
| Working in a group | |
| Leadership | |
| Research | |
| Library search | |
| Computer skills | |
| Critical thinking | |
| Online communication | |
| Managing projects | |
| Persistence | |
| Accepting/taking responsibility | |
| Good memory | |
| Public speaking | |
| Logical thinking | |
| Enthusiasm | |
| Asking questions | |
| Solving problems | |

What are your strengths and your top three skills?

Which areas do you most need to improve in?

Now think/plan what you can do to improve.

Ref: for further reading: Cottrell, S. (1999). *The Study Skills Handbook*. London: Macmillan.

Making the best of your existing skills

You might not have all those skills which are required to succeed in this 'new' academic environment but do not worry. You can use and extend your existing skills and strengths while you develop some new skills.

TIP: You can transfer your existing skills to your present study. Think how you learnt in your prior education system and what helped you to learn. Use those skills to build on new skills.

Be clear about your long-term goals

Think carefully about your decision to study in Australia and your subject choices. How does your choice to study this particular course contribute to your goals? Be clear about your long-term goals – this focus can help you get through difficulties.

Attend, and be prepared for, all classes

Only reading the textbook or going through your friends' notes is no substitute for attending lectures.

It is important to remember that assessments are usually based on material and ideas covered in class. Most units have attendance requirements – students can even fail a unit if they miss classes. For international students, there are also visa implications of missing too many classes.

Plan your time

Poor time management is one of the main reasons students fail. Make a study timetable and stick to it. Do not procrastinate! Work regularly throughout the semester, and not only at the end. Use a semester planner and weekly planner to see when your assignments are due. Hand in your assessments on time. Plan your time carefully to achieve this. Remember – severe penalties apply for late submission.

TIP: If you take up part-time employment during the semester, plan your job around your study timetable not the other way round.

Manage your stress

Some stress is good for you to remain motivated and focused. However excessive stress can interfere with your studies by causing memory and concentration difficulties, loss of focus, procrastination and specific difficulties in presentations and exams. Poor time management adds to your stress. Practise effective stress management and time management strategies to avoid these problems. See Section 5 'Students' concerns and getting assistance with problems' in this booklet.

Combat perfectionism

Do not have unrealistic expectations. Wanting to submit perfect work or to consistently achieve high marks can create much stress (under this stress some people stop working altogether). Be realistic and accept that you will develop skills as you go along. Give yourself time. Especially if you have moved country, you need time to adjust to the new surroundings and new system.

Develop academic literacy skills

Even though many of you have been speaking in English in your country, academic English is different to any other form of language. Get familiar with the terms and conventions of academic

literacy. Attend Literacy workshops. You can also go to Academic Writing Library Roving on your campus to clarify short queries and get assistance regarding academic writing and your assessment tasks. Visit this site for further information and to access the HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning) <http://www.uws.edu.au/hall>

Plan your written work and oral presentations

In general, the most effective essays, presentations and reports are developed from a written plan. Plan the layout, delivery and presentation of your assignment. Manage your time well and stay focused.

Ask for help and feedback

Request extra help or advice when you are struggling. If you don't understand something, ask your lecturers and tutors for help. You can also ask them whether you are on the right track with an assignment or what went wrong in an exam or an assignment. Ask for their feedback and then follow the advice they give you.

Attack problems quickly/Ask for help

If things do go wrong, do something about it as soon as possible. See your lecturer or Course Advisor, one of the International Office student advisors or one of the counsellors on your campus as soon as a problem arises. There are many sources of help around the university. For counselling and disability services (**Student Support Services**) visit the services and facilities for current students site at www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities#SSS

Develop and maintain supportive friendships

Having friends will make your time at university much more enjoyable. While you can't socialise all the time, you need a local support network. Good friends are beneficial to you both academically, as well as socially. You can also join a Student Association, or Postgraduate Students Association and Mature Age Students Network. Check section 5 for more information about these networks.

TIP: Develop learning partnerships with students from other cultures too.



Learn about the Australian culture

Education does not take place in books and class rooms only. The society that you live in has a great impact on what and how you learn. Your teachers and your class mates make use of their context (time and place – when and where we live) and their 'cultural knowledge' to discuss your course material. You will need to do the same. If you want to have a positive experience of studying in a university in Australia, become familiar with the Australian environment, politics, history and current affairs.

TIP: Read Australian newspapers, listen to local news, watch TV regularly, and ask questions.

Learn to follow what others are saying.

When you are new in Australia you may have difficulty understanding people's accent and pronunciation as well as the vocabulary, and phrases they use (slang/colloquial speech/local way of speaking) can be very hard to follow. You can improve your listening by practising. Listen to the radio, watch TV, and listen to people on the campus, on trains and buses. You can ask your classmates to speak slowly so you can follow them.

TIP: Become familiar with the Australian (Aussie) slang. This will help you in your own speech too.

Some resources and sites to find out and learn about Aussie slang

Lonely Planet's Australian Phrasebook, subtitled 'Understanding Aussies and their Culture', www.koalanel.com.au/australian-slang.html
www.australianexplorer.com/slang/people.htm

USEFUL TIPS FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM PAST SEMESTERS

Read your weekly readings and prepare before every lecture

It was very hard in the beginning especially listening in the class. I had so much difficulty in following what the teachers and other students were saying. They had difficulty in understanding me. I learnt to speak slowly and clearly. Also it helped to do some reading and prepare for the class every day so when they spoke I knew what they were talking about. It's still very hard. Maybe people who have a problem with listening should read more.

– A student shared his ideas in a focus group

Refer to the Unit Learning Guide frequently!

I did not understand about many of the things in my unit. But I studied my unit outline all the time (as you told me to) and I always had more information than others.

– A student who had attended International Acprep course

Lectures and tutorials – attend all even if it is not compulsory!

I missed many classes and did not know what was in the case study that I had to write. I asked my friend but she was not very helpful. I failed my assignment.

– A student in an interview

Manage your time well!

Using a semester planner was a good idea. I knew when I had to hand in two assignments in one week so worked hard and did not waste time.

– A student in an interview

SECTION 2: ACADEMIC LITERACY



READING & WRITING ACADEMICALLY, CRITICAL THINKING & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Academic Literacy is the ability to read and write academically. Assignments written in an academic style receive higher marks. It is not only good English, but **academic literacy** that is required to write well at university. Look at the following paragraph to find out what is required in your writing at university.

Academic writing

The development of academic language is vital to student success in the classroom. Each content area that students have to study contains a unique and demanding technical vocabulary. In addition, familiar words are used in completely different ways. The purpose of this paper is to share strategies that can facilitate a teacher's scaffolding of difficult academic vocabulary. 'Scaffolding refers to providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modelling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning' (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 345). The teacher of second language learners has to facilitate that support. Then 'as students become more proficient, the scaffold is gradually removed' (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002, p. 85). Active student involvement is the key to success.

(Paragraph modified from Bradley K. S. and Bradley J. A. (2004) Scaffolding Academic Learning for Second Language Learners. The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. X, No. 5, May 2004 <http://iteslj.org/>. Available @<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Bradley-Scaffolding/>)

As you can see in this text, academic writing is quite different from any other form of writing. This paragraph demonstrates many features of academic writing. The writers have used a special vocabulary and have created a particular language style, which is research based, precise and formal. This text is constructed in such a cohesive manner that there is a logical flow in the writing.

This flow makes it easy to follow the writers' points. While reading this paragraph you get a clear picture of what the writers want to present: what the main points are and also what the main issues are. Using their own 'voice' and not only repeating what others (other writers) have said, they only borrow others' ideas and words to clarify or emphasise their own points/ideas. They refer to these sources properly by using a referencing system. If you as a reader want to find out more about these sources you will look at the reference list which is always attached at the end of the paper.

Academic writing therefore is critical/analytical, research based, formal and grammatically correct. It is written in an objective manner and use of personal pronouns like 'I' or 'you' is not appropriate.

Critical thinking is the foundation of academic literacy. To be 'critical' does not mean to criticise. It means using high order thinking skills. As a critical thinker you are able to make your own judgement about what you read/hear/find without getting influenced by your emotions or others' opinions.

Higher Thinking

Creating – Generating new ideas, products, or ways of viewing things: designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing.

Evaluating – Justifying a decision or course of action: checking, hypothesising, critiquing, experimenting, judging

Analysing – Breaking information into parts to explore understandings and Relationships: comparing, organising, deconstructing, interrogating, finding

Applying – Using information in another familiar situation: implementing, carrying out, using, executing

Understanding – Explaining ideas or concepts: interpreting, summarising, paraphrasing, classifying, explaining

Remembering – Recalling information: recognising, listing, describing, retrieving, naming, finding

Lower thinking

Ref: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy
www.kurwongbss.qld.edu.au/thinking/Bloom/blooms.htm

Critical thinkers do not take things at face value. They ask questions. They look for evidence on which they can base their ideas/opinions.

Critical thinking therefore is a very important component of higher education. It helps you critically analyse (synthesise/evaluate) your information and use it in a form in your own understanding. Instead of reproducing what you hear or read, you present your own comments, arguments and conclusions based on your findings.

University students are required to develop this higher order thinking ability to critically analyse

what they read and write and to be able to argue a position.

Reading

The material you read at university is often difficult because it contains complex ideas. These ideas are expressed in a language, which is also complex, dense and not very easy to read! However, there are certain strategies that can help you 'unpack' the information and make sense of it without wasting too much time. If you read strategically, you can get a lot out of your texts. Use these strategies (before, while and after your reading) to become an effective reader.

Be a selective reader

When you pick up a text to read, start with a clear idea why you are reading it.

- » Before reading, ask yourself what you expect to learn from the text. This will help you to focus and be clear about what you are looking for. Especially if you are reading for an assignment read selectively. Refer to your notes from your question analysis.
- » Be selective, work out what information you need. Use the reading list in the unit outline, and conduct appropriate searches of the Library catalogue and e-collections.
- » Select the relevant parts of the text to read by using the index, chapter headings and sub-headings.
- » Use skimming and scanning techniques.

Skimming is when you glance through material, reading occasional lines to assess whether it is relevant to you. When you skim it is not necessary to read every word.

Scanning is used to locate specific information or a relevant chapter or section in a book or journal article. Read sub-headings and captions and consider graphs and illustrations.

How to skim and scan effectively

- » Look at the title to decide if the text is relevant.
- » Read the Table of Contents, Preface or Introduction, and Conclusion.
- » Look through the Index for specific information, key words or connections between words.

- » Look for markings that show the structure and content of the information, such as headings, sub-headings, bold face or italic type, margin comments, underlining.

Read effectively

Think about what you are reading. Question what you are reading.

- » Make links between your readings and your assignments.
- » Take notes.

Read the following paragraph on Generation X. See how it can be critically analysed to create an original comment.

Generation X

Generation X is a term used to describe people who were born from 1965 to around 1982. The term has been used in demography, the social sciences, and marketing, though it is most often used in popular culture. These people are high-achievers. They demand success quickly and take success as a personal challenge. They pursue a job which is flexible and that they are passionate about. A report has revealed that seventy per cent of Generation X employees in Australia are unhappy with their work conditions. They want both stability and a chance to rise through the ranks. They are family oriented and have traditional values. However, it was 'family life, health and personal growth' that Gen-X reported feeling the most dissatisfied with.

(Paragraph modified from John Morre, 2007. Generation X and features of change)

Notes on Gen X:

- » Born between 1965 to 82
- » High-achievers
- » Passionate about their jobs
- » Family oriented and traditional values
- » Pessimistic

How can you use this information in your thinking/writing? You can use it to form your own comment on Gen X, for example:

According to a report (Morre, 2007), Generation X people are passionate about their work and have traditional values at heart. However, they are dissatisfied and pessimistic about life in general.

ACTIVITY: Read the next text on Generation Y (modified from Bryan Patterson. A-Z of Generation Y. Herald Sun. July 08, 2007) and take some notes.

Generation Y

Generation Y also known as the iGeneration are born between 1979 and 1990. They are hip, smart-talking, and brash and sometimes seem to suffer from an overdose of self-esteem. They are the most influential generational group since the baby boomers. They are the most educated-minded generation in history. Technology has played an important part in empowering them. About three-quarters of Gen Ys regularly use the internet. They constantly remain in touch with their friends who are very important for them and are optimistic about life and work. They are highly confident and will leave employers if they are unwilling to nurture them and do not provide future opportunity for advancement.

- » Compare Gen X and Y.
- » Find three things from both Gen X and Y.
- » Use this information to make a couple of sentences.

TIP: To produce a good assignment (or a good oral presentation for that matter) you need academic skills: research & reading, critical analysis & academic writing.

Your Notes

Comparison

Your sentences

SECTION 3: ASSESSMENT TASKS/ ASSIGNMENTS



Forms of assessment

The purpose of assessment tasks (assignments) is to test what you have learnt in a unit. To pass each unit you are required to complete certain assessment tasks.

By asking you to write an essay or a report your teachers are testing how well you have understood the concepts of a particular subject and how well you can form your own unique response to the question being asked. These assessment tasks also enhance your learning, because you use reading, writing, research and critical analysis skills to do well in your assessments.

Different forms of assessment are used at university and each one is quite different in purpose, language structure and format from others. To write a good assignment, first you will need to have a clear understanding of your task: what the question is and what the marking criteria are (how you are marked).

You need to understand the **genre** (structure, type and form of writing) of your assignment. If you are asked to write an essay you cannot write a report and vice versa.

Different forms of assessment

- » Essays
- » Reports
- » Case Studies

- » Annotated bibliography and critical reviews
- » Reflective journals and reflective reports
- » Oral presentations
- » Exams

Essays

An essay is one of the most common forms of assessment at university. The purpose of writing an essay is to state/argue a point of view weighing up conflicting evidence. It is an extended argument presenting your position and understanding of a topic being studied. You put forward your own **thesis position** (point of view) on the issue/s raised in the essay question. You then justify that position by providing supporting points and evidence. Even though you argue your position in your essay, it is not an expression of your opinion, what you feel or think. It is your informed opinion, what you have discovered and what you can support with evidence.

What do you have to do?

By presenting your arguments in an essay you not only show your understanding of the subject to your teachers but in the process of writing your essay as you explore, analyse, draw ideas together and express a thesis (position) or argument convincingly, you achieve a deeper learning of your subject.

Thesis/argument is the unique point of view that you present as your position or argument in an essay. It is not a personal point of view, what

you think. You reach this point from a thorough consideration of the readings and notes you have made using your critical thinking skills. A thesis position can usually be written in one or two sentences (usually presented in the introduction); the rest of the essay provides the reader with all the explanation and the supporting arguments and points as well as the evidence needed to appreciate the thesis. An essay without a clear thesis position – or one that is built only on an accumulation of evidence (what you gather from your readings) – is not rated as a good essay at university.

Here is an example of a student giving his position clearly in an essay:

With the world's population having doubled from three to six billion in the last forty years, it is no exaggeration to speak of a population 'explosion'. However, the existence and extent of a population 'problem' is highly contested. Despite this range of opinion in the field of population study, the policy responses of political parties or, more particularly, governments and industries worldwide have, since the 1980s, largely been shaped by a dominant neo-liberal agenda. ***This essay will argue that the effect of these policies has produced wealth in the short term and for the few, at the expense of the many caught in the web of poverty. It will further be shown that such policies have delivered a legacy of environmental degradation.***

Unlike a report, usually, there are no headings in an essay. Instead, appropriate language is used to indicate the sections. Overall cohesion is created by repetition of terms and main points, the introduction effectively to indicate the upcoming argument, and by reminding the reader of the main points in the conclusion.

Structure

An essay has three sections/stages: introduction, body and conclusion.

- » The introduction tells what the essay is going to be about and how it will progress. Its purpose is to introduce the reader to the topic. It gives the thesis/the main argument/the purpose of the writer and then indicates how it will be achieved. It lists the ideas that will be used to do so and how it will be achieved. Thus it gives a preview of the body/paragraphs of the essay.

- » The body of the essay develops the ideas mentioned in the introduction. It presents a discussion that supports the thesis. Evidence is in the body of the essay to support the ideas being discussed. The ideas are organised logically into paragraphs that lead the reader to understand the thesis statement.
- » The conclusion summarises and draws together the main points that were raised in the body. The conclusion may mention aspects of the argument that are still open to debate but it should not introduce any new information.
- » The reference list is given at the end of the essay. Your school prescribes the format of your references.

Reports

Reports are a special type of communication with a specific format depending on the discipline area for which they are written. The purpose of writing a report is to provide information about a problem that was solved, an investigation that was carried out, or something that was observed. Some reports include recommendations for the future. Unlike essays, headings and sub-headings are used.

These are the usual headings for reports but lab reports may have different headings. (Sections with a * are optional).

- » Title page
- » Executive summary/Abstract
- » Table of contents
- » Introduction (background and purpose)
- » Body (method, findings and discussion)
- » Conclusion
- » Recommendations
- » List of references
- » Appendices (extra information attached to the report)

What do you have to do?

For most reports, the introduction, body and conclusions could be required to relate specifically to the material covered in the report. There are also research reports which usually relate more

to a particular project involving primary research and might have a slightly different format. These reports are a means of writing up the outcomes of the primary research projects. Find out more about your report writing assignment. Look at the marking criteria, the suggested headings, and the report format in your unit outlines.

TIP: Do not depend on what your friends think about the format of an assignment, check with your teacher or look at the criteria for how it should be presented.

Case studies

The purpose of a case study is to describe and give a critical review of an organisation, a student/patient or a situation at a particular point in time. A case study enables you to show how you can apply the case to the **theoretical framework** (theories that you are studying in your subject).

What do you have to do?

A case study requires you to use your interpretation and analysis of a case. You need to understand both the theoretical framework, and the facts of the case that are relevant. You are required to structure and present your ideas in the context of a theoretical framework that is relevant to the case and the topic. You then have to write up that analysis, usually in an essay format (some times with headings). You should check with your teachers about the required format.

Annotated bibliography

Annotated bibliography is a very popular form of assessment as a preliminary task before you write an essay. It helps you to carry out a focused academic research for your essay topic. An annotated bibliography is an organised list of sources (references), such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines, web pages, each of which is followed by an annotation (comment). This list is produced as a single document using a particular referencing system preferred by your school.

What do you have to do?

In an annotated bibliography, you produce (in an alphabetical order) the list of the texts that you have read and reviewed. Each entry has the bibliographical details (such as author, date, title) and your comment/review (annotation).

Critical reviews

The purpose of a critical review or a critique is to provide a reasoned (not personal) evaluation of a text.

When asked to provide a critical review of a book or an article, you need to do more than simply describe, identify or summarise the ideas and information that the author has presented. Some evaluative assessment (your critical appraisal) is required. Check the criteria given in the assignment and include what is asked in your evaluation.

Sometimes it is also appropriate to mention some possible future improvements or refinements. The quality of a critical review or critique lies in its ability to present a logical case for the evaluative assessment – with supporting authority – of whatever is being critically reviewed or critically analysed.

What do you have to do?

Base your stand (position) on your readings, or on your own logical and objective assessments, and justify the stand you have taken. Make your stand clear at the beginning of your review, in your evaluations of specific parts, and in your concluding commentary. Remember that your goal should be to make a few key points about the book, article or the situation being critiqued and not simply to describe or summarise whatever is being critiqued.

Reflective journals and reflective reports

Reflective writing allows you to document your experiences, thoughts, questions, ideas and conclusions that signpost your learning journey. The purpose of reflective journals or reflective reports is to describe and critically evaluate and assess your personal learning experiences. This will often require you to explain how you might apply your university learning in more practical settings, such as your work or life.

What do you have to do?

Your reflective paper is an opportunity for you to think critically about what you are learning, to evaluate or assess your learning. But as it is based on research, you have to always make links with the theories and concepts as well as the issues being studied and discussed in your subject. You can use some personal language (words like I and my). However, it is not a piece of conversational writing.

Like any other written assignment, it needs to be referenced properly and written in a grammatically correct manner.

Oral presentations

Oral Presentation is also a very common assessment task at university. It is usually presented to a class/tutorial group of students and a tutor or lecturer. You prepare a paper on a specific topic and present in the class either by yourself or with a small group. After the presentation the presenter/s and the audience discuss issues arising from it. In this assessment task you are assessed on your various academic skills, for example: critical thinking, research, reading, writing and presenting information in a manner appropriate to the audience. An oral presentation is formatted like an essay as it also has an introduction, body and conclusion. But it is not an essay!

What do you have to do?

Analyse the question or the topic. Also analyse your audience. Think how familiar they are with the topic and how much background information they will need.

1. Make a plan as to how you are going to present your information. Plan a sequence.
2. Research the topic from books, articles, library or class notes. Remember you need academic sources.
3. Organise your information according to the plan and be cohesive and logical.
4. Consider and prepare visual aids like overhead transparencies, PowerPoint slides, photos, video clips.
5. Write a script with an introduction, body, first point, second point and a conclusion.
6. Practise at home. Rehearse a few times keeping time, appropriate body language, pitch and volume of your voice in mind!

In your introduction try to capture your listeners' attention – begin with a question, or a thought-provoking comment. State your purpose – 'I'm going to talk about ...' Present an outline of your presentation – 'I will focus on these three points ...Then, I'll ... And finally, I'll conclude with ...'

In the body Your points should follow a logical order. Pause at the end of each point, and make a connection to the next point 'Okay, now I'd like to talk about ...' or 'Of course, we must not forget ...'

In the conclusion Summarise what you've covered 'To sum up ...' or 'Therefore, in conclusion ...' Refer back to the purpose or aim of your presentation 'My intention was ... or 'So, I think you can see that ...'

TIP: Do not memorise the whole speech! Remember that presenting your paper is not reading a written essay or report.

Use spoken (but not personal or informal style) language – simple and effective. Use catchy statements to capture the interest of your audience. Involve them – use questions, humour, anecdotes et cetera. to make your speech interesting. If you are nervous about the presentation and have prepared well, to calm yourself do some relaxation techniques: deep breathing, meditation exercises and visualising your self performing well. Attend workshops on giving presentations. To find out more about these workshops and for useful resources visit www.uws.edu.au/students/ods/counsellingservice/counselling_section3

Exams

The purpose of exams (examinations) is to assess your knowledge, your understanding and your ability to apply the topics covered during the semester.

Different types of exam questions

- » Problem solving questions
 - Prepare for these exam questions by revising the weekly tutorial exercise. Follow up difficulties with the lecturer. When revising, do the problems by yourself first and consult the solution only if you get stuck.
 - Learn how to associate problems with a particular formula or technique by identifying a specific characteristic of that type of problem.
 - Work through problems with a friend – discuss how each of you tackles problems.
 - Learn terms and concepts and any symbols and units of measurement associated with them.

- Use diagrams or pictures to visualise a problem.
- » Essay questions
 - Practise writing about concepts, theories and issues in full sentences and paragraphs.
 - When you have completed writing notes on a topic, try writing a summary of the topic without referring to your notes.
 - Write essay plans for several different questions to get used to thinking about the main parts of an essay and how they fit together.
 - Using essay questions from past exams (these can be accessed from the library) develop a point-form plan then write an essay under timed conditions.
- » Short answer questions
 - Explain your understanding of a concept out loud. Listen for strengths or weaknesses.
 - Learn examples of important ideas, concepts or theories.
 - Try applying theories to different situations and write down what you find.
 - Take two similar ideas and write the similarities and differences between them.

What do you have to do?

You have to attend the examination and answer various types of questions that are given.

To do well in your exams you need

- » focused study
- » study goals throughout the semester
- » time management
- » positive frame of mind and physical fitness

Regular revision of lecture notes and tutorials will make the final stages of preparation much easier. Here are some general suggestions.

- Be active in your revision – reading over notes or textbooks is not active enough. Writing things down, posing questions to yourself, looking for ways in which different ideas link up, explaining when to use and not to use a particular theory or formula, et cetera can increase understanding and familiarity with content.
- Find some relevance for yourself to the unit – try to see how it connects with your interests and experiences.
- Get some guidance from your lecturer or a counsellor as to whether you are on the right track in your exam preparation. There are resources and workshops for combating exams anxiety. Utilise them.

TIP: Prepare well for the exams not only the night before but throughout the semester. Take notes and keep them well organised.

Before the exam

- » Make sure you know the time, place and the materials you will need.
- » Arrive with enough time to find your seat and to make yourself comfortable.

In the exam

- » Read directions carefully and listen for any verbal directions or corrections.
- » Read quickly through the test and plan your time.
- » Before answering read each question carefully.

SECTION 4: PREPARING AN ASSIGNMENT



STEPS IN PREPARING AN ASSIGNMENT

Using academic sources & avoiding plagiarism

Steps in preparing an assignment

These are some of the steps that you take in the process of preparing your assignment.

1. Analyse the question.
2. Perform academic research and reading.
3. Make notes.
4. Make a plan.
5. Make an outline and plan paragraphs.
6. Write and edit your essay.
7. Format the essay.

Analyse the question

It is important to understand your question well and have a clear idea of what you need to do to answer it. Ask yourself what is and what is not relevant to the question. Follow these important strategies when analysing the question.

- » Read the question (and any other supporting material) at least twice.
- » Check the definitions of words or phrases you may not fully understand, especially technical words. (You can use a dictionary but make sure that you understand the words/meanings in the context of your subject).

- » Locate the broad topic words/phrases, instruction words/phrases (words that describe what you are asked to do – see below) and limiting words/phrases (words that set limits or boundaries on the assignment).
- » Paraphrase (or rewrite) the question in your own words.
- » Consider how the assignment is to be presented and check guidelines and assessment/marking criteria.
- » Check back to the course objectives, recommended readings and class topics to see how they relate to the task.
- » Discuss your understanding of the task with fellow students.

Consider answering the following questions:

1. What does this question require me to do? (Consider the instruction word in the essay question, for example; Select/Discuss)
2. What will be my main discussion points? (Topic)
3. What will be my focus? (I will concentrate on...)

Just understanding your essay question well can give you confidence to attempt it and can guide you to do your targeted research.

Here is an example:

Question: Discuss the relationship between literacy and academic success within the contexts of secondary and tertiary education.

This question requires me to **discuss**.

My broad **topic** is literacy and academic success in secondary and tertiary education.

My focus is the **relationship** between literacy and academic success **in** secondary and tertiary education.

Ref: Academic Literacy UNE <http://sfl.emu.edu.tr/dept/alo/essay6.htm>

TIP: Find out if any PASS sessions are being offered (study sessions run by previous years' students) in your subject/school. These study group meetings are a good opportunity to discuss any study related issues. Ask your teachers.

Instruction words in assignment questions

Account for: Decide the importance of and give reasons.

Analyse: Break the material into component parts and comment on the content of each part separately.

Critically evaluate: Express your considered judgement about the merit or truth of factors, views or theories mentioned. First discuss them, noting strengths and weaknesses, then conclude with your own judgement.

Discuss: Consider something from different points of view and then make a judgement.

Define: Give concise, clear meanings. Do not give details, but ensure you give the limits of the definition.

Describe: Recall facts, processes or events. You are not called to explain or interpret. Be as thorough as the word limit will allow. This will involve description and interpretation. The view you present should be supported by arguments and evidence.

Explain: Clarify and interpret the material you present. Where appropriate, give reasons for differences of opinions or results, and try to analyse causes.

Examine: Look at carefully; consider.

Justify: Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions, and ensure that your argument is convincing.

Relate: Show how things are related to, or connected with, each other; or how one causes another, correlates with another, or is like another.

Summarise: Give main points in a condensed form, leaving out details and illustrations

Adapted from: www.uel.ac.uk/skillzone/resources/docs/resourc/wrkshops/Bu109/workshop2/page_4.htm

Once you have analysed your question, you can find your own position on the topic or issues addressed in the question. *However, sometimes you might have to research your topic and then reinterpret your question.*

Academic research, reading & note-taking

Most of the material that you require for your assignments will come from your academic research and readings and your ideas will be formed accordingly. You must be able to make links with your assignment and borrow ideas and words to explain or support your points.

Academic research

Getting started: Begin by thinking about the topic, how your question relates to it and what you need to know.

1. **Try to locate books and articles you already know about:** e.g, from the reading list. **You can browse for these articles online.** Search for them in the **Library Catalogue**. Go to the UWS Library webpage: <http://library.uws.edu.au> under 'Title/Author/Subject'. Otherwise, try searching by typing keywords in 'Keyword (Anywhere)' or 'Subject' and, as you become more familiar with the topic, you might begin to try searching by 'Author' or 'Title'. You can also browse the library shelves.
2. **Locate up-to-date information – search for subject-specific journal articles.** Journal articles, which are usually more specific, are often the best sources for more recent information, and these can build on the results

of your catalogue searches. You can use the search facilities in the Library's **E-Resources**. Access the Library's e-journals and databases. If the journal is available electronically, the catalogue search will provide a web link to the journal.

3. **Explore further** – try selected internet sites. Start with some of your subject related internet sites.

Attend Library tours and get familiar with the system
Scholarly/academic resources include books, e-books, book chapters and journal articles. These are scholarly resources as the ideas in them are supported by evidence and academic references. The authors are experts in their disciplines and their articles are reviewed by their peers (peer reviewed). Evaluate your sources as some reading materials are more valid or credible than others.

What to look for

1. **Authority** – Is the writer an expert in the field? Is the writer often quoted by others in the field? Is the source published in a reputable book or journal or affiliated with a reputable institution?
2. **Originality** – Does the material provide original information or only a summary or paraphrase of existing information?
3. **Objectivity** – Is the writer being objective or is there a slant or bias in their approach?
4. **Accuracy** – Has reliable, credible data been used that shows knowledge of the field?
5. **Currency** – Is the information current or is it outdated and obsolete?
6. **Coverage** – Does the source cover the issues in depth or give only a cursory treatment?

Remember

- » Use the internet only to find scholarly/academic journal articles or for accessing reliable sites suggested by your teachers or given in your Reading lists.
- » Newspaper articles may be useful but are not scholarly.
- » Make sure to read the assignment guidelines to see what kind of resources are expected to be used.

Reading for assignments

Do not read everything on the topic. Whenever reading for an assignment, read selectively. Refer to your notes from your question analysis. Use your essay plan to see where you require evidence and support. Read effectively and take notes.

Selective note-making

- » When you take notes, make clear and accurate notes with complete reference information & add your comments to know the reason why you are taking those notes.
- » Use a note-taking system (that works for you) for selective note taking. It will help you in synthesising your evidence. (Refer to the note-taking matrix below.)

Making a plan

Planning is a crucial stage in assignment writing. Once you have finished most of your reading and note making, take some time to re-read the question. You may have done this several times already, but it is very easy to get carried away by the readings and be diverted from actually answering the question.

Many students lose their focus and do not answer the question in their essays.

| Your Notes | Author A Notes | Author B Notes | Author C Notes |
|------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | | |

An example of a note-taking matrix

| Outlining an essay | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Your Introduction Notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Set the scene » Thesis position » Overview |
| Body: Three to four sections | For each paragraph: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Topic sentence » Elaborate » Example » Evidence |
| Conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reiterate thesis » Conclude |
| Reference List | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Include only those authors who are referenced in the text |

Reflect on the question and your readings, and then reconsider your position, your thesis, which is your main argument.

Start to map your ideas, which will support your main point. Your ideas are to be written in paragraphs, not in a point form. So think how you are going to elaborate and extend them. Use sub-headings (just for yourself) to indicate the topic of each paragraph and add as much detail as you can (what evidence fits an idea, the supporting ideas, et cetera). Think about the required word count and estimate how many words you can devote to each paragraph. This is a good way of making an assignment seem much less daunting. It also keeps you within your word limit.

Making an outline

Once you are satisfied with the plan, start writing. It is not necessary to start with the introduction. However, to have a clear outline of what you are going to cover in the assignment you might need to have a rough introduction for yourself.

As your assignment takes shape, you may decide to make adjustments to your plan or to read some more source material.

TIP: Continue to check the question and your thesis statement to make sure you are not getting off the track.

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a group of related sentences as all sentences in the paragraph deal with the same idea or a part of one idea, and this gives the paragraph unity. Paragraphs are like mini essays and have similar stages.

The topic sentence – tells the reader what the main idea of the paragraph is. It usually occurs at the beginning of the paragraph, but can also appear at the end or in the middle of the paragraph.

The supporting sentences – present the example, explanations, evidence, causes or reasons that support the main idea of the paragraph.

The concluding or transition sentence – makes a final statement and signals that the paragraph is concluding or makes a link to the next paragraph. In longer paragraphs, it is useful to summarise or restate the main point for the reader.

ACTIVITY: Read the following paragraph, which has a missing topic sentence and a missing concluding sentence. Then read the given different topic and concluding sentences. Underline the most appropriate topic and concluding sentences out of the given choices.

As learners' prior 'experience, cognition and context' (Grabinger, 1996, cited in Benson, 2001) play an important role in their construction of meanings many international students take time to adjust to Western academic culture. Moreover because of the direct link between 'genre and cultural appropriacy' (Eggins, 1994, p. 35), initially, many international students might have difficulties in understanding their texts. There can be some confusion regarding what is expected in different assessment tasks and how to write in a manner that is appropriate. Like players in a new game they need to learn the rules and regulations of the new academic culture.

(Paragraph modified from Handa, N (2007) NESB students at Western universities – a tale with a twist. Unpublished paper)

Choose one topic sentence:

Topic sentence 1:

They need to learn the conventions of academic literacy in an English speaking country.

Topic sentence 2:

Language proficiency especially mastery in academic writing in a second language is a problem that cannot be overlooked.

Choose one concluding sentence:

Concluding sentence 1:

International students especially those who come from a Non English Speaking Background (NESB) need academic induction to become familiar with the rules of Western academic culture.

Concluding sentence 2:

Therefore international students in Western universities need induction and integrated academic support to overcome their transition issues.

A paragraph is like an argument. The writer states a position and supports it by a couple of statements, gives evidence to support them then concludes.

Therefore, to form a good paragraph and a strong argument you demonstrate the following crucial components of academic literacy

- » **Argument** – put forward a position
- » **Evidence** – Effective use of evidence to support a point, accurate referencing
- » **Structure** – topic sentence, supporting statements, concluding sentence, flow in writing

Correct answer:

Topic sentence: 1

Concluding sentence: 2



Writing and editing

Writing

Use the accurate format and style of academic writing as per the expectations of your lecturer, showing your understanding of the subject matter.

Usually, your assessment tasks have a component that tells you what the 'assessment criteria' or the 'marking criteria' are. Read this section carefully. If there is none ask your lecturer or tutor about the criteria.

These are the major considerations in academic writing:

1. **Content:** Your subject matter.
2. **Organisation:** Logical links between and among the various parts of your writing.
3. **Language:** Grammar, style and mechanics.
4. **Referencing:** Documentation (acknowledging sources)
5. **Academic literacy:** Academic writing and critical/analytical thinking: creating new knowledge/transforming existing knowledge, reflecting on the meaning of a text or situation, or how that can be improved.

TIP: Follow the assessment criteria found in your Learning Guide and vUWS site to get better marks. Answer the question asked!

Look at the following paragraph and underline various features of academic literacy in it.

Critical thinking at university

Critical thinking is a set of skills that is highly valued in university studies (Bailey, 1992; Cotton and Hackett, 2003; Dix, 1994; Moore, 2004; Phillips and Bond, 2004), yet many students are confused about what it means and how to develop critical thinking in the academic setting. This confusion is exacerbated for those who come into Western universities from other cultures and for those who are the first generation in their family to attend university and have little experience of what is expected (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; James and Scoufis, 1995). Perhaps the confusion arises because students have not encountered the term critical thinking at school, or perhaps it is because their lecturers and

tutors have not explained their expectations about critical thinking clearly.

(Paragraph modified from Carmichael C. E. (2007) Exploration of critical thinking in environmental subjects. Unpublished Thesis)

This paragraph is a piece of academic writing and shows evidence of critical/analytical thinking. In this example the topic sentence states the main thesis/topic of the paragraph and the rest of the sentences explain and/or elaborate on it. There is also evidence in the form of other writers' ideas to support the main points and finally there is a concluding sentence indicating the writer's argument on this topic.

Presentation of the assignment

- » Allow yourself enough time.
- » Check and edit your writing.

Editing

Before editing your assignment, leave it for a day to get some distance. Go away and do something else. Then come back, re-read it and fix it. While reading it consider the following points:

- » Does it answer the set question and fulfil requirements such as length and structure?
- » Is it written in academic style and is the vocabulary appropriate?
- » Is your writing easy to follow? Did you have to re-read any sections to follow the meaning?
- » Does your introduction outline your main idea and points?
- » Does the body follow the plan mentioned in the introduction?
- » Does the conclusion sum up what you have said in the body?
- » Do paragraphs have topic sentences?
- » Are sentences in paragraphs easily followed in logical order?
- » Are there links between paragraphs?
- » Are the verb tenses correct? Do subjects and verbs agree?

Check your spelling and any incomplete sentences/ fragments that your computer (word processor) shows in your writing (your computer will show you any such mistakes by putting a dotted green or red line under the words suggesting revision). Correct them. However, use the computer's spell and grammar checker very carefully.

Reference list

Use the referencing style your school prefers.

- A. Provide full references for sources you have consulted.
- B. Be consistent in your reference style,

Finally, make sure when you type your assignment you use the acceptable font (usually point 12) so it is not too big or small for the reader.

Handing in

Attach an Assignment Cover sheet (see your unit Learning Guide and/or outline for this) with your details clearly written on it. Academic work should be presented in a neat and tidy manner. It should be properly stapled on one side and put in a plastic sleeve (put the complete assignment in one sleeve).

Submit your assignment on time. If for health reasons you need an extension, talk to your lecturer before the due date.

To write a good assignment, you need at least 15 to 20 days to go through all these steps properly. Once you know the rules and you understand the topics covered in the class and especially if you have been studying throughout the semester, you should be able to produce a good essay or a report in that time. However, if you have language difficulties you might need to work harder to develop your academic writing skills.

Attend workshops on assignment preparation, developing your writing et cetera. Register online <http://staff.uws.edu.au/students/ods/lisu/workshops>

Using academic sources & avoiding plagiarism

Academic sources

University students are expected to adopt a scholarly approach in their research and written assessments. Scholarship requires exploring and building on the academic achievement of others, and university students are expected to adopt just this approach in their work. You should always draw

on 'expert' reference sources by using academic journals as they publish 'refereed' articles and papers. This means that the articles have been vetted, often by two referees, who have found that the article is of a suitably high standard to warrant publishing in the academic journal. These are often found in academic journals, and most of these are available through the UWS Library website.

Avoiding plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

(Adapted from *How to Avoid Plagiarism* workshop material)

Plagiarism occurs when you use another person's words or ideas without acknowledgement (giving credit to that individual). It sometimes can be accidental (when you cite/reference a source incorrectly or fail to cite a paraphrased sentence). Plagiarism is considered a form of 'academic misconduct'. Under the University policy on Student Academic Misconduct, any student who has plagiarised another's material is dealt with severely.

The university's policy on plagiarism is available at <http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00051>.

According to the *UWS: Student Academic Misconduct Policy* plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a unit as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular unit when, in fact, it was not.

Most commonly, plagiarism exists when:

1. the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work;
2. parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author;
or
3. the whole work, for example an essay, is copied from another source such as a website or another student's essay.

Plagiarism refers not only to academic writing, but also to other forms of presentation for assessments such as performance, design, composition, electronic media.

Other forms of misconduct include collusion or collaboration with another person or student with intent to cheat. Cheating can be in the form of tampering or attempting to tamper with examination scripts, class work, grades or class records et cetera.

Plagiarism usually occurs unintentionally as many students do not understand the referencing conventions and do not reference properly. Therefore to avoid plagiarism you need to clearly understand what is required for appropriate referencing in your assignments and how to do it.

The University undertakes the responsibility of ensuring that students are made aware of accepted academic conventions in their field/s of study and the consequences of failing to follow these conventions. However, it is students' responsibility to be aware of the policy and acquire the knowledge and skills to ensure that they are able to use the appropriate academic conventions in their field of study. For details of the policy go to the suggested site and study the rules. Each College/School handbook also contains these rules, policies and processes.

Referencing

Referencing means acknowledging/citing/documenting the sources of your information in your writing. These sources may include books, journal or magazine articles, newspapers, company, government or institutional reports, websites or personal communication among others.

You should reference sources of your ideas in your work because:

- » Referencing is a way of showing respect for intellectual property (someone else's original work or ideas).
- » It indicates the type of research you have done and the sources that have influenced your thinking.
- » It is evidence of wide reading.
- » It gives strength to your arguments.

In-text referencing

You must refer to the author (date and page number) of your sources in the body of your

assignment using the acceptable referencing/citation style. In the author-date systems like Harvard and APA referencing styles you include the author's last name and the year of publication and the page number (if quoting directly from the source) of what you have borrowed in the text. You also put quotation marks (") around the quotation to show what you have borrowed.

Reference list

A complete reference (referring to those mentioned in the assignment) should appear in the reference list (in alphabetical order) at the end of the paper. Here is an example of referencing (in-text and reference list) in APA referencing style.

Research has suggested that for most first year university students the initial few weeks of study are crucial (Kantanis, 2000; McInnis, 2001; Krause, 2005). It is in this period of transition that students either get integrated into their academic community or else withdraw from the course or university all together. Research in the US (Tinto, 1998; Kuh, 2002) and at home in Australia (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005; Scott, Bond & Webb, 2005), has shown much interest in this phenomena. Students' active involvement and their sense of belonging at university have been claimed as the most effective factors in their learning; as their engagement with the academic environment seems to translate into 'a range of outcomes including persistence, satisfaction, achievement and academic success' (Krause, 2005, p. 1)

References

Kantanis, T. (2000). 'The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first-year of university.' *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9(1), 100-110

Krause, K. L. (2005). 'Understanding and promoting student engagement in university learning communities.' paper presented as a keynote address *Engaged, inert or otherwise occupied? Deconstructing the 21st century undergraduate student* at the James Cook University Symposium 2005,

Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R., & McInnis, C. (2005). *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a decade of national studies*. Canberra: DEST.

Kuh, G. (2002). *The National Survey of Student Engagement: Conceptual Framework and Overview of Psychometric Properties*. Retrieved May 2006 from http://www.indiana.edu/nsse/html/psychometric_framework_2002.htm.

McInnes, C. (2001). 'Researching the First Year Experience: Where to from here?' *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20(2), 105-114.

Scott, G., Bond, N., & Webb, C. (2005). 'What retains students and promotes productive learning in higher education?' *UWS Quality forum*: 8 September.

Tinto, V. (1998). 'Colleges as communities: taking research on student persistence seriously.' *The Review of Higher Education*, 21 (2), 167-177.

(Paragraph and reference list modified from Handa, N. 2006, *Engaging to Empower to Educate – NESB International students at Western Higher Education Institutions*, paper presented at the 6th ISANA conference held Dec 2006 in UNSW Sydney.)

Referencing/citation styles at UWS

Most schools require the author-date ('Harvard' or APA system of in-text referencing), but a few will prefer footnotes (the 'Cambridge' system). To find out which referencing style you need to use, check your unit outline or with your tutors. For more information, visit: <http://library.uws.edu.au/> or <http://library.uws.edu.au/citing.php>

TIP: Download the preferred style. Keep a hard copy on your desk and refer to it whenever in doubt

Attend a workshop on *Introduction to Referencing* or *How to Avoid Plagiarism* if being offered by the Student Learning Unit. HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning) <http://www.uws.edu.au/hall>

SECTION 5: STUDENTS' CONCERNS & GETTING ASSISTANCE WITH PROBLEMS

Time management, stress management and where to find assistance

As an international student, while starting a life in a new environment in a foreign country, you might face many adjustment issues (other than study and academic adjustment). These can be related to your learning to be a student at a university, finding a part-time job, making friends, experiencing a new life style and sometimes having financial difficulties. To achieve your goal of studying in Australia you need to manage your personal and university life in a balanced manner. Otherwise, you might end up with a high level of stress. To strike a balance between living in a new country and your study, you need to manage your time well.

Time management

Five symptoms of poor time management

1. Rushing.
2. Chronic indecision.
3. Fatigue/tiredness even after many hours of (usually) non-productive activity.
4. Constantly intending to complete tasks but never really getting anything done.
5. Sense of having to do what you don't want to do most of the time.

Ten strategies for better time management

1. Write down goals for the day/week/month/year and set time limits for them.
2. Make a semester plan (get a calendar and a semester planner) so you do not end up with more than two assignments at the last minute.
3. Write out a plan each week. Set at least one major objective each week/each day and achieve it.
4. Keep a study time log and occasionally analyse how you use your time.
5. Keep track of what you do and eliminate the unnecessary.
6. Schedule your day, but leave time for the unexpected.
7. Make sure the first hour of your study day is productive.

8. Do it right the first time so you don't have to repeat it.
9. Set aside a quiet hour in your day.
10. Develop the habit of finishing tasks before starting new ones.

Stress management

Stress is a natural part of life. Stress keeps you alert and motivates you to face challenges. It drives you to solve problems. Low levels of stress are manageable, necessary and normal. High levels of stress (distress), however, can be detrimental to achievements. Distress results when your body over-reacts to events. In that case, your overall performance deteriorates and you may even stop being productive. The following suggestions are designed to reduce stress. Try them. They work!

1. **Learn to relax.** Take 'mini- breaks'. Sit down and get comfortable. Slowly, take a deep breath in, hold it and then exhale very slowly. At the same time, relax your shoulders, smile and say something positive like, 'I am relaxed'. Also, be sure to get sufficient sleep at night.
2. **Practise acceptance.** Many people get distressed over things they won't let themselves accept. Often these things cannot be changed, like someone else's feelings or beliefs.
3. **Talk rationally to yourself.** Ask yourself what impact the stressful situation will have on you in a day or a week and see if you can let the negative thoughts go. Rather than thinking 'I should have,' think about what you can learn from the error and plan for the future.
4. **Get organised.** Develop a realistic schedule of daily activities including time for work, sleep, relationships and recreation. Use a daily 'things-to-do' list. Improve your surroundings by cleaning your room or house. Use your time and energy as efficiently as possible.
5. **Exercise.** Physical activity is a good way of getting relief from stress. Develop a regular exercise program to help reduce stress before it becomes distress. Try aerobics, walking, jogging, dancing, swimming et cetera. Join the gym or a sports club on your campus.

6. **Reduce time urgency.** If you frequently check your watch or worry about what you do with your time, it stresses you. Learn to take things a bit slower. Allow plenty of time to get things done. Plan your schedule. Recognise that you can only do so much in a given period. Practise the notion of 'pace, not race'.
7. **Find quiet time.** Balance your social and work demands with special private times. Hobbies are good antidotes for daily pressures. Unwind by taking a walk, reading a novel/ magazine, watching a sunset or listening to calming music.
8. **Watch your habits.** Eat sensibly. A balanced diet will provide the energy you need. Avoid non-prescription drugs and minimise alcohol use. Be mindful of the effects of excessive caffeine, sugar and smoking as these affect your stress response.
9. **Talk to friends.** This can be good medicine. Daily doses of conversation, regular social engagements and occasional sharing of deep feelings and thoughts can reduce stress. Make sure you have some contact with people from your culture too. The community support can help combat feelings of isolation and loneliness.
10. **Seek professional counselling help before your problems become unmanageable or distressing.** Do not shy away from talking about your personal problems; go and see a counsellor. Your counselling sessions will be private and confidential. To find out about the counselling workshops and for useful resources visit the site www.uws.edu.au/students/ods/counsellingservice/counselling_section3

Where to find assistance

For general information about the support services available to students visit the Student Support Services website: www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/getting_help/support_services_for_students

HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning)

For Maths and Academic reading, writing (Literacy) resources, courses and workshops visit HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning) <http://www.uws.edu.au/hall>

HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning) staff are also available for drop-in support in the Academic Writing Library during Semester, if you need help with writing skills for your assignments. All services offered by the HALL are FREE to UWS students.

Many HALL (Hub for Academic Literacy and Learning) workshops are only offered in the first few weeks of the semester starting from the 2nd week of your semester. Visit www.uws.edu.au/hall

Find out about these workshops and register for a couple of workshops every week. To access online resources to develop your academic skills visit <http://tdu.uws.edu.au/languagelearning/>

For assistance with problems of a private or personal nature, get assistance from the Counselling and Disabilities Unit. Do not hide if you have any concerns. Attend their workshops. To make an appointment on your campus, ring them or go to their website: www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/getting_help/counselling_services

To access support for a disability or chronic health condition, visit www.uws.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/getting_help/disability_service

Other associations and student support networks:

- » Student Association – www.uwssa.org.au
- » Postgraduate Students Association – www.pauws.asn.au

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