

DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS

Once you have researched, located and evaluated sources of information, you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of newly assimilated knowledge in your written assessment tasks. This usually involves following a particular academic style in your writing. Academic writing requires the use of more formal language than is used in everyday speech and text, which means no slang, no contractions (for example shouldn't; won't), no text message shorthand (txt spk) and no emotive language. It also involves demonstrating that you have used scholarly sources of information to support your narrative. Your spelling, grammar and punctuation should be accurate, your work logically structured, and your sentences and paragraphs well-formed.

During your time at CQUniversity, you may be asked to write some of the following: annotated bibliography, case study, position paper, discussion paper, essay, book review, reflective journal and/or report. Each type has its own rules of style and format and it is important to find out about these before you begin—first check your unit profile and then consult your lecturers if you are unsure.

Before you begin composing your response to any assessment task, it is very important that you take time to analyse the question, topic or task you are addressing so that you know what to look for when reading and researching. The ability to compile a comprehensive set of lecture or tutorial notes will help you make sense of the information when it comes time to reading and re-writing for an assessment. A good set of notes will help with the writing of essays and will ensure that everything is said in your own words. Students who do not take lecture notes often end up copying material from books and the internet, which can lead to plagiarism.

Visit the Academic Learning Centre for further information at:
<https://www.cqu.edu.au/student-life/services-and-facilities/academic-learning-centre>

WRITE USING COMPLETE SENTENCES

Academic writing requires complete sentences and precise language. Sentences are the basic building blocks of your writing; each needs to have a subject and a verb. You need to make sure that each sentence can stand alone and makes sense on its own. Reading aloud can help you decide whether the sentence is well-formed, with a clear meaning. As a guide, aim for less than 30 words per sentence.

For more information on sentences, see:
<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/writing/2b.html>

For help with incomplete sentences, see:
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/citation/fragments-and-run-ons>

ARRANGE YOUR WRITING IN PARAGRAPHS

A paragraph is a series of around five or six sentences that are all related to a single point or idea. Typically a paragraph is about 200–250 words and starts with a topic sentence that states the main point you are making in that paragraph.

The other sentences in the paragraph should all relate to this topic sentence, providing additional:

- » explanation
- » evidence, and/or
- » examples.

The final sentence in each paragraph should sum up the material on that aspect. It is often useful to revisit those final sentences when you write your conclusion.

There are different types of paragraphs. These include the following: cause-effect, problem-solution, thesis-illustration and comparison-contrast type paragraphs. These patterns differ in the way their topic sentences are written. For example, a cause-effect type paragraph might start with a topic sentence that states that a certain problem can be attributed to a number of factors. Similarly, a comparison type sentence will provide the aspect to be compared within the topic sentence, while a problem-solution type paragraph will start with a clear statement of the issue in the topic sentence and then seek to resolve it in the sentences that follow.

WRITING AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

Use the assessment task details in your unit profile to structure your writing—these are available on your Moodle site.

Guides for CQUniversity's approved referencing styles can be accessed via <https://www.cqu.edu.au/student-life/services-and-facilities/referencing>

For more on academic arguments, see: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/>

Most academic essays follow a similar general structure, with three main components:

1. an introduction
2. a series of body paragraphs (the number will depend on the complexity of your topic, the information available and the word limit of your essay), and
3. a conclusion.

There is no need to use headings for these three components. An essay is one continuous piece of writing. Within each paragraph you must refer to (cite) the sources of specific information and ideas that you found during your literature research to support the topic that you are addressing. At the end of your essay, you should prepare a list of all sources (references), arranged alphabetically. If you compile a full record of your sources as you write your essay you will save yourself a lot of time and stress in the final stages of preparation. An academic essay will often contain an argument beginning with a contentious statement; the author will consider different viewpoints before arriving at a conclusion.

WRITING AN ABSTRACT (SUMMARY)

Some essays and other assessment tasks ask for an abstract. This is a succinct summary of your essay and should state the following: the purpose of the assessment topic, the main areas/aspects covered, and the main conclusions/findings. It should be written as continuous text, without headings, numbers or bullet points (dot points). Most academic journals require authors to write an abstract for their papers, so these can provide useful exemplars on which to model your own writing.

WRITING A REPORT

Another type of assessment task you may be required to complete is a report. A report will often have a specific set of headings for the required sections. The section headings generally used in reports are: Title Page, Executive Summary, Table of Contents, Introduction (including aim, scope, background), Data Collection Methods, Data Analysis, Conclusions, Recommendations and References (check your unit profile for any specific instructions/headings).

Your writing must be formal and objective, rather than being based on your own opinions and unsubstantiated beliefs. Reports are generally more succinct and focussed, using graphs, dot points (bullet points) and graphics to explain things more succinctly. As with an essay, you should refer to all sources by citing them within your report and including them in the list of references.

