Gold Guide to Academic Quality
Links updated August, 2014

Introduction

Good communication skills are critical to success. They help you to achieve good grades at university and are highly valued by employers. This guide provides you with general information about academic requirements for high quality communication. However, please note that some courses have special requirements and you should always follow the instructions in the course outline.

Important Note: The Learning Support group at the University offers all students free help with academic skills. They provide workshops, an excellent website with many resources, and individual and confidential help. See:
http://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/learning/study-skills/develop-your-skills

This gold guide is a very brief summary of some academic skills. It gives provides you with useful web addresses from our online teaching and library resources. The library website has a great deal of useful information and many excellent online tutorials. You can access them via:
http://www.newcastle.edu.au/library/learn/online-tutorials

1   Criteria for grades

The meaning of each grade (High distinction, Distinction, etc) is outlined in University of Newcastle policy at:
http://www.newcastle.edu.au/about-uon/governance-and-leadership/policy-library Policy Library Document 000996 (Edition 2) – 2014 Course Management and Assessment Procedure Manual. Section 19.4

Some courses provide more information to explain how the criteria are specifically interpreted.

2   The basics of academic writing and critical thinking

Basic skills
The University of Newcastle **InfoSkills modules** provide an overview of all the basic activities involved in planning, researching, and writing academic work. The modules are available at
http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/library/tutorials/infoskills/index.html

The five modules provide excellent information with respect to academic skills:
1. Planning
2. Finding information (using the Library)
3. Evaluating information (writing critiques)
4. Writing and plagiarism
5. Using information ethically

Module 4 includes links on strategies for good practice in writing. These strategies include effective notetaking, paraphrasing appropriately, and summarizing correctly and efficiently. If you use Module 4 well, you will be able to save a great deal of time, and simultaneously improve your writing. Module 4 also provides important information about academic integrity and honesty, and avoiding plagiarism.

Academic writing and critical thinking
To achieve highly at university, you must be able to demonstrate high levels of 'effective' writing and 'critical' thinking. Can you explain each of these terms?
Go to the **UniLearning** (University of Wollongong) site for succinct sections on each area. (This can be accessed directly or through the UoN library Services site.) http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/main.html

The summary below is based on the UniLearning site:

Effective writing has	Effective writing is achieved by
• A logical flow of ideas and cohesion • Links between sentences and paragraphs	• Macro devices (organisation and structure; flow; focus in sentences; paragraphs) • Micro devices to support each of the macro

Critical thinking means that you demonstrate the ability to	Critical thinking is achieved by
• Assess the validity of information and its sources for your context • Distinguish between fact and opinion • Synthesise a number of factors and articulate a response • Provide a convincing argument in favour of your response	• Evaluating and critqueing the information in front of you (see Infoskills Module 3) • Incorporating the skills of evaluation and 'hard thinking' into your reading and note-making prior to your writing • Using evidence to support your point of view NB: Critical thinking is continued in Essays below.

You cannot demonstrate critical thinking if you cannot communicate! Note the following:

Grammar, punctuation and spelling	**Eliminating some common errors in language**
Excellent work must demonstrate clear communication and be free of errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. The OWL (Online Writing Lab) website from Purdue University is recommended to you. This site includes exercises and feedback. You can access it directly: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/660/01/ https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/5/ https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/01/ Another site with a wide variety of exercises on grammar can be accessed at: http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/exercises/ Finally, the UniLearning site referred to above has a useful section on writing sentences: http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/writing	• Provide a topic sentence for each **paragraph**. Do *not* have one sentence paragraphs. A paragraph develops/argues a point. • Use short **sentences** (up to 20 words) wherever possible. • **Minimise** the use of "this, these, those". When you do use them, state the subject afterwards, for example, "This result..", "These studies.." • Do not use "**etc**", "**various**" or "**so on**". They are imprecise. If there are other cases, refer to them. • Do not use **contractions** such as "don't, didn't, can't". You should write out the words in full. • Never use "**it's**"; use "its" or "it is'. • Learn when **apostrophes** are used to show ownership and if in doubt, *do not* use them. *Never* use an apostrophe to show a plural. • Learn the difference between **affect/effect** and **their/there** and use them correctly.

It is important to understand the meaning of instruction words. For example, can you distinguish between terms such as: analyse, compare, contrast, debate, discuss, evaluate, interpret, and justify?

3   Essays – structure and style

You may access help via your Blackboard "**My Other Sites** Go to LEARNING DEVELOPMENT→Access 1.Online Resources →Assignment Types → Open Essay Structure Resources
The Study Help website from Murdoch University (no longer available) is the source of the information summarized below.

The nature of university essays – this highlights the need for your essay to be
- • Focused and relevant to the topic
- • The result of wide reading and critical thinking
- • A logical argument
  - o Shows points that are relevant to the argument (omitting the others)
  - o Demonstrates a logical and coherent structure (including links)
  - o Provides evidence (citations, quotes, examples) to support the argument
- • Presented in the conventional format
  - o Has an introduction, body and conclusion
  - o Uses appropriate language
  - o Uses citations correctly and has the corresponding reference list
  - o Is error-free in terms of language skills

The functional stages of an essay (shown as a diagram on the website)
- • Introduction – orientate/respond to topic; state purpose; outline what you will do
- • Body – write the main part here using sections that address the purpose of the essay. Each section will be a series of paragraphs, in logical order, that state your argument and provide evidence for it; and link to the next paragraph
- • Conclusion – summarise and draw out any implications of the discussion

4   Referencing – according to discipline conventions

Newcastle Business School requires you to use the APA (6th ed.) style of referencing. This style uses the author/date system of 'in-text' citations in which you place the author's family name and year of publication in parentheses immediately following the use of, or reference to, their work. At the end of your document you generate a 'Reference List' which provides full bibliographic details of the citations. (Full bibliographic details include elements such as journal or publisher, edition or volume, place of publication, page numbers of journals and date accessed for web sources).

Details of the APA style are available in the book: American Psychological Association (2010), *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington DC, USA: American Psychological Association. An online tutorial is available at: http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx

Below, you are provided with a brief summary covering the most basic requirements.

Summary of rules for referencing using APA style:

Rules for in-text citations	Examples
Paraphrasing or using ideas: include the author and year in brackets or as appropriate Two or more citations are placed in alphabetical order, separated by a semi-colon (Use 'and' in text, '&' within brackets)	In a study of ethnic marketing, Pires and Stanton (2005) found that loyalty differences exist between groups. A recent ethnic marketing study showed… (Pires & Stanton, 2005). Various authors have found a link between… (e.g., Carlson, 1999; Rosenberger, 2003a, 2003b).
Direct quotations: copy exactly, use quotation marks and include the page number	Dean (2002) found that "Service quality of the call centre affects customer loyalty to the organization" (p. 420).
Secondary sources: name the original author and cite the secondary source. Include the secondary source in your Reference List (that is, the one you have read must be in the List)	The results of a study by Baxter (cited in Griffiths, 2005) indicate…
Online material: use author, year (or n.d. if no date is given), page number, paragraph number or the heading of the appropriate section.	Kriz (2006) found …. Studying sense making, Cowley (n.d., para 4) suggests … Ngo and O'Cass (2003) debate the…

Rules for the Reference List	Examples
Book	Solomon, M. R., Marshall, G. W., & Stuart, E. W. (2006). *Marketing* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
Chapter in an edited book	Dean, A. M., & Rainnie, A. (2004). Symbolic analysts in the new economy: Call centres in less favoured regions. In A. Rainnie & M. Grobbelaar (Eds.), *The new regionalism in Australia* (pp. 103-122). Sydney, Australia: Palgrave Press.
Journal article (Include all authors in Ref List; in text, use Rust et al., 2004)	Rust, R. T., Lemon, K. N., & Zeithaml, V. A. (2004). Return on marketing: Using customer equity to focus marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 109-127.
Websites Author (if available) and/or title of document, date of publication (if available, otherwise use n.d.), date accessed (only necessary if the source material may change over time), URL	Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007). *8624.0 - Retail and Wholesale Industries, Australia: Commodities, 2005-06.* Retrieved from http://0-www.abs.gov.au.library.newcastle.edu.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8624.02005-06?OpenDocument
Newspaper article	Lee, J. (2005, August 6). Retail revolution. *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 17.

Please note:
1. All references are listed in alphabetical order by surname of first author
2. Citations and references are for published materials, not lecture notes. Do not quote lecture notes: instead you should access and cite the original sources.
3. As a UoN student, you are entitled to download a copy of **EndNote** from the library. EndNote is a database (a 'bibliography manager') whereby you can input and manage all your references. It will generate a selected Reference List very rapidly in any predetermined or customized style. If you obtain EndNote early in your course and file all your references in it, you will save many, many hours over your degree program. The library has resources and online training available for EndNote. See http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/library/tutorials/endnote/index.html
4. While APA style is the general style used at Newcastle Business School, different disciplines and courses may require different referencing styles. Check your Course Outline and, if in doubt, speak with your Course Coordinator. You can easily change the output style from EndNote.

5   Business reports

The UniLearning (University of Wollongong) website is an excellent resource for business reports. It describes their structure, and has embedded links that provide detail on the purpose and contents of each section in a report. You can access it directly: http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/report/rep_business.html

Note that a business report should include the following sections

It describes the structure of business reports, and has embedded links that provide detail on of each section in a report. Note: A **'briefing paper'** is often a modified report on a specific topic or area.

Title page	Report title, your name, course, date
Executive summary	A snapshot of the whole report including key findings and recommendations
Table of contents	List of sections and page numbers
Introduction	Background an outline of structure
Body	The main part with sections and sub-sections that address the purpose of the report and are distinguished by appropriate headings and sub-headings
Conclusion	States main inferences/implications of findings
Recommendations	Numbered, clearly stated, specific and actionable suggestions
Reference list	Essential for an academic report
Appendices	If appropriate, supporting data/information

6   Presentations (Enter Blackboard and select 'My Other Sites' Go to LEARNING DEVELOPMENT →Assignment Types → Open Giving Great Presentations. PDF)

When preparing the content of your presentation, make sure that you:
- Have clear objectives, and signposts to help the audience follow you
- Choose the content carefully (you cannot cover everything)
- Provide some background or introduction
- Build in a logical structure and flow (this helps you when you are speaking)
- Use convincing (show evidence) and interesting arguments/comments
- Have an appropriate conclusion (do not 'whimper' out)

Basic pointers for your delivery:
- Communication must be clear and polished
- Engage the audience, and use body language that shows enthusiasm
- Facilitate questions that include as many members of the audience as possible
- Provide relaxed, but serious, responses to questions
- Use a suitable pace and manage your time
- Prepare thoroughly and practice before the event!

7   Team work Enter Blackboard as in 6 above and select LEARNING DEVELOPMENT →Study Skills → Group Work. PDFs

Suggestions to help you work successfully in groups:
- Meet regularly for specific purposes
- Develop a timeline of meetings and outcomes
- Discuss and agree members' roles in the group
- Discuss and agree the expectations and study output of each group
- Ensure everyone understands the contribution that each member will make
- Use disagreements as an opportunity to discuss and improve overall outcomes
- Be prepared to communicate, co-operate and compromise.

8   Academic Honesty

The University requires new students to complete the University Academic Integrity Module, which informs of best practice academic honesty practices. The module is available under the "My Courses" listing on the Blackboard home page of the student.