

Academic Writing Guide

Throughout your university study you will need to show through your written assignments your understanding of concepts, knowledge of facts and ability to think critically. This is referred to as 'academic writing' and it is different from creative writing in the same way that spoken English is different from written English.

Layout

All written work such as essays, reports, etc should be double spaced typewritten or word processed work except for:

- footnotes which should be single spaced (if applicable)
- indented quotations which should be either single or one and half spaced.

Each page should have a wide margin of at least 3cm.

Each page should be numbered in either the top right-hand corner or at the centre of the bottom of the page.

Font should be Arial or Times New Roman and font size should be 10 or 12

Formatting

Group paragraphs under headings so that readers can find what they need easily. Aim for consistency in heading hierarchy, paragraph and text formatting, document spacing and word treatment.

Italics are used for the titles of books, publications, reports, forms and policies, events, songs, films etc.

Example:

- She has had 10 years' experience at *The Australian Financial Review*.
- Do you know the words to *Advance Australia Fair*?

Bold should be used sparingly. It makes the text harder to read, and if it is used repeatedly, nothing stands out.

Avoid use of underlining for any reason.

ALL CAPITALS should not be used in paragraphs and should only be used in titles when this is the correct style.

Preferred Spellings and Terminology

Use English or Australian spelling, not US:

- colour (not color)
- honour (not honor)
- neighbour (not neighbor)
- organise (not organize)

- organisation (not organization)
- centre (not center)
- enrol (not enroll)
- cancelled (not canceled)

However, retain actual spellings in organisation names, book titles etc.:

- World Health Organization
- US Center of Military History
- The Color of Money
- UN Global Compact Cities Programme

Referencing Style

AAPoly uses the APA referencing style. The APA referencing style refers to the main scholarly association for academic psychologists in the United States (the American Psychological Association) which developed standardized methods for citing print and electronic sources used in research.

At the appropriate place in the text, the source is indicated by stating, in brackets, the surname(s) or the author(s), the publication date, and if appropriate, the page number(s) being quoted or referred to. References in the text should correspond with entries in the list of references at the end of the piece of work.

Examples of correct citation are as follows:

- As indicated in recent research (Jones, 2000), follow up interviews needs to be made...
- A common belief (Jones & Smith, 2001) was that...
- Several texts (Adams, 1998; Cummings, 2002; Granger, 2001) have concluded...

Numbers

Spell out numbers between one and nine. Use figures for 10 upwards (except at the start of a sentence), in percentages (see below) or in decimals (3.5). Use commas (not spaces) within all numbers beyond 10,000. Examples:

- He has three cars.
- There are 17 students in the class.
- Thirty-five offers were made.
- AAPoly has 10,500 students.

Numbers higher than a million are written in words for numbers between one and nine:

- four million (except in the case of decimals – 4.5 million)
- 23 million.

Write numbers as numerals in a chart or table, or for:

- street numbers
23 Flinders Street

12/43 Goughs Lane or

Unit 12, 43 Goughs Lane

- measurements
16km
- pages, chapters or sections
Page 43, Chapters 4, 5 and 6
- dimensions
20 metres by 10.5 metres or 20.1x10.5m

Temperatures may be written as numerals (32C) or spelt out (32 degrees), but be consistent in your usage.

Use roman numerals for:

- Certificate qualifications
Certificate III, not Certificate 3
- World wars
World War I, II (“the First World War” is also acceptable)

Ordinal numbers should generally be written in full: the third student.

Where ordinal numbers are written in numerals, do not use superscript: an 18th century sculpture (not 18th)

For approximate numbers, use “almost”, “nearly”, “about” or “more than”, or omit.

For example:

- China produces more than 200 million tonnes of fly ash a year.

In printed publications, avoid splitting numbers and words across two lines:

- Incorrect: China and India produce more than 300
million tonnes of fly ash a year.

Percentages

Use “per cent” in written text, not “%”, and write numbers in numerals (except at the start of a paragraph). Examples:

Water levels were at 40 per cent.

Forty per cent of employees drive to work.

In forms or tables, numerals and the percentage symbol should be used. Keep decimal places to a minimum (65.7, not 65.6629), and be consistent.

Currencies

Money is written as follows:

- \$50
- \$50.00 (where mixed amounts appear, such as in tables)
- \$10.35
- 85 cents (in general text)
- \$1000

- \$100,000
- \$1 million
- \$1.26 million

Shortened Forms

Abbreviations and contractions

An abbreviation is a shortened form used in place of the whole word. Abbreviations usually end in a full stop, although the full stop can be omitted for commonly used abbreviations. Contractions are shortened forms in which the last letter of the original word is present. Contractions do not require a full stop.

Abbreviations

etc.
op.cit.
e.g.
co.
Vic.
The Hon. John Smith

Contractions

re
Dr
Mr
Cwlth
Pty Ltd
dept

Abbreviations and contractions should be used only if they are well known or explained, and should be avoided in formal communications. Foreign language abbreviations should be used only if the meaning cannot be expressed clearly in English, and should be italicised unless they are in common English usage (check the dictionary if unsure).

Acronyms and abbreviated forms

An acronym is a string of initial letters that are sometimes used as a word: Higher Education Loan Program – HELP (no full stops within acronyms). If an acronym or abbreviated form is not widely recognised, the name should be spelt out in full. If the full name is repeated in the same document or on the same webpage, the name should be spelt out in full on the first mention, and can then be followed by its acronym/abbreviated form in brackets: Singapore Institute of Management (SIM). For subsequent references, you can use only the acronym “SIM”. Where there is no acceptable acronym, you should subsequently use “the Institute” or similar.

NB: Give the acronym/abbreviated form in brackets after the full version only if you intend to use it later. If an acronym is widely recognised, or if an organisation is generally known by an acronym rather than by its full name, the acronym need not be spelt out.

Examples: HECS, NSW, CSIRO, ACTU, ANZAC.

Symbols

Ampersands (&) should not be used within text to replace “and”, except as part of an abbreviation (e.g. L&T) or when part of a business or organisation name (e.g. Ernst & Young).

Punctuation

Apostrophes

See Plurals and Apostrophes below .

Exclamation marks

Exclamation marks (!) emphasise meaning or importance. They should be used sparingly or not at all.

Commas

A comma (,) marks the smallest break in a sentence. As a general rule, use commas to aid comprehension and clarity. Be aware that omission or misuse of commas can completely alter the meaning of a sentence.

Some examples of usage:

- He bought a sandwich, an apple and a drink.
(no comma before final “and”)
- RMIT is committed to ensuring it has an inclusive and diverse student population, and to building education and training opportunities for disadvantaged urban populations.
(comma before “and” to aid clarity)
- a full course load, e.g. six subjects (also for i.e.)
- includes paper and writing materials etc.
(no comma before “etc.”)
- In 2001, 3.2 million people voted ...
(comma after the year if the date is followed by numbers)
- The forum was held in Bundoora, Victoria, on 6 March.
(pair of commas required)
- In the meantime, despite the continuing discussions, disaster was becoming inevitable.
(pair of commas required)
- Ziggy Switkowski AO
(no comma required before “AO”)
- Prime Minister Tony Abbott spoke at the launch.
(no comma required before and after name).

However, commas are required here:

- Professor David Adams, Director of the Health Innovations Research Institute, spoke at the launch.

Semicolons

A semicolon (;) provides a stronger break than that provided by a comma, and a weaker break than that created by a full stop. It can be used to connect two clauses that could be treated as separate sentences but have a close logical link.

Example:

To be rich and not complain is easy; to be poor and not complain is much more difficult.

Semicolons can also be used to break up long sentences, or to separate items in a series or list within a sentence.

Examples:

Factors contributing to reduced student numbers have included the strong Australian dollar; tough student visa regulations; increased competition from the US, UK and other study destinations; uncertainty in global financial markets; and negative publicity in the international media with the collapse of private colleges.

The interest of students and their families in an RMIT education has never been higher; our alumni are making their mark; our facilities have improved; our finances are healthy; and our character and reputation are well defined and respected.

When writing a paragraph such as the above, note that a semicolon is required before the final item in the list, followed by “and”.

Note that it’s usually better to write shorter sentences, rather than long paragraphs broken up by semicolons.

Colons

A colon (:) is a marker of relationship and sequence. It can be used to introduce explanatory detail, or to link a title with its subtitle.

Examples:

- There was only one word for it: catastrophic.
- We were concerned: the key speaker had been delayed and the next speaker could not be located.
- Learning Communities: An Indigenous Partnership Model
- Three areas were represented: Finance, Human Resources and IT.

The colon can also introduce further information or a bulleted list (see Bulleted and Numbered Lists, below).

Examples:

- Prerequisites: Nil (no full stop)
- Project themes include:
 - COSTS
 - INNOVATION
 - EFFICIENCY

En dash

Use an en dash (–) within text, with a space either side, to signify an abrupt change, to introduce an explanation or to set apart parenthetical elements within a sentence. (An en dash (—) is rarely used.)

Examples:

- I didn’t realise you were born overseas – but I digress.
- It’s not just encouraged – it’s expected.
- Albert Einstein authored a number of scientific theories – the Theory of Relativity being the most famous – which changed our perceptions of the world.

En dashes are also used to mean “to” in spans of numbers and time like for “2–6 June” or “5–6pm” and in expressions such as “Sydney–Melbourne train line”. They can also indicate an association between words, e.g. “cost–benefit ratios”. In all of these cases, the en dash is not spaced. Dashes are used widely in casual communications but should be avoided in formal text or published writing.

Brackets (parentheses)

Brackets () can enclose definitions, comments or extra information in a similar way to commas and en dashes. If a complete sentence is enclosed within brackets, the full stop should be within the brackets, e.g. (This applies to all commencing students.) Brackets can interrupt the reading experience so should be avoided.

Ellipses

Use ellipses (...) for omitted text with a space either side.

Example:

“Money affords choices ... in lifestyle,” she said.

Forward slash

A slash (/), also known as an oblique or solidus, is used to indicate alternatives. Examples:

- Bachelor of Engineering/Diploma in Engineering
- yes/no
- male/female

Note that there is no space on either side of a slash.

Do not use a slash to replace “or” in general text.

Hyphenation

The general rules are:

Hyphenate compound adjectives:

long-term plan, first-year student, half-hour meeting, four-year-old girl, well-known organisation, full-time work, government-owned facility, disability-related requirements, heritage-listed building, 230-seat lecture theatre, cutting-edge design.

When the expression does not form a compound adjective, no hyphen is used:

- a plan for the long term
- the first year of the course
- she is four years old;
- this doctor is well known within the community
- at the cutting edge of technology

Compounds comprising adverbs (words that describe the verb, often ending in “ly”) are not hyphenated:

- highly qualified applicant
- finely honed argument
- newly renovated premises

Use hyphens:

- After a prefix to distinguish from well-known words:
resigned, re-signed
- To separate identical letters or two vowel sounds:

re-evaluation, anti-aircraft. Exceptions are “cooperation” and “coordination” which are no longer hyphenated.

- For points of the compass:
north-east
- In prefixes followed by a capital letter:
pre-Christian era
- With “co” (“joint”) and “ex” (“former”):
co-tenant; ex-president

Avoid word breaks and automatic hyphenation in all printed text.

Quotation Marks

Use double quotation marks for quoted speech, except in headings and in quotes within quotes which take single quotation marks. Example:

“When people ask ‘Is this important?’, I tell them it’s vital,” he said.

Use double quotation marks for quoted words. Example:

He described the new technique as “a winner”.

Spacing

In web writing and publications, add only one space after a full stop, colon or semicolon.

Capitalisation

As a general rule, initial capitals are used to distinguish the particular from the general.

Particular

I saw Professor Jane Smith
See Page 6 for further details
As discussed in Chapter 10
The meeting is in Courtroom 2

In Semester 1 we will study ...
The Victorian Government’s policy ...

The University is the biggest
provider of programs

General

I saw one of the professors
It is on page six
There are six chapters in the book
We will need to book one of the
courtrooms
Next semester we will study ...
It’s up to the state governments to
decide
A global university of technology
and design

Minimal capitalisation

With minimal capitalisation, an initial capital is used only for the first word and any proper names. This style applies to the headings of articles and to RMIT News stories.

Example:

- Marketing students receive Australia Post internships

Minimal capitalisation is often used in headings and lists:

- Latest news

- Key industry sectors
- Application for leave of absence
- Equitable assessment arrangements policy

Maximal capitalisation

With maximal capitalisation, every word is capitalised except articles (“the”, “an” etc.), prepositions and conjunctions. This convention generally applies to the titles of books, songs, films, events and publications, and is also often used in headings. Examples:

- War and Peace
- The Devil Wears Prada
- People and the Planet: Transforming the Future
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing