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L TTC Resource Pack on Academic Writing & Referencing

Roisin Donnelly

Technological University Dublin, roisin.donnelly@tudublin.ie

Marian Fitzmaurice

Technological University Dublin, marian.fitzmaurice@tudublin.ie

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This pack has two sections. Section 1 explains the process of writing assignments for the postgraduate programmes in The Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC). Section 2 details the APA American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style required for all LTTC postgraduate programmes.

Section 1: Writing assignments

Context and purpose

The purpose of this guide is to support you in undertaking your written assignments for the postgraduate programmes in order to help you organise your work in alignment with academic writing requirements.

A common problem in terms of academic writing is finding a consistent voice which is correctly pitched for an academic audience. In writing for an academic audience, there are certain protocols that must be adhered to. These include sourcing and drawing on relevant research-based studies, developing an ability to critique the literature in the field, making connections between the literature and your own professional context and referencing.

Referencing is a process that identifies the sources of information used in your assignment. Some of the main purposes of referencing are: to justify/support the position you take in your assignment, to show the arguments put forward by different writers, and to allow the reader to physically locate the sources used.

Assignments should be regarded as an opportunity to reflect on key issues that arise for you during the programmes. In general, each assignment requires you to examine issues carefully on the basis of further reading and in relation to your own professional and practical experiences. We recognise that participants are drawn from a variety of disciplines and with varied experiences in third level education and what is expected in an assignment is a systematic, rigorous and informed personal response to a topic, rather than one correct solution. While there is a variety in the type of written assignment that you will undertake, there are a number of considerations that you must bear in mind, and these are listed below.

For every module on the postgraduate programmes, there is a student handbook available. This will explain the assessment criteria which tutors will use and provide details on student support and submission procedures for assignments. It is expected that the standard of work in your assignments will develop and improve as you progress through the programmes so that by the final stage you will have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to undertake postgraduate research.



Assignment organisation

For each written assignment:

- It is strongly advised that you produce an outline plan (structured abstract) for the assignment, detailing the major issues that you will be addressing and the structure in terms of headings/subheadings and the line of argument you will be following (approx 250 words).
- Ensure title and content are congruent.
- An introduction needs to state the issue that you are concerned with and how you are going to approach the issue.
- The body of the assignment should also be structured and the order of the sections will be determined by the line of argument. Signal clearly the various sections with the use of headings.
- Give each issue the attention needed; this involves ensuring that there is an adequate amount of space given to each of the issues you wish to engage with. It is important to adhere to the recommended word length.
- In conclusion, summarise the outcomes of your discussions, indicate any uncertainties in the area of study and where appropriate make suggestions for future research.

Reference to the literature

Present a comprehensive range of sources (drawn from books and journal articles) rather than relying on a small number. When using web-based resources, ensure that you can verify the reliability of the sources. All material should be properly referenced (see section 2 for details on this).

It is vital to critically appraise the literature; use it to develop and give coherence to your own arguments. You are entitled to include your own opinion but keep in mind the need to support your ideas with evidence as unsupported opinion can be seen as prejudice.

Analysis and interpretation

A critical examination of the issues in your assignment is vital. To do this you need to present alternative interpretations and perspectives clearly. This will involve analysing arguments, ideas or theories put forward by an author, deciding how valid they are and comparing these ideas with other theorists. An overall evaluation of the conclusions that can and cannot be drawn in relation to your own identified issues is a necessary part of your assignment.

Professional relevance

Where appropriate, you need to address the professional relevance of the issues addressed in the assignment. This can be easily achieved in a number of ways:

- Draw on your own personal and professional, experience, but avoid becoming anecdotal.
- Make links between theory and practice.
- Use case studies to illustrate good or poor practice.



Presentation

A high standard of presentation is essential in all assignments on the postgraduate programmes. This includes:

- Good organisation and structure
- Clarity of expression; remember that too many quotations (especially lengthy ones) can interfere with the flow of an assignment and it is advisable to succinctly summarise what the authors are saying.
- A readable, fluent style
- Appropriate referencing (see section 2)
- Writing to the prescribed number of words
- Careful personal checking of your assignment to avoid all spelling, grammatical and typographical errors. Do not rely on computerised spelling and grammar checks as they are not a substitute for careful proof-reading.

Section 2: Using the APA American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style

In using a system of reference, the main aim is to give your readers the information they need in order to find for themselves all the quotations and references that you have used. Thus, you must ensure that every reference that you cite in your assignment is included in your References section.

In-text citations

Quoting from a book

The APA referencing system provides the author's surname, date, and page number for a direct quote e.g. (Biggs, 1999, p. 28); and the author's surname and date for a paraphrase e.g. (Biggs, 1999).

There are various ways to cite a source; some examples are listed below.

How to Include a Direct Quote:

When you provide a direct quotation, place the quote within "quotation marks" and acknowledge the author's surname, date of publication, and page number(s).

“Although research, scholarship and teaching are clearly very different kinds of activity, each requires a dispositional orientation towards these virtues.” (Nixon, 2004, p. 7)

When a direct quote is more than 40 words, indent the quote five to seven spaces, leave out the "quotation marks" and single spacing may be used:

Teaching may be compared to selling commodities. No one can sell unless someone buys. We should ridicule a merchant who said that he had sold a great many goods although no one had bought any. But perhaps there are teachers who think they have done a good day's teaching irrespective of what people have learnt. There is the same exact equation between teaching and learning that there is between buying and selling. (Dewey, 1933, pp. 35-36)



How to Include a Paraphrase

When you use the author's ideas but not his/her exact words, provide the author's surname and date of publication.

One Author

Morality has been defined as an active process of constructing understandings and meanings related to social interactions (McCadden, 1998).

Frowe (2005) argues that any attempt to specify the nature of judgement in explicit terms is misconceived because judgement is resistant to reduction to a set of propositions and thus the importance of professional trust.

Several Sources

Much has been much written about the skills and abilities, qualities and understandings, characteristics and awareness, which make someone a good teacher in higher education (Ramsden, 1992; Cowan, 1998; Knight, 2002; Biggs, 2003).

Using 'et al.' (means "and others")

If there are three to five authors, cite all of the authors followed by the publication date for the first citation and on subsequent citations you use et al.

Hillman et al. (1994) extended an existing taxonomy in the field of online education.

In the reference list you provide all author surnames.

A Secondary Source - An Author Cited by Another Author

If you are reading a text that discusses another person's work, cite the surname of the person whose work was mentioned and then cite the surname of the author you are reading.

Clifford (as cited in Clegg et al. 2004) talks about the need to construct identity in collaboration with colleagues .

This tells your reader that you found out about Clifford's work by reading Clegg et al.'s book. In the reference list you provide an entry for Clegg et al.

Personal Communication

When you cite personal communication (e.g., conversations, interview data, lecture notes), cite the communicator's initial and surname, a title to explain the type of communication, and the date of communication:

M. Fitzmaurice (personal communication, January 30, 2008) commented ...
The reflective process requires an on-going commitment (R. Donnelly, personal communication, February 4, 2008).

There is no entry for 'personal communication' in the reference list.



Newspaper Article

Duffy, D. (2007, January 8). Ireland faces a university challenge. *The Irish Times*, p. 10.

Conference Proceedings

Published

Asensio, M., Jones, C., Hodgson, V., & Goodyear, P. (2000). The Student Experience: An Evaluation of Networked Learning in a Variety of Media. *Proceedings of the Association for Learning Technology Conference (ALT-C)*. Manchester: University of Manchester Institutes of Science & Technology.

Unpublished

Cousin, G. (2006). *Threshold Concepts: Old Wine in New Bottles?* Paper presented at the Threshold Concepts within the Disciplines Symposium, Glasgow.

Electronic Sources

Internet sources (e.g., articles, journals, reports) are obtained online, and these documents are cited and referenced according to the 'author-date' format.

Electronic Journal Article

Vaughan, N. (2007). Perspectives on Blended Learning in Higher Education. *International Journal on E-Learning*, 6(1), 81-94. Retrieved April 10, 2008, from ERIC database.

How to construct a Reference list

- A reference list starts on a new page and is headed References.
- List all citation entries alphabetically according to author.
- Use the hanging indent format where the first line of a citation is not indented while the second and any subsequent lines are indented five to seven spaces.
- Single space within each citation entry in the list.
- Double space between citation entries in the list.

An Example of a Reference List

Barnett, R. & Coate, K. (2005). *Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education*. Berkshire: SRHE & Open University Press.

Cowan, J. (1998). *On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press.

Frowe, I. (2005). Professional Trust. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(1). 34-53.

Harris, S. (2005). Rethinking academic identities in neo-liberal times. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(4), 421-433.

McLaren, P. (2004). Teaching in and against the Empire: Critical Pedagogy as Revolutionary Praxis. *Teacher Education Quarterly*. Retrieved December 12, 2006, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3960/is/ai_n9378137/print



Nixon, J. (2004). Learning the Language of Deliberative Democracy. In M. Walker & J. Nixon (Eds.), *Reclaiming Universities from a Runaway World* (pp. 114-127). Berkshire: SRHE & Open University Press.



House Style

The preferred house style for presentation of assignments includes the following specifications:

- * Two copies of all assignments should be submitted.

- * The American Psychological Association (APA) should be used consistently throughout all assignments.

Technical aspects of presentation are as follows:

- | | | | |
|----|----------------|---|------------------------|
| 1. | Font style | Times New Roman | |
| 2. | Font Size | Headings | 12 bold (left aligned) |
| | | Text | 12 plain |
| 3. | Page numbering | Centred at foot | |
| 4. | Line spacing | 1.5 | |
| 5. | Text justified | | |
| 6. | Quotations | Italics with double inverted commas for all short quotations embedded in the text | |
| | | All long quotations to be indented at both sides, no quotation marks. | |
| 7. | Emphasis | Bold or italics. Do not underline. | |
| 8. | Use of colour | Text in black print on white paper.
Colour may be used selectively for images, graphs, charts, diagrams etc. | |

Resources for further reading

The LTC library has copies of the following texts:

Assignment and thesis writing, by Anderson & Poole, available at 808.066

The Handbook of Academic writing, by Murray and Moore, available at 808.6637

A manual for writers of research papers, theses and dissertations, available at 808.066

Doing you Master Dissertation, by Hart, available at 808.066

Authoring a PhD, how to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation, by Dunleavy, available at 808.066

Research and writing your thesis: a guide for postgraduate students, by Antonesa et al, available at 808.066



There are also a wide variety of web sites available which provide practical tips on writing. Some that we would recommend that are either government funded or based in a university (note: the citation styles used in the sites may vary):

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/what.shtml

<http://www.asrp.info/WritingThesis.php>

<http://www.education.monash.edu.au/students/current/resources/thesiswriting.html>

<http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/>