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CHAPTER 1

Getting organised

The chances are that you're one of the third of a million students beginning a university course this year in Australia. In order to be a successful student, you need to be clear about how university teaching staff see their students:

- Students are adults who have a right and responsibility to manage their own lives.
- Students have the intelligence, experience and motivation to learn with the minimum amount of formal teaching.

Thus to be a successful university student, you need to be organised. For most undergraduates there is a steep learning curve during the first semester, and especially during the first few weeks. This chapter looks at some of the very basic but very important steps that you'll need to take to get yourself organised to study effectively.

Getting organised physically

This section is in three parts. It starts with some comments about the university campus where you attend classes, then looks at the room where you'll do most of your study, and finally gives some advice about what you need on your desk, in particular your personal computer.

University campus

Most university undergraduates (but by no means all) are *internal students* who attend classes on campus. Campuses vary a lot in size, but some can be the equivalent of a small town with tens of thousands of

students. The larger the campus, the harder you have to work to become familiar with your new surroundings. (I well remember going for a job interview, and getting lost in what seemed to be a maze of corridors!)

Universities traditionally hold orientation programs at the start of each academic year, usually starting before the continuing students come back. The bigger your home campus, the more important it is to attend this orientation period. One of the many things you'll find out is what's where. The more familiar you are with the campus geography, the less stress you'll have when the semester actually begins. Try not to be part of the group of students rushing around 15 minutes after the start of a lecture trying to find the lecture theatre!

If you're one of the 150,000 *external students* studying largely from home, then campus orientation is not likely to be a big issue. Staff may ask you to attend a residential school for a weekend or longer; but increasingly external students do all their study without ever setting foot on campus (physically, if not electronically).

Study environment

As a student, you'll spend a lot of time thinking, reading and writing. You are likely to do much of this in one or more of the following places: your campus library, other campus facilities, at work, and at home.

Your **campus library** has several areas where readers can work. They are well lit, are reasonably quiet, and have space for you to spread out your stuff. It's important to find the spot that best suits you, and make use of it during breaks between lectures and tutorials. Obviously, you have to be organised, and have the right study materials to hand.

If you don't have access to a computer at home, a very important on-campus facility is the **computer workroom**. However, they can be busy, noisy, cramped places, and it's best to use them only for the largely mechanical task of transferring your hand-written text onto a computer file. Once you have printed off a draft, go somewhere quieter to read and revise it. You may be able to use an empty classroom to do this sort of work, though on many campuses the pressure on room space makes this an unlikely option. The campus library is the best bet.

It may be possible to negotiate use of some office space at **your workplace**, particularly if you're an external student studying part-time—and even more so if your employer feels that you'll be a better employee as a result of your study! However, be aware that the way the information technology has been set up may limit your use of a workplace computer for academic purposes.

Everyone is likely to do some study **at home**; indeed, many external students do all their study at home. If you're living in on-campus

accommodation, your room is likely to be set up for use as a study, possibly with a desk, reading lamp and computer access. However, most students need to organise their own study area at home. Ideally, you need a room that is just for studying; somewhere that you can call *my study*. If that isn't possible, then try to have at least a table that you can say is *my study table*. Organise the room or area so that:

- your eyes can focus without strain on what you're reading
- you can keep it at a reasonable temperature
- you can sit in the chair for a long time (with periodic breaks) without ending up with neck ache or back ache
- you are as far away as possible from the distractions of family members or friends.

What's on your desk

You'll find that at the start of every semester, you can spend several hundred dollars if you buy all the **prescribed textbooks**. However, you don't necessarily need to *buy* each one yourself, but you do need ready *access* to each of them. Sharing a copy with a friend is easiest if you're living in the same student accommodation. But you should be clear from the start about how you'll share the book (and the proceeds from any later sale!). The first semester of first year is also the time when you're most likely to buy other things, such as your own dictionary, folders for your notes—and perhaps the book you're reading now.

However, your major single purchase is likely to be a **computer**. At one time, I could tell students that a computer was an optional extra. However, those days are now gone, and unless you have ready access to one on campus, at work or elsewhere, you're going to need a computer and a printer on your desk at home. You'll also need Internet access. Your university's IT section should have information about recommended computer specifications. If money for a computer is a major problem, you may be able to arrange a loan from your university.

Buying the equipment is only the first step, of course. If you're a rank beginner, try to find family or friends who are able to help you out, and be prepared to spend a lot of time getting familiar with equipment that is very valuable—but also sometimes incredibly frustrating! You will make heavy use of the computing equipment throughout your student career. First, and most obviously, you'll need it for word processing. Secondly, because university libraries have increasingly gone online, you'll need it to access electronic versions of a wide range of resources. And, most recently, because university staff have begun using software packages called *learning management systems*, you'll probably need it to access web-based course material and communicate with staff and other

students. Thus, the basic message is that you *must* have access to a computer.

Getting organised socially

In this section, I want to look briefly at two aspects of your new student role: (i) getting to know how your university works; and (ii) personal time management.

Getting to know how your university works

When you enrol as an undergraduate, you join nearly one million other university students. Consequently, each of Australia's 40 or so universities is much larger than the high school that you may have recently attended. For example, I teach in a middle-sized university, but its numbers are still large: over 30,000 students, over 2500 staff, over \$400 million annual income, over 300 courses (e.g. BA, BSc), and so on. Of course, the vast majority of all of this is invisible to individual students. But it is important that you have some idea about exactly where you fit in.

The chances are that you will be inundated with **information about your new university**. The traditional source of information is the university *Handbook*. In printed form it can be the size of a small telephone book, though now it's more likely to be online. Indeed, the amount of information online will be huge, with both the faculties (e.g. Arts, Science) and divisions (e.g. Library, IT) having sites. In the first few weeks, you may get emails from staff in the student services area keeping you up-to-date with what's going on. More specifically, there will be handouts from academics in your faculty about the units or subjects you have enrolled in, and about more general academic issues. It's important that you keep track of this information for future reference.

For example, get to know the **structure of your degree program**. Courses vary in terms of how much flexibility students have in choosing units or subjects. In some programs all the units may be compulsory. In others, you may be able to choose most of your units from a long list of options. Similarly, degree programs vary in their use of prerequisite regulations. For example, in one program you may need to pass Economics 1A before you can enrol for Economics 1B (i.e. 1A is a *prerequisite* for 1B). In another program, you may be able to enrol in Economics 1B without having done 1A. The more flexible the program, the more options you have—but the more planning you have to do yourself.

There are also regulations about **enrolling and withdrawing** from units and programs. You may find that an individual unit is not what you expected. After much cool and rational thought, you may decide to alter your original registration. If you wish to withdraw from an individual unit, find out how, if at all, your enrolment in the unit will appear on your record of results. For example, if you withdraw after a certain date you may be classified as having failed the unit. Similarly, find out the financial implications of withdrawing. For example, are you still eligible for a government grant? If you want to enrol in a new second semester unit, be clear about how this will affect your unit enrolments in the next academic year.

Check out your department's policy on the **submission of assignments**. For example, in some departments you have to hand in all assignments. In others, your grade depends on the total marks from those assignments you submit. There are also variations in departmental policy about assignment deadlines. For example, find out what to do when you're sick and can't meet a deadline; find out what penalties apply for late submission of assignments. If you're working across two or more schools or departments, see if there are any differences in their policies about submitting assignments.

Non-academic outnumber academic staff at universities. Some non-academic staff are there to help you with personal, economic or social problems. The most common **personal problems** are those concerned with illness. Find out about the student health service. It's likely to be conveniently located on-campus, staffed by people who understand student pressures, and set up to keep your medical costs to a minimum. For other personal difficulties, such as an inability to organise your time, the best source of advice may be the student counselling service.

Most universities provide advice about **economic problems**. For example, you should be able to get information about government grants, taxes, and concessions for such things as public transport and cinema admission. In an emergency, you may be able to get an interest-free loan from your university. Your campus might have an employment officer who will help you find part-time work. Finally, check out what's available at the second-hand campus bookshop—but make absolutely sure that any textbooks you buy are still used in the unit, and are the correct edition.

Lastly, there are a number of possible **social problems**. For example, you may feel that you are being subjected to sexual harassment; or you might be in dispute with the owner of your flat; or you may have serious family problems. If you have any problems like these, seek help from the

student counsellors. One of their main jobs is to help you get through these crises.

Generally, if you have a query about how your university works, there are **people who will be able to help**. Often, the hard part is finding out who's the right person to ask. If you're on campus and simply don't know where to go for advice, probably the best thing is to go to your faculty general office. If the staff there can't answer the query themselves, they should be able to direct you to someone who can. If you're an off-campus student, you should have information about whom you can contact if you have a query. It's important that you use this service.

Personal time management

For many on-campus students who may be living away from home for the first time, time management can be the most crucial skill during the first semester. And time management is a major concern for many off-campus students, as they juggle a variety of calls on their time. Whatever your particular situation, there are **four major calls on your time**:

- *personal activities*—e.g. eating, shopping, cleaning
- *economic activities*—e.g. acquiring (most difficult!), organising and spending money (least difficult!)
- *social activities*—e.g. family commitments, sport, cinema
- *academic activities*—class work and private study.

As a university student, you have to manage your life to make sure that you **balance your non-academic activities with your academic work**. Only you can say what the right balance is—it depends on your abilities, ambitions, interests and personality. As a very general guide, I suggest you start your degree by working for about 8 to 10 hours per week on each unit, assuming there are four units per semester for a full-time student. It should take you no more than a few weeks to decide whether you have the right balance between your academic and non-academic activities. For example, you may feel uncomfortable away from your desk because you think that you should be studying. Or you may feel uncomfortable at your desk because you've been studying too long, and think that you should be doing something different.

To help you maintain a balance between your academic and non-academic activities you need to **plan your time**. To do this well, you definitely need a plan for the semester. You may also benefit from a series of plans for each week of the teaching period.

Most important is a **semester planner**. At the start of the term or semester, the co-ordinator of each unit will give you a list of submission dates for any assignment work. In addition, your university handbook

will include a calendar of important dates such as the start and end of each semester, and the exam periods. Obtain a large year planner. Your student association may give them away, or you can buy one. Mark on the important dates from each unit handout and the university *Handbook*. Also include on your year planner any other major activities with fixed dates: your team's sporting fixtures, your sister's wedding (or your own!), and so on. Pin your year planner where you can keep a close eye on it. If you cross off each day as it goes by, you can see at a glance how much time you have left before your next assignment deadline, and can plan accordingly.

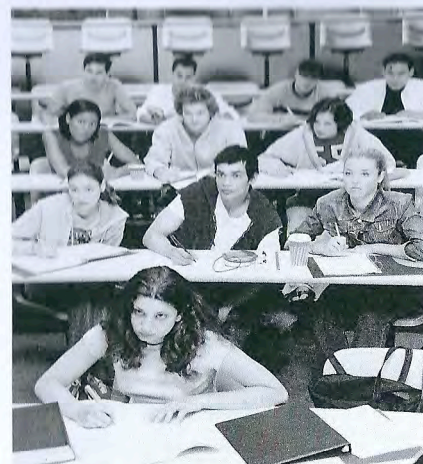
Some people also find it useful to have **weekly plans**. If you're a full-time student, you may have only 10 or 15 hours per week of formal classes, the rest being largely 'free' time. Without a plan for the week, the days can slip by as you delay your private study, believing that you have so much time that there is no need to start right away. In contrast, if you're a part-time student, you may have 40 or 50 hours per week allocated to non-academic activities. Without a plan for the week, the days can slip by as these activities crowd out your academic work. If you find this happening, then a detailed plan for each week is very useful. At the very least, include the commitments listed on the semester planner, any class times, hours of employment, and any other activities with specific times (e.g. choir or basketball practice). The remaining time is potentially available for private study.

There are two basic ways of making sure that you do the necessary amount of private study during the time remaining on the weekly timetable: **backward planning** and **forward planning**. In backward planning, you commit yourself to a certain number of hours of private study at some time during the week. Each time you complete at least a half hour's study, you add it to your list of work done, and note how much you have left to do. You thus plan your next study session by looking back at what you have done in previous sessions. In forward planning, you commit yourself not only to a certain number of hours of private study, but also to study particular subjects at specified times. Use the method that works best for you—backward planning or forward planning.

Of course, as the Scottish poet Robbie Burns points out, 'The best laid schemes o' mice and men/Gang aft a-gley'. In other words, even the best plans sometimes come unstuck. If you find that you didn't do as much academic work as you had planned, try to work out the reason why. Look carefully over the previous week to see exactly how you spent your time. If you find that there was virtually no wasted time, then you'll need to balance your academic and non-academic activities by cutting back on

some of your personal, economic or social activities. This is most likely if you're a part-time student, trying to fit studying into an already busy lifestyle. If you can't (or won't) cut back on your non-academic activities, then the only alternative is to reduce your academic workload. However, particularly if you're a full-time student, it's much more likely that you have wasted time watching TV, chatting endlessly, or spending too long in bed—all popular student activities! You need to balance your academic and non-academic work by reducing the amount of time wasted on your personal and social activities.

Many second-year and third-year students have told me that getting organised was the most important thing they did in those vital first few weeks at university. Getting organised is something you need to work at. Don't expect that it will just happen naturally!



CHAPTER 2

Lectures

This and the following two chapters show how to get the most from class work, where you and other students meet with staff at times set by the university. There are two main types of class work covered in the book: lectures, which are the focus of this chapter, and tutorials (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). Each chapter has a basic Before-During-After structure. In other words, I'll look at class work in terms of:

- what to do in your private study to prepare for the class
- how to take part effectively during the class
- how to use your private study time to review the class.

Clearly, these chapters are aimed mainly at internal or on-campus students. However, one of the major developments in university education over the last few years has been to try and make the learning experience of external or off-campus students as similar as possible to those studying on-campus. For example, one of the things I now do routinely is record my lectures digitally, and make them available on the Web, along with the associated slides. Consequently, many of the points raised in this chapter will be useful to all students.

The **traditional lecture** is a one-way communication process—the lecturer speaks, the students listen and take notes. Although often severely criticised, the lecture remains a very common teaching method in university education. This is largely because a lecture is a means of mass communication: one lecturer can communicate with several hundred

students who may spread across several rooms, or even campuses. In a period when the number of university students is growing at a faster rate than the number of university staff, it's likely that lectures will continue to be a major teaching method.

There are a number of **criticisms of traditional lectures**. As you may perhaps have noticed already, some lecturers are rather poor communicators. This is not surprising as many lecturers are appointed more on their *research* record than their teaching abilities. However, the criticism of lectures goes deeper than this. First, the attention span of the average student is very much shorter than the 50 to 60 minutes of the average lecture. Kate Exley and Reg Dennick (2004, p. 23) suggest that 'The average student's attention span is probably less than 20 minutes'. Another criticism relates to a student's two basic goals when listening to a lecture—to *understand* and to *record*. Critics see these as incompatible goals because the more carefully you listen in an attempt to understand, the less carefully you can record what the lecturer says.

It is in **response to these criticisms** that some lecturers use a modified version of the traditional lecture. To counteract the problem of rapidly declining concentration levels, some lecturers break up their lectures so that they talk for no more than 15 to 20 minutes without a break. For example, after 20 minutes lecturing, some lecturers call a 5-minute break to allow students to stretch, chat, or have a breath of fresh air (or tobacco smoke). Some organise small buzz groups to discuss the lecture material for a few minutes. And others ask you to sit quietly for a couple of minutes, and reflect on what you have just heard.

To counteract the criticism that you can't both listen and take notes, some lecturers provide their students with a **lecture handout**, which could be anything from a one-page list of the main points handed out at the start of the lecture, to online copies of all the lecture slides. These are very valuable, though certainly will not act as a substitute for attending the lecture because they often become meaningful only when the lecturer talks about them.

However, it's likely that **many of your lectures will be traditional ones**. The lecturer will talk without a break for 50 to 60 minutes, and will provide little in the way of lecture handouts. Consequently, I'll concentrate on how to get the most out of traditional lectures. Most importantly, you need to see your attendance at the lecture as a middle step in a before-during-after sequence of activities.

Before the lecture

When you prepare for the lecture, you need to do two things. First, you need to see how this particular lecture fits into the overall **structure of the unit**. At the start of the semester, the lecturer will give you a program of topics to be covered. This provides a sketch map of the intellectual path that the lecturer will take you along. Each week, it's useful to see where you are, how you got there, and where you will go next. This orientation process will usually take only a couple of minutes, and it's time well spent.

To continue the above analogy, you then need to see what's in your guidebook, so that you spend time noting down only new information about your latest port of call. In other words, in the lecture you need to take notes only about material that is not in the textbook or lecture handouts. Of course, this means that you first need to **find out what's in the textbook and handouts**. However, at this stage there's no need to do detailed reading. For example, you can get an overall impression of the development of this chapter simply by looking at the section headings and bold text.

During the lecture

Try to arrive early, turn off your mobile phone, and take a **seat near the front**. From here you will be able to hear better, see the board and screen more clearly, and have fewer distractions between yourself and the lecturer. Being there before the start of the lecture is obviously a courtesy to the lecturer. You won't miss out on any handouts, or on what is often the most valuable part of the lecture, as the speaker may start by quickly reviewing the previous lecture, and outlining the objectives of the current lecture.

I'll make a distinction between hearing and **listening**. *Hearing* is a physical process—taking in sound through your ears. *Listening* is a mental process—trying to make sense of this information. Listening intently for an hour or so is undoubtedly hard work, doubly so when you are also trying to take notes about the lecture.

What's going on elsewhere in the lecture theatre will affect your **level of concentration**. Lecturers themselves can often distract you with mannerisms such as tracing imaginary quotation marks in the air, or prefacing each point by saying 'You know'. Some students end up concentrating entirely on these mannerisms, counting the number of times they occur during the lecture. This is not a very productive use of time! Other students in the audience are another source of distraction. If you sit near the front of the lecture theatre you cut out the potentially large

number of heads between yourself and the lecturer. It's amazing just how interesting these heads can be when you begin to tire and lose concentration! Occasionally, students who lack the necessary listening skills end up completely ignoring the lecture, and spend their time texting their friends or, worse, chatting to neighbouring students. Don't let them waste your time as well as their own.

So what do you actually do when the lecturer is speaking? The short answer is to **listen for the main points**, and write them down. The first task is listening. Remember that listening is different from simply hearing. You can't just sit there and let the words flow over you. You have to be continually making sense of the information you're receiving. Thus, even though you're silent and possibly still, you are mentally active. (Just as politicians contend that, even though they seem to be asleep in parliament, they are listening intently to the debate!) You can't *listen* if you're busy thinking about yesterday's match or tomorrow's party—though you still might *hear* the lecturer. It could well need a major effort on your part to focus your attention on what the lecturer says. But you must make the effort. Otherwise you might as well be somewhere else, doing something useful, enjoyable or, ideally, both.

You listen for the main points. Lecturers use a number of **techniques to highlight the main points**. For example, they may simply repeat an idea, repeat an idea; or say it v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y; or much LOUDER; or with more **FORCEFULNESS!** Their body language may give some clues. Their arms might start waving, or the fist of one hand might start hammering into the palm of the other hand. They may put up a slide outlining the main points, or they might take the time to write something similar on the board. The better the lecturer, the more he or she will make use of these audio-visual cues.

However, you can't rely completely on these cues. The only sure way to identify the main points is to **follow the arguments** presented in the lecture. Try to distinguish between the following:

- the main points
- examples of these main points
- more minor issues
- irrelevant (often humorous) comments included to allow you to rest your brain and hands for a few moments.

This last point leads on to the final part of the discussion about what you do in a lecture. You listen for the main points and **write them down**. You need a record of the lecture to refresh your memory when you prepare for tutorials, assignments or exams. Without notes you will quickly forget even the main points. This does not mean that you need to write continuously during the lecture. Remember, many major points may

already be in the textbook or the lecture handouts. And the additional main points may be sprinkled between numerous examples, less central issues, and irrelevant comments. All you need is the series of major and minor headings used by the lecturer, the major points made under each heading, and one clear example to illustrate each main point.

There are some **alternative strategies for taking lecture notes**. Some students prefer to listen to lectures without the distraction of taking notes. Instead, they list the main points from memory, later in the day. Much depends on the length of time between going to the lecture and making the notes, and on what else takes place during this intervening time. If you can, do the notes immediately after the lecture. At the other end of the scale is the misconception that every point made in the lecture is important and needs noting. No lecture is this good! In any case, the tongue is quicker than the hand, and you will soon find yourself falling behind, and missing major points because you're busy recording minor ones. After an hour of furious writing, you end up with such an unmanageable mass of material that you have to go through your notes and cross out all but the major points. Sometimes, you may find that although you are noting down only the major points, you are still falling behind. If this occurs, simply leave space in your notes so that you can add the missing material after the lecture, either from memory or from the notes of a fellow student.

After the lecture

Some people do no review work of their lecture notes. They assume that the lecture will come flooding back to them after several weeks or months, when they start to prepare for the exams. They are always disappointed! Others adopt a slightly better but far from ideal technique, and neatly rewrite their lecture notes. But often this is just 'busy work'—a physical rather than a mental activity that does little to develop your understanding of the material.

There's no getting away from it. **Reviewing your lecture notes requires you to think:**

- To think back to what the lecturer said, and see if you have an accurate record of all the main points
- To think about the development of the material, and make sure that you understand the major points, and how they relate to each other
- To think about specific questions raised by the lecturer that will be discussed in the next tutorial

- To think about issues that you initially found unclear or unsatisfactory. You might do this review work on your own, or with one or more friends.

If you prefer to work alone, you may feel that it's a good idea to make a **sound recording of the lecture**. If you want to do this, you'll need to ask permission from the lecturer before you start recording. You may have technical problems—lecturers don't always remain behind the lectern, and don't always speak in an easily recorded voice. If you do manage to make a reasonable recording, be very careful about how you use it. Refer to the recording only when your memory is hazy about a particular point. Unfortunately, finding the relevant two-minute sequence on the 60-minute tape is not always easy. If you need to find several short segments, you can end up spending a great deal of time over issues that you can clear up more quickly by talking to fellow students. Overall, sound recordings can be more trouble than they're worth.

Some lecturers record their lectures and make them **available online**, along with the associated slides. Clearly, this is an excellent development for off-campus students who cannot physically attend the lecture. It's also very handy for on-campus students who are sick on the day of the lecture. However, if you are an on-campus student with access to a sound recording, I'd strongly suggest that, unless you're sick, you attend the lecture itself. Going along at a set time helps you structure your week. It also means that you don't get into the situation where, because the recordings are permanently available, you never get round to listening to them. After a few weeks, the backlog is too much for you to catch up. Moreover, because the lectures and tutorials are often interlinked, students who haven't listened to the lecture are more likely to skip the associated tutorial. This is not good because, as the next chapter shows, tutorials are a crucial part of an on-campus student's academic work.



CHAPTER 3

Tutorials

You are likely to meet your tutor as part of a discussion group of about 20 students. In tutorials, each student is expected to play an equal part in a discussion that usually focuses on the material covered in recent lectures and associated readings. Tutors expect you to come along prepared to discuss the material. Most tutors prefer to allow students to talk freely, but try to direct the discussion back to the main issues if the group is in danger of being sidetracked. If necessary, they will try to stimulate a faltering discussion by introducing new issues or presenting controversial viewpoints.

The primary aim of tutorials is to help you develop a **better understanding of the topic** under discussion. For example, you may have had problems sorting out a particular point. Hopefully, at least one of your fellow students will be able to explain it. In doing so, this student will improve his or her understanding of the point, as there is no better way to make sure that you really know something than trying to explain it to someone else. The tutorial discussion also helps you integrate what you have heard in the lecture with what you have read in the textbook, and possibly with what appears in the media.

The second major aim of tutorials is to provide you with an **opportunity to speak in public**. Effective public speaking is a necessary skill for many jobs. Indeed, if you consider the job interview as an exercise in public speaking, it is a necessary skill for virtually every job. The tutorial is one of the few places where you can practise your verbal skills in at least a semi-formal setting. Answering a straightforward

question in a clear and concise way is important. So, too, is the ability to defend your point of view from criticism in a calm and logical manner.

The third major aim of tutorials is to **encourage contact** between students and their peers, and between students and staff. Tutorials can widen the circle of people you know, as students are often randomly allocated to groups. Tutorials also enable students and staff to get to know each other better. This is important socially, but is also of value academically. For example, a tutor can identify a student who is having academic difficulties, and can help sort them out.

Before the tutorial

How do you prepare for a tutorial? Usually, the main aim of the tutorial is to help you develop a better understanding of each week's lecture. Consequently, it's important to attend the lecture, and do the associated reading, particularly from the textbook. What's the best way to use your textbook and other materials? You will usually have two goals in mind:

- To have a thorough understanding of the material so that you can discuss it at the next tutorial
- To have some adequate notes to jog your memory about the material when you come to prepare for the exam.

First, you need to get a **general idea of what's in the chapter**. Skim through the pages, looking at the headings of each section. These should also appear together on the contents page of the book. It's a good idea to write out the headings—to make a contents page for your notes.

Having got an overview of the chapter, you then need to read each section in detail, highlighting the most important points. But how do you **identify the important points**? I said earlier that good lecturers emphasise important points by their voice, gestures, and use of visual aids. Similarly, good textbook writers make use of different typefaces, marginal notes, and summary diagrams. However, as in a lecture, you can't rely completely on these cues. To repeat earlier advice, the only sure way to identify the main points is to follow the thread of the argument. Once again, try to pick out the main points and a good example of each of these main points.

At the end of each section, note down the main points. Try to do these notes from memory rather than copying from the textbook. Then check your notes against the textbook to make sure that you haven't missed anything important. If you have to add points to your original notes, again do them in your own words. It's an immediate check on whether you really understand the ideas, and it's much easier to

remember them when you prepare for the exams. Repeat the sequence of **reading, highlighting, note-taking and checking** with each section of the chapter. This can be very time-consuming, but it is time well spent. It will help you understand the lectures better. It will help you play a more effective role in the tutorials. It will also save you a lot of time and effort when you come to prepare for the exams.

During the tutorial

What do you do during the tutorial? In the simplest of terms, you can either contribute to the discussion, or you can sit there and say nothing. Obviously, there are degrees of participation, from an occasional grunt to a sustained and eloquent defence of a particular point of view. But for the moment, I will divide students into just participants and non-participants. Combining these with two similar categories based on whether or not students prepare for the tutorial, produces the four tutorial roles shown in Figure 3.1: *workers, trappists, empty vessels* and *drones*.

Figure 3.1: Tutorial roles

Participates?	Prepares?	
	Yes	No
Yes	Worker	Empty vessel
No	Trappist	Drone

Workers

Firstly, there are the workers. Using a beehive analogy, I refer to students who both **prepare for and participate in tutorials** as *workers*. No tutorial group can function properly without them. They have the following characteristics:

- They come to the tutorial having done the class work and private study related to the previous lecture.
- They have a good understanding of the material. They can begin to answer any particular questions raised in the lecture or textbook.
- They often can relate what they have heard to current events.
- They raise questions about what they see as unclear, unsatisfactory, or underdeveloped aspects of what they have heard or read because they realise that a useful way to straighten out a particularly puzzling issue is to ask the group about it.

- They are willing to share their understandings, insights and questions with others in the group because they appreciate that explaining a point to someone else is the best way to see whether they really understand it themselves.
- They know that the only way for a tutorial to succeed is for members to participate knowledgeably in the group discussion.

Trappists

Trappists are conscientious students who prepare for the tutorial but, like their namesakes in the monastery, are **noted for their silence** when the group meets. There are two basic explanations for this lack of participation: (i) some students lack the self-confidence to talk in public, and (ii) others have a fear of public speaking.

Students who **lack self-confidence** to talk in public may believe that they are less intelligent than other students. Consequently, they believe that what they say simply highlights how little they understand compared with the rest of the group. A related problem is the feeling that they don't have the verbal skills to express themselves adequately. They know what they want to say, but don't believe they can express it clearly in speech.

Building up self-confidence comes about partly through knowing that you have carefully prepared for the tutorial. It also comes from becoming familiar with the other students in the tutorial. You'll soon see that you are not that different from many other students. For example, in one tutorial you may find that you are by no means the only one having trouble with a particular point. In another tutorial, other group members raise ideas you thought were too unimportant or too obvious to comment on—and these are regarded as valuable contributions. And in a third tutorial, you find that issues you consider important have been completely missed by everyone else.

There is no doubt that **verbal skills vary** considerably between students at the start of a tertiary course. Most obviously, there is the gap between those students whose first language is English, and those for whom English is a second language. Less obviously, there is the gap between those students whose families and schools have encouraged the development of verbal skills, and those who have not had the same encouragement. Whatever your background, you will find that your verbal skills develop with *practice*. Take the opportunity to practise in tutorials—that's one of the main reasons why they're there.

A **fear of public speaking** is a widespread phenomenon—as shown by the much-quoted statistic (made famous by Jerry Seinfeld) that Americans fear public speaking more than death (e.g. Rolls 1998). Although often related to the problem of self-confidence, a fear of public

speaking does not always have a rational cause. Students with a fear of public speaking may feel confident that what they have to say is of value, but the thought of actually saying it to the rest of the group makes them feel extremely nervous. They get tight-chested, and short of breath. This increases their nervousness, as they know they are no longer in a physical state to speak without revealing that they are anxious and tense. To avoid embarrassment, they simply sit tight. They are in the awkward situation of mentally wanting to participate, but physically not being able to do so. To overcome this phobia of public speaking you need to have control over both your mind and your body.

How can you **develop the right mental attitude to public speaking**? Virtually everyone is anxious about public speaking. For example, there are countless stories about top performers having stage fright before going on-stage. It is something that improves with experience. The first night is always more nerve-racking than the last. In particular, becoming familiar with the people in the group can help considerably. Over time, the tutorial group develops from a formal meeting of strangers to an informal get-together of friends and colleagues. The more familiar and less formal the setting, the easier it is to speak up.

In addition, try to **see your tutorial role in its true perspective**. There are dozens of tutorials and scores of comments made in each one. If your nervousness makes you hesitate and stumble, then it's no big deal—you are likely to be the only one who remembers it. The more you exaggerate the importance of any mistakes you might make, the more nervous you become about making them. You can help yourself from starting on this downward spiral by adopting a more realistic idea of the importance of any contribution you might make.

Finally, there are some **techniques to help you feel more relaxed about tutorial participation**. For example, *systematic desensitisation* allows you to think through the process of public speaking in tutorials systematically until you can do it without anxiety. And *relaxation therapy* helps you stop your body feeling so tense. I'll look at these techniques in more depth in Chapter 4.

Empty vessels

So far, I have discussed workers and trappists. I'll deal quickly with the other two tutorial roles, empty vessels and drones. There is an old proverb that empty vessels make the most noise. Sometimes a tutorial can be afflicted by empty vessels—students who rarely do any of the tutorial preview work, but still have a lot to say. Such students have not made the necessary distinction between a tutorial discussion and a chat with friends

over a beer in the pub. The important distinction is not where each group meets. Indeed, some tutors make a point of avoiding the timetabled room, choosing instead a café, a pub, or the shade of an old gum tree. The distinction is more in terms of the preparation needed for the tutorial. If there are empty vessels in any of your tutorial groups, both the tutors and (more particularly) you and the other students should make them aware of the need for *informed* comment. Of course, you need to choose your moment—and words—very carefully to minimise embarrassment all round! But if you don't tackle the problem, empty vessels will waste a lot of your time.

Drones

The final group of students, the drones, are like male honeybees that do no work but live in the hive and feed off the honey collected by the workers. As a group, these students are the most difficult to understand. They don't prepare for the tutorial (often boasting about it) and don't participate in the tutorial discussions, but they do turn up for class. Usually their attendance is short-lived as they get bored listening to other students, especially when they can't follow the discussion because they haven't done the necessary preparation. Once again, it's up to the participating members of the group to show them the error of their ways. If everyone were like them, the tutorial would not get very far.

As a final general comment, it is worth re-emphasising that **successful tutorials depend on you**. You can't sit back and let others do all the work. Initially, at least, a common failing among first-year students is to assume that it's the tutor's responsibility to ensure that all goes well. Instead, try to see the tutorial as a team effort. The tutor has some organising role, but at the end of the day, the result depends on everyone in the team. If you feel that your group isn't working well, then try to discuss openly the reasons why. Remember, it's your time that's being wasted if you are part of an unsuccessful tutorial group that staggers along from week to week on the hard work of a small minority of its members.

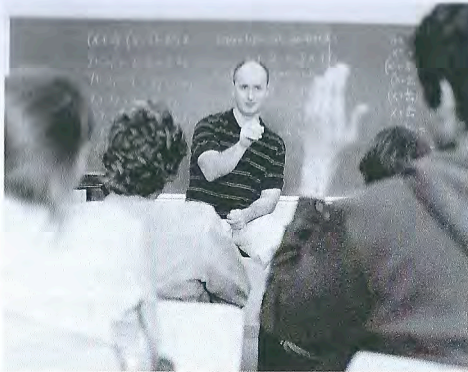
After the tutorial

Overall, it's a good idea not to take notes during the tutorial. Concentrate instead on listening and talking. If you review the tutorial later that same day then you should have no difficulty in recalling the important points. Spend 10 minutes thinking about the tutorial. You may have had **your own specific queries** about the lecture or reading. Did the tutorial

discussion help you sort out this problem? If so, make a note of what was said. If not, consider whether it's worth following it up privately with your tutor or lecturer. You will get a sympathetic hearing from the staff member, providing that you go along well prepared.

In addition to your own specific queries, ask yourself whether there were any **other noteworthy points** raised in the tutorial. Perhaps someone brought along a newspaper cutting that perfectly illustrated a general point raised by the textbook. Perhaps someone added a new dimension to an issue covered by the lecture. Perhaps someone raised an interesting alternative interpretation of some data in the textbook. If so, then make a note of them. In particular, take note of the discussion based on any questions specifically prepared by the tutor for discussion in the tutorial. Presumably, these questions raise important (and examinable!) issues.

One way of making doubly sure that you recall the important points is to get together with another student in the group and spend a few minutes going over the tutorial. Even better, you might establish a **self-help group** with a few of the students in your tutorial. The group need not necessarily confine its activities to tutorial work. You might also want to discuss the lectures, the textbook, and possibly the assignment work. Fix a regular time and meeting place for each session.



CHAPTER 4

Making presentations

Tutorials are often organised so that one student takes a leading role by presenting a paper (i.e. giving a mini-lecture), and the rest of the group joining in by asking questions and giving comments at the end. In first year a tutorial presentation often lasts for about 10 minutes, with the question-and-answer session going for about the same time. In later years you may have to do more, possibly leading a one-hour *seminar* during third year. However, although the first-year tutorial presentation is much shorter, the basic principles are very similar. Because of the importance of presenting a paper, I have given it a chapter of its own rather than incorporating it into the previous general chapter on tutorials. As before, I'll use a Before-During-After chronological sequence.

Before the presentation

There are two parts to this section. The first looks in detail at the preparation you need to do before presenting a paper. Usually, you have to give a talk based on an essay that you submit for assessment. I look at how to research, plan and write an essay in Chapter 12. Here, I'll assume that you have completed a draft of the essay, and focus on how to give a presentation about it. The second part of this section looks at the preparation needed before attending a presentation as a member of the audience.

Presenter

Don't assume that because you have written the paper you can simply take it along and read it out. If you have a lecturer who reads large chunks from a prepared script, you'll know just how boring it can be. You need to **become familiar with your material** so that you can talk about it with only a bare outline of the main points as a guide. For example, your presentation may be on the question, 'Why are there varying rates of illness between social classes?' (the example used in Chapter 12). You need to become so familiar with your material that you can talk using the key points from your essay plan (see Figure 4.1). Copy each numbered heading onto a prompt card. Generally, you should have less than a dozen of these. Under each heading, write down the additional comments listed next to the bullets (•). These refer to the main points that you must cover in your talk.

Figure 4.1 Class and illness detailed essay plan

1. Introduction
2. Describing variations in illness between social classes
3. Explaining variations in illness between social classes
 - 3.1 Radical arguments about work
 - dangerous industrial substances
 - organisation of work practices
 - general political environment
 - 3.2 Conservative counter-arguments about work

As for section 3.1
 - 3.3 Conservative arguments about home
 - diet
 - smoking
 - preventative health services
 - 3.4 Radical counter-arguments about home

As for section 3.3
4. Conclusion

The use of **audio-visual materials** can improve your presentation. If nothing else, they provide both speaker and listener with a visual focus. Prepare these materials beforehand rather than trying to develop them while giving your talk. If you have access to a computer and projector, use them if you are familiar with PowerPoint or similar software. If not, use an overhead projector. Your tutor will arrange the equipment for you.

Regardless of the display medium, when making slides aim for **maximum size, medium colour, and minimum text**. For example, make your text at least size 24, and use no more than half a dozen lines of text on each slide. A title at the top of each slide is always helpful to your

audience. Charts and photographs can be very useful—a picture *is* often better than a thousand words. However, they rarely 'speak for themselves'. You must *always* add your own verbal commentary to highlight the importance of what's on the screen. The final chapters of this book give advice about making tables and graphs.

It's crucial to **rehearse your entire presentation**. Mentally rehearsing your speech is not satisfactory because we speak much more slowly than we read. As a result, it's important to *say* the words to get an accurate estimate of your timing. Pay particular attention to how fast and loud you speak. If you talk very quickly, make a conscious effort to slow down; if you have a very quiet voice, practise speaking more loudly.

If you tape record your rehearsal, and find your eyelids gently closing as you play it back, then you have clear evidence that something is wrong (falling asleep in your own presentation is a definite no-no!). If you are confident that your material is interesting, then the problem is most likely to be the **tone of your voice**. A speaker with a monotonous voice does not give verbal cues about the relative importance of each word, and so listeners find it difficult to understand what they hear. At worst, a monotonous voice, like that of the classic hypnotist, can lull the listener to sleep. One of the major benefits of basing your presentation on prompt cards is that you need to *think* about what you are saying. The more you think about what you're saying, the more expressive your voice.

Another common problem is to have a **constant vocal pattern** for each sentence, regardless of its meaning. A common British failing is to end each sentence on an inaudible downward pitch. A common Australian failing is to end each sentence with an upward pitch. Usually, a final upward pitch is reserved for a sentence that asks a question. If a speaker constantly uses this vocal pattern, it loses this function of identifying a question.

Finally, some students will dread the thought of giving a presentation because of their **fear of public speaking**. To overcome this phobia of public speaking, you need to have control over both your mind and your body. One technique to help you develop a more relaxed mental attitude is *systematic desensitising* (Orr 1997, Ch. 7). You have to write out four or five cards, each outlining in half a dozen sentences a stage in the process that leads to giving the presentation. For example, the first card might describe the first day of the semester when you first discover that you have to give a presentation. You put it onto your semester planner, and later go past the tutorial room. The second card describes your preparations for the presentation, a day or two before it is due to take place. The third describes the period immediately before the presentation, as you walk into the room and organise yourself. The final one describes

the presentation itself, as you stand in front of the group with your prompt cards showing the slides you have prepared.

You have to relax, then read the first card, imagining the scene in as much detail as possible. You work through the cards until you imagine a scene that causes you to feel anxious. You must then try to wipe the scene from your mind and release the tension by deep breathing and saying *Relax* as you breathe out. You then again imagine the scene that caused you anxiety. If necessary, you repeat the above process until you can imagine the scene for half a minute or so without feeling anxious. The aim is to **work through the cards without anxiety** many times over several weeks.

A second approach to overcoming a fear of public speaking is to try and gain greater **control over your body** to prevent it from becoming too tense (Orr 1997, Ch. 6). In brief, to learn how to relax you must go through a daily program of relaxation training. You find a quiet spot, make yourself comfortable, and gradually relax your body. Your student counselling service may be able to loan you an audio tape designed to help you relax. Alternatively, you might go along to some relaxation classes.

Audience

What preparatory work do you need to do before going along to listen to a presentation? Your preparation is very similar to that for a tutorial. You need to do the recommended reading, noting down the main points and any queries or comments that come to mind. Avoid falling into the trap of thinking that because someone else is giving the presentation, you can turn up without doing any preparation.

During the presentation

Again, the section is divided into the role of the presenter and the role of audience member.

Presenter

Make sure that you **arrive early** so that you can compose yourself for the presentation. Most people feel anxious at this stage, just as actors do on an opening night. This anxiety is a positive emotion because it helps you produce a good performance. If you have been using a relaxation technique to overcome your fear of public speaking, you should take a couple of minutes before the start of the presentation to close your eyes, breathe deeply, and relax your body. As soon as the room is free, go in to check on the equipment, and make sure you know exactly where you'll

position yourself so that you won't be blocking anyone's view of the display screen.

Never start by apologising for the quality of your work. If you have prepared thoroughly, apologising is simply not called for. If you haven't prepared thoroughly, it's too late to regret it now. The first few minutes are the hardest. Once you get into your stride, the presentation becomes a lot easier. If you've rehearsed thoroughly, you should have no timing problems. Even so, keep an eye on the wall clock or put your watch on the table in front of you. As you warm to your topic, you may find yourself taking longer than you had anticipated. If so, leave out material rather than speaking more quickly or cutting into the discussion period.

Try to avoid **body and speech mannerisms** that might distract the attention of the audience from what you are saying. Most importantly, don't talk while you have your back to the audience—it's bad manners, and much of what you say will not be heard. Don't repeatedly scratch the top of your head (or anywhere else), fiddle with your pen, adjust your clothes, trace imaginary quotation marks in the air, pace around the room, or keep saying 'You know' and 'If you like'. Try to look around the group as you speak. Don't stare at your prompt cards, or at the back wall of the room.

After the presentation, members of the audience are likely to have **questions and comments**. These people are in a similar position to that of someone marking a written essay. Complimentary comments rarely take the arguments any further, while critical comments often do. For example, 'I found the talk well-structured and well-presented' needs only a 'Thank you' in reply. Contrast this with the following more critical comment: 'I found what you said to be interesting, but did you really do full justice to the radical interpretations of the issue? If you had, surely your conclusion would have been rather different?'

The ability both to give and to take **criticism** is an important part of your development as a university student. Don't see a critical question as a slur on your personal integrity! It will almost always be asked in a co-operative rather than a competitive way, to help you rather than to score points off you. (Points scoring is more common further up the academic ladder!)

You need to **consider each question** from the audience calmly and rationally—not an easy task in a high pressure question-and-answer session. Remember that for the duration of your presentation you are the expert, with hours of reading, thinking and writing to draw on. Often, it will be a question of emphasis or interpretation rather than right or wrong. Perhaps you gave the radical interpretations the minor coverage you thought they warranted. Perhaps you gave them the same coverage as

the more conservative arguments, but the questioner has ignored or forgotten this. Perhaps you deliberately excluded radical arguments from the presentation, for reasons you gave in the introductory part of the talk. Or perhaps—just possibly, despite your careful planning—you *didn't* do justice to the radical interpretations.

You need to **give a reasoned, rational response** to all your questioners, even the most mistaken and misguided ones. For example, some members of the audience may simply not have been listening properly, or have misrepresented what you said. If this is the case, make sure that you let them down gently. Withering scorn is not appropriate! If it's possible that the questioner has a valid point, concede the possibility and use it to develop the discussion.

Audience

What do you do during the presentation when you are a member of the audience? Generally, **treat the presentation seriously**. One day, *you* will give a presentation. Participate in other people's in the way that you would like them to participate in yours. Firstly, make sure that you arrive on time. If you're late, you either delay the start of the presentation or interrupt the speaker during those important first few minutes. Don't look on the presentation as time during which you can take it easy. Indeed, you may well be in for a period of hard listening if an inexperienced student is giving the presentation. Take notes in the same way you do during a lecture. Ask yourself whether the presentation answers some of the queries you listed earlier. Does it raise other issues which you feel need further discussion?

Be prepared to **play your part in the discussion**—don't sit back and think that you can let the tutor and the presenter do all the work. Don't avoid making critical comments, but do it in a constructive manner. Generally, comments are best framed as questions, such as the earlier example about '... did you do full justice to the radical interpretations of the issue?'. Such a format makes it less difficult for the presenter to concede any error or omission. It also puts you, the questioner, in a less difficult position if it turns out that you have misheard or misunderstood the presenter.

After the presentation

In this short final section, I'll look firstly at what review work you should do after you've presented a paper, and then I'll show how to review a presentation when you have been a member of the audience.

Presenter

You may find that presenting a paper is an exhausting experience, and thus you may be reluctant to spend time reviewing it later in the day. However, a review period can be very worthwhile in terms of improving both the content of this paper and the presentation of your next one.

It's likely that you'll have to hand in the paper on which you based the presentation, with your result in the unit depending on both the presentation and the written work. If you have some time between the presentation and the submission deadline, it's useful to recall any verbal or written questions or comments made by members of the audience that will help you to **improve the content** of the paper. Did they highlight any omissions, inconsistencies, confusions, or ambiguities? To continue an earlier example, you might decide to add extra material on the radical interpretations, or perhaps make clearer in the introduction your reasons for leaving them out.

Use your review to help you **improve the standard of your next presentation**. Ask yourself the following questions. Did you know your material well enough to feel comfortable using just the prompt cards? Did you make effective use of your visual aids? Were you in the best position to show the slides? Were you happy with your voice, or did you notice yourself talking too quickly, too quietly, or without much expression? What about your body and speech mannerisms? (Was that student right when he said you used the phrase 'If you like' 72 times?) How about the discussion period? For example, did you react coolly to the more critical comments and questions? If you also ask members of your audience, you may get some useful additional feedback.

Audience

This final comment leads onto what you do as a member of the audience. In terms of reviewing the content of the presentation and the subsequent discussion, your job contains elements of both the lecture and tutorial review work. Thus, you need to think about the **content of the paper** in the same way as you think about any other lecture. Have you an accurate record of the main points? Are you sure about how the main points relate to each other? Are there any points that you still find unclear or unsatisfactory? Did the speaker deal satisfactorily with the questions and comments from the audience?

It's also worthwhile to think about the **presentation of the paper**. Remember that *you* will probably have to do something similar. Each presentation you attend as a member of the audience will give you some pointers about what you should (and shouldn't) do in your own

presentations. Look back over the questions raised earlier in this section: about the presenter's familiarity with the material; about visual aids; about the voice; about the mannerisms; and about the reaction of the presenter to critical comments and questions. Learn from your experience as a member of the audience. Make sure that your next presentation benefits from this experience.



CHAPTER 5

Exams

Your grade in a unit often depends, in part, on how well you do in an exam. In this chapter, I'll give you some advice about tackling exams. I'll start by looking briefly at the types of exams and the reasons for holding them. Then I'll use the now-familiar Before-During-After sequence of headings to structure the advice about how to do well in exams.

Types of exams

In exams, you have a specified time in which to write answers to a number of questions. Everyone else enrolled in the course is also given the same questions under the same conditions. Under this general definition, there are several types of exam, depending on their basic format and on the depth of knowledge they are designed to test.

With **multiple-choice exams**, there are many questions, each of which you answer correctly by being able to *recognise* the most appropriate response from a number of options. An example of a multiple-choice question is as follows:

Chapter 3 refers to an anxiety reduction technique that can be used to help students reduce their fear of public speaking. What is it called?

- (a) relaxation therapy
- (b) systematic desensitisation
- (c) stress management reduction (SMR)
- (d) adrenalin control therapy
- (e) stage-fright phobia alleviation

With **short-answer exams**, you are expected to *recall* from memory answers to a fairly large number of specific questions. The answers can vary in length. Sometimes you may be asked to supply a single missing word (e.g. The technique of gradually reducing your anxiety of activities such as public speaking is termed *systematic* ____). Alternatively, you may be asked to write a short answer of one or two paragraphs (e.g. Outline the technique of systematic desensitisation).

With **essay exams** there are a number of more general questions, of which you usually have to answer no more than half a dozen, writing a few pages on each. For example: 'Discuss the technique of systematic desensitisation, paying particular attention to its relative effectiveness compared to other anxiety reducing techniques'. With essay questions you have to show not only that you can recall what you have read or heard, but also that you *understand* it. There are several types of essay exams.

With **traditional essay exams**, you enter the examination room with only pens and pencils, and you find out the exact questions only when you read the examination paper. Traditional exams are often criticised for their artificiality. It's the only time when you write assessable work without access to other sources of information. Consequently, the argument runs, traditional exams place a premium on memorising rather than understanding information.

It's largely in response to this criticism that some staff have introduced **open-book essay exams**. In an open-book exam, you can take reference materials into the examination room, but you still don't know the exact questions until you read the paper. In practice, there is not much difference between traditional and open-book exams. This is because during the exam you don't have much time to look at your notes and other reference materials. You have to know them thoroughly in order to write an essay in the short time available.

Another alternative is the **open-question essay exam**. Here, you know what's on the paper some time before the exam, and can thus prepare for specific questions. However, you can't take notes and other reference materials into the exam room. Open-question exams retain most of the benefits of traditional exams, but reduce the main cause of exam stress—uncertainty about the exact questions.

Why exams?

Why is there such an emphasis on examinations? I'll start by assuming the need for *some* type of assessment. In other words, there needs to be a check on each student's level of learning, for use most directly by staff and the students themselves, but also by prospective employers and the

public in general. Given this need for assessment, why are exams so widely used?

First, exams encourage students to **read widely**. The argument runs that without the stimulus of an exam, students would concentrate almost exclusively on the assessed assignment work, and would thus end up knowing a lot about a little. With an exam, students are encouraged to take an interest in a much wider range of issues so that they end up knowing at least a little about a lot.

Secondly, exams largely ensure that the **exam answers are the student's own work**. With assignment work, the name on the face sheet needn't necessarily be that of the person who has written the paper. The growth of websites selling made-to-order assignments to unscrupulous students is likely to increase the importance of exams in university assessment over the next few years.

Thirdly, exams are a **convenient form of assessment**. The exam period is a non-teaching period, meaning that marking can be done largely free of the disturbance of formal class teaching and informal student consultation. Moreover, the practice in many universities is not to return the marked exam scripts to students. Consequently, lecturers can mark papers relatively quickly as they don't have to write comments on them.

How can you maximise your chances of doing well in an exam? I'll discuss the skills that you need to develop under the now-familiar Before-During-After sequence.

Before the exam

Your first job is to find out all you can about the **format of the exam paper**. The initial unit or subject guide should give you information about how long the exam goes for, and the type and number of questions. If not, ask the co-ordinator for details. If the format is similar to that of previous years, you will probably find old exam papers available in the library, or online.

It is also helpful to find out the **administrative system related to exams**. For example, what arrangements are possible if you are ill on the day of the exam? What if you are ill for much of the period leading up to the exam but are well on the actual exam day? What if you become ill during the examination? If you find out how the system works, you are in a much better position to cope effectively with any crisis.

The key to doing well in exams is to **start your preparations early**. The first day of the term or semester is about right! This isn't as crazy as it first sounds when you bear in mind that class preparation, the classes

themselves, and the class reviews are all part of exam preparation. In other words, the reading, thinking, writing, listening and speaking necessary for you to get the most out of your classes make up much of the work you need to do for the exams.

Earlier, I noted that many students have a fear of public speaking. Similarly, many students have a **fear of examinations**. Sometimes the fear is well founded—they haven't done the necessary preparation! Often, however, the fear is more irrational in that students are well prepared, at least in terms of their knowledge of the course content. If you are one of these students, you should spend time using the relaxation and systematic desensitisation techniques mentioned in Chapter 4.

Of course, you will need to refresh your memory by going through your notes in the week or two before the exam. What you do in this revision period will depend largely on what sort of exam you have to do.

Multiple-choice and short-answer exams

Go through your notes, writing down important words and phrases (making sure you spell them correctly) and making lists of the main points. This **active reading** will help reinforce what you have read and discourage your mind from wandering. Next, you need to look up from your notes and try to remember the main points. Reciting, or saying the words out loud, helps you fix them in your mind. Check back to your notes if you get stuck, and do a final check of the entire section. Next, write down your own version of the section from memory. Brief notes will do, providing you know what goes under each heading. (Be honest with yourself!) Repeat the sequence as many times as you can, bearing in mind the limited time available, the other notes that you need to memorise, and just how difficult you find the material to learn.

Much of the material you have studied will not lend itself easily to being examined using multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Read your notes with an eye specifically on those **details that can be included in these types of exams**—lists of technical terms, important statistics, definitions, and issues that you can summarise in a paragraph or two. Moreover, good questions are quite difficult to write. As a result, you are much less likely to have access to last year's exam as staff re-use many of the questions. Of course, if you do have the previous paper, study it very carefully as the next paper is likely to be similar.

Occasionally you may find it helpful to use a memory technique such as **memory cue cards**. Buy a pack of small filing cards. On the front of each card, write a term that you want to learn about, and on the back add the definition or the major points that you want to remember. After a while, you will have a few dozen of these cards. You can carry them

around with you, and use them to test yourself any time you have a few minutes to spare.

Traditional essay exams

Essay exams require you to *use* material rather than just recognise or recall it. Consequently, you need to go beyond simply memorising your notes when preparing for these exams. First, get to know the **format of the exam**—its duration, how many questions there are on the paper, and how many you have to answer. You then know how long you can spend on each answer, and you can decide on how many topics to prepare. To make sure that you can always produce the required number of answers, aim to prepare twice that number of topics.

For each topic, draw up a list of **possible questions** from past examination papers and your notes. Familiarise yourself with a topic using the approach outlined above for multiple-choice and short-answer exams—though there's no need to memorise information at the same level of detail. Then select a question on that topic at random from your list of past and possible exam questions, and from memory try to structure an answer to the question.

Most importantly, **be clear about what you have to do**. Look at the question, word by word, and make sure that you know what each word means. Also, look at how the words are arranged. Are you asked simply to describe something, or are you also asked to explain it? Are you given any information about how you should go about it, or do you have to supply your own categories? Devising the basic structure, perhaps as a table or diagram, is the final part of this crucial first stage.

When you are satisfied with the structure of your answer, **look at each section** in turn. How confident are you about writing out each section in full? Perhaps you're unsure about the details of a particularly useful illustration or, more importantly, perhaps you aren't really clear about a basic argument. Whatever the reason for your lack of confidence, the best way to overcome it is to attempt to write out the section in full, from memory. Compare what you have written with your notes and work on the specific bits where your answer is unclear, misleading or simply incorrect.

Make sure that you do this type of **active exam preparation**, rather than passively reading the same materials over and over again. You will find that with active revision, you end up memorising just as much information and, more importantly, you will have used your notes in a similar way to that required in the exam.

One problem with an answer in note-form is that it can be difficult to estimate how much you can cover in the **time available** during the exam.

The only foolproof way to find out how much you can write in the time allotted is to do one or two essays under exam conditions. In other words, you need to write out in full one or two essays without access to reference materials, using a strict time limit. Try one of the questions for which you have already prepared a satisfactory answer in note-form. Compare what you covered in the timed essay with the earlier answer in note-form. Obviously, if you are able to cover the material in 10 minutes, you have seriously underestimated the time available. However, you are much more likely to find that the timed essay covers only part of the material in the note-form essay because you have seriously overestimated what you can write in the time available. You then have to prune your outline plan to fit the available time. Thus, a timed essay can be very time-consuming, but can prove invaluable if it highlights a major timing problem.

Timed essays also help you to test how your **handwriting** stands up to sustained pressure. The exam is the one important academic occasion when other people read your handwriting. Staff faced with scores, if not hundreds, of exam papers to mark cannot afford the time to decipher poor handwriting. Thus, an unreadable exam script is doomed to fail. Check the legibility of your handwriting by asking a friend or relative to read the last page of your timed essay.

You can also look at the **clarity of your expression**. Once again, asking the opinion of someone else is useful. Try to arrange a swap system with another student in the same unit. Such an arrangement benefits both of you. If you are working on your own, look critically at each paragraph. Where does each lie on a seven-point scale from crystal clear to utterly garbled? Can you express what you want to say more simply? Is a paragraph vague because you don't really understand what you're writing? Examiners aren't looking for finely honed pieces of literature, but they do expect (and reward) clarity and directness.

Non-traditional essay exams

Preparation is similar for **open-book essay exams** as for traditional closed-book exams. As I pointed out earlier, because you have so little time in the exam, you must be almost as well prepared for an open-book exam as for a traditional one. The only difference might be in the number of facts you memorise to illustrate your general ideas. Providing that you have ready access to such information in your notes, you can minimise the amount of such detail you need to memorise.

Preparation for **open-question essay exams** is more focused because you already know what the essay questions will be. To encourage wider reading, staff who use this type of exam sometimes hand out a longer list of questions from which they select the ones for the exam paper. For

example, you might be given a list of eight questions from which the lecturer selects six, and expects you to answer four. If any of your lecturers use this method, it's important that you work out the optimum number of questions to prepare. In the above example, if you prepare six questions then, regardless of which questions are on the exam paper, you will always be able to answer four of them.

During the exam

The first step is to **get to the right place at the right time in the right frame of mind**. Give yourself plenty of time to travel to the examination room. If you arrive early, use this time to exercise your body (and, hopefully, relax your mind) by taking a brisk walk around the block. Alternatively, you might find a quiet seat in the library and practise a relaxation technique. Either activity is certainly better than hanging around outside the exam room with a gaggle of hyped-up students, all busy increasing their level of nervous tension!

When you take your seat in the exam room, check the **physical conditions** of the place where you will spend the next few hours. Is your table unsteady? Is the sun streaming in on you? Is it too dark to read or write satisfactorily? Is there a radio playing in an adjoining room? Is the clock not visible from your seat? If problems like these occur, try to get them fixed before the exam begins—don't just grumble to yourself. If you can, solve the problem yourself. If not, explain the problem to the supervisor and ask politely that something be done to correct it. Remember, the next few hours are important ones for you.

You might be allowed to read the paper some time before you can start writing. Make maximum use of **reading time**. Before looking at the questions, read very carefully through the instructions at the top of the paper about what you must do. How much time do you have? How many questions must you answer? If the paper is divided into sections, how many questions need answering from each section? Are any questions compulsory? Do you have to start each question or section in a separate booklet? You should already know most of the answers to these questions but it's important to double-check. What you do next obviously depends on whether you're faced with an essay exam or a short answer exam.

Essay exams

If it is an essay format exam, read quickly through the paper and make a mental note of the **probable, possible, improbable and impossible questions**. Then read each question in more detail, starting with the *probables* and working through to the *impossibles*, and check to see

whether your initial evaluation of each question was the correct one. You should be able to convert at least a couple of the *probables* to *definites* so that you can start planning your first answer immediately the written part of the exam starts. Detailed planning of a question is best left until you have a pen in your hand, but you can do some brainstorming work when you evaluate each question during the reading time. If you come up with some particularly interesting and novel ideas, jot them down as soon as possible. Good ideas, particularly under exam conditions, tend to surface and sink without trace if you don't grab hold of them.

Never start writing your answer without an **outline plan**. Think of the essay as an intellectual journey. Hopefully, you are familiar with most of the route you will take, having already been along parts of it during your exam preparation. Even so, it's a fairly complicated journey and, unless you're very lucky (or doing an open-question exam), you won't have taken this exact route before. In such circumstances, it's useful to have a map to consult as you go along. The outline plan is your map. If permitted, pull out the middle sheets of the answer booklet and use these to draw up each of your outline plans. As you write your answer and turn over to a new page, you can carry the outline plan with you and glance across to it as you write.

Keep an eye on the time. It is likely that you will spend a bit longer on your first answer than on your last, but don't end up with only 10 minutes to do the last question when you really need 30 minutes. A law of diminishing returns applies to exams. If a question is marked out of 20, it's relatively easy to get the first 5 marks, a bit harder to get the next 5, considerably harder to get the next 5, and next to impossible to get the final 5. Don't waste valuable time trying to squeeze out the final few marks for one question when you could be better employed on another question, earning the first 50% of the marks. For example, you may have to complete four questions in three hours, an average of 45 minutes per question. Spend no more than 50 minutes on each of the first three questions, thus allowing you a minimum of 30 minutes to complete the last question. If you find that you have still not finished a question after 50 minutes, then finish the paragraph you're working on and leave a space in the answer booklet so that, time permitting, you can return to it later.

Use all the available time. If you complete the final question and there are still several minutes remaining before the end of the exam, read quickly through what you have written, looking for major errors caused by the speed at which you wrote the material. Then spend any remaining time on looking at answers in more detail, correcting errors, omissions, duplications and illegible words.

Multiple-choice and short-answer exams

These exams are more straightforward, though the earlier comments about timing and checking still apply. The following hints may also be useful:

- Read *all* the options before selecting one. Remember that some answers may be more appropriate than others.
- The more restrictive the statement, the less likely it is to be correct. For example, be wary of options that include words such as *always* and *never*.
- Beware of jargon-riddled options. In other words, don't work on the principle that the less you understand a possible answer, the more likely it is to be correct (Percy 1983, p. 27).
- When reviewing your answers, if you have a hunch that you have made a mistake, then change your original response (Orr 1997, p. 126).
- Multiple-choice questions are notoriously difficult to compose. In particular, it can be very difficult to summarise an idea into one or two sentences. Thus, other things being equal, choose the longest option (Hay, Bochner & Dungey 2006, p. 304).
- Unless there is a penalty for an incorrect answer, make sure that you have a go at all questions. Most of the time, you will be fairly certain that one or two options can't be correct, leaving you with quite a reasonable chance of guessing correctly from the remaining two or three alternatives.

Of course, the best way to make sure you choose the right option is to know the right answer!

After the exam

You may well have several more exams to prepare for, perhaps another on the following day. Even so, you have just finished what was probably a gruelling period when you were working under exceptionally high pressure. Give yourself a **chance to unwind**. Take at least an hour to do something completely different, whether it's running on the beach or watching a video.

Before moving on to the next round of exam preparation, find a few minutes to **look back over your performance** in the last exam to see if it gives you any ideas for the next one. For example, if you had virtually no time to do the final question, don't use this review period to kick yourself about the marks lost. Instead, use the experience to reinforce the need for timing your answers. Perhaps the basic problem was that you hadn't included any timed essays in your exam preparation. Use your experience

from the last exam to give you a clearer idea of just how much material you can cover in the next exam. Promise yourself that next semester your exam preparation will definitely be better!



CHAPTER 6

Books

As a university student, you are part of a worldwide academic community. Like you, everyone is busy writing. Of course, only a tiny proportion is published, but there is still an **enormous volume of material**. For example, a quick calculation suggests that if a single copy of every new book published *each year* were stacked flat, one on top of the other, there would be a pile over 15 kilometres high. Somewhere in there are books that will be useful for your next essay—the only problem is finding them! However, this is reasonably easy once you know how to use your university library effectively. This chapter will help you do that.

Your **university library is your greatest study resource**, and it's important to become familiar with it. You need answers to a host of basic questions relating to the rules of the library. For example, how do I become a registered library user? How many books can I borrow at one time? What's the loan period? If you are an off-campus student, you need to become familiar with the procedure for accessing the library and asking for materials to be sent to you. If you are an on-campus student, you need to become familiar with the geography of the library—in particular, how the library's collection of materials is organised. Many academic libraries have three book collections:

- *general collection*, which includes most of the library's books, all of which are for loan

- *reference collection*, which includes encyclopedias, dictionaries, year books and other reference materials for use only in the library
- *popular collection*, which includes all heavily used books for short-term use only in the library.

One of the basic jobs of librarians is to make the library resources as accessible as possible for users. To do this, Australian academic libraries shelve library materials using the **Dewey decimal classification system**. As Figure 6.1 illustrates, it has 10 broad classes; each class has 10 divisions; and each division has 10 sections. For example, if you are doing an Economics degree you will focus on material in the 300 class (Social Sciences), in particular the 330 division (Economics). The Economics division, in turn, has 10 sections, representing more specialised areas (e.g. 331 is Labour Economics). Although not shown in Figure 6.1, each section is broken into even more specialised areas by adding more numbers after the decimal point (e.g. 331.1 is Labour Force and Market, 331.11 is Labour Force, and 331.118 is Labour Productivity).

Figure 6.1: Dewey Decimal Classification: Economics

All Classes	Divisions of Social Sciences	Sections of Economics
000 Generalities	300 Social Sciences	330 Economics
100 Philosophy etc	310 General Statistics	331 Labour
200 Religion	320 Political Science	332 Financial
300 Social Sciences	330 Economics	333 Land
400 Language	340 Law	334 Cooperatives
500 Natural Sciences	350 Public Admin	335 Socialism etc
600 Technology	360 Social Problems	336 Public Finance
700 Arts	370 Education	337 International
800 Literature	380 Commerce etc	338 Production
900 Geography etc	390 Customs etc	339 Macroeconomics

Source: based on Chan & Mitchell 2003

Finding books with a reading list

To help you write an assignment, your lecturer may hand out a list with the bibliographic details of useful readings. For example:

Johnson, WA, Rettig, RP, Scott, GM & Garrison, SM 2006, *The sociology student writer's manual*, 5th edn, Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

This entry in the reading list shows the following bibliographic information about the book:

- authors (Johnson, Rettig, Scott & Garrison)
- year of publication (2006)
- title of book (*The sociology student writer's manual*)
- edition of book (5th)
- publisher (Pearson Prentice Hall)
- place of publication (Upper Saddle River, NJ).

All these bibliographic details are straightforward, except perhaps for the **edition** of the book. If a book is successful, the publishers are likely to invite the author to revise the original manuscript. They then publish the book as a *second edition*. If it continues to sell well, there may be further editions. Different editions can look very different as authors make changes to the previous edition. Thus, it's important to find the right edition when looking for a book from a reading list.

Your library catalogue will tell you if your university holds the book and, if so, where you can find it. It's best to **search on the book title**, as this is likely to find the smallest number of hits, thus minimising your search time. For example, my title search for *The sociology student writer's manual* produced just two hits, which were the second and fifth editions of the book. In contrast, an author search produced 44 hits. Figure 6.2 shows part of a catalogue record for the fifth edition, the one specified in the reading list. It gives all the information you need to find a library copy of *The sociology student writer's manual*.

Figure 6.2: Part of a library catalogue record for *Sociology student writer's manual*

Title: The sociology student writer's manual		
Author: William A. Johnson [et al.]		
Published: Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, c2006		
Edition: 5th		
Locations	Call number	Status
East campus	808.066301 J7112/S 2006	Available
Central campus	808.066301 J7112/S 2006	Available
West campus	808.066301 J7112/S 2006	Available
Subjects:		
Report writing—Handbooks, manuals, etc		
Sociology—Authorship—Handbooks, manuals, etc		
Sociology—Research—Handbooks, manuals, etc		

The library catalogue record shows that on this multi-campus university, each campus library has a copy of the book. Its **call number** is

808.066301 J7112/S 2006, and this shows where it is shelved. It is important to write down the entire call number, as it's likely to save you time when looking for the book. Notice that the book is in the 800s, which is the Literature class of the Dewey Decimal Classification (see Figure 6.1). The final part of the call number (J7112/S 2006) refers to the author (J for Johnson) and the edition (2006 is the year of publication). The catalogue record also shows that the book is *Available*. In other words, it's not on loan to someone else. Thus, if you're an on-campus student, you need to find the 800s section in the general collection, and then look in detail to find the 808s, and finally the specific book. If you're an off-campus student, you'll need to know the procedure for ordering the book, which library staff will then send to you.

How do you go about finding the following item from a reading list?

Brain, S & Martindale, K 2005, 'Using the library', in S Maslin-Prothero (ed.), *Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*, 3rd edn, Baillière Tindall, Edinburgh, pp. 49-81.

This entry in the reading list shows the following bibliographic details:

- authors of chapter (Brain & Martindale)
- year of publication (2005)
- title of the chapter (Using the library)
- editor of book (Maslin-Prothero)
- book title (*Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*)
- edition of the book (3rd)
- publisher (Baillière Tindall)
- place of publication (Edinburgh)
- pages in book (49-81).

Unlike the previous example, this is a chapter in an **edited book**. This edited book is the result of the editor (Maslin-Prothero) gathering a number of other *contributors* (e.g. Brain & Martindale) to write chapters (e.g. Using the library) for the book (*Baillière's study skills...*). Generally, the editor advises the contributors on the general style and content of each chapter, and may write some chapters, often the first and the last. Librarians use the title and editor of the edited book in the catalogue record. Thus, if your reading list includes a chapter from an edited book, in your library search use the *book* title, not the chapter title. As before, you need to identify the correct edition number when doing the catalogue search. Figure 6.3 shows part of the catalogue record for the third edition of this book.

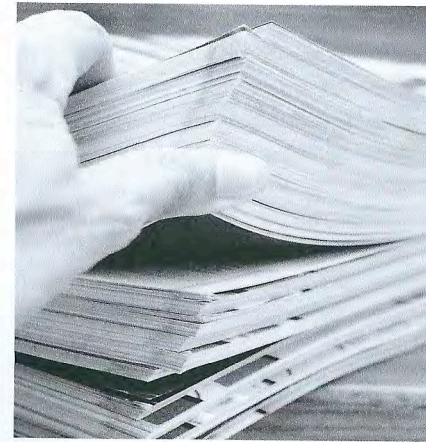
One option is to do a **subject search**. Using the search term 'Internet and crime' produces no matches because this isn't one of the 200,000 subjects used by librarians. In contrast, simplifying the term to just 'Internet' or 'Crime' is likely to produce a large number of hits. I found 700 subjects starting with the word 'Crime', and 350 subjects starting with the word 'Internet'. Searching through 700 subjects is clearly unmanageable, but the 350 Internet subjects, although at first rather daunting, in practice is manageable. This is because they appear 50 at a time, and are in alphabetical order. Thus, scanning down the list, I quickly found the entry 'Internet Crimes—See Computer Crimes', and used the hyperlinks to find relevant books such as *Does the Internet increase the risk of crime?*

Another useful option is to do a **keyword search** (though not all catalogue systems allow this type of search). You may have done some basic web searching using a search engine like Google. If so, you'll know that you simply type in a word, and Google searches its database for web pages with this word. Doing a keyword search on the library catalogue is a miniature version of this web search. You search all the records in the catalogue to find those that include your search term. It's likely that there will be a large number. For example, my two searches on the keywords 'Crime' and then 'Internet' both found thousands of records. Clearly, the search needs defining more precisely.

To **make the keyword search more precise** you may also be able to use what are termed *Boolean operators* (e.g. AND, OR). Thus, on some library systems you can do the following types of keyword searches:

- find records that contain two or more search terms (e.g. crime AND Internet)
- find records that include a phrase (e.g. "criminal aspects of the Internet")
- find records that contain either one or both terms, but not necessarily both (e.g. crime OR Internet)
- find records that include one term but exclude another (e.g. Internet AND NOT programming)
- use brackets to do more sophisticated searches (e.g. Internet AND (fraud OR terrorism)).

For example, to refine the earlier searches, I did a keyword search that combined my two keywords (crime AND Internet). This found over 50 records, virtually all of which appeared useful. Indeed, the harder task is often to reduce the number of possibly useful books to those few that look as if they will be the most helpful. Thus, in many cases, you will need to limit and sort your search results.



CHAPTER 7

Journal articles

I started the previous chapter saying that your university library is potentially your greatest study resource. You now have at least the basic skills to find the books you need. This chapter extends the scope of the library work to journal articles. Once again, I'll start by making some general comments, and then look at how to find information from journals, first when you have bibliographic details on a reading list, and secondly when you have to compile your own reading list.

I use the word *journal* in its widest sense here, meaning everything from the good old *Australian Women's Weekly* to the grandly titled *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. However, all journals have a few **basic things in common**. They are published regularly under the same general title; they include different sections written by different people; and their basic purpose is to keep their readers informed.

Clearly, if you read the *Australian Women's Weekly*, you do so much more for general interest than academic interest! However, that does not mean that it's of no value to you as a student. In particular, look on newspapers and general magazines as sources of **case studies** you can use to illustrate general principles. I regularly use my daily newspaper in my teaching. Indeed, it's my main source of illustrative material.

Of course, there are major differences between general and academic journals. One of the most important is that they have very different editorial procedures. Most popular newspapers and magazines come out daily or weekly, and editorial staff have to process material very quickly.

Clearly, editors make sure that content is not potentially libellous, but journalists' work generally is not carefully scrutinised for accuracy. In contrast, most academic journals come out on average probably four times a year, and the development of their content is much more time-consuming. It usually involves the following steps:

1. An author submits a manuscript to the editor.
2. The editor sends out the manuscript to a number of expert assessors.
3. The assessors comment on the manuscript. They often recommend that the author makes certain specified changes before publication.
4. The editor returns the assessors' comments to the author, and asks that the changes be made.
5. The author makes the requested changes, or mounts an argument as to why they aren't necessary.
6. The editor decides whether to accept the revised manuscript for publication, or to contact the assessors again.

Up to two years can go by between the submission of the original manuscript and its appearance as an article in the journal. That's the down-side for writers. The up-side for readers, of course, is that they can be sure the **article has been very carefully scrutinised** by experts before publication.

Professional groups often publish academic journals. The basic aim is to keep group members up-to-date with the latest thinking in the discipline. A journal does this in three main ways:

- *Articles* These often form the main part of each issue of a journal. Usually, an article is a stand-alone piece of research of several thousand words, written by an expert in the area. Most journal articles start with an abstract, which in 100-250 words summarises the basic points made in the article as a whole. Articles conclude with a reference list of the works cited.
- *Book reviews* To keep their readers up-to-date, academic journals also often include book reviews that describe and evaluate new books in the area.
- *Letters to the editor* These often contain the responses of readers to articles published in the previous edition (especially when the article criticises earlier research). They may also contain the response of the author of the article to criticisms in earlier letters.

Not all journals contain all these elements. But all journals contain at least one of them. They provide valuable, detailed sources of information, and you need to find them as part of your research for essays and other assessment work.

Not long ago, all journals were in printed format. Recently, however, libraries have tended to concentrate on **journals in electronic format**. This obviously reduces pressure on shelf space, and in multi-campus universities makes journal articles equally accessible to all users, regardless of campus. Because of this trend, many libraries hold journals in both printed and electronic formats. Often, the older volumes are printed, and found on the library shelves; and the more recent are in electronic format, and found online.

Finding articles with a reading list

How do you find the following article from a reading list handed out by a lecturer?

Forrest, J & Dunn, K 2006, 'Racism and intolerance in eastern Australia: a geographic perspective', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 37, no. 2, July, pp. 167-186.

Chapter 6 advises you to search on the title of the book. Similarly, when searching for journal articles, always search on the **title of the journal** (*Australian Geographer*), not the title of the article ('Racism and intolerance...'). It's important to get clear the distinction between journal and article. Journal titles will be in the catalogue; article titles will not.

Imagine I have done a title search on *Australian Geographer*. Figure 7.1 shows the library record from a multi-campus university, with three campuses, East, Central and West.

Figure 7.1: Results from a journal title search

Title: The Australian geographer
 Location: Central campus: PER 919.4 Aus
 Issues held: Vol.2:3 (1934)-8:4 (1962), 10:1 (1966)-31:3 (2000)
 Location: East campus: PER 919.4 Aus
 Issues held: Vol.10:1 (1966)-34:3 (2003)
 Online access available from: Taylor & Francis Online: March 1999-

The catalogue record gives answers to four important questions about the **library's holdings of this journal**:

- *Campus*—In a multi-campus university, which campuses hold the journal?
- *Issues held*—Do they hold this particular issue?
- *Format*—Is it in printed or electronic format?
- *Call number*—If it's a printed copy, where is it in the library?

Figure 7.1 shows that on the Central campus, there is an incomplete run of printed copies between 1934 and 2000; on the East campus, the printed collection runs between 1966 and 2003. The Western campus is not on the record, meaning that the library there holds no printed copies of this journal. The final line of Figure 7.1 shows that readers on all campuses (and those off-campus) can access electronic copies of *Australian Geographer*. They are included on the Taylor & Francis database, which includes all issues of this journal published since March 1999.

The *Australian Geographer* article by Forrest and Dunn is dated July 2006. This is too recent to be included in either of the printed collections (which end in 2000 and 2003). Thus, the only option for all readers is to **access the journal online** using the Taylor & Francis database. Each firm's database is slightly different, but it is quite straightforward to follow the links to volume 37, number 2, and then to the article by Forrest and Dunn. In this and many other databases, you first see an abstract of the article. Read the 250-word abstract first: 'Racism has become a fact of life in Australia over the past decade or so, yet there are relatively few studies of its nature or extent...'. If you think the entire article is worth reading, you can access the full text, as either a PDF or HTML file. The former shows the article exactly as it appears in the printed version journal. It includes the page numbers, which you will need if you quote or paraphrase part of the article.

Let's look at **one more example** of finding an article from the same journal, *Australian Geographer*.

Smith, GD & Winchester, HPM 1998, 'Negotiating space: alternative masculinities at the work/home boundary', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 29, no. 3, November, pp. 327-339.

The 1998 publication year means that you can't use the Taylor & Francis database, which starts in 1999 (see Figure 7.1). However, there are printed copies of the article on the shelves at both the Central campus (1966-2000) and the East campus (1966-2003). If you are at one of these campuses, you need to take note of the call number (PER 919.4Aus) and find volume 29, number 3 of *Australian Geographer* on the shelves. The library has probably bound together all the individual issues making up volume 29. Having found the article, you once again first read the abstract and if it's useful, read and take notes from the entire article. If you happen to be studying on the West campus or off-campus, you need to find out if you can arrange for library staff to send you a copy of the article.

Finding articles without a reading list

What do you do if you don't have a reading list from your lecturer? You have to compile your own list, and then assess which are the most useful articles—a much more difficult job! Particularly in first-level units, staff will provide details of the basic sources you need. However, you can make your work stand out from the crowd by using additional material. Imagine you're a marker faced with a large pile of essays, many very similar in content. It's a refreshing change to read something different. And this could well mean that the marker awards the assignment a higher grade.

In order to help readers find journal articles, many years ago librarians began to compile special catalogues that grouped journal articles by subject. They provided two different types of **printed reference journals**:

- *Indexing journals*—These listed just the bibliographic details of each article: author, article title, journal title, and other journal details (e.g. year, volume, page numbers). Indexing journals were broad in scope. For example, the *Australian Public Affairs Information Service* covered the social sciences and humanities.
- *Abstracting journals*—In addition to bibliographic details, abstracting journals provided (not surprisingly) an abstract of each article. Because each entry was longer, abstracting journals tended to concentrate on specific disciplines (e.g. *Sociological Abstracts*).

I have just talked about indexing and abstracting journals in the past tense, which is a bit misleading as both *APAIS* and *Sociological Abstracts* still exist, but now as **electronic databases** rather than as printed journals. Computer technology has made it easier to search for journal articles, electronic searches usually being much faster and less prone to error than manual searches.

In addition, computer technology has made it possible for databases to include not only bibliographic information and an abstract, but also the **full text of each article**. Limiting issues tend to be more legal than technical. For example, an enhanced version of *Australian Public Affairs Information Service* (*APAIS*) is sold as *Australian Public Affairs—Full Text* (*APA-FT*). It includes scanned images from over 200 journals. Ideally, if you have a choice between using a database with full text and one without full text, it makes sense to use the one that can provide you with the most information.

Thus, these days librarians talk about **full-text databases** (e.g. *APA-FT*), and **other databases** (e.g. *APAIS*, *Sociological Abstracts*). However, the division is not quite as clear-cut as it first appears, because

many full-text databases also include journal articles without the full text. For example, *APA-FT* began full-text coverage only in 1995. The database contains only bibliographic details of earlier articles. And even with recent issues of some journals, you'll find some articles without full text. Nevertheless, *APA-FT* is probably the database of most general use to Australian students, covering a wide range of issues, especially in the social sciences and humanities. It has nearly a third of a million records, with about 12,000 new articles added each year (National Library of Australia 2003).

Your university library will almost certainly subscribe to *APA-FT*. Exactly **how you access *APA-FT*** will vary from library to library. For example, you might be able to do a simple title search on 'APA-FT', or through an alphabetical list of databases. You need to do some research on your own library's catalogue.

Searching *APA-FT* is largely a matter of reading what's on the screen, and practising simple and more complicated searches. Following on from the previous 'Racism and intolerance' example, I did a simple search of *APA-FT* using the term 'racism'. It found over 500 records, the earliest dating from 1978, the year from which online coverage starts. (The printed records go back to 1945.) You can limit the *APA-FT* search to find only full text records, which reduced the 'racism' records to less than 150. You can also limit the search by year. For example, a search of full text records from 2005 onwards produced 13 journal articles.

What do you do if a particularly useful **article is not available in full text**? Next to each record is a 'WebBridge' icon. If you click on this icon, you will be able to link directly to the main library catalogue to see whether the journal you want is part of the library's journal collection. If it is, then you go through the same procedure outlined in the previous section on finding articles with a reading list.

Apart from *APA-FT*, there are many **other databases for finding journal articles**. My library's collection starts with *A+ Education* and goes through the alphabet to *Worldwide Political Science Abstracts* (no Xs, Ys or Zs). Much more useful than an alphabetical list is one that groups databases by subject. There will probably be a subject list of the databases in your university library. Figure 7.2 gives you an idea of how part of the subject list might appear.

Figure 7.2: Some databases for finding journal articles

Discipline	Some recommended databases
Anthropology	Expanded Academic ASAP, Academic Search Premier, APA-FT, MAIS (Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies)
Communication	Communication and Mass Media Complete, Communication Abstracts, APA-FT, Academic Search Premier
History	APA-FT, Expanded Academic ASAP, Academic Search Premier, Historical Abstracts
Literature	Literature Resource Center, Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP, AUSLIT, APA-FT
Management	Business Source Premier, Emerald Intelligence+Fulltext 2000, Expanded Academic ASAP, PsychINFO, APA-FT
Philosophy	Philosophers Index, Religion and Philosophy Collection, Expanded Academic ASAP
Politics	APA-FT, Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts
Psychology	PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, Expanded Academic ASAP, ScienceDirect
Sociology	Sociological Abstracts, Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP, Current Contents, APA-FT
Visual Arts	Art Abstracts, ARTbibliographies Modern, APA-FT, Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic ASAP

Apart from giving you some idea of the large number of databases, Figure 7.2 shows that some **general databases** are useful across a range of disciplines while others focus on just one discipline. Apart from *APA-FT*, there are two other important general databases shown. *Academic Search Premier* provides abstracts and indexing for over 3000 scholarly journals covering the social sciences, humanities, education and more. It also includes the full text of articles in over 1000 journals with many dating back to 1990. The second is *Expanded Academic ASAP*. It contains nearly 200 indexed journal titles going back to 1980. Over 500 of these

are available in full text, largely dating from the early 1990s. The range of disciplines covered includes the arts, humanities, social sciences, science and technology.

Slightly different are the **databases that focus on newspaper articles**. The biggest is probably *Factiva*, which uses nearly 9000 sources from over 150 countries in 22 languages. Smaller, and a bit more user-friendly, is *NewsBank* which gives you access to the complete full-text content of more than 100 local, regional, and national Australian newspapers. For example, the *Australian*, *Adelaide Advertiser*, *Hobart Mercury* and *Courier Mail* are available from 1998, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* from 1999, and the *Canberra Times* from 2003.

In addition, there are many **discipline-based databases**. For example, Figure 7.2 includes *Historical Abstracts*, *Literature Resource Center*, *MAIS (Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies)*, *Philosophers Index*, *PsychINFO*, *Sociological Abstracts* and *Art Abstracts*. Clearly, many of you are likely to use these specialised databases later in your student career when you begin to focus on one or two specialised areas in your studies.

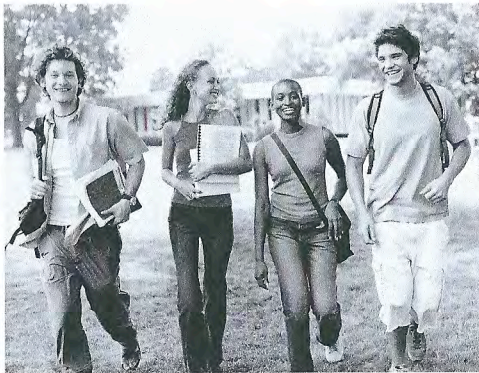
As you can see, there's a lot of stuff out there! In fact, you will quickly find that the major problem is finding too many journal articles, not too few. The number of articles you find in these databases is not of Google-like proportions, but you can quickly identify thousands with an unfocused search. The **more focused the search, the more manageable the results**. For example, my academic journals search in *Expanded Academic ASAP* found the following:

- terrorism—9000 items
- terrorism AND Australia—100 items
- terrorism AND Australia, limited to documents with full text—60 items
- terrorism AND Australia, limited to documents with full text in peer-reviewed publications published in the last two years—10 items.

However, even when you reduce the research findings to a manageable number, **dealing with the information can be tricky**. The first step is to read the abstract of the article. If you can, read the abstract before you download the entire article. If you read the abstract, and then the article itself, you may decide to print off the entire article, or only the most important pages (often the introduction, discussion and conclusion). If there is a particular passage that you think you might quote in your essay, you could copy and paste it into a Word document. With some types of file, you can simply highlight the text, copy it, and then paste it. Make sure that you also note the page number of the selected text, and all

the bibliographic details of the article. You can then correctly cite and reference if you end up using the material.

For a complete novice (as everyone is at one point) it can all seem rather confusing. It's important not to think that you have to learn everything about all the main databases by the end of this week, this month, or even this semester. The important thing is to start to feel confident about searching for articles from a reading list. The next stage is to start searching *APA-FT* for material not on a reading list. After that, try your hand with the likes of *Expanded Academic ASAP*, *Academic Search Premier* and *NewsBank*. You'll find that the time you spend on this developmental work will pay handsome dividends over the next few years.



CHAPTER 8

Government reports

Federal, state and local governments in Australia employ over one and a half million people (ABS 2006b). To operate efficiently, government agencies need up-to-date, detailed information on a huge range of subjects. Governments, of course, are often in the unique position of being able to compel individuals and organisations to provide this information. And governments are often the only organisations big enough to mount frequent, large-scale data collection exercises. Much of this information, known as *official statistics*, is published and available for general use.

You can **use official statistics to improve your essays**. Markers look favourably on essays that support general ideas with up-to-date statistics. These are what you'll get from government reports. Many come out several times a year and show results from recently conducted research. In contrast, much of the statistical information in books is out-of-date. This is not surprising as the authors have probably made use of already-published statistics, and it can take several years for a book to be written and published.

All levels of government, federal, state/territory and local, produce reports, though those from federal bodies tend to be most useful for student essays, because of their national coverage. A few organisations exist primarily to collect information and make it widely available. The most important is the **Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)**, Australia's official statistical organisation. According to their mission statement, the role of the ABS is to 'assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by

leading a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service' (ABS 2005). Of all the reports published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia* is undoubtedly the flagship. It is essentially a 'best of the ABS' compilation, with information on everything from abalone to zoological parks.

As with the previous chapters on books and journal articles, this chapter looks first at how to find the material included in a lecturer's reading list. It then moves on to the more difficult problem of how to find material to add to your own reading list. Because of the range of material, each section concentrates on Australian sources.

Finding government reports with a reading list

How do you find the following government report?

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Year Book Australia 2006*, cat. no. 1301.0, ABS, Canberra.

The comments made in Chapter 6 about books also apply here. For example, the warning against doing an author search for books applies even more to government reports, in particular those with departmental authors. For example, in my university library an author search for 'Australian Bureau of Statistics' finds over 1500 titles. Moreover, politicians tend to change the names of government departments with bewildering speed. They want to seem to be *doing* things, and a departmental name change is an easy option! For example, in the last decade, the federal education department has had the following titles: (i) Employment, Education and Training, (ii) Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, (iii) Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and (iv) Education, Science and Training!

Do a catalogue search on the title of the report. The only difference from a general book title search is the need to make sure that you leave out the year in the title. Thus, you would type just *Year Book Australia* in the title search box. *Year Book Australia* is published serially (i.e. one after the other). Rather than making a separate catalogue entry every year, librarians use the one general entry that tells you about all the editions in the library collection.

The catalogue is likely to show a **shelf number** that is slightly more complicated than the average. My library's catalogue shows 'REF 319.4 Aus 1301.0':

- *REF* This means it is in the Reference collection.

- *319.4 Aus* This is the standard Dewey number given to all ABS reports, regardless of their subject.
- *1301.0* This is the ABS catalogue number, which librarians use to organise the ABS reports on the shelves.

Recently, the ABS has moved from printed to **electronic reports**. Moreover, because the electronic reports are now available online without charge, your university library may have cancelled its order for copies of many reports that are still available in print. The good news is that the electronic reports are available through your library catalogue via a link to the ABS website. As this site is quite difficult to find your way around, it's helpful to use the library catalogue to get to the right part of the website. The example below shows how to find the following report:

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Causes of Death Australia 2004*, cat. no. 3303.0, ABS, Canberra.

In my library, a title search tells me that the 2003 edition is the most recent printed copy held. To access later issues, you have to use the online access link shown on the catalogue record. Clicking on this takes you into the *Causes of Death* area on the ABS website. Look first to see if the information you're looking for is available on the 'Summary' page. If not, you can view the entire report without charge by clicking on the 'Details' link, and then on 'Download now'. The only thing you need to bear in mind if you're working from home is the time and cost of downloading. For example, this report is over 2 megabytes in size.

Finding government reports without a reading list

Most of your searches for government reports are likely to be without a reading list. For example, you may be working on an assignment, and realise that some recent Australian statistics, or perhaps a table or diagram, would be useful to support your more general comments. For ABS material, there are a number of search options:

- Index pages of *Year Book Australia*
- *ABS Catalogue of Publications and Products*
- ABS website (<http://www.abs.gov.au>).

In addition, of course, there are other sources of official statistics apart from the ABS. I'll mention these at the end of the chapter.

Index pages of *Year Book Australia*

The simplest type of search is to pick up the current copy of *Year Book Australia*, and search the index or contents pages for relevant terms. Your

campus library will have reference copies of the *Year Book*, and you should also find it in your local public library.

For example, imagine that your current essay is about home ownership in Australia. You want to find some statistical information about the following: (i) the proportion of households owning a home as compared to renting; (ii) the proportion of owners who are still paying off their mortgage, as opposed to owning the property outright; and (iii) the proportion of households who rent from a state housing authority as opposed to a private landlord. You're looking for information that is as up-to-date as possible, but you'd also like to see some historical trends.

The printed copy of the *Year Book* index has an entry under 'Home ownership'. This leads you to two tables showing a breakdown by dwelling structure (e.g. separate house, flat), tenure (e.g. owner with mortgage, owner without mortgage), landlord type (e.g. state, private), and household composition (e.g. couple, lone person). So, most of the information required for the essay is there. All that's left to find are the historical trends.

Catalogue of Publications and Products

A printed copy of the *ABS Catalogue of Publications and Products* is available on all university campus libraries plus many other libraries. It has an index at the back, which directs you by catalogue number to relevant reports.

To continue with the home ownership example, when I searched the index in the *Catalogue* for 'Home ownership' I was directed to 'See Housing'. One of the reports listed there was *Australian Social Trends*, another of the widely available ABS flagship reports. When I searched *Australian Social Trends*, I found a major section on housing, including historical data for the last 10 years.

ABS website

The simplest way to use the ABS website is to do a title search on your library catalogue for *Year Book Australia*. This takes you to the relevant page of the ABS website. Then click on the 'Details' tab and 'Download now'. You will then have the entire *Year Book* at your fingertips. The only downside is that the full report is around 30 megabytes. You can then manually search the index in the back as if it were a printed report. Alternatively, you can search electronically for words and phrases by holding down the [Ctrl] key and pressing the [F] key. If you don't want to download the entire *Year Book*, you can download individual chapters by clicking on 'Contents' rather than 'Details', and then on the relevant chapter. Then use [Ctrl+F] to find specific text.

Alternatively, you can search the ABS website directly by simply entering your search term on the search box on the home page and then pressing 'Go'. I entered the term 'home ownership'. Not surprisingly, many of the hits were different editions of *Australian Social Indicators* and *Year Book Australia*. Further down the list was a more specialised report, *Housing Occupancy and Costs*. By clicking on the link, I found a summary of the report, and could have downloaded the entire report by clicking on the 'Details' tab.

Other sources of official statistics

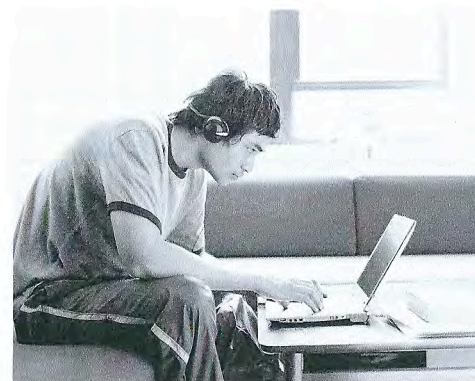
Although the ABS is Australia's official statistical organisation, there are several other government bodies responsible for data collection on more specialised areas of Australian society. They include:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (<http://www.aihw.gov.au>)
- Australian Institute of Criminology (<http://www.aic.gov.au/stats/>)
- Australian Road Transport Safety Bureau (<http://www.atsb.gov.au/>)
- Reserve Bank of Australia (<http://www.rba.gov.au>).

You'll find the full list of links to Australian official statistics at <http://www.publications.gov.au/index.php?statistics>.

Occasionally, you may want to make some international comparisons. One of the best sources is the *World Factbook*, published by the Central Intelligence Agency, the American spy organisation. Originally set up as a guide for diplomats going on overseas postings, the *World Factbook* is now available at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. It is organised by country, but you can also obtain rank ordered lists of countries on topics such as population size, birth rate, unemployment, telephone use and (of course) military expenditure. For example, the US military spends a mind-blowing \$500 billion each year (CIA 2006). Click on the 'Guide to rank order pages' on the home page of the *World Factbook*.

The ABS does provide some overseas data. For example, *Australian Social Trends* has a section on international comparisons. It includes statistics on population, health, education and work. More generally, there is a link to international statistics on the ABS home page. This provides access to international bodies such as the United Nations, as well as to national statistical agencies everywhere from Afghanistan to Zambia.



CHAPTER 9

Web resources

If you have been working your way through the earlier chapters, you should have a sense of déjà vu when reading the title of this chapter. After all, I have referred to the World Wide Web in the previous chapters about finding books, journal articles and government reports. Indeed, your most important Web address is that of your university's library. In this chapter, I'll very briefly recap some earlier points, and then focus on other parts of the Web that will be of use in your studies.

But first, a general **word of caution** about using the World Wide Web. Recall that the chapters are in the following order: books, journal articles, government reports, web resources. This reflects the importance of each, starting with the most important. When faced with a new essay topic, the first thing you must *not* do is a Web search. It may well be useful—but later on, when you have a much better idea of what you'll be writing, and know the gaps you need to fill. Generally, the more specific the question, the better the Web is as an information resource.

People often use the terms *Internet* and *World Wide Web* as if they mean the same thing. In fact, the Web is part of the Internet, which also includes things like email and online chat. The Internet is a collection of interconnected computer networks. The idea originated in the 1960s during the Cold War between the US and the former Soviet Union. It started as a US military project designed to keep government functioning during a nuclear war. Thankfully, it hasn't been used for its original purpose! The World Wide Web has grown into a huge collection of interconnected documents, which are accessible through the Internet. As I'm sure you know, it's an enormous supermarket, library and soapbox.

It's as if your university librarians allow anyone to put anything on the library shelves—sales brochures, personal musings, and so on.

Each web site has a unique address, or **URL** (Uniform Resource Locator). A unique address allows *web browsers* such as Internet Explorer to find a particular site. The URL also helps you identify the main function of each site:

- *gov*—government sites provide information about the state and public policy (e.g. <http://www.abs.gov.au>)
- *edu*—educational sites provide information and promote the sponsoring institution (e.g. <http://www.deakin.edu.au>)
- *org*—not-for-profit organisation sites are often designed to influence public opinion by promoting a cause (e.g. <http://wwf.org.au/>)
- *net*—a broad term, simply meaning computer network (e.g. <http://www.abc.net.au>)
- *com/co/biz*—business sites promote a product or service (e.g. <http://www.pearson.com.au/>).

All the above examples are Australian sites, as shown by the final *au*. Each country has its own suffix (e.g. *uk* = United Kingdom, *ca* = Canada). The only exception is the United States because the Internet started there, and thus originally there was no need to identify the country of origin.

Online books, articles and reports—recap

Talking about web sites involves going over some old ground, in that you may well have already spent time looking at a number of sites related to books, articles and reports. I'll recap some of the points from earlier chapters.

Chapter 6 refers to **electronic books** (or *e-books*). You have access to e-books in your university library because it has bought them, in the same way it buys printed books. Your library is likely to have only a very small proportion of its collection in the form of electronic books. However, there are also about 20,000 books freely available to all web users. The one thing they have in common is that they are free of copyright. Copyright is the legal right to control the copying of literary and other works. It lasts for the life of the author plus 70 years. This is why many e-books are by authors from the nineteenth century or earlier (e.g. Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens, Marx).

The best-known collection is **Project Gutenberg**, named after Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press (<http://www.gutenberg.org>). The Project Gutenberg of Australia site

contains books not listed on the US site (<http://www.gutenberg.net.au/>). This is because until recently the copyright period in Australia lasted for 50 (not 70) years from the death of the author (Australian Copyright Council 2006). For example, many of George Orwell's books are in the Australian list, but not the American one.

Chapter 7 outlines various **databases of journal articles** available in your university library. Because there are so many of these databases, librarians have created both alphabetical lists and subject lists so that readers can quickly find the database they need. In my library, the alphabetical list starts with *A+ Education* and ends with *Worldwide Political Science Abstracts* (no Xs, Ys or Zs). In addition to *Worldwide Political Science Abstracts*, the subject list for political science also includes *Expanded Academic ASAP*, *Australian Public Affairs—Full Text* and *Academic Search Premier*.

Chapter 8 looks at some **government websites**, in particular the Australian Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.abs.gov.au>). There are many other sources of official statistics. To access them, go to the following address: <http://www.publications.gov.au/index.php?statistics>. A useful source of international statistics is the CIA's *World Factbook*. It may well be that your university library has created its own list of useful government websites. Check your library catalogue.

But the World Wide Web is not simply a collection of materials found in other formats. There is a huge amount of material found only on the Web. Just *how* huge is difficult to say. It's certainly hundreds of billions of documents. But, of course, it's quality that counts rather than quantity. Ideally, you would like to find half a dozen very useful sites rather than half a million fairly useless ones. The remainder of this chapter will help you do that.

Finding web resources with a reading list

In many respects, finding web resources from a reading list is the easiest of all literature searches. How would you find the following item from a reading list?

Jackson, L 2006, *Riots and revenge* [transcript of a *Four corners* program], Australian Broadcasting Corporation, viewed 20 April 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2006/s1590953.htm>>.

If you are using an electronic reading list, you may find that the URL is underlined and in a different colour to the standard text. If so, then all you need do is position your cursor over the URL, press the [Ctrl] key, and then click on the hyperlink to go to the site. If this doesn't work, highlight

the URL and copy the text in the usual way, and then paste it into the address box at the top of the web browser page. If you're using a printed reading list, you need to copy the URL *very carefully* into the address box.

What if you get an **error message** saying 'The requested URL could not be retrieved'? It's possible that it has been typed incorrectly or, more likely, that the address has changed. If so, then there are a couple of options:

- Do a search using the main title of the item (e.g. 'Riots and revenge') in a search engine (see below)
- Type part of the URL into the address box (e.g. <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners>> or <<http://www.abc.net.au/>>).

Then do a more specific search of the web site.

By the way, the ABC site is a very useful one (<http://www.abc.net.au>). For example, it includes the transcripts of many television and radio programs, such as the *Four corners* script mentioned above. You can also listen to various programs as podcasts. I have the ABC's URL on my list of favourites.

Finding web resources without a reading list

As always, finding resources without a reading list is a much more difficult task. This particularly applies to the Web, because of its size and its lack of overall organisation. It's like a huge library, but with all the items shelved higgledy-piggledy (a lovely phrase!).

You have **two basic options** to find something of academic use. They parallel in many respects the sort of searches you can do in the library:

- *Subject search*—In the library a subject search finds items catalogued by librarians using a pre-existing list of subject headings. This means that you find a smaller number of items, but all of them are about the same subject. On the Web, the librarians' job is much more difficult because they are not the gatekeepers and thus can't control what is added. As a result, they must first find and then evaluate web pages before deciding whether to add to their web catalogues, or *subject directories*.
- *Keyword search*—In the library a keyword search scans each catalogue record to see if it includes the search term. It is the most general of the basic library searches. On the Web, a *search engine* finds pages with a given search term. Each search engine indexes only a small portion of the Web. However, unless you define the search very carefully, the total number of pages found by the

search engine can be enormous. Moreover, as with a library catalogue search, terms can appear in a number of different contexts, many of which are likely to be irrelevant to the purpose of the research.

I'll use this distinction between subject directories and search engines to structure this section about finding web resources without a reading list.

Subject directories

There is a rather confusing mixture of related terms: subject directories, organised hierarchies, indexes, subject gateways, information gateways and virtual libraries. However, all involve librarians or others with an interest in the field doing two things: (i) selecting the best web sites, and (ii) cataloguing them into subject areas. Thus, relatively speaking there is a small number of sites in subject directories, though their quality is high. Subject directories include:

- Google Directory (<http://directory.google.com.au/>)
- Yahoo Directory (<http://au.dir.yahoo.com/>)
- Librarians' Internet Index (LII) (<http://www.lii.org>)
- WWW Virtual Library (<http://www.vlib.org.uk/>)
- Intute (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/>)

As Table 9.1 shows, the subject lists used by **Google, Yahoo and Librarians' Internet Index** are much more like those in a public library than an academic one. Nevertheless, when you follow the links, you find a range of potentially useful sites. For example, in Google Directory, clicking on the broad subject 'Society' brings up a detailed list of over 40 more specific subjects, from 'Activism' to 'Work'. Each has further links. For example, the 'Philosophy' area (with 9000 sites) includes the 'History of Philosophy' (1000 sites). This, in turn, includes the 'Twentieth Century' (300 sites), which includes 'Existentialism' (30 sites).

The three subject directories mentioned so far are essentially web equivalents of public libraries. The **Virtual Library (VL)** and Intute are more like academic libraries. The Virtual Library 'is run by a loose confederation of volunteers, who compile pages of key links for particular areas in which they are expert; even though it isn't the biggest index of the Web, the VL pages are widely recognised as being amongst the highest quality guides' (VL 2005). As you might imagine, the quality of each section depends very much on the enthusiasm of the volunteers who administer it. Consequently, some sections are much better than others.

Table 9.1: Major subjects in Google, Yahoo and Librarians' Internet Index directories

Google Directory	Yahoo Directory	Librarians' Internet Index
Arts	Arts & humanities	Arts & humanities
Business	Business & economy	Business
Computers	Computers & Internet	Computers
Games	Education	Government
Health	Entertainment	Health
Home	Government	Home & housing
Kids & teens	Health	Law
News	News & media	Media
Recreation	Recreation & sport	People
Reference	Reference	Recreation
Regional	Regional	Reference
Science	Science	Regional
Shopping	Social science	Science
Society	Society & culture	Society & social science
Sports		
World		

Sources: Google (2005), Yahoo (2006) and LII (2006)

Some sections of the Virtual Library are now provided in collaboration with **Intute**, a British service that gives 'access to the very best web resources for education and research' (Intute 2006a). There are four subject groups:

- Arts and humanities
- Health and life sciences
- Science and technology
- Social sciences.

Table 9.2 shows the subject headings for two of these groups, 'Arts and humanities' and 'Social sciences'. Each subject shown is divided into more specific discipline areas. For example, Historical and philosophical studies is split into (i) Archaeology, (ii) History, (iii) History and philosophy of science, (iv) Philosophy, and (v) Religion and theology.

Table 9.2: Major categories in Virtual Library and Intute directories

Virtual Library	Intute: Arts and Humanities	Intute: Social Sciences
Agriculture	Arts & creative industries	Anthropology
Arts	General arts & humanities	Business & Management
Business & economics	Historical & philosophical studies	Economics
Communications & media	European languages & literature,	Education
Computing	Historical & cultural studies	Environmental sciences
Education	Other languages, Literature	European studies
Engineering	Historical & cultural studies	Government policy
Humanities	Literature	Hospitality & catering
Information & libraries	Historical & cultural studies	Human geography
International affairs	Literature, linguistics & classics	Law
Law		Politics
Natural sciences & maths		Psychology
Recreation		Research tools & methods
Regional studies		Social welfare
Social & behavioral sciences		Sociology
Society		Sport & leisure practice
		Statistics & data
		Travel & tourism

Sources: Virtual Library (2006b) and Intute (2006b & 2006c)

Search engines

Recall that a keyword search on a library catalogue scans each record to see if it includes the search term. It's the most general of the basic library searches. Similarly, on the Web, **a search engine finds pages that include the search term**. Unlike subject directories, search engines collect information without any human judgement as to what are good sites. In addition, there is no attempt to categorise web pages into subject areas. Preston Gralla (2004, p. 191) describes search engines as follows: 'They are all composed of three parts: at least one spider, which crawls across the Internet gathering information; a database, which contains all the information the spiders gather; and a search tool, which people use to search through the database'.

Using a search engine is, if anything, too easy—you can find hundreds of thousands of sites with a simple search. Of course, what you're aiming to do is **find a few high quality sites** rather than a lot of generally low quality ones with a few gems scattered among them like

needles in a haystack (if I can mix my metaphors). This is the reason why search engines, which used to sell themselves on size, now focus more on trying to make your search easier to refine to exactly what you want.

Many of you will have used **Google and Yahoo**, currently the Web's largest search engines. At the time of writing, Google accounted for about half of all web searches, and Yahoo for about one fifth (Nielsen/NetRatings 2006). It is vital that you make your search as refined as possible. The easiest way to do this is always to use the *advanced* search option. Table 9.3 shows how by gradually limiting the search, I reduced the number of hits from nearly two billion to just four!

Table 9.3: Limiting a search using Google

Search terms	Limited to	Sites found
drugs OR sex OR rock		1,990,000,000
drugs AND sex AND rock		26,300,000
drugs AND sex AND rock	edu	366,000
drugs AND sex AND rock	edu.au	21,200
heroin AND sex AND rock	edu.au	362
heroin AND sex AND punk	edu.au	100
heroin AND cybersex AND punk	edu.au	4

The **advanced search options** in Google and Yahoo are at the following addresses, or you can use the link on each home page. Choose one, and put it in your list of favourite sites for easy access:

- http://www.google.com.au/advanced_search?hl=en
- <http://au.search.yahoo.com/web/advanced>.

Table 9.4 shows some of the options on the advanced search pages in Google and Yahoo. Make as much use of these options as you can to narrow your search.

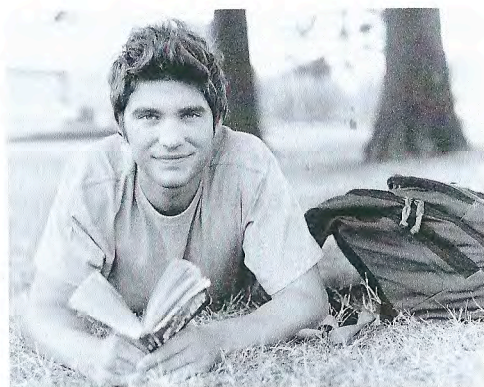
Table 9.4: Advanced search options in Google and Yahoo

Feature	Google	Yahoo
With all the words	✓	✓
With the exact phrase	✓	✓
With at least one of the words	✓	✓
Without the words	✓	✓
In the specified language	✓	x
In specified file format	✓	✓
Updated in specified time period	✓	✓
From specified site or domain	✓	✓
From sites with few copyright restrictions	x	✓
Safe-search filter	✓	✓

How to evaluate a website

You can be confident that the vast majority of books, journal articles and government reports in the library contain reliable and accurate information. The editorial process helps guarantee that. For example, recall the long procedure that authors of journal articles go through before they see their work in print. However, the same editorial process does not apply on the Web, and so you cannot have the same confidence about what you read there. Use the following guidelines to help you decide whether you can use different web pages in your essays:

- *How did you find it?* Did you find it via a subject directory or search engine? If a directory, then it's likely that there has been some checking of the content by an expert (or, at least, an enthusiast). However, you need to check pages found via a search engine much more carefully.
- *What institution hosts the site?* If it's an educational institution (i.e. if the URL ends with .edu) or a government body (.gov) you can fairly safely assume that the information is of high quality.
- *Who is the author?* Does the web page identify the writer? If it does, what position and qualifications does the writer have?
- *What is the basic purpose of the site?* There is likely to be more than one purpose, but ask yourself whether it's primarily to provide information, to entertain, or to sell something (e.g. goods, services, ideas).
- *What evidence is given?* As with all your reading, you should ask whether the author backs up each claim with evidence, or whether it's simply an unsupported opinion.



CHAPTER 10

Academic writing practices

You will do a lot of writing as an undergraduate student—a minimum of 100,000 words if you're enrolled in an Arts degree. As a consequence, four of the chapters in this textbook are directly devoted to writing: (i) Academic writing practices, (ii) General writing practices, (iii) Writing essays, and (iv) Writing business reports. Many of you will have a fairly well-developed set of writing skills as a consequence of your time at high school or elsewhere. However, writing at university is more intellectually challenging, and it's important that you develop these writing skills as much as possible. Under the general heading of *Academic writing*, I'll look at the following:

- Tone or formality
- Inclusive language
- Using other people's words and ideas
- Formatting assignments

Tone or formality

You always **write for a specific audience**. When writing an academic paper as part of an undergraduate course, you write with your marker in mind. Markers expect a number of things when they pick up a paper, one of which is that it's in the right *tone* or *register*—i.e. written with the right level of formality.

But **what is the right level of formality?** The first piece of written work I ask students to do includes a short account of the procedures and results of a library exercise. Some students pitch their accounts far too low, and write the essay as if it were an email to a friend (e.g. 'I was pretty sure that I'd draw a blank—imagine my surprise when I found a great stack of books!'). Many more students pitch their accounts far too high (e.g. 'I consequently proceeded to peruse the monographs'). Here are some basic pointers to writing with the correct degree of formality.

First, **keep your style as simple as possible**. Clearly, this doesn't mean you should try to write the academic equivalent of a *Dr Seuss* story! Aim to produce an essay that a fellow student in your course will immediately understand. Don't deliberately avoid jargon or technical words as, once defined, they can provide a useful shorthand. Ideally, get a friend to read your draft essay and give you some honest feedback—though friends can be thin on the ground at times like these! It will be easier if you offer to repay the favour. If you do, you'll find that commenting on other people's writing also helps you to improve your own.

Second, use **direct sentence constructions**. Use the active voice of a verb (e.g. The cat sat on the mat) rather than the passive voice (e.g. The mat was sat on by the cat). Instead of the phrase 'It has been shown', use the more direct 'The paper shows'. Indeed, you might use the even more direct 'I show'. *However*, academics do differ in their views about using *I* and *my* in essays. Find out what each of your lecturers regards as an acceptable level of formality.

The **active voice is more informative** because it can reveal *who* is doing what. This brings to mind a story about the D-day Allied landings in France during the Second World War. Just in case the plan proved unsuccessful, the soldier in charge, General Eisenhower, drafted a press statement saying that the landings had failed and the troops had been withdrawn. On reflection, he changed the wording to 'I have withdrawn the troops', so people could see where responsibility for the decision lay (Fussell 1989, pp. 296–7). In your essays, follow Eisenhower's lead and use the active rather than the passive voice.

Finally, when writing an essay **avoid using contractions** such as *I'd*, *it's* or *didn't*. Leave contractions to writers of informally written textbooks—like this one. The only exception in an essay is when you use a quotation that includes a contraction. You need to reproduce the original exactly as written.

Inclusive language

It's important in your academic writing that you don't 'marginalise or exclude particular segments of the population' (*Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 2002, p. 55). The *Style manual* is used by all Australian government bodies and many other organisations. It's the closest Australia comes to having a standard guide for writing. As the *Style manual* points out, *inclusive writing* involves inclusive treatment of the sexes, ethnic groups, and people with a disability.

The most common aspect of inclusive writing relates to **non-sexist or sex-neutral language**. In many societies, men are more powerful than women. Language can reflect and help maintain women's subordinate social position. For example, language can make women 'invisible' by allowing masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to both men and women. Consider the following: 'If any reader would like to comment on this book, he should write to me'. By using this form of words, I have made each female reader invisible by including her in the pronoun *he*. The problem is that the English language doesn't have a gender-neutral, third-person singular pronoun for people. Of the three possible pronouns, *he*, *she* and *it*, the last one is the obvious choice. Unfortunately, this word is used almost exclusively to refer to things, not people (babies are the only possible exception).

So, how do you **avoid using *he* and *his* to refer to both sexes**? The simplest way is to include a reference to both sexes: 'If any reader wants to comment on this book, *he or she* should write to me.' The term *he or she* (or *she or he*) is preferable to *he/she* or *s/he* because it can be deciphered immediately by the reader. However, although the phrases *he and she* and *his and her* are acceptable when used occasionally, they can become rather tiresome if your essay is peppered with them. Another possibility is to make the subject of the sentence plural, and use the gender-neutral pronoun *they*: 'If readers have comments about this book, *they* should write to me'. A third method, and often the best one, is to eliminate the third person pronoun: 'Any reader with comments about this book should write to me'. (By the way, I *am* interested in your comments about the book. My address is Deakin University, Warrnambool 3280.)

The dot points below show **how to overcome other difficulties with using non-sexist writing**:

- Use *people*, *humanity* or the *human race* instead of 'man' or 'mankind'.
- Replace occupational terms that exclude women with terms that are more general. For example, use *business executive* for

'businessman', *sales assistant* for 'salesman', *fire-fighter* for 'fireman', *cleaner* for 'cleaning lady', *minister of religion* for 'clergyman', and *police officer* for 'policeman'.

- Words such as 'authoress' or 'actress' that refer specifically to women and which are created by adding a feminine ending to a masculine word (author/ess) suggest that women are deviations from the masculine norm. Use general term such as *author* or *actor* for everybody. If the sex of the author or actor is important, it will come out naturally in your text. If it's not important, then there's no need to mention it.
- Similarly, show women as participating equally with men by using generic terms such as *doctor*, *lawyer* and *reporter* for both women and men. Avoid terms such as 'lady doctor' or 'female reporter'.

The *Style manual* (2002, pp. 56-61) gives the following advice when referring to **ethnic groups and people with a disability**:

- Use the term *Indigenous Australians* to refer to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- When referring to immigrants whose mother tongue is not English, use the acronym *LOTE* (Language other than English). It is more positive than 'NESB' (non-English speaking background).
- Don't overgeneralise (e.g. not all Lebanese people are Muslims; and not all Muslims are Arabs).
- Highlight people's abilities rather than their disabilities (e.g. use *a musician with a vision impairment* rather than 'a blind musician'). Note that *with a vision impairment* is more inclusive than 'blind', including those who are partially sighted. Similarly, *with a hearing impairment* is more inclusive than 'deaf'.

Using other people's words and ideas

No student writes an essay without using other people's words or ideas. Because you are expected to draw on other people's work, you are also expected to acknowledge their help by saying exactly which parts of your essay are taken from someone else's work. This is done as a mark of recognition for the original author, and as a way of helping your reader follow up any of your sources. If you don't give your reader details of your sources, you may be accused of *plagiarism*—passing off someone else's work as your own. Plagiarism is the academic equivalent of fraud; avoid it like the plague! You can use other people's work in a variety of ways.

Most obviously, you can **quote their exact words**. You should integrate short quotes into your own sentences, but show which words are

not your own by the use of quotation marks. The Australian *Style manual* (2002, p. 113) recommends 'single quotation marks to enclose direct quotations'. Use double quotation marks (i.e. "...") only for a quote within a quote. If a quote is longer than 30 words, it is termed a *block quote* because you set it out separately from the rest of your text by: (i) indenting it by five spaces from the left margin, (ii) using single line spacing, and (iii) using a slightly smaller font size. Because you clearly identify a block quote as someone else's words, you don't also need quotation marks around it. For example:

Quote materials exactly... Do not alter verb tense, subject-verb agreement, or anything else about the quotation to make it fit into your text. Instead, change your text to conform to the quotation... Finally, if you must alter the original quotation to include it properly in the text, identify any words you *add* by placing them in brackets [i.e. square brackets]; ... indicate *omission* of any words by ellipses [i.e. sets of three full stops]. (Cuba, 2002, pp. 179-80)

Notice that I follow Cuba's advice and use an ellipsis (...) each time I leave out parts of the original text, and square brackets each time I add my own words. Of course, a quotation full of omissions and deletions suggests that a quote is not appropriate. Most generally, use quotations, and especially long quotations, very sparingly. Your essay should largely be in *your* words rather than other people's. Moreover, an essay made up of one quote after another is very disjointed and thus difficult to read.

Secondly, you can use other people's work by **paraphrasing their exact words**. When you paraphrase, you rephrase someone else's text in your own words. This does not mean changing the odd word here and there, but completely rewriting the original language. Generally, the length of the original text is usually similar to that of the paraphrase. For example, I can paraphrase the above block quote as follows: 'As Cuba (2002, pp. 179-80) notes, any quotes must reproduce the words exactly as they appear in the original. On those few occasions when you do make changes, you must clearly show that they are alterations to the original. The convention is to use square brackets to show added text, and ellipses to show deleted text.' When you paraphrase someone else's work, you *must* acknowledge the fact by referring to your source.

Thirdly, you can use other people's work by **summarising the original text**. When you summarise, you condense the text to a fraction of its original size. Depending on what it is you are trying to achieve, you may reduce a page, chapter or even whole book to a single sentence. Again, when you summarise someone else's work, you *must* acknowledge the fact by referring to your source.

What do you *not* need to acknowledge? Most obviously, you don't have to acknowledge your own ideas or arguments. Less obviously, you

don't have to give a citation for *common knowledge*. The difficulty is defining 'common knowledge'. For example, everyone (or, at least, everyone likely to read your essays) knows the name of the current prime minister. But what about the name of the previous prime minister, and the one before that? A basic rule of thumb is simply to acknowledge every source that you looked at, either to find new information or to check on old information.

Unfortunately, there is more than one way to provide details about your sources of information to your readers. Most generally, there are **two basic systems of acknowledging sources**. *Author-date* (or *Harvard*) systems, like the one used in this book, acknowledge sources by adding the author's name, the year of publication and the page number next to the relevant text in the body of the essay. In addition, there is an alphabetical reference list at the end of the essay. This gives all the details necessary for readers to follow up any sources mentioned in the essay. In contrast, *documentary note* (or *Oxford*) systems use numbers next to the relevant text in the body of the essay. These refer the reader to either footnotes (at the foot of each page) or endnotes (at the end of the essay). These provide details about the source of the quote and any other related matters the author thinks useful but not suitable for the main text. At the end of the essay, there may be a bibliography, an alphabetical list of all references consulted, including those not actually cited in the essay itself.

Unfortunately, the **variety of referencing systems** doesn't stop with these two basic types. For example, within the general structure of the author-date system, there is APA style (American Psychological Association 2001), MLA style (Modern Language Association 2003) and Australian style (*Style manual* 2002). And within the general structure of the documentary note system, there is Oxford style (Ritter 2003), Chicago style (*Chicago manual* 2003), Vancouver style (ICMJE 2006), Law style (MULRA 2002) and Australian style (*Style manual* 2002). Although the differences between types of author-date and documentary-note systems are relatively minor, it's important to use the exact one that a lecturer requires. However, he or she may simply ask you to use the author-date or note system, leaving the details up to you. If this is the case, use the following advice, which is based on the Australian *Style manual* (2002, Ch. 12).

Author-date system—Australian style

There are two parts to the author-date system. First, *in-text citations* go in the body of the essay. You include a citation every time you use someone else's work. Second, a *reference list* goes at the end of the essay. It gives

the publishing information necessary for the reader to find the original source of the information. This section looks at each in turn.

You need to include **in-text citations** every time you use someone else's work, regardless of whether you are summarising, paraphrasing or quoting. Each citation usually needs three things:

- Family name of the author or authors—These details are usually clearly listed in the original. If the work is anonymous, use its title.
- Year of publication—Most of the time, the year of publication is clear. However, in books, the imprint page (on the reverse of the full title page) often lists two or more years. If so, always remember that the year you cite is the latest *publication* date. For example, the imprint page of my copy of the anonymous *Style manual* lists the publishing year of six editions, all of which have been reprinted since publication. For the citation, the important date is the publication year of the most recent edition (2002). Therefore, the citation for this book is *Style manual* (2002).
- Page number These are essential when quoting from a work. However, if you paraphrase or summarise another author's ideas, it's still potentially helpful to your reader if you include page numbers. If you don't, then it's much more difficult to find the exact section in the original.

One of the drawbacks of the author-date system is the fact that **the citation interferes with the flow of the text**. Minimise this disruption wherever possible by placing the citation at the end of the sentence, immediately before the full stop. If you have more than one reference to the same source in a paragraph, there is no need to repeat the citation in full each time. After the first (full) citation, you can omit the author and year details, leaving just the page number. However, make sure you do this only if the source remains clear to the reader. For example, if the paragraph combines material from two sources, then to avoid confusion always cite each in full. Table 10.1, near the end of the chapter, gives more details about using in-text citations using the Australian author-date system.

The other part of the author-date referencing system is the **reference list** at the end of the main text. The reference list is headed simply 'References'. It provides bibliographic details for the works cited in the essay. Each source appears only once in the list, regardless of how many times you cite it in the essay. Each entry begins with the family name of the main author, and the list is in alphabetical order. Leave a blank line between one entry and the next. The following comments give details about what you need when adding entries about books, reports, journal articles and web pages.

With a **book**, you give details about the author, year of publication, title, the name of the publisher, and the place of publication. I have already discussed problems that might arise with the author's name and year of publication. The book title is virtually always straightforward. For books other than first editions, give the number of the edition after the title. Remember that you can find this information on the imprint page that follows the main title page at the front of the book. The publisher is often prominently displayed on the inside title page. The place of publication refers to the city in which the publishers have their offices. You should find the city on the title or imprint page. Many publishers have offices in several cities; list only the one responsible for publishing this particular book.

Treat **government reports** in the same way as other books, apart from two things. First, if there is no specific author listed, use the name of the government body commissioning the report (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics). If the name appears a number of times in the body of your essay, abbreviate it to make the citations less intrusive. You also need a separate entry in the reference list, directing readers from the abbreviation to the full title (e.g. ABS—see Australian Bureau of Statistics). Secondly, government reports often have identifying series numbers or catalogue numbers. Add this information to the entry in the reference list; it will help your reader to track down the report.

When you reference a **journal article** you need to give details of the author, year, title of the article, title of the journal, details about the edition of the journal (e.g. volume, issue, month) and the page numbers. Notice that you don't need either the place of publication or the publisher of the journal. You include an authored article from a newspaper or magazine in the same way as an article in an academic journal.

Referencing **World Wide Web pages** requires you to give information about the author, the year when the page was created or last updated, the title, and the 'publisher' (the institution sponsoring the page). In addition, you also need to include the web address (the 'Uniform Resource Locator', or URL) and when you viewed the page. The URL provides a quick, direct link to the page. The best way to make sure that the URL in your reference list contains no errors is to copy it directly from the site, and then paste it into your document. To do this, click in the address bar at the top of the page to highlight the URL, copy it (Ctrl/C—i.e. hold down the 'Ctrl' key, then press the 'C' key), move into your Word document, position the cursor where you want the URL to go, and paste (Ctrl/V). You also need to say when you viewed the page. Web pages regularly come and go; by including the date you accessed the page, you are saying that the page was available at that time.

Table 10.2, near the end of the chapter, gives details of how to organise the most common types of references. It first shows the general format and then gives an example of each.

Documentary-note system—Australian style

The other major type of referencing system is the documentary-note system. Rather than in-text citations, this system uses *in-text note identifiers*. These are reference numbers next to the relevant text in the body of the essay, which refer the reader to either footnotes or endnotes. The *Australian Style manual* allows either. At the end of the essay you may include an alphabetical list of all references consulted, including those not actually cited in the essay itself, under the heading 'Bibliography'. My advice is to use footnotes, so that your reader can glance down to see your source; and to add a bibliography at the end, to highlight your breadth of reading, and to make it as easy as possible for your reader to find any particular source.

Having already stressed the importance of referencing earlier in the chapter, I'll concentrate here on formatting the in-text note identifiers and the footnotes.

Here are some of the recommendations from the *Australian Style manual* about **in-text note identifiers**:

- Use superscript arabic numerals (^{1,2,3}), not other symbols (e.g. *^{†‡}).
- Number notes consecutively throughout the essay.
- If number occurs at the end of a sentence, place after full stop. Elsewhere, place *before* punctuation marks. Make sure the reference number comes immediately after a quotation.
- If you refer to more than one source in the same location, use only one number, and include all the sources in the same footnote.

It's important that you become familiar with how to use the footnoting tool in MS Word. To start, simply place the cursor where you want to position the reference numbers, and then go to Insert-Reference-Footer.

Each in-text note identifier refers the reader to the relevant **footnote**. Footnotes can be used for non-citation purposes. The *Australian Style manual* (2002, p. 208) notes that they can 'add information that is explanatory, relevant but not crucial to the argument, or simply of interest'. However, unless you are experienced with footnoting, you can easily fall into the trap of using footnotes to postpone decisions about what to leave out of the essay. Markers quickly pick up this fact, and are likely to downgrade their assessment of essays that include 'grab-bag' footnoting. The simplest advice is to use footnotes exclusively for citation purposes—at least until you gain experience of footnoting. Consequently, the rest of this section focuses on how to format citation footnotes.

The major difference is between **first citations** and second and subsequent citations. 'The first citation of a particular source in the footnotes or endnotes provides the same information as that required for the author-date system but in a slightly different order.'¹ The author's initials come before the family name, and the year of publication comes at or near the end of the citation. Table 10.3, near the end of the chapter, shows how to format the most common types of first citations.

You may refer to the same source more than once. You need to acknowledge your source each time, but there is no need to repeat all the bibliographic information given in the initial citation. Thus, for **second and subsequent citations** you give a 'shortened form [which] must contain sufficient detail to provide the reader with an unambiguous indication of the place where the fact, opinion or quoted words are to be found'.² For example, if the initial citation includes a named author, the subsequent citations include just his or her name and the relevant page number:

1. L Faigley, *The little Penguin handbook*, Pearson Longman, New York, 2007.
2. ...
3. ...
4. Faigley, p. 120.

In your reading, you may come across notes that use various **Latin abbreviations**. For example, *ibid.* (short for *ibidem*, meaning 'in the same work') can be used when two or more successive notes refer to the same source. For example, the following examples show the initial full citation for the *Australian Style manual*, and then specific references to two pages within the *Style manual*:

5. *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Qld, 2002.
6. *ibid.*, p. 210.
7. *ibid.*, p. 214.

The use of *ibid.* in footnotes is still quite common in scholarly writing. Thus, you need to know about it because you're likely to come across it in your reading. However, in your own writing the easiest approach is to avoid *ibid.* and other Latin abbreviations unless specifically told by a lecturer to use them.

The final part of the documentary-note referencing system is a **bibliography**. It's optional in the Australian note system of referencing,

¹ *Style manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Qld, 2002, p. 210.

² *Style manual*, p. 214.

but having a consolidated list of references at the end of the essay helps to highlight your breadth of reading. This is particularly the case if there are some works that you looked at when preparing your essay, but didn't cite in the final paper. You can include them in your bibliography along with your cited sources. The format of the entries in the bibliography is almost the same as in the footnotes, and so you can copy and paste from footnotes to bibliography. The only difference is in the main author's name. In the footnotes, the initials come before the family name (e.g. L Faigley), while in the alphabetical bibliography the family name comes first (e.g. Faigley, L). Note, however, that the order of names of any other authors remains the same (e.g. I Hay, D Bochner & C Dungey in the footnote, but Hay, I, D Bochner & C Dungey in the bibliography).

Formatting assignments

Even the best Christmas presents look better when they come well-wrapped. And the same applies to essays! You should try to make sure that your formatting does two things:

- makes the essay as inviting as possible for the marker to read; and
- makes it as easy as possible for the marker to add comments.

In part, the two things go together. For example, an essay with cramped text with a small typeface, single line spacing and minimal margins is neither inviting to read or mark.

Here's some **advice about formatting essays**:

- Use a maximum line length of 12 words. This allows a "comfortable" reading rhythm ... where the reader's eye travels from the start of a line to the end and then moves on without disruption to the start of the next line' (*Style manual* 2002, p. 331).
- Make sure that your left and right margins are wide enough for the marker to add any necessary comments.
- Use a *serif* typeface, such as this one (Times) because 'readability tests confirm that most people prefer them' (*Style manual* 2002, p. 331). Use just one typeface throughout. Use **bold** font in headings; use *italics* for emphasis and for book and journal titles.
- Use 12 point for your type size. Marking a large number of essays leads to tired eyes—which don't appreciate having to focus on too small type. It's not surprising that James Hartley and his colleagues (2006) found that 'essays printed in 12 point type gained significantly higher marks' than essays printed in 10 point type.

- Use double or one-and-a-half line spacing for your main text (in MS Word, go to Format-Paragraph-Line spacing). Confine single line spacing to block quotes, reference lists and tables.
- Minimise the amount of information given on the header and footer of each page. Always include page numbers (in MS Word, go to Insert-Page numbers). They allow you to double-check that the pages are in the correct order; and they help a marker to refer you to a specific page. If you want to add something about the authorship of the essay, put your student ID on the page. Anything else may make the page look cluttered.
- Use A4-sized paper, and print on one side only (use both sides for drafts of the essay). Make sure that at the start of the essay there is a separate sheet with your name and ID, the full essay title, the unit or subject, and the name of the lecturer or tutor—correctly spelled and with the right title (e.g. Dr, Assoc Prof, Prof)!
- Add any cover sheet required by your school or faculty to the front of your paper. Make sure that you sign any declaration about authorship. Buy yourself a stapler so that you can securely staple the sheets together at home.
- Essays do sometimes go astray. Make sure that you keep the word processing file, just in case you need to print off another copy.

Finally, it's important to raise the **vexed issue of headings in essays**.

Some lecturers see headings as providing useful signposts, highlighting the basic structure of the essay, in the same way that they do in textbooks and most journal articles. Other lecturers regard headings as inappropriate in essays, fragmenting the flow of the text. My advice is as follows:

- If the lecturer asks you to use headings, bear in mind that you need several paragraphs to develop a section. Don't start each paragraph with a new heading. In addition, make sure that you make the link in your text between one section and the next. The simplest advice is to use only one level of heading, particularly in essays of 2000 words or less. Two levels of heading (e.g. **MAJOR** and **Minor**) is likely to result in too many headings, thus fragmenting the essay.
- If the lecturer asks you not to use headings, still include them in all *drafts* of the essay, but be careful to strip them out just before you print the final version for submission. This is because headings encourage you to structure your essay; they also help you to make sure that each paragraph is related the topic shown in the section heading.
- If there's no advice about headings, ask for some. If the lecturer is unconcerned whether they're there or not, I would include them.

Not only are they useful for keeping your writing on track, but they also show the marker that your essay has a structure, and provide him or her with 'natural breaks' when marking the paper.

Table 10.1: In-text citations with Australian author-date system

If name of author appears in main text	No need to give author's name again in citation (e.g. As Cuba points out, when the author's name occurs in the text it 'is not repeated in the citation' (2002, p. 182)).
If name of author does not appear in main text	It's important to give author's name in citation (e.g. When it is not mentioned in the main text, the author's name 'should be included in the citation' (Cuba 2002, p. 182)).
If work has two or three authors	List all in the order they appear on the title page. If names are in main text, use <i>and</i> between them (e.g. According to Smith and Brown (2007) ...). If citation is in brackets, use an ampersand between authors (e.g. (Smith, Jones & Brown 2007)).
If work has more than three authors	Use name of only first listed author, followed by phrase <i>et al.</i> , meaning 'and others' (e.g. According to Black et al. (2007)...).
If authoring body has a long name	When the name of a body occurs more than once in an essay, give it in full the first time, and abbreviate it subsequently (e.g. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2007) ...). Make sure that the reference list provides a cross-reference (e.g. ABS—see Australian Bureau of Statistics).
If work is anonymous	Use name of work (e.g. According to the <i>Style manual for authors, editors and printers</i> (2002) ...). If title is a long one, shorten it in subsequent citations (e.g. (<i>Style manual</i> 2002)). If the anonymous article is from a newspaper, provide all the details in the in-text citation (e.g. According to a report in <i>The Age</i> (31 August, 2007, p. 7) ...). There is no need to include an entry in the reference list.
If using secondary sources	If you read one author (your <i>primary author</i>) who quotes another author (<i>secondary author</i>), provide both in the in-text citation (e.g. Jones (cited in Brown 2007)...). In this example, Brown is the primary author (whose work you have seen directly), and Jones the secondary author. The reference list gives details only of your primary source (Brown 2007), i.e. the one you read yourself.

Table 10.1 continued

If using a general dictionary	Provide the necessary information in the text (e.g. <i>The Macquarie dictionary</i> (2005) defines it as ...). Don't make an entry in the reference list. Be careful about using general dictionaries to define specialised terms. For example, if it's a sociology essay, use a specialised sociology dictionary, and cite as for any other source.
If using an encyclopedia	If the encyclopedia entry has no author, provide the necessary information in the text (e.g. According to <i>The world almanac and book of facts</i> (2006) ...). Don't make an entry in the reference list. However, if the entry has a named author, treat it like any other source, with a full citation and related entry in the reference list (e.g. According to Haugaard (2006, pp. 457-462) in the <i>Encyclopedia of social theory</i> ...).
If using personal communications	If you have been given the information through an interview, telephone call, email and so on, this is documented in the text, without any entry needed in the reference list (e.g. During an interview on 20 May 2007, Dr J Smith of the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirmed that... OR According to Dr J Smith of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007 pers. comm. 20 May)...).
If no publication date given	Use the expression <i>n.d.</i> , meaning 'no date', instead of a year (e.g. Smith (n.d., p. 2) points out...).
If citing page numbers	Add page numbers at the end of the citation, separated from the year by a comma. Use the abbreviations <i>p.</i> for page or <i>pp.</i> for pages (e.g. Smith (2007, pp. 20-31) makes the point that ...).
If citing a video, DVD, radio or TV program	Include title and date of production (e.g. In the film <i>Jindabyne</i> (2006) ...).
If citing a web resource	Use the family name of the author. If no author is given, use the name of the sponsoring body. The date is the year the material was created or last updated.
If using a block quote	Place citation at very end of text, after the final full stop.
If author has more than one item in same year	Distinguish between different sources by adding a letter to each year (e.g. Smith 2008a, Smith 2008b).

Source: based on *Style manual* (2002, pp. 188-199)

Table 10.2: Reference list entries format using Australian author-date system

Book, first edition

Author, A Year, *Title of book*, Publisher, Place of publication.
Faigley, L 2007, *The little Penguin handbook*, Pearson Longman, New York.

Book, second and later editions

Author, A & Author, B Year, *Title of book*, edition number, Publisher, Place of publication.
Marshall, L & Rowland, F 2006, *A guide to learning independently*, 4th edn, Pearson Longman, Frenchs Forest, NSW.

Edited book

Editor, A & Editor B (eds) Year, *Title of edited book*, edition number [unless first], Publisher, Place of publication.
Maslin-Prothero, S (ed.) 2005, *Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*, 3rd edn, Baillière Tindall, Edinburgh.

Chapter in an edited book

Author, A Year, 'Title of chapter', in A Editor (ed.), *Title of book*, Publisher, Place of publication, page numbers.
Brain, S & Martindale, K 2005, 'Using the library', in S Maslin-Prothero (ed.), *Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*, 3rd edn, Baillière Tindall, Edinburgh, pp. 49-81.

Government report without a specific author

Name of department Year, *Title of Report*, catalogue number, Publisher, Place of publication.
Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Year book Australia 2006*, cat. no. 1301.0, ABS, Canberra.

Authored entry in an encyclopedia

Author, A Year, 'Title of encyclopedia entry', in A Editor (ed.), *Title of encyclopedia*, edition [unless first], Publisher, Place of publication, page numbers.
Haugaard, M 2006, 'Power', in A Harrington, BL Marshall & HS Miller (eds), *Encyclopedia of social theory*, Routledge, London, pp. 457-462.

Book with no author

Title of book, edition [unless first], Year, Publisher, Place of publication.
Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 6th edn, 2002, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Qld.

Journal article

Author, A, Author, B & Author, C Year, 'Title of journal article', *Title of Journal*, volume, issue, month [if any], pages.
Hughes, J & Stone, W 2006, 'Family change and community life: an empirical investigation of the decline thesis in Australia', *Australian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 3, September, pp. 242-268.

Table 10.2 continued

Journal article viewed via a database

Author, S, Author, T & Author, U Year, 'Title of journal article', *Title of Journal*, volume, issue, month [if any], pages, date viewed, Name of database.
Hartley, J, Trueman, M, Betts, L & Brodie, L 2006, 'What price presentation? The effects of typographic variables on essay grades', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 523-534, viewed 3 September 2006, Taylor & Francis Online database.

Authored newspaper/magazine article

Author, S Year, 'Title of newspaper/magazine article', *Title of Newspaper/Magazine*, day month, page.
Perry, L 2004, 'The pressures of being a fresher', *Australian*, 14 April, p. 34.

Program on video/DVD

Title of program Year of broadcast, type of recording, Publisher, Place of publication. Details of main performers (if any).
Research skills: how to find information 2002, DVD, Educational Video Network, Huntsville, TX.

Program on TV

Title of program Year of broadcast, television program, Broadcaster, Place, date.
The Hawking paradox 2006, television program, SBS Television, Victoria, 7 May.

Program on radio

Title of program Year, radio program, Broadcaster, Place, date.
Hindsight 2006, radio program, ABC Radio National, Victoria, 31 August.

Document on a Web site

Author, A Year, *Title of document*, Sponsor, Place, date of viewing, <URL>.
Flesch, R n.d., *How to write plain English*, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, NZ, viewed 31 August 2006, <http://www.mang.canterbury.ac.nz/writing_guide/writing/flesch.shtml>.

Lecture

Lecturer, A Year, 'Title of lecture', details of where lecture presented, Place, date.
Burdess, N 2007 'Academic writing', lecture presented to ASC160 Deakin University students, Warrnambool, 7 March.

Source: based on *Style manual* (2002, pp. 188-199).

Table 10.3: First citations with Australian documentary-note system**Book, first edition**

A Author, *Title of book*, Publisher, Place of publication, Year.
 L Faigley, *The little Penguin handbook*, Pearson Longman, New York, 2007.

Book, second and later editions

A Author & B Author, *Title of book*, edition number, Publisher, Place of publication, Year.

L Marshall & F Rowland, *A guide to learning independently*, 4th edn, Pearson Longman, Frenchs Forest, NSW, 2006.

Edited book

A Editor & B Editor (eds), *Title of edited book*, edition number [unless first], Publisher, Place of publication, Year.

S Maslin-Prothero (ed.), *Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*, 3rd edn, Baillière Tindall, Edinburgh, 2005.

Chapter in an edited book

A Author, 'Title of chapter', in A Editor (ed.), *Title of book*, Publisher, Place of publication, Year, page numbers.

S Brain & K Martindale, 'Using the library', in S Maslin-Prothero (ed.), *Baillière's study skills for nurses and midwives*, 3rd edn, Baillière Tindall, Edinburgh, 2005, pp. 49-81.

Government report without a specific author

Name of department, *Title of report*, catalogue number, Publisher, Place of publication, Year.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year book Australia 2006*, cat. no. 1301.0, ABS, Canberra, 2006.

Authored entry in an encyclopedia

A Author, 'Title of encyclopedia entry', in A Editor (ed.), *Title of encyclopedia*, edition [unless first], Publisher, Place of publication, Year, page numbers.

M Haugaard, 'Power', in A Harrington, BL Marshall & HS Miller (eds), *Encyclopedia of social theory*, Routledge, London, 2006, pp. 457-462.

Book with no author

Title of book, edition [unless first], Year, Publisher, Place of publication.
Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Qld, 2002.

Journal article

A Author, B Author & C Author, 'Title of journal article', *Title of Journal*, volume, issue, month [if any], Year, pages.

J Hughes & W Stone, 'Family change and community life: an empirical investigation of the decline thesis in Australia', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 3, September, 2006, pp. 242-268.

Table 10.3 continued**Journal article viewed via a database**

A Author, B Author & C Author, 'Title of journal article', *Title of Journal*, volume, issue, pages, Year, date viewed, Name of database.

J Hartley, M Trueman, L Betts & L Brodie, 'What price presentation? The effects of typographic variables on essay grades', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2006, pp. 523-534, viewed 3 September 2006, Taylor & Francis Online database.

Authored newspaper/magazine article

A Author, 'Title of newspaper/magazine article', *Title of Newspaper/Magazine*, day month year, page.

L Perry, 'The pressures of being a fresher', *Australian*, 14 April 2004, p. 34.

Program on video/DVD

Title of program, type of recording, Publisher, Place of publication. Details of main performers (if any), Year of broadcast.

Research skills: how to find information, DVD, Educational Video Network, Huntsville, TX, 2002.

Program on TV

Title of program, television program, Broadcaster, Place, Date of broadcast.

The Hawking paradox, television program, SBS Television, Victoria, 7 May 2006.

Program on radio

Title of program, radio program, Broadcaster, Place, Date of broadcast.

Hindsight, radio program, ABC Radio National, Victoria, 31 August 2006.

Document on a Web site

A Author, *Title of document*, Sponsor, Place, Year, date viewed, <URL>.

R Flesch, *How to write plain English*, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, NZ, n.d., viewed 31 August 2006,

<http://www.mang.canterbury.ac.nz/writing_guide/writing/flesch.shtml>.

Lecture

A Lecturer, 'Title of lecture', details of where lecture presented, Place, Date presented.

N Burdess, 'Academic writing', lecture presented to ASC160 Deakin University students, Warrnambool, 7 March 2007.

Note: entries based on *Style manual* (2002, pp. 208-215).



CHAPTER 11

General writing practices

This chapter concentrates on the smallest parts of your writing, the words, sentences and paragraphs. To write well you must have a suitably large vocabulary of English words and a good working knowledge of the rules for linking words together. As much of the time at school is spent learning these skills, most university students are reasonably proficient in writing English. There are exceptions of course. Your first language may not be English, or you may have returned to formal study after many years with little or no recent writing experience. If so, you may need extra help. If you're having real difficulties with written English, then you may need to enrol in a refresher course. Alternatively, you may need to carefully work your way through a basic English grammar book. There's a lot to choose from. Do a search of your campus library catalogue for books under the subject heading 'English language grammar'.

The aim of this topic is not to provide a crash course in the basics of written English. Rather, I'm simply going to highlight some of the major difficulties I've noticed when marking student assignments. The chapter starts with individual words, then moves onto the rules about linking the words together into sentences, and finally looks at how to group sentences into paragraphs.

Words

According to David Crystal, there's probably **over one million words in English** (2003, p. 18). And it's getting larger all the time. For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* online version adds at least 1000 new and revised words every quarter.

Spelling the ones you use correctly is important, though spelling has little to do with understandability, as the following extract from *New Scientist* shows:

My PhD ... showed that randomising letters in the middle of words had little or no effect on the ability of skilled readers to understand the text. ... This is easy to demonstrate. In a paragraph of *New Scientist* you could randomise all the letters, keeping the first two and last two the same, and readability would hardly be affected... The reason for this is surely that identifying content by parallel processing speeds up recognition. We only need the first and last two letters to spot changes in meaning. This was not easy to type! (Rawlinson 1999)

Instead, incorrect spelling is important because it reflects badly on the writer. One notable example is a former American vice-president, Dan Quayle, whose image never recovered from having his spelling corrected by a primary school student.

So, how to improve your image by spelling words correctly? The best advice is simply to **read as much as you can**. Virtually all the words you come across in published work are spelled correctly. And as you read, you unconsciously learn to recognise the correct spelling of words. But what about more specific advice? Here's a couple of tips.

First, make **maximum use of your word processor**. Virtually all university students in Australia use word processing, most commonly Microsoft Word. This is very powerful software, but most of us use only a fraction of the features it offers. Table 11.1 shows just a few ways you can use MS Word to improve your spelling. If in doubt, click on the 'Help' tab at the top right of the screen.

Second, and less importantly, try to remember a few of the **spelling rules** in English. Unfortunately, there are a lot of them, many are difficult to remember, and often there are exceptions to the rule (see Peters 1996). Here's just a few, starting with the best known one. The others are about adding a group of letters to the end of a word (termed a *suffix*).

- Place *i* before *e* (e.g. chief, achieve) except after *c* (e.g. perceive, receive), or when sounded as 'a' as in neighbour and weigh
- Double a consonant before a suffix (e.g. forget/forgetting, red/redder, refer/referred)
- Drop a silent final *e* when adding a suffix which starts with a vowel (e.g. deplore/deplorable, fame/famous)
- Keep a silent final *e* when adding a suffix which starts with a consonant (e.g. false/falsehood, scarce/scarcely)
- Change a final *y* to *i* before a suffix (e.g. happy/happiness, story/stories).

Table 11.1: Setting up some spelling functions in MS Word

Purpose	Setting up MS Word
Use Australian English dictionary	Tools—Language—Set language—English (Australia)
Create your own <i>custom</i> dictionary of words not in the main dictionary	Tools—Options—Spelling & Grammar—Custom Dictionaries—New
Highlight words not in electronic dictionary as you're typing	Tools—Spelling and Grammar—Options—Check spelling as you type
Add new words to electronic dictionary	Right-click word underlined in red—Add to dictionary
Autocorrect words that you commonly mistype	Right-click word underlined in red—Autocorrect—Highlight correct option—Left click

Often, **selecting the right word** is more difficult than spelling it correctly. This is because many English words have the same sound, but different spellings and meanings (e.g. *there* and *their*). They are called *homophones*. Again, the most general advice is to read widely. The only exceptions are advertisements and cartoons, where the deliberate mixing up of words is popular (e.g. an Australian cheese and wine promotion headed 'Advance Australia *Fare*' rather than *Fair*). Check on the meanings of any doubtful words in your dictionary. Table 11.2 at the end of the chapter shows some of the misused words I often find in student essays.

There are two final points about individual words. The first relates to the use of **apostrophes**. An apostrophe with a noun shows possession (e.g. Jim's iPod—i.e. the iPod belonging to Jim). If the noun is plural and ends in *s*, you can add the apostrophe without a second *s* (e.g. the students' marks). Don't use an apostrophe with a plural noun when possession is not intended (e.g. The students sat the exam). An apostrophe is not used in *yours*, *hers*, *his*, *ours*, *theirs* or *its* (e.g. a dog and its bone). In this example, *its* indicates possession—the bone belongs to the dog. An apostrophe can also show that two words have been contracted into one by leaving out some letters (e.g. I've seen Jim's iPod—it's on the desk.) In this example, *I've* is short for *I have* and *it's* is short for *it is*. Don't use word contractions in academic writing—leave them to textbook writers!

Finally, a few comments about **capital letters**. Generally, limit capital initial letters to the beginning of each sentence, the pronoun *I*, and the names of *specific* people, places or things (e.g. Nelson Mandela was

born in South Africa). Sometimes you can use the same word in both a specific and general sense. Use a capital letter when referring to a specific place (e.g. Deakin University) but a small letter when referring to places in general (e.g. all Australian universities).

Sentences—grammar

This section can't even begin to scratch the surface of English grammar. Instead, it simply lists a few of the most commonly occurring problems in student essays. As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, if you feel you need to spend some time on your English grammar, there are many useful books.

You may recall that you need to combine individual words into **clauses**. There are two types: main or principal clauses, and subordinate or supporting clauses. Each sentence must include at least one main clause. A main clause has two groups of words, a subject group and a verb group. For example, in 'Jim lost his iPod', the word 'Jim' forms the subject group and 'lost his iPod' forms the verb group. Together, therefore, the two groups of words form a main clause. A main clause on its own forms the simplest sentence.

You can't use some verb-forms as the main verb in a sentence. The **present participle** is the verb-form that causes most problems (e.g. The student sitting the exam.) In this example, the present participle (*sitting*) needs changing to a verb-form that can be attached directly to a subject (e.g. The student sat the exam.). The distinction between complete and incomplete verbs is blindingly obvious in these very simple example (that's why I've used it). However, I've often found similar errors in student essays (e.g. The radical interpretation being the one most supported by the evidence.). Here the student incorrectly uses the word 'being', the present participle of the verb 'to be', as the main verb. Instead, the sentence needs a simple 'is' (i.e. The radical interpretation is ...).

The present participle of a verb also appears in the problem of **danglers**, or phrases not connected to what they are meant to describe (e.g. Driving through the park, two kangaroos were seen.). In this example, 'Driving through the park' is dangling because it is separated from what it is meant to describe: not *two kangaroos*, but whoever is doing the driving. All that's needed is a reworking of the sentence to make clear exactly who is driving (e.g. Driving through the park, *we* saw two kangaroos.).

Finally in this list of common grammatical faults is the **incorrect use of pronouns**. Most pronouns vary depending on whether they are the

subject of the sentence, and thus part of the subject group (i.e. I, he, she, we, they); or whether they are the object of the sentence, and thus part of the verb group (i.e. me, him, her, us, them). Thus, it is 'I saw him' (I = subject, him = object) but 'He saw me' (He = subject, me = object). The fact that there's more than one subject or more than one object, doesn't change this word use (e.g. Tom and I saw him. He saw Tom and me.) In the first example, 'Tom and I' make up the subject of the sentence. In the second example, 'Tom and me' form the object of the sentence. If in doubt, read out the sentence with just the pronoun as the subject or object of the sentence (... I saw him. He saw ... me.).

These and other grammatical problems are part of the **MS Word grammar checker**. It's by no means perfect—English grammar is too complex for that. But it can draw your attention to possible problems, and is certainly worth using. Have a look at the spelling and grammar tool in MS Word. Go to 'Tools', then 'Spelling & Grammar'; and finally tick the box next to 'Check grammar'.

One potentially useful feature of the spelling and grammar function in MS Word is the **readability statistics**. Some students tend to write long, rambling sentences, often sprinkled with long words—wrongly assuming that it will impress the marker. Rudolf Flesch (n.d.) has developed a 'Reading Ease' measure, based on the length of the sentences and words in a piece of writing. It goes from 0 (practically unreadable) to 100 (extremely easy). The Reading Ease score for this section of the chapter is 65. If you have already ticked the 'Check grammar' box, the readability statistics appear once you have finished checking the grammar and spelling. Make sure that your Reading Ease score is over 50. Of course, such a mechanical technique says nothing about how *well written* your text is. You still have to work hard at that. But it does provide you with an objective benchmark to assess your writing.

Sentences—punctuation

Basically, **punctuation helps clarify the meaning of the text**. There are two major groups of punctuation marks. First, *middle stops* are marks that go inside a sentence. They include commas, semicolons, colons, dashes and brackets. Secondly, *end stops* are marks that go at the end of a sentence. They include full stops, exclamation marks and question marks.

Generally, **middle stops go between clauses** rather than within them. For example, 'Jim lost his iPod' is a main clause that forms a simple sentence. It doesn't need any punctuation within it. The rule is simple enough, yet one of the most common punctuation errors is to separate the subject group and the verb group with a comma (e.g. Jim, lost his iPod').

In contrast, a subordinate clause does need separating from its main clause by a comma (e.g. Driving through the park, we saw two kangaroos.). Here, 'Driving through the park' is the subordinate clause, and 'we saw two kangaroos' is the main clause. The separating comma helps to make clear the meaning of the sentence.

You use **commas inside a clause in only two circumstances**. First, when there's a list of two or more adjectives describing the same noun (e.g. We saw two large, grey kangaroos.). And second, when there's a subordinate clause inside a main clause (e.g. Two kangaroos, one of them an old male, watched the car.). In this example, 'one of them an old male' is a subordinate clause inside the main clause (Two kangaroos ... watched the car), and is separated from it by a pair of commas.

The comma is the most commonly used middle stop; it is also the weakest. A less commonly used middle stop is the **semicolon (;)**. It's a punctuation middleweight, lying midway between the comma and the full stop. Indeed, it's made up of both a comma and a full stop. Not surprisingly, it's used in those situations when a comma is too light and a full stop too heavy. It's most commonly used when you have two closely related main clauses. Although it's technically possible to divide them with a full stop, in terms of writing style it's a bit heavy-handed (e.g. It was a good cat. It never brought in rats.). On the other hand, by itself a comma is definitely too lightweight for the job (e.g. It was a good cat, it never brought in rats.). This is an occasion when a semicolon—not too heavy, not too light—comes in handy (e.g. It was a good cat; it never brought in rats.).

The basic function of the **colon** is to introduce text that explains, expands or summarises the previous text. For example, the colon often introduces a quotation: 'It brings the sentence to a sudden, temporary halt and gives a cue for the quotation which is waiting in the wings' (Bailey 1984, p. 62). However, make sure that your quote is sufficiently important to warrant bringing the sentence 'to a sudden, temporary halt'. If it isn't, then 'something gentler is needed' (p. 63). As the previous sentence shows, a less disruptive comma may be all that's needed.

You can also **use a colon to introduce a list**. Recall how I said earlier that there are two basic types of punctuation mark: middle stops, or marks used in the middle of a sentence; and end stops, or marks used at the end of a sentence. In the previous sentence, the colon introduces the list. Notice that the two main items in the list, middle stops and end stops, are separated by a semicolon. This is because the weaker comma is used to separate the name from the definition inside each item in the list (e.g. 'middle stops, or marks used ...').

What about the remaining middle stops and end stops: **dashes, brackets, questions marks and exclamation marks**? The simplest advice is to avoid using them. Dashes and exclamation marks are better suited to less formal writing—as your last email to a friend probably illustrates! Apart from in-text citations (e.g. Peters 1996), round brackets enclose ‘asides’ or additional information. You often find that the first draft of your essay goes over the word limit, and you need to cut out material. It doesn’t make sense then to leave in those parts that, by their position inside brackets, are obviously additional to the main text. What about question marks? In an undergraduate paper, your main job is to answer questions, not ask them. Textbook writers often start by asking a rhetorical question, which they then go on to answer. But your essays don’t need rhetorical questions. Basically, the full stop is virtually the only type of end stop you need to use in your essays.

Paragraphs

The final section in this chapter looks at grouping sentences into paragraphs, which best-selling author Stephen King regards as ‘the basic unit of writing’ (2000, p. 103). **A paragraph is an identifiable group of sentences about a single topic.**

It’s important to make clear to the reader the **topic of each paragraph**. You may want to start at least some of the paragraphs with a topic sentence, as I have done in this paragraph. However, to have an opening topic sentence for each paragraph may result in a too-predictable writing style. Instead, try putting a heading before you start writing each paragraph. This will help you to make sure that each sentence in the paragraph is about the same topic. Of course, make sure you delete these paragraph headings before printing off the final version of the paper.

The **length of a paragraph** will depend, in part, on the complexity of the topic you are discussing. Consequently, there is no hard-and-fast answer to the question ‘How long should a paragraph be?’. However, bear in mind that you can’t adequately cover a topic in a single sentence. Consequently, don’t follow the lead of the tabloid press and start almost every sentence on a new line. Because it’s on a new line, the new sentence is seen by readers as the start of a new topic. They soon become tired and annoyed at being misled! At the other extreme, if a paragraph has 10 or more sentences, read carefully through it to decide whether the topic is too complex for a single paragraph. Alternatively, you may be able to explain yourself more succinctly, and so delete one or two sentences.

You need to **highlight where one paragraph ends and the next one begins**. There are a number of options. You can start a new paragraph on a new line, about five character spaces from the left margin. Or you can leave a blank line between paragraphs, and start at the left margin. Either method is fine, though if you double-space your text, the blank line method can result in a lot of white space and not too much text on each page. An unsatisfactory method of formatting is to start each paragraph on a new line without an indent or blank line. This is not a good idea because if the last word of a paragraph is near the end of the line, then the reader may not see the start of the next paragraph.

Finally, you also need to show the **continuity between paragraphs**. In other words, it’s important to tell readers that the paragraph they are about to read is related to the topic of the one they have just read. Often, you can do this using a single word or phrase at the start of the new paragraph. Most simply, if you are going through a series of points, each taking up a paragraph, then a simple *First...*, *Second ...*, *Third ...* is all you need at the start of each. Other linking words and phrases include *However*, *On the other hand*, *Nevertheless*, *In addition*, *Similarly*, *In contrast*, and so on. Notice that I use the word *Finally* at the start of this paragraph to tell you that what’s coming up is the last of several on the same general issue. However, bear in mind that these linking words are not always needed. Indeed, they can get a bit tiresome if used when the reader doesn’t really need them. Often, the first sentence clearly shows that there is continuity with the previous paragraph. For example, the word *paragraphs* in the opening sentence of each of the last few paragraphs highlights the links between them.

Table 11.2: Groups of words often confused

Access	Access is mainly used as a noun meaning admittance or approach (e.g. you gain access to a place or person).
Excess	<i>Excess</i> is related to exceeding, or going beyond the usual limits. It most often appears as an adjective (e.g. excess baggage), sometimes as a noun (e.g. Some children have an excess of energy).
Advice	<i>Advice</i> (rhymes with 'rice') is information or opinion about a course of action (e.g. good advice).
Advise	To <i>advise</i> (rhymes with 'rise') means to give advice (e.g. I advise caution). Similarly: device/devise, licence/license, practice/practise, prophecy/prophesy.
Affect	To <i>affect</i> means to influence (e.g. Smoking may affect your health). <i>Affect</i> used as a noun is rarely seen outside psychology texts where it is used to mean an emotional response (e.g. Anger is one affect often found among victims of crime).
Effect	An <i>effect</i> is a result or consequence (e.g. 'What sort of an effect does smoking have?'). Occasionally you see <i>effect</i> used as a verb meaning to produce or make (e.g. to effect an entry).
Amount	Although not homophones, these words are often confused.
Number	Use <i>amount</i> with things that cannot be counted (e.g. a large amount of experience). Use <i>number</i> with things that can be counted (e.g. a large number of students).
Bare	<i>Bare</i> means uncovered (e.g. bareheaded; the cupboard was bare) or just sufficient (e.g. a bare majority).
Bear	Use <i>bear</i> on all other occasions (e.g. to bear pain, grizzly bear).
Chose	Use <i>chose</i> (usually rhymes with 'rose') when referring to past choices (e.g. The voters chose a Labor government at the last election).
Choose	Use <i>choose</i> (rhymes with 'roos') when referring to present or future choices (e.g. What would voters choose if there was an election today or tomorrow?).
Complement	To <i>complement</i> means to make complete or perfect (e.g. The hat will complement the rest of the outfit).
Compliment	A <i>compliment</i> is an expression of praise or civility (e.g. with compliments). It is also used as a verb meaning to praise.

Table 11.2 continued

Criterion	A <i>criterion</i> is a principle or standard (e.g. Honesty is the main criterion for this job).
Criteria	<i>Criteria</i> are two or more principles or standards (e.g. The Government laid down a number of criteria which groups had to meet). Similarly: phenomenon/phenomena.
Its	<i>Its</i> means belonging to it. The absence of an apostrophe matches with its absence in <i>yours, hers, ours</i> and <i>theirs</i> .
It's	<i>It's</i> is short for <i>it is</i> or <i>it has</i> , the apostrophe indicating the missing letter or letters.
Loose	<i>Loose</i> (rhymes with 'moose') means unfastened or unrestrained. It is usually seen as an adjective (e.g. at a loose end; a loose tongue).
Lose	To <i>lose</i> (rhymes with 'booze') means to fail to win, or fail to keep something (e.g. to lose your balance).
Off	You can usually substitute 'away from' for <i>off</i> (e.g. a metre off the hole, \$5 off the usual price).
Of	Use <i>of</i> in most other instances. (Avoid the phrase <i>off of</i> .)
Past	<i>Past</i> refers to time gone by (e.g. in the past year) or is used to mean <i>by</i> (e.g. The march went past).
Passed	<i>Passed</i> is part of the verb <i>to pass</i> (e.g. The procession passed by the crowd. He passed some favourable comments about the student's work).
Principal	A <i>principal</i> is a person of the highest rank (e.g. a school principal). As an adjective, <i>principal</i> means most important (e.g. the principal port).
Principle	A <i>principle</i> is an accepted rule of conduct (e.g. a man of high principle) or a fundamental truth (e.g. the principles of government).
Role	A <i>role</i> is a part in a play (e.g. the role of Macbeth). More generally, it is a function in society (e.g. a lecturer's role).
Roll	Use <i>roll</i> on all other occasions.
Their	<i>Their</i> means belonging to them.
They're	<i>They're</i> is a contraction of <i>they are</i> .
There	Use <i>there</i> on other occasions (e.g. Where are their books? They're over there).
Two	<i>Two</i> is a number (e.g. one, two, three).
Too	<i>Too</i> means also or over (e.g. young, rich and clever too; too clever for his own good).
To	Use <i>to</i> on all other occasions.
Where	<i>Where</i> refers to a place (e.g. Where is he?).
Were	Use <i>were</i> on all other occasions.

Table 11.2: Groups of words often confused

Access	<i>Access</i> is mainly used as a noun meaning admittance or approach (e.g. you gain access to a place or person).
Excess	<i>Excess</i> is related to exceeding, or going beyond the usual limits. It most often appears as an adjective (e.g. excess baggage), sometimes as a noun (e.g. Some children have an excess of energy).
Advice	<i>Advice</i> (rhymes with 'rice') is information or opinion about a course of action (e.g. good advice).
Advise	To <i>advise</i> (rhymes with 'rise') means to give advice (e.g. I advise caution). Similarly: device/devise, licence/license, practice/practise, prophecy/prophesy.
Affect	To <i>affect</i> means to influence (e.g. Smoking may affect your health). <i>Affect</i> used as a noun is rarely seen outside psychology texts where it is used to mean an emotional response (e.g. Anger is one affect often found among victims of crime).
Effect	An <i>effect</i> is a result or consequence (e.g. 'What sort of an effect does smoking have?'). Occasionally you see <i>effect</i> used as a verb meaning to produce or make (e.g. to effect an entry).
Amount	Although not homophones, these words are often confused.
Number	Use <i>amount</i> with things that cannot be counted (e.g. a large amount of experience). Use <i>number</i> with things that can be counted (e.g. a large number of students).
Bare	<i>Bare</i> means uncovered (e.g. bareheaded; the cupboard was bare) or just sufficient (e.g. a bare majority).
Bear	Use <i>bear</i> on all other occasions (e.g. to bear pain, grizzly bear).
Chose	Use <i>chose</i> (usually rhymes with 'rose') when referring to past choices (e.g. The voters chose a Labor government at the last election).
Choose	Use <i>choose</i> (rhymes with 'roos') when referring to present or future choices (e.g. What would voters choose if there was an election today or tomorrow?).
Complement	To <i>complement</i> means to make complete or perfect (e.g. The hat will complement the rest of the outfit).
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