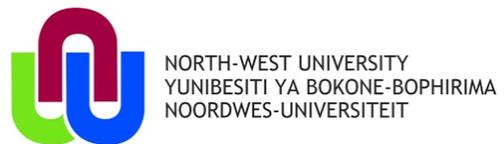


WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

2013

Library services
Potchefstroom Campus



© 2013 Ferdinand Postma Library
North-West University
Potchefstroom Campus

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication and package including all interior designs, cover designs and icons, may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN 1-86822-336-1

CONTENTS

1	AIM	1
2	INTRODUCTION	1
2.1	Planning	2
2.2	Outline or framework	2
2.3	Headings	3
3	COLLECTION OF THE INFORMATION	3
3.1	General	3
3.2	Locating of information sources	3
3.2.1	<i>The library and library website: www.nwu.ac.za/library</i>	3
3.2.2	<i>Types of information sources</i>	4
3.2.3	<i>Databases</i>	4
3.2.4	<i>Keywords</i>	4
3.3	Evaluation of sources	5
3.3.1	<i>Authority</i>	5
3.3.2	<i>Recency</i>	5
3.3.3	<i>Relevance</i>	5
3.3.4	<i>Popular / Scientific?</i>	5
3.3.5	<i>Availability</i>	5
3.3.6	<i>Primary or secondary sources</i>	5
4	ORGANISATION OF THE INFORMATION	6
5	READING AND UNDERSTANDING SOURCES	6
6	LOGICAL DISCUSSION, ARGUMENTATION, FORMULATION	7
6.1	General	7
6.2	The introduction	7
6.3	Problem statement	8
6.4	Subsections	8
6.5	Conclusion	8
7	LANGUAGE AND STYLE	9
7.1	Introduction	9
7.2	Clarity	9
7.3	Translations	9
7.4	Spelling, mode of writing	9
7.5	Punctuation	10
7.6	Abbreviations and titles	10
7.7	Numbers	10
7.8	Hints	10
7.9	Division of words	11
7.10	Joining together of words	11
7.11	Quotation marks	11
8	REWRITING – THE SECRET OF A GOOD ASSIGNMENT	12
9	DOCUMENTATION	12
9.1	What should be documented?	12
9.2	Style of documentation	13
9.3	Source list or bibliography	13
9.4	What does the source list look like?	14
10	TECHNICAL FINISH	14
10.1	The title page	14
10.2	The table of contents	15
10.3	Numbering system	15
10.4	The summary	16

11 TYPING INSTRUCTIONS.....	16
11.1 General.....	16
11.2 Headings.....	16
11.3 Paragraphs.....	16
11.4 Page numbers.....	16
11.5 Emphasising of words.....	17
11.6 Proofreading.....	17
12 EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK FROM THE LECTURER	17

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1 AIM

Following completion of this guide you should have a good idea of the value and procedures of a systematic literature study and be able to apply it to assignments in all your subjects.

You should be able to

1. describe the processing of information and illustrate this with your own examples.
2. write an assignment with an introduction and conclusion once the information processing has been done meaningfully.



I can do it!

Why?



An assignment can only be as good as the sources which you have used to write it. You can start once you have ensured that you have collected the best and most recent sources by means of a systematic literature study. If you know how to integrate this source material into a logical unit and to present your paper neatly, you can give your semester mark a good boost. This skill will have to be practiced right through your academic career.

2 INTRODUCTION

In spite of all kinds of electronic developments in the field of science and especially in the field of tertiary education, the written word still remains the single most important form for the obtaining, processing and transferring of knowledge. Without the ability to write clearly, logically and effectively, you cannot claim to have mastered the art of scientific writing to the full. For this reason it is important that you develop this skill to the best of your ability.

Particularly during undergraduate and honours studies, this skill is developed through the writing of assignments. Hereby three goals are aimed for.

Firstly, whilst writing an assignment, your knowledge about a topic will be broadened. In the second place one gains experience in the process of doing research and in the third place one's ability to formulate and write improves immensely.

The ability to write a good assignment is not something that happens automatically. This is a skill that is inculcated through regular practice and a deliberate effort to keep on evaluating your work against the stated criteria and to improve what was done incorrectly. It is in support of this process that this manual has been developed.

2.1 Planning

The planning of the assignment is very important - allow enough time and attention to this phase.

In the first place, one has to think carefully about the topic. Very often this is where the battle is lost or won. Questions which should be considered include:

- What is the **aim** with the assignment?
- What is the **core issue**?
- What is the **extent** of the assignment?

In this phase you have to give attention to a number of issues.

- Carefully read the **lecturer's instructions** since he/she might include a suggested outline for the assignment.
- Determine where the topic fits in with the material already discussed in class.
- Read the relevant sections in the textbook or the study guide to orientate yourself.
- Again check the study guide to make sure of the envisaged aims with the assignment, make sure that you know what the core issue is, and then go on to the next step.

2.2 Outline or framework

Formulate a framework or scheme. ALWAYS KEEP THE CENTRAL THEME IN MIND. Take care not to digress from the topic. Keep a balance between sections. If one section tends to become too long, consider dividing it into more than one section. Divide the information into subsections.

In the subsections the different components of the topic should be dealt with separately, but integral as part of the logical whole. The method to be used for organising the material will differ from assignment to assignment. It can be done chronologically, thematic-chronologically or in any other way. Regardless of what method is used, the presentation always has to be logical. It should be clear what the thread of the argument is, and the one argument must logically lead to the next one.

Take care that there is balance between the different sections. Do not only concentrate on the sections that you find interesting. The image of a river with side streams or tributaries is applicable here. The tributaries feed into the main stream, and this is also how it should be with an assignment.

When writing a long assignment, it is better to use connecting sentences at the ends of concluding paragraphs. A useful hint is that one word in the final sentence of a section links to the following heading.

Example of a logical framework

Topic: Student problems

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 ACADEMIC PROBLEMS
 - 2.1 Subject choices
 - 2.2 Study habits
- 3 FINANCIAL PROBLEMS
 - 3.1 Registration
 - 3.2 Class fees
 - 3.3 Accommodation
 - 3.3.1 Housing
 - 3.3.2 Meals
- 4 TRANSPORT
- 5 SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT
- 6 CONCLUSION
- 7 SOURCE LIST

PLEASE NOTE: Do not include two different aspects under one heading. It would for example be wrong to put together 4 and 5 (transport and social adjustment).

2.3 Headings

Keep headings as short as possible and keep consistently to the style that you have chosen. Do not do the following:

4 Journals as information sources

- 4.1 What are the advantages of journals as sources of information
- 4.2 Disadvantages

The first subsection (4.1) is a sentence with a verb, whereas 4.2 is one single word.

Rather:

4 Journals as information sources

- 4.1 Advantages
- 4.2 Disadvantages

3 COLLECTION OF THE INFORMATION

3.1 General

Read, read, read. One should never be afraid of getting to know more than one is going to use in a specific assignment. It is only by reading extensively that one acquires the insight needed and realises the extent of the topic. It is generally a good idea to move from the general to the more specific, and therefore to start with books and move to relevant journal articles.



While you are reading, you can start making notes of details from the sources and begin to group this information in accordance with the assignment scheme or plan that you have already outlined. At this stage it is very important to thoroughly and accurately keep record of the bibliographic details of each source that you are using.

3.2 Locating of information sources

3.2.1 The library and library website: www.nwu.ac.za/library

Once you have finalised the headings, the University Library and University Library Website is the first logical place to look for sources to use in the assignment. Trained personnel are always available in the library to help the student find suitable material. It is of utter importance to know how to access and retrieve material, and for that reason the student has to make sure that he/she knows what resources there are in the library.

Electronic journal databases make life considerably easier. They contain scientific information which is evaluated beforehand and is not available through Google. It is in your own interest to learn how to use these. Once again, ask the library staff. Training in the use of these databases is presented in collaboration with AGLE. Some lecturers even arrange visits to the library to help familiarising students with the facilities.

The sources found in the library through the library website will lead to more relevant information. Bibliographies in books and journal articles found in the first round of information retrieval will be additional sources that can be used.

3.2.2 Types of information sources

What kind of information do you need?

A certain type of information is to be found in a certain type of source. For example, do not expect to find a theoretical outline in a newspaper!

Here is an outline of information needs and types of information sources:

- definitions, descriptions: subject-specific dictionaries
- introductions, frameworks and brief surveys: subject-specific encyclopaedias
- more complete, but still basic information: books
- the latest research data: subject-specific journals
- recent news reports: newspapers on the Internet.

3.2.3 Databases



To locate information sources, you can use various scientific databases.

The following types of databases are available:

- To search for **books and e-books** on a specific topic, use the **library catalogue**. The shelf number of the book or the link to the e-book is clearly indicated on the screen.
- For **South African journal articles**, make use of **SAePublications**.
- **International journals**: Make your choice from databases like **ScienceDirect**, **EbscoHost**'s various databases, **Scopus**, **JSTOR** and many more. Gain access to the most popular databases via the library's web page www.nwu.ac.za/library
- **Newspapers**: Use the **SA Media** database for South African newspaper reports. The full text of national newspaper reports is available in PDF format.
- Despite the absence of an authoritative body and the apparent abundance of unorganised information, the **Internet** could also be used for up to date information on different subjects. Use the criteria in 3.3 when evaluating sources from the Internet.

3.2.4 Keywords

For a search on a database you have to select appropriate keywords for your topic. You will then use these keywords in different combinations on the search screen of the database.

For example: You have to do an assignment on the influence of violence in television programmes on children. Your keywords will be: **violence television children**

However, you will get better results if you also use synonyms, for example a synonym for **violence** could be **aggression**.

Keywords can be used in either AND or OR combinations. It can be presented like this:

(violence OR aggression) AND (television OR video) AND (children OR adolescents)

In essence, the commands and search methods of the various databases are the same. Ask the library staff to show you how to use the various databases if you encounter difficulties.

3.3 Evaluation of sources

The quality of the sources used is very important. Sources could be evaluated according to the following criteria:

3.3.1 Authority

Is the author(s) qualified to write on this subject? Is the source written by experts? Clues to look for are the author's credentials, the author's connection to an organisation/institution, the publisher. Is there a source list and what type of sources are quoted?

3.3.2 Recency

Note the date of publication. Is the source recent enough for the subject? For example, if you are looking for information on a computer application, the source has to be very recent. If you are researching a historical topic, for example Napoleon, recency is not that important. Remember that the most recent material will be found in scholarly journals.



3.3.3 Relevance

Is the information in the source applicable to the topic or subject field for which it is required? Does the source contain too little or too much information? How many pages does it have? Does it meet your needs?

3.3.4 Popular / Scientific?

Is the source scientific or is it popular? This is particularly relevant in the case of journal articles – you can usually recognise a popular magazine by the number of advertisements that it contains. Headings of articles in popular magazines are also often more sensational. Popular magazines are not acceptable for research purposes. You can make sure that you only use scientific articles by using the library's databases

3.3.5 Availability

Is the source available in the library? Can it be borrowed or do you have to use it in the library only? Is the source in the main library or is it in a branch library? If it is in a branch library, you have to find out how you can obtain it. If the source is not available here, you may borrow it from another library via interlibrary services. However, this service applies to postgraduates only.

3.3.6 Primary or secondary sources

Use primary sources and as few secondary sources as possible. **In scientific literature study there is a clear distinction between primary and secondary sources.** Primary sources are sources which provide **original** information about a topic, while secondary sources relate or discuss information originally presented elsewhere (second hand information).

4 ORGANISATION OF THE INFORMATION

A frequently asked question is: How can I organise my information? The following practical hints may be useful:

Read each of the selected information sources through once. Use the headings in your framework and write down a short note of the relevant sources under the appropriate heading as *indicated* in italics in the following example:

<p>1 Introduction</p> <p>1.1 Actuality <i>Johnson, p. 34</i></p> <p>1.2 Problem statement</p> <p>2 The value of printed scientific journals</p> <p>2.1 Peer evaluation <i>Malan, p. 14 – complete description</i> <i>Johnson, p. 57 – historic overview</i> <i>Steyn, p. 25 – importance for research</i></p> <p>2.2 Editorial control <i>Steyn, p. 23 – short summary</i></p> <p>2.3 Quality <i>Jones, p. 19 – compare with Internet</i></p> <p>2.4 Ways of communication <i>Wilson, p. 56 – vs e-journals</i></p>	<p>3 Electronic journals <i>Costens, p. 24 – what is an e-journal?</i></p> <p>3.1 Advantages</p> <p>3.1.1 Cost <i>Plank, p. 56 – no paper, printing costs</i></p> <p>3.1.2 Speed <i>Jones, p. 2 – Internet, availability</i> <i>Wilson, p. 57 – use in office, laboratory</i></p> <p>3.2 Acceptability</p> <p>3.2.1 Accession <i>Malan, p. 34 –</i> <i>Wilson, p. 58 – use by researchers</i></p> <p>3.2.2 Acknowledgement <i>Coles, p.12 - in scientific community</i></p> <p>4 Conclusion</p>
---	---

Having done this, you can work through the different subheadings easily and systematically. This way you are also able to see which subdivisions require more information.

In the example above, only short notes regarding the sources are made. Make sure that you write down the complete bibliographic reference for your source list!

5 READING AND UNDERSTANDING SOURCES

Read the relevant sections in the source (for example a journal article) a few times. Often the concept is not clear at the first glance. Try to understand the logic of the section: first read through the headings and then concentrate on each of the subsections.

If it is a photocopy or your own book, underline the core or key sentences or even better: write down the main idea in your own words. In reading it is always wise to move from the general to the specific. It is therefore a good idea to start with books or articles in encyclopaedias on the particular topic. Take care not to repeat statements – this occurs mostly when you use arguments from different authors, for example: *Journals contain recent information / The information in journals is not old.*

When you are using information from different sources, you are “talking” to your sources – you are **in conversation with the authors**. Do not just quote a source and let it hang there. What do you want to say with this argument or statement? What is the contribution of this quotation? What is your interpretation of the quotation? Quotations are like examples: discuss them and indicate how they complement your argumentation. In other words, explain and digest your quotations. How do you do this? A few explanatory examples follow:

While writing your assignment, indicate clearly whether you agree with or differ from the quoted author, and whether the different authors agree or disagree. Use phrases like:

Smith (1990:6) differs from Jones (1997:5) when he states that ...

Jones (1997:6) adds the following fact ...

Sometimes students have difficulty in expressing their own interpretation since the personal form (I, me, my) should be avoided in scientific writing. You can overcome the problem by using phrases like:

This argument clearly indicates that ...

It is clear that ...

It can be concluded that ...

The gathering of information was the first step. Now the processing or collation of the material follows. This is where one has to exercise very careful judgement, because at this stage already, the assignment can either stand or fall.

The first important step is to eliminate material that you might have gathered but that is not specifically relevant to the assigned topic. Remember that the art of selecting proper material is a crucial part of the skill that you are learning, and using irrelevant material is a certain indication that you still have not mastered this part of the skill properly.

The necessary and **relevant** data should be retained, and should be studied and interpreted again so that you really develop insight into the topic. By doing so, the assignment, alongside the training process, becomes a result of study and not a mere compilation of details gathered from books.

An essential part of processing the material is to evaluate and interpret the data critically. One therefore has to look at the underlying principles and also look for links and significance. This entails amongst others

- determining the value of the facts/details;
- interpreting the facts, that is, analysing the issues concerned and making deductions, so that the meaning of the facts can be highlighted;
- the evaluation and comparison of details: look for confirmation of statements/assertions and for supplementation of facts. If there is any controversy, look for information until you are able to find the solution or the supposed solution;
- emphasising certain facts or aspects;
- deductions and the determination of principles, laws, trends/tendencies, directions, and so forth. Also the ways in which the material under discussion might deviate from the rules.

The ideal is that the assignment should be

- part of a training process;
- part of a result in terms of knowledge acquired;
- part of proof of the development of insight.

An assignment by a student who was not careful about following these steps is characterised by uneven patches of the student's own work and information copied haphazardly from sources, often blatant plagiarism. It becomes a "copy and paste" job which does the student no good and misses the essential aim and purpose of writing an assignment. This is clearly to be avoided.

6 LOGICAL DISCUSSION, ARGUMENTATION, FORMULATION

6.1 General

The successful presentation of an assignment calls for thorough planning and processing of information. This should result in the final product being a systematic, logical and balanced whole.

6.2 The introduction

The *introduction* is one of the most crucial parts of the assignment. In this section the student has to formulate the intention of the assignment, which can be done by means of a problem statement, a statement or a hypothesis.

After having read the introduction it is important that the reader should have a clear idea of the central issue which is going to be researched, and how the student intends dealing with this issue. A well-formulated introduction is the student's best guarantee to

successful further development of his theme or argument. Therefore it is worthwhile spending a considerable amount of time making sure that the introduction is good.

A proper introductory section to an assignment is just as important as a proper foundation for a house, for without it the whole structure would collapse.

6.3 Problem statement



Write a provisional problem statement or central theoretical statement. State the problem and why it is important that a solution should be found.

For a long assignment a literature review is important. Here one indicates where arguments come from, who said what about the topic, and briefly what they said about it in this regard.

6.4 Subsections

The introduction should lead logically to a number of *subsections*. The way in which the information in the body of the assignment is organised will of course vary in terms of the nature of the assignment, for it can be done thematically or chronologically, depending on what suits the topic best. The most important point to remember is that there should be a logical structure and that the student must move from one point to the other, maintaining a tight and logical *line of argumentation*.

This logical structure is one of the most important skills to be mastered in writing an assignment. During the writing process you are presenting a case to the reader (the lecturer) and you have to build up your case as carefully as you can, using information from the sources as evidence, in a certain sense like a lawyer presenting a case to a judge. You have to make sure that there are no gaps in the argument that can weaken your case. Do not go off the track (digress unnecessarily) or use irrelevant information.

6.5 Conclusion

In the *conclusion* of your assignment you have to go back to the introduction, check what was undertaken there, once again go through the body of the assignment to make sure that all the points were in fact dealt with and then provide a résumé. This means that you have to evaluate the extent to which your problem statement has been resolved, the extent to which a hypothesis has been proved or disproved.

The conclusion is the logical final step in the argumentation, and should reflect real insight and understanding of what has been achieved in the course of the assignment.



7 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

7.1 Introduction

This part of assignment writing can never be over-estimated. One of the most important skills that students at university level has to acquire is the ability to write clearly and cogently, to argue well and to communicate properly. These skills cannot be acquired in any other way than through rigorous practice. It is the duty of both student and lecturer to pay special attention to this aspect.

It is often assumed that assignments deal mostly with content and that no real attention needs to be given to the language and style. This is simply not true. An assignment is also a document in prose and it is accordingly measured by the same criteria as good prose. The importance of good style, neat and correct language usage and logically coherent constructions cannot be stressed enough.

“Golden apples have to be served on silver trays” – through the use of correct and elegant language you reveal that you as a writer have pride in what you are saying, and by so doing you instill interest in your opinion.

THINK before you ink ...

Make sure that sentence constructions are clear and logical.

7.2 Clarity



In order to attain the maximum level of effectiveness in writing, you have to write clearly, naturally and to the point. With regard to style there is one basic principle that always applies: make sure that you have something to say, and say it as clearly and unambiguously as possible. Read over each sentence and ask yourself whether each one will be clear – even to the uninitiated reader.

Remember that precise formulation reflects accurate thought. Do not use words from a source in an undigested form. Do not simply translate directly when the source is written in another language. Render the information understandably in your own words.

7.3 Translations

Be careful of assumptions that names of persons, places, and organisations, as they occur in English sources, are correct. Nine out of ten times there are equivalents in other languages, for example in Afrikaans Cologne becomes Keulen, Estonia becomes Estland, Brussels becomes Brussel and NATO becomes NAVO. Check your translations in books, atlases, newspapers and encyclopedias for the correct spelling or acceptable spelling of names. The most recent edition of *Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreëls* can be very useful when doing an assignment in Afrikaans.

7.4 Spelling, mode of writing

It is important to keep checking spelling to make sure that unnecessary errors can't detract from the final impression.

Make use of the spell checker available on MS Word. Make sure whether it is using the British (UK) or American (US) spelling mode.

Rather use the British form, except in the source list where the information has to be taken literally from the title page of the source.

BRITISH (UK)	AMERICAN (US)
organisation	organization
labour	labor
centre	center
fibre	fiber
catalogue	catalog
programme	program

CText (NWU) developed a handy Afrikaans spell checker which can be bought. Students and personnel on the NWU campuses may, however, use the spell checker for free on MS Word.

7.5 Punctuation

A full stop is mostly placed outside the quotation marks, except where a sentence starts outside the quotation marks.

- He insisted that "it was premature to start anything now".
- He said: "The whole matter is *sub judice*."

Exclamation marks (and question marks) are placed inside quotation marks:

- "What a mess!" she exclaimed.

7.6 Abbreviations and titles

Use only standardised abbreviations and only where they are acceptable. Personal creations are not allowed because it might have the effect that the reader has to guess what you mean. Do not, for example, use **info** for **information**. It is acceptable if the lecturer gives permission for the use of abbreviations such as WWW for the World Wide Web, for example.

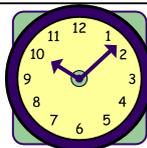
For the correct spelling of abbreviations it is recommended to use the latest edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* – there is always a full stop after an abbreviation.

For Afrikaans it is recommended to use the *Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreëls* – according to the 2009 edition full stops are optional.

7.7 Numbers

Use the full mode of writing out numbers from one to ten (one, six, ten) and then use figures: 11, 19, 31, except if the figure is followed by an accepted abbreviation (3 km, 7 kg, 20%). There is no space between the monetary symbol and the figure (56c, R192,35 and \$12).

- Write a number in full if it starts a sentence.
- Use numbers if you are stating a date, time, measurement or age.



7.8 Hints

- **Write in the active voice.**
- Avoid the passive voice where possible: *The investigation will be led by Dr. Vosloo.* Rather: *Dr. Vosloo will lead the investigation.*
- **Do not use the personal form** in a formal scientific paper. The direct form of address (you) has been used in this guide, but the purpose of the guide is that the lecturer should be "talking" to you personally and somewhat informally. This is not a formal scientific document. In order to avoid using the personal form of address, phrases like the following can be used:

It is therefore clear that the main cause for the war ...

The foregoing arguments can be summarised as follows ...

Various possibilities emerge ...

A possible solution could be to ...

- Do not use exclamation marks (!) in a scientific document. They should be reserved for writings such as letters and in prose and drama.
- Naive phrases should not be used in a scientific document. Therefore not something like “Let us have a look at the advantages of journals ...”
- Each sentence should have a verb.
- Write in brief, business-like sentences: Avoid long and complex sentences like: “Although it is now clear that research about the topic has been incomplete and controversial, more recent research has brought to light the fact that ...”
- Be careful about the use of “fashionable” expressions, such as “At the end of the day ...”, and so forth.
- Commas: Use a comma between two verbs which refer to different parts of the sentence, for example “When we arrived, they were gone already.”

7.9 Division of words

When hyphenating a word at the end of a line, the requirements of clarity and ease of reading should be borne in mind. The **Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary** divides words in syllables and hyphenation is done in accordance to that. In Afrikaans the breaking off of words is not recommended. However, when it seems necessary, the hyphen should be placed between syllables or meaningful parts of the word. Use the directions of the *Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreëls* (2009).

7.10 Joining together of words

- In general, the joining together of words by means of hyphens to form a new noun, is used much less frequent in English than in Afrikaans.
- Hyphens are generally used when prefixes of classical origin are used with English words: anti-nuclear demonstration, macro-level, and so forth.
- With regard to computers and the Internet the letter **e** is used for **electronic**, e.g. ebook/e-book, email/e-mail, et cetera.
- For the Afrikaans use, once again refer to *Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreëls*.

7.11 Quotation marks

- Usually double quotation marks are used for the first quotation, then single ones for a quotation within a quotation. When a number of paragraphs are quoted in succession, the opening quotation marks are repeated at the beginning of each paragraph, but the closing mark is used only at the end of the whole quotation.
- Punctuation marks used in quotations present many difficulties.
- The full stop is almost always outside the quotation marks:
 - He maintained that “it would be premature to say anything now”.
 - She is the “prima donna of the tennis courts” (*Newsweek*, 9 February 1984).
 - “It is felt that people pay too much attention to politics” (*Time*, 3 March 1980).
- Punctuation marks which contribute to the meaning of the statement are placed inside the quotation marks:

“What a complete mess!” she exclaimed.

“Would you want me to be different?” she asked incredulously.

She was furious, telling him that “You have no sensitivity!” (Smith, 1978:220).

8 REWRITING – THE SECRET OF A GOOD ASSIGNMENT

Do not hesitate to read through an assignment a few times. Good advice is to keep record of all the information you have found in sources, and once you have finished compiling this, to read through your assignment again. Determine whether it reads smoothly AND WHETHER YOU CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT. It often happens that you have simply done poor translation or that your wording does not reflect the correct interpretation from the source.

9 DOCUMENTATION

Documentation in an assignment can be described as the justification of the student's way of dealing with material gathered from a variety of sources. Research results, arguments and viewpoints of other individuals as reflected in a wide variety of sources, form an important component of any assignment. These are accepted as the basis or foundation on which one has to build.

The way in which a student deals with source material is therefore of crucial importance as it is a barometer of his thoroughness, academic honesty and integrity.

9.1 What should be documented?



The guiding rule should be: document what is essential.

The following should be useful as guidelines:

- As soon as one refers to a specific person's viewpoint, document it.
- Document as soon as there is some doubt or controversy about an issue.
- As soon as information, for example statistics, is used without the correctness having been verified it should definitely be documented.
- All sources used in the course of the reading for the assignment should be acknowledged, whether in the bibliography or by way of footnotes.
- The student should clearly indicate how he is using the material that he obtained from the sources, in the sense that he should indicate whether he agrees with it, whether he supports it or whether he simply wants to indicate the range of opinions about an issue.
- References to two or more authors dealing with the same topic are not really necessary at this level, unless there is a specific reason for doing it. One also has to judge carefully what the framework is within which an author operates, otherwise he cannot be quoted as evidence in support of one's case.
- The most recent edition of a book should be used where at all possible.
- Quotations from translated works are generally undesirable, unless one has a specific aim in mind, such as the comparison of a number of different views.

9.2 Style of documentation

Different styles are used in different academic disciplines. In problem cases, it is useful to remember that the bibliography should enable the reader to locate any of the sources quoted. Therefore, give sufficient bibliographical detail to make this possible. The style used here is known as the NWU Harvard style, which implies a system of references in the text rather than in footnotes. This implicates that the source and the relevant pages are mentioned in the text.

The reference can be given in the text:

Boulton (1987:23) maintains that ...

The reference can also be at the end of the sentence, thus:

It has "always been the principle ..." (Boulton, 1982:23).

If two authors wrote the book one would use the plural verb:

Gardner and Shelton (1967:45) say that ...

In the case of a reference by a number of authors, one would use Meyer *et al.* (1973: 34) Note, however, that this reference has grammatical implications (it is a plural concept);

Meyer *et al.* (1973:39) suggest that ...

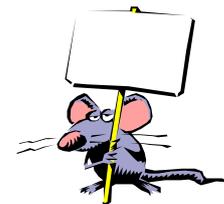
For more detailed guidelines use the booklet "**NWU Referencing guide**" which is available in the Ferdinand Postma Library. This guide is also electronically available on the library website.

9.3 Source list or bibliography

What should be included in the source list?

An important question which arises is: What sources should I include in the source list? Only the works I referred to in the text, or also other sources which I consulted but did not refer to in the text?

A serious warning must be issued against the trend among students to try and impress lecturers with extended bibliographies. In most cases it is quite easy for the lecturer to realise that the student is trying to trick him and this will have a very negative effect.



A source list consists of all the sources you have referred to in the text.

A bibliography refers also to other sources that you have used and that contributed to your insight. Therefore a bibliography consists of more sources than used in the text. For undergraduates a source list will be sufficient.

The source list or bibliography must contain full bibliographical details of the sources.

9.4 What does the source list look like?

Your text references should be supported by a source list at the end of the assignment in which you provide full bibliographical details of the sources you refer to in your text.

The reader of the assignment should be able to access the sources listed. Complete, correct and full bibliographical details should therefore be provided.

Your source list must consist of **one alphabetical** list (arranged according to the first author's name) of all the information sources that you've used.

One has to be able to move quickly and accurately from the text reference to the right spot in the source list where the full details are given.

Leave one line open between references.

AN EXAMPLE OF A SOURCE LIST

Anon. 2009. Chamber music.
<http://www.classicol.com/classical.fcm?music=instrumentInfo§ion=ChamberMusic&title=About%20Chamber%20Music> Date of access: 29 Sep. 2010.

APA dictionary of psychology. 2007. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Deci, E.L. 1980. The psychology of self-determination. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Gentner, D. & Colhoun, J. 2010. Analogical processes in human thinking and learning. (*In* Glatzeder, B.M., Goel, V. & Von Müller, A., eds. Towards a theory of thinking: building blocks for a conceptual framework. Heidelberg: Springer. p. 35-48).

McClintock, M. 2002. The production and stability of creatine-containing sports supplements. Potchefstroom: PU for CHE. (Dissertation – MSc).

Pienaar, W.J. 2010. Logistics aspects of petroleum pipeline operations. *Journal of transport and supply chain management*, 4(1):224-242.

South Africa. 1993. Trade Marks Act 194 of 1993.

South Africa. Department of Trade and Industry. 2006. Draft export strategy 2006-2009: trade and investment South Africa, export development and promotion. (Unpublished).

10 TECHNICAL FINISH

It is of the utmost importance that an assignment should be presented in a neat and acceptable format. The appearance is never more important than the content, but remember that first impressions are lasting, and a student's care with the presentation of the assignment reflects both self-respect and the respect that is due to the lecturer for whom the assignment is intended.

In the first place the assignment should be word-processed neatly and correctly, on one side of the paper only.

10.1 The title page

The assignment should be covered with a title page containing all the relevant information.

A discussion of Macbeth and Othello as examples of Elizabethan tragic heroes

ENGL211

VAN DER MERWE, A.S.

20764768

12 March 2012

The title page should always contain the following:

- The title of the assignment
- The subject code
- Your surname and full initials
- Student number
- Date

10.2 The table of contents

The assignment should have a proper table of contents. This should contain all the headings of the assignment as well as the page numbers on which each heading starts.

The following example is from an assignment on: *The use of Internet for scientific information*.

CONTENTS	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 COMPONENTS OF INTERNET	1
2.1 Electronic mail	2
2.2 World wide web	3
2.3 Newsgroups	4
3 EVALUATION OF INFORMATION	6
3.1 Authority	6
3.1.1 Author	7
3.1.1.1 Personal author	7
3.1.1.2 Web master	7
3.1.2 Institution	8
3.2 Recency	9
4 QUOTING OF INFORMATION	10
5 SUMMARY	11
6 SOURCE LIST	12

10.3 Numbering system

It is advisable to use a proper numbering system for the assignment, and to use it consistently. The decimal system (with points between figures) is generally used at university level. Suggested format:

- | |
|--|
| 1 CAPITAL LETTERS AND BOLD |
| 1.1 Small letters (lower case) - bold |
| 1.1.1 <i>Small letters - italics</i> |

It is generally advisable not to use so many headings that more than four figures are required (1.1.1.1), as that tends to fragment the essay and impede the line of argumentation.

Do not mix a numbering and lettering system – for example, NOT 1.1(a).

However, this depends on the topic. In a literature assignment headings should ideally be limited to the minimum, while in an essay dealing with more factual material, headings are useful markers to organise the material.

10.4 The summary

If a lecturer requires a summary, it should be put at the beginning of the assignment, and should be a concise and accurate reflection of the content of the assignment. The summary differs from the introduction and the conclusion. The introduction promises certain things, and the conclusion assesses the extent to which these promises have been fulfilled. The summary is just a summing up of the content of the assignment. As a quick rule, one could say that each paragraph/section in the assignment should be represented by a sentence in the summary.

11 TYPING INSTRUCTIONS

11.1 General



- Typing should be done in one and a half spacing on A4 paper.
- Fair margins (about 2,5 cm at the top and bottom and 3 cm on the left and right sides of the paper) should be left - enough for the lecturer to write remarks.
- A safe font size is 11.

It is not only said of a good assignment that the content is excellent, but also that the appearance is impeccable. Naturally the physical appearance of an assignment is never more important than the content, but it should not detract from the assignment as a whole.

11.2 Headings

Place headings and subsections against the left hand margin. **Do not put full stops after the headings.** Leave two spaces open between the number and the headings. The system used in this guide is recommended.

8.3** Headings (* =space)

A new section should not be started in the last five lines of a page. In the case of a long assignment, each chapter has to start on a new page.

11.3 Paragraphs

Paragraphs should start against the left hand margin. It is not necessary for a paragraph to have an indent.

Paragraphs should be clearly separated from each other. Leave at least double the normal line space between paragraphs.

A heading should never be left at the bottom of a page. The same applies to the first line of a paragraph.

The last short line of a paragraph or short section of a sentence also should not run over to the next page.

11.4 Page numbers

The pages should be numbered, preferably at the bottom of the page. Word processing programmes offer various options for numbering the pages of your document. The following is recommended, unless the lecturer instructs otherwise: The title page is counted but not numbered, and numbering then starts with page ii. Thus, the summary (if required) and the table of contents are numbered in Roman numerals. The page on which the Introduction of your assignment starts, becomes page 1 and from there on the rest of the assignment has to be numbered in Arabic numerals.

11.5 Emphasising of words

Use **bold** for the words that you would like to emphasise. You can also use *italics*, especially for words in other languages which might be used for the sake of clarity.

11.6 Proofreading

The student is personally responsible for the careful proofreading of the assignment. Ask somebody to help – one easily misses errors in one's own work. An excellent, though time-consuming method, is to read the assignment from back to front, because you then read words and not context. For important and major assignments of undergraduate students as well as masters students the services of text editors are recommended.

12 EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK FROM THE LECTURER

Although this might differ from one lecturer to another, assignments are usually not only evaluated on the basis of content. Aspects such as logical reasoning, correct language usage, physical layout, editing and correct textual references and the source list normally count marks.

When you receive your assignment after the lecturer has marked it, it is in your own interest to check the comments carefully. The lecturer spent a lot of time on indicating the weaknesses and errors (or the good points). Use the comments to improve your work.

Usually a substantial number of examination questions are based on assignments given as class work, and it is thus important to give proper attention to this.

Good luck – keep up the hard work! It is surely worth the time and effort.