

GRADUATE COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT

Introduction to Study and Writing Skills

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Purpose and structure

This booklet is designed to assist you to develop your skills as a postgraduate student, particularly in the various kinds of assignment tasks you will encounter. It provides assistance in preparing and writing standard assignments such as essays, reports and case studies, as well as providing guidance for students undertaking online assessment tasks such as blogs, wikis or online conferencing.

For convenience this booklet has been divided into the following key sections:

PART A: INTRODUCTION TO POSTGRADUATE STUDY

- Postgraduate study
- Writing in business
- The role of the writer
- The assignment process
- Interpreting the assignment task
- Reading – coping with the quantity
- Critical reading skills
- Critical evaluation skills for online information

PART B: ESSAYS, REPORTS AND CASE STUDIES

- Essays, reports and case studies – what are the differences?
- Essay structure
- Report structure
- Case studies

PART C: BLOGS, WIKIS, ELLUMINATE AND PODCASTS

- Web 2.0
- Blogs, Wikis, Elluminate Live! and Podcasts: what are they?
- Advantages of online study and assessment tools
- Online study and assignment tasks using blogs
- Online study and assignment tasks using wikis
- Online study and assignment tasks using Elluminate Live!
- Online study using podcasts

PART D: REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

- Referencing

PART E: CHECKLIST AND SUMMARY

- Assignment writing checklist
- A summary: What makes a good assignment?

PART F: APPENDICES

Introduction to postgraduate study

Postgraduate study

How is postgraduate study different from undergraduate study?

When students begin university as undergraduates, they tend to focus on understanding and reproducing, often with little critical analyses, the knowledge that they read and learn. At this undergraduate level, the emphasis is on learning to read and write in ways that are appropriate for the field of study, and to pass the assignments.

However, postgraduate students enter this level of study usually knowing quite a lot about the field in which they want to specialise. The focus, thus, moves from merely reproducing what is read to constructing knowledge.

Knowledge is constructed either through research or by examining, exploring and questioning knowledge. As a postgraduate student, you are expected to examine knowledge in more depth and to use the skills of critique and reflection.

Critique, or being critical, does not always mean being negative. Within the university context, it also means to identify the differences and similarities, and the gaps, strengths and weaknesses in ideas. You are expected to question knowledge, and to consider others' perspectives.

You are expected to locate the knowledge that you are examining, or using, within a context of other relevant knowledge. Ideas are rarely examined in isolation. You are expected to see connections and relationships. You can do this by asking questions such as 'Is there another way to think about this? What do other writers think? What are the strengths of this idea in relation to my project or topic?' (See the later section, 'Critical reading skills', for more details.)

When you begin to have your own perspective on the knowledge you begin to see alternative ways of thinking about ideas and understandings. As a postgraduate student you are expected to contribute to the knowledge base of your specialised field. Thus, your role has changed from simply being an objective 'reporter' of what you have read, to a writer with an attitude or position in relation to the knowledge that you are encountering. You are also writing to readers who may hold different perspectives from yours. You therefore need to be convincing.

During your studies, assignment tasks play a central role in strengthening and testing the development of your abilities as a postgraduate student. The assignment tasks that you will be required to undertake may follow 'traditional' forms, such as essays, reports and case studies. These are addressed in *PART B* of this booklet. In addition, online technologies are increasingly used for postgraduate study and assignment tasks. These technologies enhance collaboration and communication between teaching staff and students, enable interactive learning environments and facilitate peer sharing and review of work. Further information about online technologies used at SCU is provided in *PART C* of this booklet.

Writing in Business

Each field of study examines and builds knowledge in different ways. For example, in the Sciences, the focus is usually on organising and classifying the physical world; in the Arts, the focus is on exploring the human experience. In the field of Business, a major focus is on improving outcomes, usually through problem solving. Thus, the ability to identify problems and issues, to explore and discuss cause and effect relationships and to offer solutions to a problem are important skills that are used in both the spoken and written language of Business.

Problem solving appears in various written forms in Business writing for academic study. The writing purpose will determine the way the work is structured.

Some purposes of writing in Business are to:

- identify and report on a problem and to offer a solution (this is usually presented as a report)
- plan projects (usually presented as a report)
- identify issues in specific situations and to explore possible solutions (usually presented in the form of a case study)
- apply for resources/funding to help solve a problem (presented in the form of a submission or proposal)
- examine and take a stance in relation to issues and concepts (presented in essay format).

The role of the writer

How often have you read or been advised (usually in books that teach writing) to 'write as though the reader knows nothing about the topic'? However, your reader (your lecturer/tutor) knows quite a lot about the topic and if you write as if they know nothing, then you will include too much detail! On the other hand, if you take the other position of writing to an informed reader you will assume that your reader knows what you mean. In this case you won't give enough details and you will force your reader to 'read between the lines'. What a dilemma!

In the academic context, you are writing to be graded on an assessment. Therefore you have to **convince the reader that you know what you are writing about.**

Several techniques can be used (and are expected) in order to be convincing. Some techniques used in the standard essay format are:

- give details and explanations. Ask the 'how' and 'why' questions to help explore ideas beyond the more descriptive 'when', 'where', 'what' and 'who' questions
- take a stance in the essay and state it clearly in the introduction
- explain, or define terms to show your understanding, and your perspective
- use the literature to demonstrate your knowledge and to support your perspective
- use paragraphs to help to explain, to give details and to discuss.

Techniques for other assessment types will be considered in later sections of the booklet.

The assignment process

Consider a typical assignment from your current unit of study. Can you identify the process that you will go through to complete the assignment? Being able to identify your process will help you to take control over your learning and writing, and to 'situate' yourself within the process. Although everyone may go through that process slightly differently, there is a pattern that usually consists of the following:

- Read and interpret the assignment task. (See the next section, 'Interpreting the assignment task'.)
- Carefully check the assignment due date and required mode of submission. This is especially critical for online assessment items, which may require online interaction throughout the study period, in addition to a due date for final submission.
- Undertake the readings and activities in your Study Guide, keeping the assignment task in mind. Keep asking yourself: 'How is this relevant to the assignment task?' (See the section, 'Critical reading skills'.)
- Once you have an understanding of the broad area of the assignment topic, and have 'read around' the topic, check the task again to refine your understanding.
- Read to understand basic concepts, to find definitions.
- Decide on the most appropriate structure for your assignment – report, essay, proposal, discussion paper, blog, etc. In some assignments you will be directed to use a specific structure.
- If the assignment task requires you to write for an online environment (e.g. blog or wiki), the writing style and structure you will need to use are significantly different to those used for 'traditional' written assignments. Refer to *Part C* within this booklet for more information.
- Read to decide on your position/perspective if you are writing an essay or a critical reflection, or to gather data/evidence/sources if you are writing a report or contributing information to a blog or wiki. You may need to read

more widely than the set text and supplied readings, see *Appendix F: Using the Library databases* for advice about locating relevant information.

- Begin writing. For essays, case studies or reports, begin with the introduction. It gives focus to the assignment, so if you are unable to write it, then re-consider your writing task. For blog entries, or wiki contributions, begin with a list of main points which will shape the body of your entry. Also make a list of additional information and sources (usually hyperlinks) that can be included to provide background and detail for the reader.
- Break the assignment into sections. Use the assignment instructions to guide you.
- Perhaps you need to read further to add details?
- Write/rewrite/rewrite. The changes you make at this stage will be to the meaning. For essays, case studies, reports and discussion papers, check your paragraph structure, add logic, extend and explain ideas. For wiki and blog tasks, take advantage of the medium: provide hyperlinks to material rather than replicating detailed information available elsewhere online. Be direct in your written expression: clarity and conciseness are critical to successful online writing. In addition, short paragraphs help make your work easy to read online.
- Polish: pay attention to layout, spelling, punctuation and presentation. It is very difficult to comprehensively proofread your own work. If you have a friend, relative or co-worker with good written English skills, ask them to check your assignment for spelling, grammar, punctuation and typographical errors.
- Ensure that you have fully attributed and correctly referenced all sources of information used in your work.



Note

The process is not straightforward. You tend to move from the general to the detail, often re-tracing your activities in order to find details, increase your understanding or improve clarity and focus in your writing.

Interpreting the assignment task

Questions to ask:

- What is the assignment about – i.e. what is the topic?
- Are you being limited in your thinking about the topic?
- What are you being asked (or expected) to do with the knowledge (e.g. evaluate, describe) and what do those words mean? (Go to *Appendix E: Glossaries* for definitions of these direction words.)
- What do the Marking Criteria for the assignment tell you about what is expected in this assignment?
- What is the concept that underlies the whole assignment? Do you need to define this concept?

- When examining online assignment tasks that require ongoing entries and contributions throughout the study period (such as blogs and wikis), make sure that you have a clear understanding of their overall purpose. Keeping this 'big picture' in mind will help you to shape individual entries and contributions that will work together to construct a body of work over time.

Essays

- Does the task contain a proposition or an opinion? If so, you will probably respond in essay format.
- What is your viewpoint/perspective?
- What reasons do you have for this perspective?
- What evidence do you have to support your perspective?
- What evidence is there against your perspective and why is it not credible?

Reports

- Are you being asked to undertake a project, to develop a product or to report on something? If so, a report format will probably be the most appropriate format to use.

Case studies

- What are the major issues presented in the case?
- Which aspects of the situation do you need to examine?
- What literature do you need to read to give ideas about solutions, options, alternatives and critical issues?

Blogs

- What is the overall purpose of the blog? What is it meant to do?
- Are there set rules or guidelines you must follow (e.g. how many entries, submission due dates, word length restrictions)?
- Is the content of the blog externally shaped (e.g. has your lecturer set a list of topics or questions that must be addressed in blog entries) or is there freedom to respond to topics and issues which you determine?
- Is the blog private or public? Who is the audience for your work?
- What tasks will you need to perform to create your entries (e.g. research, drafting, writing and editing) and how much time needs to be allocated for these tasks?
- Do you need to conduct any research to increase your understanding of blogs and their format, or locate some exemplars?

Wikis

- What is the overall purpose of the wiki? What is it meant to do?
- Is there a checklist or set of guidelines for major content areas which must be addressed? If so, are these included in the wiki's current structure or do they need to be developed?

- Who is allocated to work on the wiki? If it is a small group project, communicate with members of your team. Consider whether appointing an editor or moderator may help to facilitate the smooth development of the wiki.
- What is your individual responsibility in developing the wiki? For example, are there a set number of contributions you need to make within a specified time? Have particular content sections of the wiki been allocated to you for development?
- What tasks must you perform to meet your individual responsibilities (e.g. research, writing, reading and editing/expanding the work of other wiki contributors), and how much time needs to be allocated for these activities?
- Are there rules or guidelines you must follow (e.g. style, referencing)?
- Do you need to conduct any research to increase your understanding of wikis and their format, or locate some exemplars?

Reading: Coping with the quantity

University study involves a lot of reading. Thus, you need to find ways to read efficiently and effectively, without compromising your comprehension of the topic. This section outlines some ideas to help. Modify them to suit the way that you work.

Have a purpose every time you read. This purpose will determine **how** you read. At university, you have two main purposes in reading – for study and for research. You read for study when you are preparing for an exam. Even though most of your assignments will be ‘open book’ format, you still need to understand concepts and their relationships and to remember some of the knowledge.

You read for research when you have an assignment to prepare and you have to gather knowledge for that assignment. Your aim is not to speed read, but to read efficiently and with comprehension.

The section below gives some guidelines for reading for research – that is, to prepare for an assignment. Again, there is a process that you can follow. Apply this process and see how it works for you. If you modify the process, notice what you do. Becoming aware of how you work and learn can help you to save time.

- **Skim** to get the gist of the content. What can you find out when you skim? **(Never begin at the beginning and read every word without skimming first.)**
- **Make the structure work for you.** How does the writer introduce/conclude the material? How is it organised? Why is it organised like this? Is there a different organisation for a proposal, report or summary? For online materials, the structure may be significantly different to that of a journal article or chapter from a book. Identify the structure and organisation of the material you are reading. Identifying and understanding this will help you to read more quickly because you will know what to expect.
- **Decide your purpose.** Why are you reading this material? What are you looking for? If you cannot answer these questions, then your reading will lack focus and you will probably feel that you are wasting time.

- **What questions can you ask about the material?** (See next sections on 'Critical reading skills' and 'Critical evaluation skills for online information!')
- **Record/take notes.** Use any method that makes sense to you, but don't forget to record full bibliographic details for materials such as journal articles and book chapters (i.e. author's surname, initial, year, title of article/chapter/book, publisher, place of publication, page numbers). Comprehensive details of any online resources you use must also be recorded. Refer to *Appendix D: More about referencing* of this document for citation examples.
- Re-read for more details/take notes/re-read for even more details ...



Note

Know your reading purpose each time you re-read.

Critical reading skills

Sometimes you might be reading just to gather factual information and sometimes (usually for an essay where you have to respond to a proposition) you have to read to decide what you think and to gather evidence to support your position. In this case, you evaluate the knowledge, its source and its focus.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to encourage critical thinking and reading:

- What is the writer's perspective?
- Do I agree? Why?
- How is the writer's perspective different from/the same as other writers?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of this perspective? (Has the writer chosen to focus on particular aspects of a topic? Is the knowledge general/detailed?)
- What assumptions has the writer made?

Reading widely helps you to:

- come to your own position, that is, to situate yourself in the knowledge
- evaluate knowledge and learn to recognise not only more credible research but also quality writing.

Critical evaluation skills for online information

In addition to critical reading skills, it is important to apply critical evaluation skills to materials published on the Internet. Applying the points below, from Fitzgerald (1997), will help you to make informed decisions about the relevance, currency and accuracy of the material you are reading, and the authority of its source:

- **Be critically conscious.**

It is important to remember that the Internet is an open medium. In contrast to scholarly publications (such as journal articles and books), much information published online has been produced without editorial control or peer-review. Be skeptical about information you encounter and scan for indicators which may highlight that the material contains inaccurate or biased information. Search for references within the material, such as footnotes, statistics and bibliographic details which can be cross-checked.

- **Read widely to establish a contextual framework.**

Your reading should include books and journal articles in addition to materials published on the Internet.

- **Evaluate the argument presented.**

Examine the argument presented for fallacies in logic, the use of generalisations and oversimplifications, unstated assumptions and the selective or misleading use of statistics.

- **Compare and contrast information from multiple sources.**

Use multiple search engines to achieve diversity in your results.

- **Evaluate the reliability of the author/source.**

To achieve this, consider the *authority of the format*, the *authority of the writer*, the *internal validity* of the information and its *currency*.

(Adapted from Fitzgerald, MA, 1997, 'Misinformation on the Internet: Applying Evaluation Skills to Online Information', *Emergency Librarian*, vol. 24, no. 3, Jan/Feb.)

Essays, reports and case studies

Essays, reports and case studies – what are the differences?

We often think of the differences between essays, reports and case studies in terms of the way they **look**. However, the difference is actually in their **purpose**, which, in turn, affects how the knowledge is organised.

The purposes of academic **essays** are usually to:

- respond to a proposition in the assignment task
- take a position/perspective and to present evidence to support that position/perspective
- acknowledge evidence that might undermine your position and to demonstrate the limitations or weaknesses of that evidence
- be convincing and credible.



Note

There is no 'right' answer in an essay.

The purposes of **reports** are usually to:

- report on the findings of projects, investigations or research
- analyse data and come to some conclusion
- not to respond to a proposition.



Note

You might still have a perspective or take a stance in a report, but your writing purpose is usually not to argue for that perspective. Your major focus is on reporting the findings/issues/data to allow readers to come to their own conclusions.

The purposes of **case studies** are usually to:

- identify the opportunity, problem or decision for the organisation
- identify and evaluate possible actions
- propose a solution.

The differences between reports, essays and case studies are most evident in their layout. Case studies are set out in a report format. Reports (including case studies) have headings and dot points as well as discussion sections set out in paragraphs. Academic essays do not usually have headings and dot points because the writer's perspective or position, acts as a 'thread' that binds the essay together. Headings can sometimes break that thread. Insert headings if you are specifically instructed by your lecturer in order to make the essay easier to read.

Reports and essays are also different in the way they 'sound', that is, in the style and tone of the writing. Essays usually have more of a tone of a discussion whereas reports can have descriptive/reporting sections as well as discussion sections, depending upon the writing purpose in different parts of the report. Examples 1 and 2 below demonstrate these differences. In Example 1 the tone is one of 'reporting' because the writer is describing the method and focus of the research and giving some of the findings. However, the last sentence changes from the report style. What is the writer doing in it?



Example 1: Reporting

A program of research was developed which incorporated three research studies. The research focused on the 'how' and 'why' questions about recruitment and selection procedures. It also examined patterns of use and differences between various kinds of organisations. There were slightly more male salespeople than female. In terms of age, the average age of the sample was 27 years and over half were single with one-third married. 46% had some post secondary school education and their average length of employment was 4.2 years. Finally, the average level of sales experience was 3.8 years. This implies that the organisational attempts to enhance salespeoples' levels of self-esteem and organisational commitment are likely to be encouraged by commitment from the organisation, and through job satisfaction.

In the last sentence the tone changes. This sentence is a statement of the implications of the findings. Rather than giving the 'facts' of the project, the writer is **interpreting**.

Reports often have more descriptive sections than in essays. Descriptive writing tends to answer the 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'who' questions. It involves identifying, describing or listing, and can often be seen through a focus on the facts. It is most useful for describing cases and situations, and for outlining objectives and the background to a business or project. Descriptions are useful to 'set the scene' so that situations or projects can be analysed.

The shortcoming of writing descriptively is that it does not readily allow interpretation, justification, analysis, argument, explanations, reflections or hypotheses – usually the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. These are the higher order thinking skills that are expected of any university student, and particularly of postgraduate students.

Using higher order skills in writing (and in thinking) makes it possible to see connections and relationships between concepts and to generalise and apply concepts to a new area. Thus, they help in knowledge construction. These higher order thinking and writing skills are found more frequently in essays than reports.

Example 2 is a discussion. It is taken from an essay and is a demonstration of the use of these higher order skills. The writer is not ‘telling a story’ but, rather, is putting forward a perspective.



Example 2: Discussing

Given the turbulent environment in which executives operate, they need to continually review and renew their competencies. Concerns that executives can meet this challenge have increased because it is clear that the knowledge and skills of executives affect the competitive advantage of organisations (Kotter 1988). Uhlich and his colleagues (1993) argue that knowledge at the senior level in companies is central to their competitiveness, and real competence has become an increasingly scarce resource ... Indeed Fulmer (1990) advises that a major challenge facing professionals in this decade is coping with the problem of a closed mind.

(Dickenson, J 1994, 'Executive Competencies: A framework for identification and development', unpublished PhD thesis, Graduate School of Management, University of Queensland, p. 118.)

In Example 2 the writer is clearly taking a position [*Given the turbulent environment in which executives operate, they need to continually review and renew their competencies*]. The writer identifies an area of concern related to this issue and offers a judgment, both of which are supported by the literature [*Concerns that executives can meet this challenge have increased because it is clear that the knowledge and skills of executives affect the competitive advantage of organisations (Kotter 1988)*]. The writer uses a different ‘language’, the language of argument and justification, evident in the use of *because, given, argue* and *indeed*. The writer is building knowledge by demonstrating relationships [*knowledge and skills of executives affect the competitive advantage ...*] and by moving from ‘executives’ to a new, and generalised, knowledge domain in the last sentence, of ‘professionals’. This enables the writer to identify a challenge [*a closed mind*] that could be developed, if appropriate.



Note

In reports the higher order thinking skills are most evident in the analysis and recommendations sections.

(See *Appendix A: Developing ideas through paragraphs* for ways to build and develop a paragraph for essays and reports.)

The next section outlines the structures of essays, reports and cases and gives more detailed guidance on how to demonstrate your knowledge.

Essay structure

Essays for academic study still have an introduction, a body and a conclusion, but in order to decide what to include in these sections, you need to be able to identify the writing purpose. There are different types of academic essays. Some require you to link theory with practical situations (see Example 5 later in these notes). You might be required to examine a workplace practice and to 'measure' or evaluate that practice by comparing it with the theory. (This assignment could also be written as a report.)

However, the essay type that you will encounter most frequently is the one in which you are expected to respond to a proposition. An example of such an assignment is *Globalisation has wrought fundamental changes in the global economy and it is evident that the effects of globalisation are more positive than negative*. This is a viewpoint that you are being proposed, and you are expected to take a stance in relation to it. You need to ask yourself:

- What do I think?
- What are my reasons for taking this position?
- What evidence can I find to support the position?

Asking yourself these questions will help you to 'shape' the essay.

Introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to give focus to the essay and to outline the decisions that you have made about the essay.

You can do this by:

- stating your perspective/position
- identifying the topic
- outlining the limitations and/or scope of the essay
- giving a definition of terms that are basic to the whole assignment.

The definitions also serve as a foundation from which you can present your perspective.



Example 3a: Introduction to an essay

<i>topic, and writer's position</i>	Telephone contacts are becoming a normal part of business. Several factors have contributed to this, and among them are the accelerating costs of personal selling, together with the introduction of innovative telecommunications and computer sophistication. Also, buyers are becoming increasingly more willing to use direct channels. With the increasing costs of personal selling techniques there is a growing need to more closely examine telemarketing human resource management, particularly recruitment and selection, and sales performance.
<i>Scope of the essay and some main reasons that will be developed</i>	
<i>definition, often in a separate paragraph to allow for discussion</i>	Telemarketing has been defined by Jones as ... [<i>note definitions are usually written as direct quotes</i>].



Example 3b: Introduction

<i>setting the scene</i>	The purpose of research is often to provide information about how things have been over a given period of time, or are right now. Its product is knowledge. There are many different methodologies for collecting information and consequently, the output differs on that basis. Generally, quantitative data is considered to be collected objectively, while qualitative data is collected subjectively. Herein begins the debate about the uses of both types of research, which is best suited and if, in fact, they are complementary rather than competing.
<i>writer's position</i>	Qualitative research can often lead to quantitative research and, given that the second is a highly structured process, usually with a set outcome, while the first tends to be more free flowing and may provide a greater depth of understanding, one may be preferable to the other in some instances. Further, gender bias needs to be considered and could be important in terms of understanding a feminist point of view, or the use of critical approaches to understand knowledge as it grows and interacts with its world. Given this, the various methodologies need to be seen as complementary rather than competing. The joining of qualitative and quantitative methodologies with either the feminist or critical approach forms a rich triangulation, enabling a complex and systemic view.
<i>other areas for discussion</i>	
<i>development of position</i>	



Note

Every sentence in the introduction should serve a purpose for you. Can you identify the purpose of each sentence in your introductions? If not, do you need to include them?

Body

In the body, your purpose is to develop and support your perspective by putting forward reasons and evidence that are credible. You can do this by:

- logically organising the knowledge – this might be organising material into issues/topics or by using broad groupings such as social, economic, political and environmental sections – also take note of any guidance given in the assignment task
- asking the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions to delve more deeply into the topics and to add details and explanations
- organising your knowledge into paragraphs that state and develop a point (see 'Developing ideas through paragraphs' later in this section)
- using a variety of evidence such as cases, examples, theories, statistics
- using citations to help you to take a position and develop it (see section 'Referencing and citations').

Conclusion

The purpose of the conclusion is to **answer the assignment task** by:

- restating your position
- summarising the main points
- forecasting future developments or implications (if appropriate)
- not telling the reader what you did in the essay.

What do you think of the conclusion in Example 4a?



Example 4a: Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has critically analysed the strategic marketing plans of the business. It has applied and evaluated each element of Blomstrom's model for strategic marketing planning. The essay revealed that, while the manager has some innovative ideas for marketing strategies, they are not being used to their full capacity. In order for the business to maintain and develop a strategic response to changing marketing opportunities, the manager needs to develop a formal and structured strategic marketing plan.



Example 4b: Conclusion

Given the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and considering the biases and embryonic stages of both the critical and feminist approaches, all need to be considered in the ‘big picture’. No one methodology produces a complete and undeniably accurate piece of data. To use one without the other may lead to a myopic view and produce a linear rather than a systemic approach. While researchers may choose an approach that they are most comfortable with, clearly this will have limitations

and may result in other knowledge not being considered. The only way to produce a whole systemic approach to research is to consider the range of methodologies as complementary.

You probably noticed that the conclusion in Example 4a tells the reader what was **done** in the essay, and it doesn't actually leave the reader with the 'answer' to the topic. In Example 4b the writer's position and 'answer' is clear. The student has left the reader with a clear indication of the writer's attitude, and the conclusion complements the introduction.

Report structure

Reports are more complex forms of assignments because their structure will vary depending upon your writing purpose. They will always have an introduction, body and conclusion, but organisation of the body will vary depending on the assignment task, and therefore the writing purpose. It is also appropriate usually to have sections of the report that are descriptive because they give background and set the scene for analyses and justifications. There are a variety of reasons for writing reports for academic assignments. Some are:

- planning a project, hence, the report structure is appropriate to outline the stages of the plan. (Your assignment usually outlines the way this report should be set out – see the example on writing 'Business style reports', next)
- reporting information that you have gathered by conducting surveys and questionnaires, or through observation. This is a research report. In this report you must tell the reader how you gathered the information (or data), what the data is, and then you are expected to interpret the data, usually by also referring to the literature to support your interpretations, or to offer explanations that you can explore further
- reporting what you have read about a topic. This is a research by reading report. The focus is on the knowledge, not on how you gathered it
- reporting to evaluate a behaviour or workplace practice. This is an evaluative report where you have to use some criteria from the literature to help you to make the evaluation.

Business style reports

Sometimes you are given instructions to write a 'business style report'. There is no particular format for these – rather, the expectation is that you use a particular style of writing, that is, business writing. Business style reports also have a variety of purposes and structures. Therefore you need to consider the writing purpose. Here are some tips to help you:

- Read the assignment task closely. The lecturer often includes suggestions on areas to cover in the report. In the following example, the aspects that the lecturer expects to be included in the report have been bolded. Your task is to consider whether any other aspects should be included and then to think about an introduction and conclusion.

- Select the appropriate style of writing that your reader would expect to see in a business report. Business writing is objective and formal writing (avoiding the archaic business terms).
- Business reports (and most other reports) use headings, and dot points.
- Descriptions of the background and other facts necessary for the reader are given before interpretations and opinions are added. (The instructions in the assignment task demonstrate this.)



Example 5: Assignment task

Write a business style report with a maximum length of 500 words explaining the **background** of the organisation where the project will be carried out, the **objectives** of the project and the **importance** of this project to the organisation. You can also include a **budget** if you know the estimated cost as well as any other **major problems anticipated** with this project.

The table below gives you some questions to guide you, and acts as a checklist as you construct various types of reports.

Further information about dealing with business reports may be found in *Appendix C: More about business report writing*.

Table 1: Report writing checklist

- **Research report:** Use this structure if you have gathered your own data via interviews etc. and it is important to report the method and results.
- **Evaluative business report:** Use this structure when you have to evaluate a workplace activity.
- **Research by reading report:** Use this structure when you are only expected to gather the information for your report by reading from books of readings, textbooks and other materials you find in the library.

	Research report	Evaluative business report	Research by reading report
Abstract, Summary, Executive Summary	Does this contain a summary sentence for each main part of the report? (about 5–6 sentences)	Does this contain a summary sentence for each main part of the report and especially my major conclusions?	Does this contain the purpose of the report, the main issues/topics that have been identified, reasons why they are issues/topics and my conclusion?
Introduction	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stated the aim of the report? identified any limitations to my study? defined essential terms? given the reader background information that is necessary to explain the context? given a review of the literature? (This can be a separate section: 'Literature Review') referenced accurately? moved from the general to the detail? 	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stated the purpose of the report? identified the criteria that I used to evaluate the practice, situation? given my conclusion (if appropriate)? defined essential terms? identified limitations (if appropriate)? <p>What else do I think the reader will need to know (theoretical background, information about the situation, workplace)?</p>	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stated the purpose of the report? set the context or given background information about the topic? said how I limited my investigation (if appropriate)? defined basic terms? given a reference for my definition?
Body	<p>Method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have I given all the details on how the data was gathered? Is it in a logical order? If appropriate, have I justified my methodology? <p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have I only recorded the results in this section (and avoided interpreting)? Have I explained or recorded my findings clearly? If I have used tables, graphs or maps, have I introduced them? Do they have a title? <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is my information organised in a logical way? Are the heading titles appropriate? Have I selected the major findings? Have I picked up on knowledge mentioned in the review of literature and results in my discussion? If I have decided to separate Results and Discussion, is that clear? If I have included Results and Discussion together, have I guided the reader in how I have set this out (through headings)? Have I demonstrated how the literature supports my findings? Have I acknowledged any contrary evidence? Is it convincing? Have I included references to other writers' ideas? 	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> written my observations before I have attempted to interpret them? demonstrated how my findings relate to the theory? demonstrated how the theory and findings have implications for each other? given references to other writers' ideas? 	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organised the Body under headings related to the main issues/points? Does the first sentence under each heading make sense without the heading? Does the first sentence of each paragraph state the point I want to make? (See 'Developing ideas through paragraphs') Have I explained how the main points are relevant to the topic? Have I explained how these issues relate to a practical situation? Have I given references to other writers' ideas?
Conclusion	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified my major finding? mentioned other findings? shown their relevance in relation to the 'big picture'? listed my references on a separate page? 	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified my major conclusion? stated how effective the workplace or practice is? listed my references on a separate page? 	<p>Have I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified main issues/points? stated why they are the main issues/points? identified implications of these issues/points? listed my references on a separate page?

Case studies

Case studies are often used in assignment tasks in MBA units. Much activity in business is related to problem solving and decision making. Case studies are a useful and practical way of presenting business situations which require some kind of decision or resolution.

A case study used in an assignment task will be accompanied by a question or a set of questions which you will be required to answer. The form of your response will, to a considerable extent, be determined by what questions have been asked.

In dealing with a case study it is best to read it through quickly to get an overview of the situation. You may wish to mark aspects in the case study which seem to stand out as important. A closer reading will then enable you to isolate and begin to analyse the situation with a view to focusing on the key issues. You can then consider what needs to be done to resolve the problem or come to a decision.

In general, where a case study requires the solution to a problem or the making of decisions, the steps required involve:

- understanding the case as a whole
- identifying the key issues or problem
- proposing alternative solutions or outcomes
- looking at the implications of the alternatives
- choosing and justifying the most appropriate solution or outcome.

Further information about dealing with case studies may be found in *Appendix B: More about case studies*. In addition, the core unit MNG00720 Processes of Management contains, among its assignment readings, a section on case method.

Blogs, wikis, Elluminate and podcasts

Web 2.0

We live in the age of 'Web 2.0': the second generation of the Internet. In this era, the rapid evolution of new online tools and spaces has seen a fundamental change in how the Internet is perceived and used.

The first generation of the Internet was primarily understood as a space that enabled information to be accessed and retrieved. Now, with the rise of 'social networking' sites, such as Facebook and Flickr, and the growth of collaborative online knowledge bases such as Wikipedia, the Internet has evolved into a space for ongoing dialogue where individuals and groups create and share information and interact in diverse online communities.

For students, this environment enables a dynamic shift in the experience of learning, as students work, share ideas and refine knowledge in a collaborative space with peers and teaching staff, rather than producing work in isolation.

Blogs, wikis, Elluminate Live! and podcasts: What are they?

Blogs

- 'Blog' is an abbreviation of 'Web Log'. A blog is a much like a journal or diary (a log) that is published online.
- Blogs are usually written by **one author**, unlike wikis which are primarily intended for development by multiple contributors.
- Blog entries are displayed in reverse chronological order, showing the most recent entry first.
- Like wikis, blogs can contain images and audiovisual files in addition to text, hypertext and hyperlinks.

Wikis

- A wiki is a collection of linked web pages which can be accessed and edited by multiple users.
- Content within wikis is frequently updated, edited and expanded by contributions from **multiple authors**.

- An Internet connection and a web browser are the only tools that users need to modify or add to the wiki.
- Wikis function like online databases: anyone with access to the wiki can access information within it or add or amend content.
- A well-known example of a wiki is 'Wikipedia' (<http://wikipedia.org/>), a free, online encyclopedia available in multiple languages.
- Web pages within wikis are hyperlinked to each other, providing clear connections between related information as content expands over time.
- In addition to text, hypertext and hyperlinks, wikis may contain images, video or audio files.

Illuminate Live!

- Illuminate Live! is a software product currently used at SCU which enables audio-conferencing sessions to be conducted via the web.
- It enables real-time collaboration between multiple participants in different geographic locations, providing a 'virtual classroom' environment.
- Teaching staff and students can hold discussions, view PowerPoint slides and websites, use a virtual whiteboard or share applications in real-time.
- Participants who have a microphone or headset can ask verbal questions during the session. Text messages can be used by session participants who do not have this facility.
- Illuminate Live! enables teaching staff to conduct on-the-spot polls or provide 'breakout rooms' where small groups of students can work together.
- Illuminate Live! also contains tools for basic assessment items which can be completed by students during the live session.
- Illuminate Live! sessions can be recorded by teaching staff and made available for later playback.

Podcasts

- A podcast is a digital media file made available via **subscription** to users over the Internet.
- Subscription enables new podcasts from a nominated source to be automatically downloaded to the user's device for playback.
- Podcast files contain audio and may also include multimedia content (such as video or pdf files).
- Podcasts may be played on a computer or portable device (such as an MP3 player).

Advantages of online activities as study and assessment tools

Blogs and wikis

- **Ease of use and information storage**
Blog and wiki interfaces are simple and intuitive: you do not need to learn any complex technological skills to use them.

Blogs are a convenient way to store an individual body of work which expands over time, as blog entries are kept together online. Blog entries are dated; making it easy to see when an entry was made, and to access the most recent contribution.

The multiple, linked pages of a wiki enable information to be quickly and easily structured, developed, expanded, stored, retrieved, revised and enhanced by a group of users. Additions and amendments to a wiki become instantly visible, so everyone interacts with the latest version of information. This helps control iterations of work and simplifies the location of information assets.

- **Student-created content**

Blogs and wikis work to shift the learning 'agency' (Guzdial, cited in Mitchell 2006, p. 123) from teacher to student. As students develop and share ideas, they take control of the learning process, a process which is integral to the construction of knowledge.

(Mitchell, P 2006, 'Wikis in education', in J Klobas, *Wikis: Tools for Information Work and Collaboration*, Chandos Publishing, Oxford.)

- **Transparency**

Postgraduate students are required to develop and articulate critical positions relevant to their field of inquiry. The structure of wikis and blogs can be used to promote clear connections between information, making the construction of knowledge transparent.

As blog entries are automatically dated, information about the date and time each entry was submitted is recorded and visible to both student and teaching staff.

Wikis contain tools that enable different versions of information to be tracked; providing statistical information about which user modified, added or removed content, and the date on which this occurred. Such tools encourage transparency in group assessment tasks, as individual performance and contributions can be objectively evaluated.

- **Collaboration**

Blogging enables each student to express their opinions using an individual voice, and to hear the voices and opinions of others. Blogging is a social process, as individual positions or viewpoints are made available for feedback from others. This process is reciprocal, as each blog writer is also a reader: one who considers the viewpoints presented by peers and provides constructive feedback in response to them. As Johnson (cited in Walker 2005, p. 113) writes, 'relationships in this system are mutual ... All emergent systems are built out of this feedback, the two-way connections that foster higher learning'.

The ability to use wikis to collaborate with peers in a shared learning environment enables students to tap into 'collective intelligence' (Bonabeau 2009, p. 46) in order to generate and evaluate potential solutions to a problem or issue. As wikis are increasingly harnessed by organisations for operational and strategic endeavours, the ability to work in a distributed, networked environment is an essential skill for management students to develop.

Diverse ideas contributed by multiple collaborators within a wiki expand individual student understandings while constructing and refining a shared body of knowledge. As wikis facilitate input by multiple authors, a range of critical positions can be expressed and tested by diverse student contributors. Such contributions are subject to a process of peer review which encourages open, shared learning experiences and academic rigor.

Wikis are especially useful for distance education students as they can facilitate regular interactions with peers and teaching staff. This helps address feelings of isolation experienced by students who have limited opportunities for face-to-face contact with members of their university community.

(Walker, J 2005, 'Weblogs: Learning in public', *On the Horizon*, vol. 13, no. 2, viewed online from Proquest.)

(Bonabeau, E 2009, 'Decisions 2.0: The Power of Collective Intelligence', *MIT Sloan Management Review*, winter, vol. 50, no. 2, viewed online from Proquest.)

- **Skills development**

Blogs and wikis require a 'hands-on' approach. Each student is expected to make a contribution appropriate to the specific purpose of the task (e.g. sharing resources and ideas, expressing a critical position). These contributions are subject to peer scrutiny, which encourages development of skills in critical thinking, information analysis and in giving and receiving constructive feedback.

As wikis enable multiple viewpoints and positions to be shared, differences of opinion may occur between users. Thus, wiki authors may need to make compromises in order to achieve group consensus. This enables students to practice skills in negotiation and effective communication in a constructive learning environment.

- **Ongoing evaluation of student learning**

As a blog or wiki expands and develops over the study period, it serves as a 'snapshot' of the evolution of student learning.

This 'snapshot' assists teaching staff to identify and address areas which students find challenging. Teaching staff may clarify or enhance connections within a wiki being constructed by a student group, while the comment facility for blog entries can be used to provide ongoing feedback for individual students from teaching staff throughout the study period.

Thus, student experiences which are articulated in blogs and wikis can serve to inform the development of the course and to encourage a responsive, flexible and dynamic learning environment to evolve over the study period.

In order to develop this environment, teaching staff may set up a blog or wiki to provide new stimulus materials to students as the study period progresses. For example, a blog or wiki which contains links to online newspaper articles may be created; highlighting these for student reading and discussion. Student responses to such materials are communicated through the blog's comment facility or contributions to the wiki. When used in this way, blogs and wikis enable topical, 'real world' examples relevant to the field of study to be shared, discussed and built upon among a community of learners.

In addition, ongoing access to this community of learners provides valuable support for students, as the alternative peer viewpoints or ways of

considering information expressed in blogs and wikis can lead to enriched understanding of the topic under study. The online environment in which blogs and wikis are situated enables comments and input to be gathered from all members of a study group, regardless of geographic location, to facilitate shared learning and communication with peers.

Illuminate Live!

- **Multiple study modes**

Illuminate Live! enables students from diverse geographic locations to participate in interactive learning sessions with teaching staff and peers.

For external students, Illuminate Live! can provide access to a community of learners which enriches the study experience and helps to overcome feelings of isolation. Internal students may also participate in sessions to expand their on-campus learning activities. In addition, courses offered in mixed modes can use Illuminate Live! to provide equity in study opportunities for all students, regardless of geographic location or study mode.

- **Information capture and review**

Illuminate Live! sessions can be recorded by teaching staff and made available for later playback by students. This enables each recorded session to be reviewed, or accessed by students unable to attend a live session. Recorded sessions enable each student to view or revise learning resources at times convenient to their individual study schedule.

- **Presentations and tutorials**

As presentation tools (such as Microsoft PowerPoint slides) can be used in Illuminate Live! sessions, both students and teaching staff can make audiovisual presentations to the class.

This allows off-campus students to participate in a wider range of assessment and study tasks. To illustrate, student presentations conducted in Illuminate Live! enable real-time feedback and questions from teaching staff and peers. This helps students to gain experience and confidence in conducting a live presentation in an interactive online environment.

- **Postgraduate supervision**

Illuminate Live! may be used to facilitate one-on-one consultations and meetings between supervisors and postgraduate students. The audiovisual capabilities of Illuminate Live! can help make such interactions more efficient than other communication forms, such as telephone or email.

- **Training**

Illuminate Live! is often used by teaching staff to conduct training sessions with students. As an example, a workshop session may be held to demonstrate how to use the various components of a MySCU site. In this scenario, the trainer would open the MySCU site within Illuminate Live! to explore various pages and tools within it while students watch, listen and ask questions.

For students and teaching staff, the ability to view dynamic interactions between user and online content in real-time enables a deeper level of immediate instruction. Recording such sessions allows training materials to be captured for students who are unable to attend the scheduled session or for later review by session participants.

Podcasts

- **Flexibility**

The ability to subscribe to podcasts helps students effectively schedule their study time to accommodate individual work, travel and family needs. As podcasts are automatically downloaded, students do not need to be available at scheduled times to obtain study resources. In addition, students can listen to podcasts at the time and place most convenient to their personal study schedule.

- **Diversity and enriched study material content**

Podcasts provide diversity in the format of study materials available to students. Some podcasts are used to provide audio and/or multimedia materials as an alternative to traditional written study materials, such as a Study Guide.

Podcasts may also be used to provide an enhanced range of study materials. They may be used in conjunction with traditional materials (such as a Study Guide) to provide in-depth examples of material under study. To illustrate, a podcast of a presentation by a guest lecturer may be provided to increase the diversity and depth of information available to students.

For off-campus students, access to podcast recordings of lectures delivered to on-campus students encourages equity in learning opportunities.

- **Portability**

As podcasts can be played back via a mobile device (such as an MP3 player), students do not need access to a computer in order to play the downloaded files. This portability is a considerable advantage for students who need to plan their study around the requirements of frequent travel.

- **Student control of study resources**

Podcast playback is controlled by each user, enabling students to interact with files according to their individual learning needs. As an example, some students find that taking notes while listening to a podcast assists in their comprehension and retention of the material presented. The ability to pause or stop the podcast while taking notes, or re-play a selected content section enables greater individual student control of study resources and effective use of study time.

- **Training**

Podcasts are often used by teaching staff to narrate practical skills and transfer technical knowledge about specialist tasks. Such podcasts are especially useful for external students, who may not be able to attend live demonstrations or workshops or for students undertaking revision activities.

Online study and assignment tasks using blogs

Blogs are used for a range of individual tasks and to achieve a variety of learning outcomes. Students will normally be provided with information about the scope and purpose of the blog in addition to guidelines or requirements concerning the length, frequency and content of entries.

Blogs can be set up by teaching staff within each unit's MySCU site. Blogs developed within MySCU sites can only be accessed by students enrolled in that

unit and the staff responsible for teaching it. In addition, blogs within MySCU sites can be set by teaching staff to be private (only accessible by the student author of the blog and the unit's teaching staff) or available for comment by other students enrolled in the unit.

Teaching staff may also set restrictions upon who may access a blog within the unit, according to individual task needs. For example, small teams of students working on a collaborative assessment task may be the only individuals who (along with teaching staff) can access and comment upon blogs belonging to members of that team.

Sample uses of blogs for study and assignment tasks include:

- reflective journals
- recording individual progress in professional development tasks
- submitting responses to discussion/assessment questions
- maintaining a record of learning experiences and progress throughout the study period
- creating an electronic portfolio of student work.

Beginning to blog

Some students find it difficult to begin blogging as the writing tone and style of this format is usually quite different to that of conventional assessment tasks, such as essays.

If you are required to keep a blog, using the first person ('I') in your entries is usually appropriate. It may take time to become comfortable writing in this way, as most academic writing uses the more objective third person form.

It is important to remember that blogs are social: they enable and encourage your individual ideas and thoughts to be shared and read by others.

Like all skills, good blog writing requires time and practice to develop. If possible, set aside a short time every day for this task.

You may like to write your blog entries using a word processing program (such as Microsoft Word) before posting it online. This means that you do not need to be connected to the Internet while you are developing and refining your blog entry.

Remember to take advantage of the feedback that your teaching staff and/or peers provide via comments on your blog. This feedback will help you become accustomed to receiving constructive criticism. Often, such feedback will help you to become more aware of your communicative strengths as well as the areas that you need to develop.

In return, read the blogs of other students in your course, and provide constructive feedback where possible. This reciprocity helps to generate a sense of community in your peer group during the study period and encourages a constructive environment in which all participants can share ideas and develop skills.

Tips for approaching blogs

- Make note of any technical parameters associated with the task (e.g. required number of entries, time and or date/s due, word length).
- Read the task details thoroughly to determine the purpose of the blog (e.g. is it a reflective journal? Is it a space in which to record your response to tasks or questions set throughout the study period?)
- Once you know the purpose of the blog, you will be able to make an informed decision about the appropriate writing style. To illustrate, a reflective journal is suited to the first person ('I'), but a blog which serves as a space to record responses to set discussion questions which require analysis may be better suited to the more objective third person style.
- In addition, the purpose of the blog will affect how you structure your blog entries. Responses to discussion questions may require a short introduction and summary, while reflective journal entries usually do not.
- Ensure you are aware of your audience: will your blog be read by other students or only by your unit's teaching staff?

Stages of blog writing

1. Planning

Read the instructions or guidelines to determine exactly what is required. For example:

- Are you being asked to write in response to a specific text (e.g. a set reading)?
- Is there a set question you need to address? If so, identify the direction words within the question.
- Are you required to construct an individual response to a particular topic or issue?
- Are you being asked to reflect on your learning experiences over a specific period of time?
- Does the task require you to conduct independent research?

Once you have identified the core requirements, allow time to undertake the required tasks (such as reading and research). Allowing appropriate time to work through these tasks is vital to ensuring that you have the background knowledge necessary to make an informed, appropriate and interesting blog entry.

While undertaking these tasks, make note of any material that you find thought provoking or challenging: this may present an interesting way for you to begin your response. In addition, make a note of ideas or material that especially engages you: these can be valuable sources of inspiration for writing reflective journal/blog entries.

2. Drafting

The content of your blog entry will be guided by the requirements of the task. For example, if you are required to respond to a set question, ensure that you have

noted all the direction words (such as 'analyse' or 'discuss') that it contains. This will help to direct and shape the content in your response.

If you are writing a reflective journal entry, review any set study materials or activities for the week and also reflect upon your learning experiences. What has inspired or challenged you? What have you found especially thought provoking? What areas are you struggling with? What most engages your interest? What research have you undertaken? Is there a quotation or idea that you wish to discuss? What knowledge or critical positions are you developing or challenging?

Begin with a draft of the main points you wish to make. Check your draft against the requirements of the task. If you are responding to a set question, make sure that you have addressed it comprehensively.

3. Writing

Work through the draft and develop your ideas. Explore the threads and links within your work and draw these relationships out. Remember to reference all sources of information as you work.

If you are responding to a set question, check that your response fulfils the requirements of direction words (e.g. analyse, discuss) within it.

Alternatively, if you are required to write a reflective journal entry, ensure that you have linked your response effectively to any background, study or research materials that have been set in relation to the task.

Review your work against the marking criteria for the task to evaluate how comprehensively you have met these requirements.

4. Structure

Successful online writing requires a different structure to that used in other written assessment tasks, such as academic essays.

Good blog entries are characterised by immediacy, freshness and succinctness. Long introductions, large paragraphs of text and the provision of detailed background information are not appropriate. Consider your blog entry as a showcase: it should contain only the very best of **your** work.

Experienced blog readers expect thought-provoking entries that are engaging and relevant. When writing your blog entry, begin your post with a compelling opening sentence to capture the reader's interest. Follow with short, well-structured paragraphs. Choose a succinct, yet descriptive headline for your blog entry.

5. Editing

Examine your writing critically: is the meaning of every sentence clear? Do sentences build upon each other? Revise and edit your work to promote clarity. Remember that succinctness is a benefit for readers of your work.

If your entry is too long, determine which sections contain your critical ideas and which sections contain details. Reducing the amount of supplementary or supporting detail will help reduce word length and foreground your key points.

Remember to take advantage of the online environment. Use hyperlinks and/or digital images to provide the reader with related detail and alternative sources of information as appropriate.

Check your work for spelling, grammatical and typographical errors.

6. Sharing

Submit your post. Blogging is social, so read and reflect upon peer and teaching staff feedback on your work. In return, read the work of other students and provide comments as appropriate. Be an active member of your learning community.

Further resources

- *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts Staff and Student Guide* (pdf)

Available on the Graduate College of Management website under 'New and current students': <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm>

Online study and assignment tasks using wikis

Each wiki is unique, and has a particular scope and purpose. This is informed by the motivation for the wiki (why it is being used) and the learning outcomes intended to result from it. Teaching staff will normally provide a summary of each wiki's scope and purpose to assist students in structuring and developing the wiki.

Wikis can be set up by teaching staff within each unit's MySCU site. Wikis developed within MySCU sites are not accessible by the general public: they can only be accessed by SCU students enrolled in the unit and the academic staff responsible for teaching it.

Sample uses of wikis for study and assignment tasks include:

- generating and evaluating solutions to a case presented for group analysis
- enabling collaborative work on a group assessment item
- creating an electronic portfolio of student work
- project management
- building a collaborative knowledge repository.

Tips for good wiki writing

(Adapted from: Niles, R 2008, 'How to Write for the Web', viewed 11 April 2009, [http://www.ojr.org/ojr/wiki/writing/.](http://www.ojr.org/ojr/wiki/writing/))

- Wikis are collaborative: they are written by multiple authors. It is therefore not usually appropriate to use a first person ('I') writing style.
- Take advantage of the medium. Each topic should have its own page within the wiki. Use hyperlinks and hypertext to create connections between related pages and sections of information within the wiki. Use images as appropriate to expand the depth of material and to provide alternative forms of information for the reader (ensure that you have permission to use the image and that author/source is correctly attributed).
- Communicate clearly and succinctly. Use direct language. Avoid long preambles or unnecessary qualifying statements.
- Use short paragraphs. Reading on screen is different to reading printed material. Short paragraphs (approx. 6 lines of text) increase the readability of your material. Include white space between paragraphs: this gives the reader's eyes a chance to rest between blocks of text.
- Aim for continuity in writing style and tone: when editing an article, try to 'match' the style of your amendments to the existing material.
- Format your text to enhance readability. Use a sans serif typeface (such as Arial) and different sized text to distinguish between headings, subheadings and paragraphs. This helps to break up content for the reader while providing a cohesive structure and appearance for wiki pages. Use italic and bold type to draw attention to key words. Do not type words in uppercase, and avoid pale text on light-coloured backgrounds: this will make your work very difficult to read.
- Reference all sources of information you have used, providing hyperlinks to sources where possible. In addition to ensuring that you do not plagiarise material, referencing your sources increases the authority of the material you present. By providing references, you also enable the reader to locate relevant sources of background or detailed information; ensuring that you do not have to replicate or summarise this material within the wiki.
- Check your work for spelling, grammar and typographical errors, as these will communicate poorly about the quality of your work. Errors distract the reader's attention from the content of your wiki.

Further resources

- *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts Staff and Student Guide* (pdf)
- Student Wiki Guides (zip)

Available on the Graduate College of Management website under 'New and Current Students': <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm>

Online study and assignment tasks using Elluminate Live!

Elluminate Live! may be used throughout the study period to provide scheduled 'virtual classroom' sessions. These sessions may be used to present a lecture or to facilitate tutorial style interactions between students and teaching staff.

Alternatively, a small number of Elluminate Live! sessions may be scheduled during the study period for training or to facilitate student presentations for assessment.

If Elluminate Live! is used for a unit in which you are enrolled, you will be notified of the time and date for scheduled sessions. Teaching staff may provide you with a link to join the scheduled session via email or through posting an announcement within the unit's MySCU site. Alternatively, you may be directed to access the session from within your MySCU site.

Getting started

Details about system and software requirements for Elluminate Live!, along with answers to frequently asked questions and a comprehensive range of explanatory and training materials are available from <http://www.scu.edu.au/illuminate>. Follow the set-up instructions provided via this link **prior** to joining your Elluminate Live! session.

Tips for conducting Elluminate Live! presentations

- **Environmental preparation:** Ensure that you have participated in Elluminate Live! sessions prior to the date of your presentation. This will enable you to become acquainted with Elluminate Live! tools and to gain valuable experience in using them. Participation in live sessions will help you gain confidence in interacting with your peers and teaching staff in an online environment.
- **Materials and content preparation:** To conduct an effective presentation, you will need to prepare both visual materials (e.g. Microsoft PowerPoint slides) and the content of your oral presentation. It is important to note that these are separate, yet interrelated parts of your presentation.
- **Visual materials** should enhance, not reproduce, the oral component of your presentation. Do not include large blocks of text in your slides, as the audience will read these rather than listen to you speak. Limit written content in slides to key words and short bullet points. Aim for simplicity and consistency: restrict the use of typefaces and use high-contrast colour combinations (e.g. dark text on a light background). Provide variety for the audience by using photographs, diagrams or figures to illustrate and enhance your spoken content. Be highly selective about the use of clip-art, transitions and sound effects: these can distract the audience from the key message of your presentation.

Thorough preparation of the **oral content** of your presentation is vital, as this provides the 'core' of your material. Spoken and written language is different: spoken language is less formal and more succinct than written

language. Do not prepare material to 'read' to your audience, instead, prepare a series of main- and sub-points to 'speak to'. When preparing the oral content of your presentation, think of ways to engage the audience and stimulate their interest. You may like to pose questions, which are subsequently explored and answered during the presentation. Structure your points so that they follow a logical sequence and build upon information.

- **Practise** your presentation, incorporating both spoken and visual components. Time yourself to ensure your presentation achieves the required length and make adjustments as necessary. Practice is critical to becoming confident with your material and ensuring that you deliver it in a clear voice with a measured speaking pace.
- **Putting it all together online:** Prior to your presentation date, ensure that you practise delivering your material in the Elluminate Live! environment. Your teaching staff should make an Elluminate Live! practice room (in which you will have moderator access) available for this purpose. This will enable you to load your slides and practise delivering your presentation. You may also wish to record your presentation for review. Information about loading PowerPoint slides in Elluminate Live!, along with a comprehensive range of further resources, is available from the 'support' section of the Elluminate Live! website: <http://www.illuminate.com/support/index.jsp>
- **Present:** On the day of your presentation, ensure you have ready access to all files and materials you will need. Confirm that all devices (such as your microphone) are functioning. Supply teaching staff with a copy of your PowerPoint slides and/or speakers notes in advance, if required to do so. When your presentation begins, introduce yourself and advise the audience if you will take questions throughout the presentation, or if you have allocated time at its conclusion for discussion and questions. Take advantage of opportunities for real-time collaboration with your staff and peers: questions and comments from your audience are to be encouraged. Be open to staff and peer comments: constructive criticism will help you to further develop your presentation skills.

Online study using podcasts

If podcasts are available for a unit in which you are enrolled, a subscription link will be made available to them within your MySCU site. Once you subscribe to this service, new podcasts for your courses will be automatically downloaded, based on the parameters you select.

Further resources

- *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts Staff and Student Guide* (pdf)

Available on the Graduate College of Management website under 'New and Current Students': <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm>

An external source of educational podcasts is **iTunes U**. Information about iTunes U can be obtained from: <http://www.apple.com/education/guidedtours/itunesu.html>

Referencing and citations

The functions of references and citations

Referencing is the convention used to acknowledge the use of someone else's ideas. Referencing forms vary and you will need to read the guide given in *Appendix D: More about referencing* of this booklet for details on the form of referencing that is expected of you. Business study usually uses a form of 'in-text' referencing – that is, the reference is placed within the assignment, not as a footnote at the bottom of the page. This can be done in two different ways:

- The author's name is included as part of the sentence. The effect is to align the knowledge with the source of that knowledge. For example, *McCarthy and Perreault (1987, p. 745) define positioning as 'showing where proposed and/or present brands are located in a market, as perceived by consumers'*
- The author's name is included in parentheses at the end of the sentence. The effect is to give a stronger focus on the knowledge with the source almost as an afterthought. For example, *Positioning is defined as 'showing where proposed and/or present brands are located in a market, as perceived by consumers' (McCarthy & Perreault 1987, p. 745).*



Note

If the second form is used predominantly in the assignment, a reporting tone will be built. If your intention is to discuss and/or to take a stance, then the use of the author's name in the sentence is the style that will help you achieve this.

Why do we reference?

Referencing is also called 'citing' or giving citations. Most simply, you will reference/cite in order to:

- acknowledge someone else's ideas and maybe their words
- support the position that you are presenting or the knowledge claims that you are making
- show the reader that you know the literature in your field of study
- call upon the reader's support (in a subtle way) by using references that are considered acceptable to the community of experts in your field of study.

However, citations can also help in many more subtle ways. Some are used to:

- demonstrate that current theories have been employed
- demonstrate your allegiance to a particular theoretical perspective
- act as a 'springboard' to other ideas you want to introduce
- provide a benchmark for comparisons
- create a particular tone of writing (i.e. report or argument).

What can referencing do for you?

Referencing does more for you than show that you are being honest through the acknowledgement of sources. The way you use references can give several subtle messages to the reader and help you to create different tones and styles of writing. Read the example below and see if you can identify some of the subtle uses of referencing.



Example 6: Use of references

McCarthy and Perreault (1987, p. 745) define positioning as showing where proposed and/or present brands are located in a market, as perceived by consumers. Morrison (1989, p. 187) claims that there are four essential criteria for effective positioning. They are information on the needs of the customers in the target market, a knowledge of the organisation's competitive strengths and weaknesses, a familiarity with competitors' strengths and weaknesses and information on how customers perceive the organisation relative to competitors. While the manager of the organisation in this case study professes to know the needs of his target markets, he is unable to decide on an active positioning strategy because market analysis has not been conducted. Thus, the objective for the manager is to ensure that he realises that the positioning of his organisation depends upon customers' perceptions of how well the organisation meets their needs and wants (Blomstrom 1983, p. 200).

Some uses of referencing in the example are:

- By placing the authors McCarthy and Perreault in the dominant first position of the first sentence, the writer is placing emphasis on the source of the knowledge.
- The choice of these specific authors is demonstrating knowledge of particular areas of the literature, alignment with particular perspectives.
- The choice of the verb 'define' very clearly tells the reader that one of the purposes in selecting these authors is to use their definition. The writer is also subtly aligning themselves with this definition.
- Morrison's criteria are used as a benchmark to evaluate/examine the effectiveness of the organisation in the case study.

- The placing of the authors' names within the first two sentences is beginning to create the effect of listing. The writer manages to avoid this tone by not doing the same thing in the third sentence.
- The final sentence is not only a conclusion but the writer gives the message that the knowledge being presented (in the form of the conclusion) is more important than where it comes from.
- The use of a reference in this last sentence demonstrates that the writer is aware of the literature and has used it to strengthen the claim being made.



Example 7: How can the focus and stance be changed?

Positioning is defined by McCarthy and Perreault (1987, p. 745) as showing where proposed and/or present brands are located in a market, as perceived by consumers. Morrison (1989, p. 187) identifies four essential criteria for effective positioning.

- The concept, 'positioning', the topic of the paragraph, now has more prominence.
- Changing *Morrison claims* to *Morrison identifies* takes away some attitude and the possible implication that there is some doubt about the criteria (he is only claiming).

These changes make a difference to the focus of the paragraph and the stance that can be developed.

There's more to a citation than 'says' or 'states'

The choice of reporting verb is a subtle way to add attitude, if that is your purpose. In the next example, consider the difference in tone created by choosing different verbs.



Example 8

Morrison (1989, p. 187) claims [states, argues, says, reports] that there are four essential criteria for effective positioning.

Get the verbs to work for you.

Porter states, confirms, suggests, argues, concludes, attributes, questions, says, believes, expects ...

Can you add more?



Note

Verbs with attitude are more frequently used in essays than in reports.

To paraphrase or quote?

You probably noticed that there are no quotes (direct use of an author's own words) in the example above. The writer has paraphrased, that is written the ideas into her own words. However, references are still given to the **idea** that was used. Paraphrasing is more highly valued in scholarly academic writing. It helps you to create more 'smooth' writing in one style (yours) rather than having a piece of writing that does not read as well because it contains different styles of writing.

Don't forget to keep a record of:

- the bibliographical details of a document such as author, title, publisher, place of publication and date of publication of any additional materials that you use
- page numbers to use when you are using direct quotes.

Constructing a reference list

Always refer to the guidelines provided in *Appendix D: More about referencing* for details on referencing. Here are some questions to ask yourself before you submit an assignment.

- For essays, reports and case studies: is your Reference List on a separate page at the end of the document?
- For blog or wiki entries: have references been listed at the bottom of the page in which the citation appears?
- Have you listed your sources in alphabetical order by author surname or sponsoring body?
- Have you only listed the material (books/journal articles) you have read and not those referred to within the material you have read? (If you include everything you have read, you have constructed a bibliography.)
- Have you been consistent with use of typography and punctuation (e.g. italics, full stops and commas etc.)?
- Have you used enough references so that you are able to give a variety of ideas and show that you have an informed opinion? For a 3000-word essay, an **absolute minimum** is 5–6 references, preferably more.

Checklist and summary

Assignment writing checklist

- Has a set format been specified for the task (e.g. report, essay, blog entry)? If so, have you used this format? If no set format has been specified, have you chosen an appropriate structure for the purpose of the assignment task?
- Have you read the Marking Criteria for this assignment and noted what this tells you about the marker's expectations?
- Have you had to modify any of the suggested structures to suit your purpose? Can you explain why you have modified it? (If so, then it is probably appropriate.)
- Have you unintentionally used the second person ('you', 'we', 'us')? This will remove the objective 'business' style used for case studies and reports.
- If you have used the first person ('I'), is this appropriate (e.g. used in a reflective journal/blog entry)? Third person is the usual form for essays, case studies, reports and wiki entries.
- Which tone and style of writing have you used? In reports, is there a balance of description/reporting and discussion? In the essay is there more focus on discussion rather than reporting?
- Have you paraphrased more than you have quoted (aim to do this)?
- If your assignment is too long, go back to the 'big picture' and ask yourself: *What are the main ideas? What is the detail?* These questions will help you to identify irrelevant or extra long sections.
- If you're not sure if the information is relevant, ask yourself: *How does this information help me to answer the question, or support my position?*
- If appropriate, have you linked the theoretical ideas to practical situations to explain the relevance of the theory?
- Have you included a reference for all evidence and information you have cited?
- If appropriate, have you included a comment that indicates an alternative view? Underline it.
- Do paragraphs that critique, evaluate, justify and discuss conclude with a comment that answers the question '*so, why have I written this?*'

Summary

Essays, case studies and reports: What makes a good assignment?

- Selecting a structure that is appropriate for the writing purpose – e.g. essay or report.
- Laying the ‘groundwork’ at the beginning of the assignment so that the context, boundaries and focus of the assignment are clear to the reader.
- Clarifying, or defining, terms so that your reader understands where you are ‘coming from’. Remember, your reader might have a different perspective.
- Considering your reader. Use paragraph structure to develop ideas. Add details, use examples, support your statements by using the literature.
- Knowing your role as a writer. It is to convince the reader that you know what you are writing about. Don’t assume that your reader will interpret what you mean.
- Demonstrating the relevance of the theory and research to practical situations.
- Identifying relationships between the knowledge that you are examining.
- Having a combination of concrete ideas (usually associated with descriptions and examples of workplace activities) and abstract issues. These are often extrapolated from the concrete. For example, a description of tension between staff in a workplace is the practical, concrete example, but it is also a demonstration of the abstract concept of ‘conflict’.
- Moving beyond simple descriptions to examine the knowledge through the use of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, when appropriate.
- Using the beginning of sentences and paragraphs to state the point or theme of the sentence or paragraph.
- Using your conclusion to give your ‘answer’.

Blogs and wikis: What makes a good assignment?

- **Remembering the ‘big picture’:** Blogs and wikis develop over time. Identify how your contribution helps achieve the overall aims of the blog or wiki as a body of work. This will help you to write effectively.
- **Taking advantage of the medium:** Use hypertext, hyperlinks and/or digital media to enhance your work and provide access to background or expanded materials for the reader.
- **Foregrounding relationships between information:** Use hypertext and hyperlinks to make associations between related information obvious to the reader.
- **Structuring your work effectively:** Use headings and subheadings where appropriate to break down sections of content. Use short paragraphs of approximately six lines of text. For wikis, add pages for new content sections.

- **Choosing the right voice:** Blogs are normally written by individuals, so first person style ('I') is usually appropriate for blog entries, depending upon the requirements of the task. Conversely, wikis are written by multiple collaborators, so a more objective third person style is conventional.
- **Writing to suit the requirements of the task:** If writing a reflective journal entry for your blog, put forward **your** ideas. If contributing to a wiki, write to explain and inform, supporting your material with facts and evidence as appropriate.
- **Being clear and concise:** Use direct language. Blogs and wikis are not the place for long preambles.
- **Referencing your sources:** Referencing is central to your academic integrity. In addition, references lend weight to the authority of your work. If the sources of information you have used are available online, provide a link to them for the reader.

Part F

Appendices

Developing ideas through paragraphs

One of the most useful techniques that you can use to improve your writing is a systematic use of paragraphs. Paragraphs are groups of sentences related to a particular topic. This topic is usually stated in a sentence that is commonly called a 'topic sentence'. The topic sentence can be anywhere in the paragraph, but the location that has the most impact is the first position in the paragraph. Paragraph structure will vary according to your writing purpose.

Paragraphs for discussions

For paragraphs in which you want to use the higher order skills (e.g. argue, justify or explain) the structure is:

- topic sentence
- developing sentences
- concluding sentence.

You can ask yourself the following questions to develop the ideas:

- What is the point I want to make? (1 sentence)
- What do I mean by this? How? Why? (3–4 sentences)
- So what? Why have I said this? (1 sentence)

Another feature about paragraphs that use the higher order skills is the way that ideas are developed. Generally, you will find that there is a strong pattern of linking ideas from the end of one sentence through to the beginning of the next. Consider the following example.



Example 9: Linking sentences in discussions

The manager in the study displays characteristics of a wide variety of roles within the **Competing Values Framework**. However, of the **four models** discussed in the text, the Open Systems model, comprising the **Innovator and Broker** roles, is utilised more than other roles. An **innovator** is described by Quinn et al. (1996, p. 19) as someone who facilitates adjustment and change and a **broker** as being concerned with image and integrity. The organisation in this study is part of a rapidly changing environment that must **respond quickly and effectively to consumer demands and market trends**. **This** is possibly why the manager in this

study displays characteristics of an innovator, promptly responding to current consumer demands, reacting to flagging markets and visualising future trends.

In the above paragraph, the writer's purpose is to discuss how the manager's style of management fits with the models. The knowledge is built by mentioning a point later in a sentence and then picking up on that point, but at the same time moving further with the knowledge, at the beginning of the next sentence. The links from the end of one sentence to the next have been bolded. An example is in the first sentence, where the writer introduces the topic of a particular framework and then picks up on one model within this framework in the next sentence. In sentence 2, the writer introduces the roles of 'innovator' and 'broker' as a mini summary, and then deals with each of these concepts separately in the following sentence. Thus, one sentence leads into the next and knowledge is built.

(See also Example 2 in *Part B* where, for example, the topic of *competencies* is picked up in the second sentence, and then *competitive advantage of organisations* is picked up as *competitiveness* in sentences 2 and 3.)

You can use this knowledge about how ideas are developed in two ways:

- To develop your ideas in paragraphs. It's also a good way to test yourself. If you cannot develop an idea into a paragraph, then perhaps you need to read more.
- To check whether you have drifted off the topic stated in the topic sentence. Maybe you need to begin a new paragraph with a new topic.



Note

There is no such thing as a good one or two sentence paragraph. You will do yourself a disservice because you cannot explain, interpret, justify, argue (etc.) in less than four sentences.

Paragraphs for descriptions

For reporting or describing, the questions you ask yourself will be slightly different. They become:

- What is the topic or point that I want to deal with?
- What do I want to write about this? Who? When? Where? What?
- So what? (This concluding sentence is not always used in a report.)

In reports the linking between sentences is usually different. The linking will stay with the idea that you have in the topic sentence and everything you write will link back to it. See the example below where the topic (**Business X**) is bolded. Notice that the topic of the paragraph is written at the beginning of each sentence, and the writer uses a variety of terms to refer to the business.



Example 10: Linking sentences in descriptions

Business X is a nineteen-room resort and conference centre that has been operating for eighteen months. **The organisation** promotes itself as being unique in that it offers international standards in a five-star facility at a reasonable rate. Hence, **the organisation** has segmented the market into middle and upper income earners. **Business X** is privately owned by a European company ...

When checking your work, focus on the structure – overall structure and then paragraph structure. Ensure that the points you want to make are not lost within the paragraph, or not made at all! The next section summarises other ideas that contribute to a good assignment.

More about case studies

Guide to case analysis

(Adapted from Cravens, DW & Lamb, CW 1983, *Strategic Marketing Cases and Applications*, Irwin, Homewood, Illinois.)

Introduction

A case is a factual description of a situation involving a managerial problem or issue that requires a decision. Most cases describe a variety of conditions and circumstances facing an organisation at a particular point in time. This description often includes information regarding the organisation's goals and objectives, its financial condition, the attitudes and beliefs of managers and employees, market conditions, competitors' activities, various environmental forces that impact upon decision making, and the organisation's present, and sometimes its proposed, strategy. Your responsibility is to carefully sift through the information provided in order to identify the opportunity, problem, or decision facing the organisation; to carefully identify and evaluate an alternative course of action; and to propose a solution or decision.

Why cases?

The method differs substantially from alternative teaching/learning approaches such as lecture and discussion. Lecture and discussion-oriented classes provide students with information about concepts, practices and theories. Cases, on the other hand, give students an opportunity to use concepts, practices, and theories. The primary objective of a case is to provide a hands-on opportunity to apply what you have learned in your coursework.

Cases assist in bridging the gap between classroom learning and the so-called real world of management. They provide us with an opportunity to develop, sharpen, and test our analytical skills at:

- assessing situations
- sorting out and organising key information
- asking the right questions
- defining opportunities and problems
- interpreting data
- evaluating the results of past strategies

- developing and defending new strategies
- interacting with other managers
- making decisions under conditions of uncertainty
- critically evaluating the work of others
- responding to criticism.

The case method of instruction

The case method of instruction is different from the lecture/discussion method that you have grown accustomed to since you began your formal education. It is only natural that you are bit anxious and apprehensive about it. The methods of study and class preparation are different, your role and responsibilities are different, and the 'right' answers are much less certain. The case method is neither better nor worse than alternative methods; it's just different.

The case method is participative. You will be expected to take a more active role in learning than you have taken in the past. The case method is based on a philosophy of learning by doing as opposed to learning by listening and absorbing information. Case analysis is an applied skill. As such, it is something that you learn as opposed to something that someone teaches you. The more you practise, the more proficient you will become. The benefit that you receive from case analysis is directly proportional to what you put into it.

Your responsibilities

Your responsibilities as a case analyst include active participation, interaction, critical evaluation, and effective communication.

Active participation

We have already noted that the case method is participative. It requires a maximum of individual participation in class discussion. Effective participation requires thorough preparation. This entails more than casually reading each case before class. The guidelines in the following section will assist you in preparing cases analyses. Also, keep in mind that there is a difference between contributing to a class discussion and just talking.

Interaction

Interaction among students plays an important role in the case method of instruction. Effective learning results from individual preparation and thinking combined with group discussion. Whether you are assigned to work independently or in groups or teams, most instructors encourage students to discuss cases with other students. This, of course, is common practice among managers facing important business decisions. Case discussions, in and out of class, are beneficial because they provide immediate feedback regarding individual perspectives and possible solutions. Other important benefits of case discussions are the synergism and new insights produced by group brainstorming and discussion.

Critical evaluation

One of the most difficult responsibilities of student case analysts is learning to critique their peers and to accept criticism from them. Typically students are reluctant to question or challenge their classmates or to suggest alternatives to the perspectives proposed by their classmates. Students find this difficult because they are generally inexperienced at performing these functions in the classroom. Likewise, students are not accustomed to being challenged by their peers in the classroom. However, the case method of instruction is most effective when all parties engage in an open exchange of ideas. Good cases do not have one clear-cut superior solution. Don't be shy about expressing and defending your views.

Effective communication

Each of the three responsibilities discussed above requires effective communication. It is important that you organise your thoughts before speaking out. You will develop and refine your communication skills by making class presentations, participating in case discussions, and writing case analyses. Furthermore, the focus of the case method is developing and sharpening quantitative and qualitative analytical skills. Your analytical skills will improve as you organise information, diagnose problems, identify and evaluate alternatives, and develop solutions and action plans.

An approach to case analysis

There is no one best way to analyse a case. Most people develop their own method after gaining some experience. As with studying, everybody does it a little bit differently. The following suggestions are intended to give you some ideas regarding how others approach cases. Try these suggestions, and make your own adjustments.

Begin by reading each case quickly. The purpose of the first reading should be to familiarise yourself with the organisation, the problem or decision to be made, and the types and amount of data provided and in general to get a feel for the case. Your second reading of the case should be more careful and thorough. Many people find it helpful to underline, highlight, and make notes about symptoms, potential problems and issues, key facts, and other important information.

Now you should be in a position to investigate any tabular and numerical data included in the case. Ask yourself what each figure, table, or chart means; how it was derived; whether or not it is relevant; and whether further computations would be helpful. If calculations, comparisons, or consolidations of numerical data appear useful, take the necessary action at this time.

A large part of what you will learn from case analysis is how to define, structure, and analyse opportunities and problems. The following information is intended to provide you with a general framework for problem solving. In essence, it is the scientific method with some embellishment. If your instructor does not assign you an analytical framework that he or she prefers, it is suggested that you follow the approach shown in the diagram below:

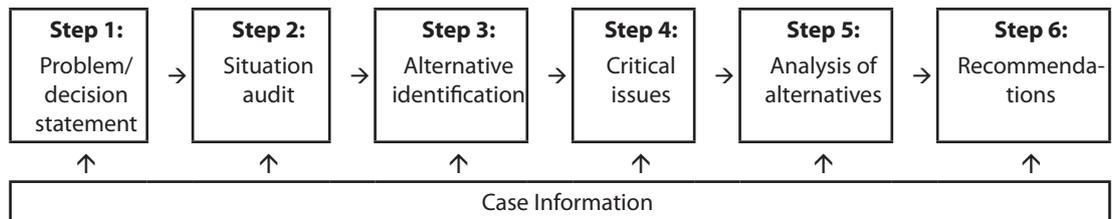


Figure 1 An approach to case analysis

Let's examine each step in the approach.

Step 1: Problem/decision statement

Identification of the main problem, opportunity, or issue in a case is crucial. To paraphrase from *Alice in Wonderland*, if you don't know *where you are going*, any solution will take you there. If you don't properly identify the central problem or decision in a case, the remainder of your analysis is not likely to produce recommendations necessary to solve the organisation's main problem.

You may become frustrated with your early attempts at problem/decision identification. Don't feel alone. Most students and many experienced managers have difficulty with this task. Your skill will improve with practice and direction.

A major pitfall in defining problems/decisions is confusing **symptoms with problems**. Such things as declining sales, low morale, high turnover, or increasing costs are symptoms that are often incorrectly identified as problems. You can often avoid incorrectly defining a symptom as a problem by thinking in terms of causes and effects. *Problems are causes, and symptoms are effects*. The examples cited above are the effects or manifestations of something wrong in the organisation. Why are sales declining? Why is morale low? Why is turnover high? Why are costs increasing? The key question is WHY? WHAT is the cause? Sales may be declining because morale is low and turnover is high. Why is morale low, and why is turnover high? These effects may be caused by an inadequate compensation plan, which in turn may be caused by inadequate profit margins. Profit margins may be low because products have been incorrectly priced or because the distribution system is outdated. As you can see, symptoms may appear in one part of the overall marketing program and the true problem may lie elsewhere in the program. Keep asking the question WHY until you are satisfied that you have identified the problem (cause) and not just another symptom (effect).

When you identify more than one major problem or decision in a case, ask yourself whether or not the problems or decisions are closely enough related to be consolidated into one problem/decision statement. You may not yet have gotten to the central problem. If, however, you have identified two or more problems that are not directly related, we recommend that you rank them in the order of their importance and address them in that order. You may find that although the problems do not appear to be closely linked, the solutions are related. One solution may solve multiple problems.

A final suggestion regarding defining problems or decisions is to state them concisely, and in the form of a question if possible. Try to write a one-sentence question that is specific enough to communicate the main concern. For example:

- Which of the five candidates should be hired?

Step 2: Situation audit

The situation audit phase of the problem-solving process is basically a synopsis and evaluation of an organisation's current situation, opportunities, and problems. This does not mean that you should simply restate material included in the case. The purpose of this step is to interpret and show the relevance of important case information. Thus, it is important that your situation audit be diagnostic rather than descriptive.

The breadth and depth of an appropriate situation audit are determined by the nature and scope of the case situation. The following format provides a useful guide in developing your situation audit:

First, if appropriate, summarise the organisational mission and objectives that are expressed or implied in the case. Mission and objective statements identify the nature and scope of a firm's operations. This information is an important basis for assessing present and future directions and decisions.

Second, assess any relevant environmental information that is available. Are there political, legal, regulatory, societal, consumer, economic, or technological forces that present significant opportunities or threats?

Third, critically assess the company's strengths and weaknesses. Are the goals and objectives realistic? Are they financially sound? Calculate appropriate ratios, make industry comparisons, determine break-even points, and make other quantitative assessments. What are the product's strengths and weaknesses? Evaluate management's capabilities. How strong is the firm's position in the marketplace? How does the firm measure up to the competition? The criteria that you employ will be determined by the case information provided.

The final section of the situation audit deals with assumptions and opinions. Generally, enough information will be presented in each case for you to develop intelligent solutions. In some instances, however, you will be given information that is based on someone's assumptions or opinions. This information should be clearly identified as such, and its reasonableness should be evaluated. In other instances you may feel a need to make your own assumptions about the organisation's objectives, competition, the environment, or something else.

Step 3: Alternatives

Alternatives are the strategic options or actions that appear to be viable solutions to the problem or decision situation that you have posed. Often more than two seemingly good alternative actions will be available. Sometimes these will be explicitly identified in the case, and sometimes they will not.

Prepare your list of alternatives in two stages. First, prepare an initial list of alternatives which includes all the actions that you feel could be appropriate. Group brainstorming is a useful technique for generating alternatives. Be creative, keep an open mind, and build upon the ideas of others. What may sound absurd initially could become an outstanding possibility.

After you have generated your initial list of alternatives, begin refining your list and combining similar actions. Use the information that you organised in your situation audit regarding goals, objectives, and constraints to help you identify

which alternatives to keep and which to eliminate. As yourself whether or not an alternative is feasible, given the existing financial, productive, managerial, marketing, and other constraints, and whether or not it could produce the results sought. That is, does the alternative directly address the problem or decision that you identified in Step 1? If your problem/decision statement and your alternatives are inconsistent, you have erred in one step or the other. To help avoid this mistake, be explicit in showing the connections between the situation audit, the problem/decision statement, and the final set of alternatives.

Step 4: Critical issues

Next, you should develop a list of critical issues. These are simply the main criteria that you will use to evaluate your strategic options. By explicitly expressing the critical issues that you intend to use in evaluating alternatives, you have made clear the criteria that you intend to use in assessing and comparing the viability of your alternative courses of action.

The single most important critical issue in most decisions is profitability. Since profits are a principal goal in all commercial organisations, nearly every decision is influenced by monetary considerations that ultimately affect profits (or expected profits). Sometimes several profit-oriented critical issues are involved. These may include future costs and revenues, break-even points, opportunity costs, contribution margins, taxes, turnover, sales, and market share.

Many critical issues are only indirectly linked to profits. Such things as the impact of a decision on employees, the local economy, the environment, suppliers, or even customer attitudes may not be directly linked to profits. Directly or indirectly, profits are almost always the overriding critical issue.

Step 5: Analysis of alternatives

Analysis entails a careful evaluation of the pros and cons of each strategic option identified. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative in terms of the identified critical issues?

If you have done a thorough job in Steps 1 through 4, Steps 5 and 6 should be fairly easy. Let's review. First, we defined the major problem or decision facing management. Second, we developed a synopsis and evaluation of the organisation's current situation, opportunities, and problems. Third, we identified the available alternative courses of action. Fourth, we specified the critical issues that we intend to employ to evaluate the alternatives. Our task now is to simply use the information developed in previous steps to select the course of action for the firm.

Some case analysts find it helpful to use an outline form to summarise their analysis. Consider using the following format:

Alternative 1: Introduce product X nationally without test marketing*Pros:*

1. Avoids costs associated with test marketing
2. Saves time
3. Keeps product information and marketing strategy secret

Cons:

1. If there are product weaknesses, a recall will be very expensive
2. If there are product weaknesses, it will be difficult to overcome initial consumer and distributor dissatisfaction

Alternative 2: Conduct test marketing before national introduction*Pros:*

1. Will allow testing of alternative packages, prices, and advertising appeals
2. Will assist in preparing sales forecasts
3. Will provide information regarding who will and who will not purchase the product, repurchase frequency, and ways the product is used
4. Will help identify any product performance weaknesses
5. Will provide an idea of the extent to which product X cannibalises sales of product Y
6. Will save a lot of money of the product 'bombs'

Cons:

1. Will reveal our plans to competitors
2. Competitors may interfere with the experiment by increasing their advertising, purchasing large amounts of product X, or other activities
3. If the results are good, some competitors may introduce similar products before our national introduction

Although this is a fairly simple example that does not include any financial comparisons, the format can be used to evaluate any set of alternatives. Often a thorough evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative courses of action will indicate that one option is clearly superior to all others. This is particularly true if all critical issues have been identified and if a common set of criteria is used to evaluate each alternative.

The format illustrated above helps you to organise your thoughts and clearly specifies your rationale to others. Your instructor or your classmates may have selected another alternative that they felt was superior. However, if your logic is sound and your analysis is thorough, they will find it difficult to argue that your solution is not a good one.

Step 6: Recommendations

If your analysis has been thorough, the action recommendations that you propose should flow directly from it. The first part of your recommendations section addresses what specific actions should be taken and why. State the main reasons why you believe that your chosen course of action is best, but avoid rehashing the analysis section. It is important that your recommendations be specific and operational. The following example of a recommendation deals with whether a manufacturer of oil field equipment should introduce a new product line:

The key decision that management must make is whether viscosity measurement instrumentation represents a business venture that fits into the overall mission of the firm. The preceding analysis clearly indicates that this would be a profitable endeavour. If AOS concentrates on the high-accuracy and top end of the intermediate-accuracy range of the market, sales of \$500,000 appear feasible within two to four years, with an estimated contribution to overhead and profits in the \$145,000 range. This is assuming that manufacturing costs can be reduced by 20 to 25 percent, that effective marketing approaches are developed, that further product development is not extensive, and that price reductions per unit do not exceed 10 percent.

The second part of your recommendations section addresses implementation. State clearly who should do what, when, and where. An implementation plan shows that your recommendations are both possible and practical. For example:

AOS should initially offer two instruments. One should provide an accuracy of ± 0.25 percent or better; the second should be in the accuracy range of ± 0.1 to ± 0.5 percent. Top priority should be assigned to inland and offshore drilling companies. Next in priority should be R&D laboratories in industry, government, and universities, where accuracy needs exist in the range offered by AOS. Based on experience with these markets, other promising targets should be identified and evaluated.

AOS needs to move into the market rapidly, using the most cost-effective means of reaching end-user markets. By developing an OEM arrangement with General Supply to reach drilling companies and a tie-in arrangement with Newtec to reach R&D markets, immediate access to end-user markets can be achieved. If successful, these actions will buy some time for AOS to develop marketing capabilities and they should begin generating contributions from sales to cover the expenses of developing a marketing program. An essential element in the AOS marketing strategy is locating and hiring a person to manage the marketing effort. This person must have direct sales capabilities in addition to being able to perform market analysis and marketing program development, implementation, and management tasks.

The last part of your recommendations section should be a tentative budget. This is important because it illustrates that the solution is worth the cost and is within the financial capabilities of the organisation. Too often, students develop grandiose plans that organisations couldn't possibly afford even if they were worth the money.

Your instructor realises that the numbers you use in your tentative budget may not be as accurate as they would be if you had complete access to the records of the company. Make your best estimates, and try to get as close to the actual figure as possible. The exercise is good experience, and it shows that you have considered the cost implications.

Students often ask how long the recommendations section should be and how much detail they should go into. This question is difficult to answer because each case is different and lends itself to different treatment. In general, it is advisable to go into as much detail as possible. You may be criticised for not being specific enough in your recommendations, but you are not likely to be criticised for being too specific.

More about business report writing

(Open and Distance Learning Unit 1997, 'Writing a business report', unpublished paper, Southern Cross University.)

Writing a business report

You will sometimes be asked to present an assignment in the form of a written business report. Reports are a common form of written communication in organisations; they are usually 'internal', that is, written **by** people within the organisation **for** people within the organisation, although external consultants may also present their findings in written reports to organisations.

Reports usually go 'up the chain of command' in an organisation. They are often commissioned by managers who need information on which to base decisions, and they are usually written by employees (or consultants) who are in a position to provide direct, accurate, reliable and objective information on which decisions can be based. Sometimes, employees on their own initiative write reports to managers in an attempt to persuade them to take action on a particular matter, or to initiate change. Managers are busy people who need information presented to them in a precise and concise way, and the business report format is designed to meet these needs. The main way it achieves this, and the major difference you will see between a **report** and the more familiar **essay** style of presentation, is in the structure and visual layout. A report makes effective use of headings, a numbering system, and sometimes variation in type and font styles, as you will see further on.

A report may state facts, present analyses and opinions, document progress, draw conclusions, and/or suggest new proposals. In most cases, a report covers a single problem area or issue in an organisation. **Individual assignments may specify different requirements of the report, so be sure you follow the instructions given with each assignment.**

Writing an effective business report requires skill and practice, and assignments are designed to give you some of that practice! In this paper, the basics of business report writing are summarised. We consider the report's terms of reference, things to keep in mind as you plan your report, how to collect data and organise and analyse it to draw conclusions and make recommendations, a suggested format for your report (including using section numbering to give structure to the report), and the style of writing which is appropriate to business reports. Each one of these is important in preparing a written business report.

Terms of reference of the report

The report's terms of reference – that is, the *subject* of the report, together with its *limits* or 'boundaries' and its *purpose* (its intended outcomes) – should be specified by managers who commission reports. Make sure you know exactly what you are required to do, and document it. Employees who write reports on their own initiative should define their own terms of reference.

For purposes of an assignment, you may be asked to 'invent' a situation, for example, one in which a manager in your organisation has asked you to analyse particular practices and give your opinion on possible changes to those practices, or you may be given case study data on which to perform your analysis and write a report.

Planning a report

As you plan your report, you should keep in mind the subject and purpose of the report, what information the reader (manager) already has about the subject of the report, what the reader (manager) needs to know, and what the reader (manager) is going to do with the information.

For purposes of an assignment, however, you must remember that the marker of the assignment doesn't know about your organisation as a manager would, unless case study data has been provided in the assignment! You therefore need to provide relevant background information to enable the marker to assess your workplace setting and to determine whether your recommendations are appropriate in that setting. (This can be done in the body of the report or as an appendix to the report.)

At the planning stage you should also do a rough outline of some of the headings or sections of your report, which will help you to decide what data you need to collect and will also make the early stages of analysis easier.

Collecting data

Assuming your assignment does not provide case study data, you will need to gather data for your report from a variety of sources. Your data collection may involve:

- reading and researching textbooks and other scholarly publications
- reading and researching publications produced by organisations, as well as journals, newspapers, Internet sites etc.
- observing workplaces
- having formal or informal discussions with employees and managers in organisations
- interviewing or surveying employees and managers in organisations.

You should record the data as you collect it, in a way which makes it easy for you to organise and analyse it, then check it for accuracy and reliability before including it in your report. Remember also to record (and to acknowledge in the report) the sources of your data.

If case study data is given and you believe there is insufficient data in the case study on a particular topic, you may either assume facts – and state in your report that you have assumed these facts – or simply state that further investigation would be needed on that matter.

The data you collect from other sources can provide useful facts and other background information for reports, but reporting ‘raw’ facts is rarely the purpose of a report. The key elements of a report involve you analysing the facts, drawing conclusions on the basis of the facts, and making recommendations based on your conclusions. This analysis and evaluation cannot be found in books or journals – you must carry out these steps yourself on the data you have collected, and you must express your own views and conclusions and justify them to the reader (manager).

Organising data

Once you have collected relevant data, and checked it for accuracy, you should begin to arrange the data under the tentative headings you set up at the planning stage. As you try to arrange your data under those headings, you may find that you need more, or different, headings, or you may find that you need to collect more, or different, data.

Analysing data

By considering the data you have collected and arranged under various headings, and by comparing that data with your knowledge of the relevant professional literature (for example, what management experts say about particular topics or issues), you can begin the stage of analysing your data. If you are looking for areas which can be improved in a certain part of your organisation, then you would start your analysis by considering a range of practices in that area, eliminating the ones which appear to be done well in your organisation, and focusing on the ones which offer room for improvement.

Sometimes you will think about some possible solutions to problems at this analysis stage, and you should note them down before you forget them! (You can always eliminate them later if you change your mind.) Don’t assume that there are problems that cannot be solved, and don’t decide in advance that some solutions will not work in your organisation or that there is only one possible solution to each problem – give them all a hearing at the analysis stage. Work through each problem that you have identified, analyse how and why it occurs in your organisation, and what its effects are. Then evaluate a variety of possible solutions to the problem. At this stage you may also draw some rough diagrams or charts that help you in your analysis; if so, keep these, as they may be useful to the reader of your report too.

Drawing conclusions and making recommendations

The ultimate purpose of a report is usually to recommend an effective solution to a problem and to give reasons for this choice. Sometimes you will find that your knowledge of the professional literature will provide you with possible solutions to the problems you identify in your organisation, but you cannot assume that the ‘textbook’ approach is the best approach or that it will necessarily work in a particular organisation. It may be, for example, that the textbook suggests an

approach that works well in one cultural setting (whether that be culture of a country or culture of an organisation) but not in another. In situations where you believe the recommendations of the 'experts' would not work in your organisation, you should say why you believe this. In fact, it is good practice in a business report to include all the solutions you considered during your analysis and evaluation, and to state why you have rejected some of those solutions and accepted others. This way the reader (manager or marker!) cannot criticise you for not being sufficiently thorough in your report. It also provides the reader (manager) with a range of options; for example, if your final recommendation is too costly to implement in the organisation, then other possible solutions can be considered.

Report format

Just as financial reports (such as a Balance Sheet or Profit and Loss Statement) have to be presented in a particular format to make them easy for managers to read and use, so business reports have a specified format and style. Some organisations have developed what is called a 'house style' – if you are employed, check to see if your organisation has a house style. (There is no prescribed format for your report in **most** assignments, although the following headings may give some structure to your report.)

Possible section headings are:

- title (simple and concise but meaningful; a subtitle may be used and it may include the terms of reference)
- contents page (section headings and beginning page numbers)
- one-page summary or abstract (it's written last, but put at the front of the report, and it contains comment on the main areas of investigation, general conclusions and recommendations)
- terms of reference (who requested the report, its precise purpose and subject, and its limits – this is sometimes called an 'introduction' to the report)
- method of investigation
- data collection
- data analysis
- evaluation of possible solutions
- conclusions
- recommendations
- appendices (if needed).

Your report may also be enhanced by using diagrams, plans, graphs, charts, tables etc. which often summarise data much more concisely than lots of words in sentences can. If there are several diagrams, charts etc. you should number them, and perhaps even provide a separate listing of them following the contents page.

To keep the main flow of argument or reasoning uninterrupted in the body of the report, information such as bibliographies and sources of information, survey and questionnaire results, plans and layouts, and statistical, technical or financial data

should be attached in one or more appendices at the end of the report, although they can also be summarised in the body of the report as appropriate. It may even be desirable to include some of the diagrams, charts etc. in appendices rather than in the body of the report, to avoid clutter in the body.

Numbering of sections

It is common practice in presenting written business reports to use numbering for sections and subsections. This gives visual structure to a report (and also helps you to organise your ideas as you write the report).

A common numbering system is where major headings are numbered:

1
2
3 etc.

while next and lower level headings are numbered (e.g. under 1):

1
 1.1
 1.1.1
 1.1.1.1
 1.1.1.2
 1.1.1.3
 1.1.2
 1.1.2.1
 1.1.3
 1.2
 1.2.1
etc.

An example of numbered headings from part of a report follows. Notice how they give structure to the report, even though you don't necessarily know what it's about!

1	Typographic style
1.1	Chapters and sections within text
1.1.1	Chapters
1.1.2	Sections
1.1.2.1	Paragraphs
1.2	Headings
1.2.1	Spacing of headings
1.3	Page numbering
1.4	Tables
1.4.1	Fonts and sizes
1.3.2	Placement
1.5	Other features
1.5.1	Footnotes and endnotes
1.5.2	Captions

Report writing style

The information you present must be organised – you must anticipate the reader's questions and answer them. Because your report is designed to influence a manager's decisions, you should present the most important information either first or last, depending on the reader's expected reaction to it. If you expect the reader will welcome the contents of your report then you can present the most important part of the information at the beginning. If, on the other hand, the reader is likely to reject your recommendations, then you should work from facts to conclusions to recommendations.

Reports are usually written in formal, business language rather than in colloquial or informal language – the report should be concise and easy to read, avoiding jargon and explaining any necessary technical terms or specific situations which the reader (manager) may not be familiar with.

Your language should be impersonal, as objective as possible, precise, coherent and unambiguous. You may find that using bullet lists helps you to present facts and figures in an easy-to-read way, but don't overuse lists – they can make your report appear as a point-form summary rather than a well-reasoned argument.

Your writing style should clearly show which parts of the report are 'facts', which are your own personal views or 'inferences' drawn from the facts and which are value judgments. Most assignments require you to write an analytical report – information plus opinion. You should not write in a way which will provoke the reader (manager) to anger but to action! You should aim to persuade by logical argument and reason (and tact!). Remember your report contains recommendations, not orders or commands!

Checklist

Windschuttle and Elliott (1994, p. 270) offer a checklist to be used as you work through your report from first draft to final version – you're checking for intelligibility as well as for mistakes!

1. Are any facts misstated or misinterpreted?
2. Are any points exaggerated?
3. Are there any instances where opinions have been presented as facts?
4. Are there any contradictions or inconsistencies?
5. Are all findings properly drawn from the evidence?
6. Are all numbers and dates accurate?
7. Are there any gaps in the argument or evidence that have not been considered?
8. Is there any material out of place?
9. Are there any irrelevancies or unnecessary digressions?
10. Are there any sentences or paragraphs that are too long?
11. Are there any concepts left unexplained?
12. Are there too many abstract words or any unintelligible jargon?
13. Above all, is the report convincing?

A final note

Don't forget to spell check your report and to edit it. Many a good report has been ignored because of poor grammar, punctuation or spelling which got in the way of the contents!

Reference

Windschuttle, K & Elliott, E 1994, *Writing, Researching, Communicating: Communication Skills for the Information Age*, 2nd edn, McGraw-Hill, Sydney.

More about referencing

Perry, C 2000, unpublished paper.

Format for references

When preparing references in your assignments the citations should be presented in the Harvard style – unless another referencing style is specifically requested.

Citations in the body of the text

Examples of the Harvard style citations in the body a text are:

Smith (1998), (Smith 1998), Smith (1998, p. 3) and (Smith 1998, p. 3)

Note that there is no comma between the name and the year, but there is a comma after the date if a quotation necessitates the page number being added. If there is no author to cite, cite the name of the sponsoring organisation or the title of the article or book, for example:

Australian Government Publishing Service (1992), and (*Tom Thumb* 1966)

You have to put in the page number if you are referring to a quotation or to figures/data produced in a research project.

If you are referring to more than one reference, place them in alphabetical order; and if you have more than one reference from one author, place them in chronological order. Examples are:

(Abel 1999; Baker 1990) and Smith (2000, 2001)

For multiple citations in the same year use a, b, c ... immediately following the year of publication, for example:

(Fox 1997a, 1997b)

Use the ampersand symbol (&) only within brackets and in the list of references at the end of the thesis; use 'and' when the names of the authors are being incorporated in the text, outside of brackets. Examples are:

(Larsen & Green 1987) and Larsen and Green (1987)

When referring to a work that has four or more authors, use only the first author and add 'et al.', for example:

(Perry et al. 2000) and Perry et al. (2000)

The principles of referencing above are also used for Internet sources. That is, the author or the title of the article or the sponsoring organisation is placed in the text, for example:

Smith (1996, p. 2) and (*The World in Cyberspace* 1999)

List of references

The full details of the references are given in the list of references at the end of the assignment, as shown next.

Article or chapter in an edited book

Axelsson, B & Easton, G 1992, 'Foreign market entry – The textbook vs. the network theory', in B Axelsson & G Easton (eds), *Industrial Networks: A New View of Reality*, Routledge, London.

Article in a journal

Minor, M, Wu, WY & Choi, MK 1991, 'A proposition-based approach to international entry strategy contingencies', *Journal of Global Marketing*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 69–87.

Deshpande, R 1983, 'Paradigms lost: On theory and method in research in marketing', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 47, Fall, pp. 101–110.

Anderson, E & Coughlan, AT 1987, 'International market entry and expansion via independent or integrated channels of distribution', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 51, January, pp. 71–82.

Article in an electronic journal

Tellis, W 1997, 'Application of a case study methodology', *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 3, no. 3, September, <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/OR/OR3-3/tells2.html>.

Article in a magazine

Keating, P 1993, 'The 'quiet revolution'', *Asian Business Review*, April, pp. 16–17.

Austrade 1993, 'Exporting of services come into focus', *Business Review Weekly*, 17 September, p. 1.

Book

Bradley, F 1991, *International Marketing Strategy*, Prentice Hall, London.

Thorelli, HB & Cavusgil, ST (eds) 1990, *International Marketing Strategy*, Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Conference paper

Ritchie, JB 1993, 'Accessing international education markets', paper presented to the 3rd Internationalising Education Conference, Sydney, 22–23 September.

Richardson, J & Taylor, G 1996, 'Firm embeddness and performance within Japanese network organisations', paper presented to the Academy of International Business South-East Asia Regional Conference, *Competitive Advantage through Global Networks*, eds V Gray & Llanes, University of Otago, Dunedin, 17–20 June, pp. 533–556.

Internet site

Lee, MT 1996, 'Guidelines for Citing References and Electronic Sources of Information', viewed 12 May 1997, <http://www.eliz.tased.edu.au/refs.htm>.

Thesis or dissertation

Crowley, FK 1949, 'Working class conditions in Australia, 1788–1851', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne.

Working paper series

Selvarajah, CT 1988, 'Marketing education in Malaysia: Implications for Australian tertiary institutions', *Faculty of Business Staff Papers*, Working Paper no. 43, Swinburne Institute of Technology, Melbourne.

More details

SCU provides a range of documents to assist in correctly referencing your assignments:

- Paraphrasing and Quoting
- Referencing In-text: Harvard
- Reference List: Harvard.

These documents are available for download in pdf format from:

http://www.scu.edu.au/learningassistance/index.php/dds?cat_id=614#cat614

Appendix E

Glossaries

Extract from Bate, D & Sharpe, P 1979, 'The essay', *Essay Method and English Expression*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney.

Most statements/questions will contain a keyword telling you what to do regarding your theme. Become familiar with these different types of instruction.

Commonly used terms (and their meanings) include:

<i>Analyze</i>	Separate or break up a whole into its parts so that you may discover their nature, proportion, function, relationship, etc.
<i>Comment</i>	Make critical observations, even if they are fairly open-ended; however, your texts and lecture and discussion notes should provide sufficient guideline and your own common sense should prevail.
<i>Compare</i>	Find similarities and differences between two or more ideas, events, interpretations, etc. Ensure you understand exactly what you are being asked to compare. For example, if asked to compare two poems, on which aspects should you focus? Should you be concerned with poetic techniques, philosophy and perspective, or both? Are you expected to include a comparison of personal, social and historical influences which affect the technique and philosophy? If you are unclear about such considerations, find out before you begin the essay.
<i>Contrast</i>	The remarks on 'compare' apply equally to 'contrast'. The difference is that you should concentrate on dissimilarities.
<i>Criticize</i>	Express your judgement regarding the correctness or merit of the factors being considered. Discuss both strong and weak points and give the results of your own analysis.
<i>Define</i>	Provide concise, clear, authoritative meanings. In such statements, details are not necessarily required, but briefly cite the boundaries or limitations of the definition. Remember the 'class' to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates the particular object from all others in that class.
<i>Describe</i>	Recall facts, processes or events. You are not asked to explain or interpret. Try to provide a thorough description, emphasising the most important points.
<i>Diagram</i>	Present a drawing, chart, plan or graphic representation in your answer. Generally, the student is also expected to label the diagram and a brief explanation or description may be required.
<i>Discuss</i>	Present a point of view. This is likely to need both description and interpretation. Your opinion must be supported by carefully chosen and authoritative evidence.
<i>Enumerate</i>	Provide a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, but concisely, the points required.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Present a judgement of an issue by stressing both strengths and advantages, and weaknesses and limitations.
<i>Explain</i>	Interpret the facts along the lines of a particular topic. Do not be trapped into describing events or summarising the plot. Your main focus should be on the 'why' of a particular issue, or on the 'how', with the aim of clarifying reasons, causes and effects. You are being tested on your capacity to think critically, to exercise perception and discernment.

<i>Illustrate</i>	This asks for an explanation; you may clarify your answer to a problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram or concrete example.
<i>Interpret</i>	Explain the meaning of something and give your own judgement of a situation.
<i>List</i>	Give an itemized series or tabulation; such answers should be concise.
<i>Outline</i>	This asks for an organized description. Give the main points and essential supplementary materials, but omit minor details. Present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.
<i>Prove</i>	To confirm or verify. You should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence, or by logical reasoning.
<i>Relate</i>	When showing relationships, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in a descriptive manner.
<i>Review</i>	Re-examine, analyse and comment briefly (in an organized sequence) on the major points of an issue.
<i>State</i>	Express the high points in brief and clear narrative form. Details, and usually illustrations or examples, may be omitted.
<i>Summarize</i>	Provide a brief statement or an account covering the main points: omit details.
<i>Trace</i>	Give the development, process or history of a thing, event or idea, especially by proceeding from the latest to the earliest evidence.

Sharpened.net provides a comprehensive glossary of online terms in A–Z format:

<http://www.sharpened.net/glossary/>

Webopedia offers a search facility for computer and Internet technology

definitions: <http://www.webopedia.com/>

Using the Library databases

Information for postgraduate students

The Library offers specialised support and assistance for postgraduate students. For an overview of borrowing limits, services for off-campus students, resources, training and key contacts, visit <http://www.scu.edu.au/library/index.php/43/>.

The 'resources' section of this page contains links to useful documents available for download, including:

- Postgraduate research: getting started
- Research Design and Methodology
- Conducting a literature review
- Finding Information: books, theses, conference papers, statistics, government publications
- Writing and Submitting your thesis.

Databases

Through the SCU Library, students have access to multiple online databases.

The Library provides information about which databases are most relevant to different subjects or fields of study. Search tips for databases and information about new databases being trialed by the Library are also available. To locate the database guide relevant to your field of study, go to: <http://www.scu.edu.au/library/index.php/52/>.

In addition to a list of the most relevant databases, the 'Management' subject guide contains a list of useful websites and further information.

Journals

If you wish to locate a specific journal online, enter this into the SCU Library catalogue. Check the 'journals/ejournals' box to limit your search results.

Click on the journal title in the results list. In the 'availability' field, links will appear to the online journal, the Library holdings of hard copies of the journal, or both.

If provided, click on the 'SCU online journal' link. The location, a link to the Eresource and summary of holdings (available date ranges and database location for the journal), will be displayed.

Click on the Eresource link. A hyperlink to the database which contains the journal will be provided.

You can now search within this journal online.

Journal articles

If you are searching for a specific journal article, use the Library's citation linker to conduct your search and locate the article. Enter as many details as possible to narrow your search results. The citation linker is available from:

<http://p.9003-cooee.unilinc.edu.au.ezproxy.scu.edu.au/scu/cgi/core/citation-linker.cgi>

Electronic books

Electronic books are a valuable resource for postgraduate students as they enable immediate online access to a diverse range of publications. Electronic books enable users to explore the table of contents and index or print selected material (print limits may apply).

The Library is constantly expanding the range of electronic books available to students. The Library's 'electronic books' webpage contains details of ebook sources from both the Library and from public websites: <http://www.scu.edu.au/library/index.php/53/>.

ePublications

ePublications@SCU is an electronic repository administered by the SCU Library. It serves to store and promote the intellectual output of authors and researchers from SCU, and to provide access to this material to other researchers around the world in a convenient, online format.

ePublications is available from: <http://epubs.scu.edu.au/>. The site contains a search facility, information about the project and answers to frequently asked questions for both authors and users.