

Writing Support

(Adapted from UNISA Tutorial Letter 30/14/2012)

Academic Writing is a way of demonstrating understanding and critical thinking

You are a student beginning to get into the information and the debates of your discipline and its subject matter. The best way to proof your competency and scholarship in this regard is through academic writing of literature reviews for papers, research proposals and reports. Writing these correctly can help you to develop your academic scholarship. It can also show that you have understanding and critical thinking with regard to the discourses within your discipline.

How do you write to show understanding and critical thinking?

Firstly, you develop your argument on the topic. Your argument is writing which is in your own words. Through this writing of your own you make judgements about the question / problem / challenge/ gap (= Pro of ProDec), and about the information and debates in the literature. Through these processes, you create your “answer” (opinion, stance and argument) to the question / problem / challenge/ gap (= Pro of ProDec).

However, to do this you need to engage with the scientific literature of your discipline and subject matter (World 2 – World of Science), and its debates, information, approaches, contemporary research and findings. A good student will be scholarly- he/she will use quotations and paraphrases (all with references!) to strengthen his/her argument. So a good literature review / ‘essay’ has a clear, original voice and a dialogue with the points and issues in the literature.

Different ‘essays’, different arguments

Different essay/literature reviews direct you to different kinds of argument.

For the purpose of writing a research study’s literature review you are expected to include all of the following aspects discussed below:

Should you summarize, outline or describe, then you are not yet to take a side in a debate-you are just being asked to present material. However, you are still writing an essay with your own argument. Your introduction and conclusion will consist only of your words as you explain what you are doing with the topic. The arrangements of your sections and the order of your paragraphs must follow your own argument-your organized answer to the question. Your presentation of points from the reading should also be mostly in your own words, as you condense and organize material, and as you use your own neat phrases to summarize. You may also have a number of quotes and paraphrases.

Your next step is then to ensure that you also discuss, analyse or debate about your topic, this part should be dominated by your own arguments in which you evaluate and weigh up different options and the opinions of both sides of bitterly contested debates. For example, is western-style modernisation, with a constitution, gender rights, capitalism, the English language and global soccer, good for Africa? But even in presenting your original discussion/argument, you

must also be scholarly, and constantly strengthen your argument by referring to the literature in the proper way.

Learning to use your own voice

Learning to write an argument 'in your own voice' and using your own words can be difficult and it can take time. If your English is not strong, you may be reluctant to write your own words. Other students feel that their own opinion and their own voice is worthless, and that an essay should only use words from the literature.

But all students must start the process of moving towards original, scholarly essays, which are argued in your own words but are strengthened by quite a number of good quotations and paraphrases. Start by being clear that you will write an essay in your own words. Make the sections of the essay to reflect what you are arguing in the essay. Make each paragraph carry forward a new point in your argument in a logical way. Learn how to quote and give references. Soon you will become both original and scholarly!

Once you have done the necessary planning, understood what activity you need to perform and have completed the reading, you are ready to take the first step in writing a literature review ('essay').

2.2 Framework

You will find it useful to compile a framework. It helps you to:

- arrange your ideas in a logical and systematic manner
- make sure that you do not leave out some of the core aspects

Using the key words you have identified earlier, make a list of points you need to cover in the review. This is just a first or a preliminary list. You will be able to finalise this list only after you have done all the reading.

Now decide which ideas will be the main ideas in your review, and which will be secondary or supportive ideas. List these ideas (they will probably end up being the headings in the body of your essay) and decide how you want to arrange them.

Leave enough lines between each of these main ideas or headings in your rough draft to add further ideas and information.

You are now ready to write the first rough draft of your literature review. You will do this by including a few components.

2.2.1 The introduction

You probably know the saying that "first impressions are lasting". In the introduction you have an opportunity to make sure that these impressions are positive.

Begin by explaining to the reader, in your own words, what the project, 'essay', or literature review is all about. This will show that you understand the discourse of your topic. Briefly explain **what** you will be doing, **how** you will be doing this, and **why**. You already have a good idea of what you will be doing because you have compiled a framework. Therefore, your introduction could be a summary of your framework. By doing this, you will also ensure that you do not deviate from what the review requires of you. You will be able to see the core of the argument / main point/focus at a glance. You should also try to grab the attention of the reader by briefly stating your own opinion on the topic, but leave the details for the essay / review itself.

A good introduction is brief, directly aimed at the question / topic / "Pro" and sketches the main argument briefly.

A useful hint: be prepared to rewrite your introduction more than once before finalising it. Normally the final version of the introduction is written last because it is only then that you know what you are doing in the 'essay'/review.

2.2.2 The body of the 'essay'

Give the main arguments of your answer in the body of your essay. Use the main items of the framework that you compiled earlier as headings to ensure that your essay is logically structured. **Do not use the words "The body" as a heading.**

Write paragraphs directly linked to that item under each of the headings. Each paragraph normally deals with one aspect or topic at a time. This topic or aspect is made clear in a topic sentence, which is normally the first sentence of the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph contains all the necessary proof, details and examples to substantiate or illustrate the statement made in the topic sentence. The examples you use need not necessarily come from the sources, but may be based on your own experiences. A good paragraph also indicates how the information contained there relates to the assignment question. Therefore, you constantly need to make your paragraphs relevant to the central theme of the assignment question.

Also make sure that your paragraphs follow logically after one another and that you present a convincing and systematic argument. Exactly how you will do this, will depend on the question asked, the "Pro" statement and the argument you wish to put across and especially the action word.

It is no good to try to answer the question / "Pro" / an argument by listing unconnected points. Do not number your sentences. See to it that your 'answer' is a discussion.

2.2.3 The conclusion

In the conclusion, the 'essay' is brought to a close with a brief summary of the review / task at hand. You will give your final opinion on the topic here, and show the reader how all the arguments raised in the body of the essay have led to your conclusion. **Do not include new information in the conclusion.** Make sure that you address the topic directly again in your conclusion. Remember that final impressions are also lasting.

A good conclusion summarises the main arguments and content of the review / essay, focuses on the question / “Prof”, argument and is brief and to the point.

2.2.3 The bibliography

At the end of the review, report, proposal etc. you need to list all the sources you have used. This is done in alphabetical order, according to authors' surnames.

2.3 Things to keep in mind

When you write, your task is to convince the reader of your views on the topic under discussion. You should imagine, therefore, that the person who will be reading your assignment knows nothing about the topic.

The success of the task at hand will depend on the following:

- whether you have the relevant facts at your disposal
- whether you have expressed yourself clearly by using short sentences and ensuring that every word makes sense
- whether your essay/review is compiled in a logical and systematic manner
- whether you have shown that you have done and understood the required reading

We discuss three issues below that will help you give proof of the points raised above. Further below this document contains advice on how to ensure that your essay/review is logically structured and well argued; dealing with use of quotations; and the problem of plagiarism.

2.3.1 Logical structuring

When we discussed the body of the essay further above we said that your essay has to be logically structured. This is easier said than done. How **can** you make sure that your sentences and paragraphs follow logically on one another and that you write a systematic argument in which you answer the assignment question directly? A book that contains useful answers to questions such as these is one by Du Toit, Heese and Orr. The full bibliographical details are as follows:

Du Toit, P, Heese, M & Orr, M. 1995. Practical guide to reading, thinking and writing skills. Halfway House: Southern Books.

This is a book well worth reading because it contains useful advice on the three key areas of study: how to read, think and write effectively. One of their suggestions refers specifically to the question we asked above. They suggest that, after having written a first draft, you answer a series of questions in a checklist. If there is a problem with the structure or logic of your paragraphs, you need to consult a list of "remedies" to help you find solutions to the problem

area in your essay. We have reproduced the two lists in the boxes below so that you have it at hand and can "test" yourself against these questions before submitting your document.

Checklist

- 1 Does each paragraph have a topic sentence or main idea?
No - see remedy 1.
- 2 Does each paragraph have at least one sentence in addition to the topic sentence?
No - see remedy 2.
- 3 Does the topic sentence of your introductory paragraph make a general statement about the content of your essay?
No - see remedy 3.
- 4 Are the topic sentences of the rest of your paragraphs related to the subject of your essay, as indicated in your introductory paragraph?
No - see remedy 4.
- 5 Do two or more paragraphs have the same topic sentence?
Yes - see remedy 5.
- 6 Do the topic sentences of the paragraphs follow in logical sequence to each other?
No - see remedy 6.
- 7 Does the topic sentence of your concluding paragraph sum up the main argument of your draft, as expressed in the topic sentences in the preceding paragraphs?
No - see remedy 7.

(From: Du Toit, Heese & Orr 1995:275)

Remedies

- 1 If a paragraph has neither a topic sentence, nor a main idea, you have three options:
 - rewrite the paragraph so that it does have a main idea; *or*
 - scrap the paragraph entirely; *or*
 - move the sentences in the paragraph to another paragraph where they support, illustrate or explain the existing main idea.

- 2 One sentence is not a paragraph. You have two options:
 - scrap the "paragraph" entirely; *or*
 - if the main idea is an essential part of your essay, add supporting sentences to explain, illustrate or add details to your main idea.

- 3 Rewrite your introductory paragraph so that it relates more logically to your topic.

- 4 If the topic sentences of the paragraphs in the body of your essay do not follow on from, or relate to your introductory paragraph, check the following:
 - Is your introductory paragraph correct, and directly related to your topic? If so, then the rest of your paragraphs must be incorrect and not properly related to your topic. Keep your introductory paragraph; rewrite the rest of your essay. You will need to go back to the research stage to generate relevant material.
or
 - Are the main ideas of the paragraphs in the body of your essay correct and directly related to your topic? In that case, you need to rewrite your introductory paragraph so that it leads more logically to the rest of the essay.
or
 - If the topic sentence of any one paragraph does not seem to relate to the subject of your essay, it is probably irrelevant. Eliminate the paragraph.

- 5 If two or more paragraphs have the same main idea, you are probably repeating yourself.
 - See if you can combine these paragraphs into one main paragraph. *or*
 - You can try to re-phrase the main ideas so that they state different aspects of or perspectives on the topic.

- 6 If the topic sentences do not follow in a logical sequence, you need to re-order your paragraphs so that they do develop your argument logically.

- 7 Re-write your concluding paragraph so that it is a logical summary of the preceding paragraphs.

(From: Du Toit, Heese & Orr 1995:275-276)

If you go through this checklist before re-writing your 'essay/review' for the final time, your end product will be a much better one.

2.3.2 Quotations

Use quotations sparingly and avoid lengthy quotes. It is important that you put the information across in your own words and use a short quote to substantiate (prove) or illustrate your statements. When you rely too heavily on quotes the question of whether you actually understand the information, arises. Remember, an essay/review should be your own answer/argument in your own words.

2.3.3 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking words, ideas and thoughts of others and passing them off as your own. It is a form of theft which involves a number of dishonest academic activities.

The *Disciplinary Code for Students* (2007) is sent to all registered students. Students are advised to study the Code. Kindly also read the University's policy on *Copyright Infringement and Plagiarism*.

An essay/literature review/ proposal /report must be the product of your study. It is not a matter of simply reproducing facts from a couple of books or journal articles. **It is unacceptable simply to combine data taken from different sources, particularly if this data is copied word for word from the sources.**

You need to acknowledge your sources when you quote directly from them, when putting the information in your own words, or when using the ideas of an author. If you do not do this, you are simply stealing the ideas of others and committing plagiarism - one of the most serious offences a student can commit.

Plagiarism is totally unacceptable. Not only is it dishonest, but it also means that your lecturer cannot evaluate your assignment because it is not your own work. You will also be doing yourself a great disservice, because your lecturer will not be able to see whether you are experiencing difficulties with your studies or a particular part of the work.

Remember that you are also committing plagiarism when copying from a fellow student. Students who copy from sources or fellow students **will be penalised**. We encourage students to form study groups, but prefer it if each student prepares and submits his or her own attempt.

3 REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

If you use information from a published source (i.e. a book or article); academic integrity requires that you acknowledge its origin. This is essential, whether you use direct quotations, paraphrase (i.e. write the information in your own words), or simply take over an idea from a source. In the text of the document this acknowledgement takes the form of a reference.

Academics use various reference systems but we recommend that you use the Harvard system.

3.1 Giving references

When you use the Harvard system, you have to write the following information in the body of your essay:

- the author's surname
- the year in which the source was published
- the page number(s) on which the information appears

3.1.1 Quoting directly

If you quote directly from a book or article, you need to use quotation marks (" and ") to show that you are quoting. Therefore, in the body of the assignment we might find the following direct quotation:

"Development, once a public project, has been redefined as a private, global project" (McMichael 2004:152).

Note the information contained in the reference (between brackets) and the punctuation used.

3.1.2 Paraphrasing

If you did not quote directly, but paraphrased something that the author said, you would not use quotation marks, but you would still need to give a reference. Your reference would then look as follows (we will again use McMichael as an example):

McMichael (2004:152) points out that development, which used to be a public project, has been redefined as a project which is private and global.

The author's surname forms part of the sentence, and is therefore **outside** the brackets. This is not a direct quote, but a summary of the main point made by McMichael and therefore you do not use quotation marks.

An alternative is to write the full sentence and to refer to the author's surname only at the end:

Development is now a private and global project (McMichael 2004:152).

3.1.3 References to articles

Let us pretend that we have read an article by CM Rogerson, called Feeding Africa's cities: the role and potential of urban agriculture. This article appeared in a journal called Africa Insight. The volume is 22, and the issue is number 4 of 1992.

The reference in the body of the essay is the same as for a book. For instance:

(Rogerson 1992:229)

3.1.4 References to contributions in readers

It is possible that you will make use of articles that have been reprinted in **Unisa readers**. The reference in the body of the essay is identical to the style used for books and articles. In other words, you would give the name of the author, the date of publication of the reader and the page number(s), for example:

(Webster & Buhlungu 2006:279)

Please note that you must refer to the author of the article and not to the compiler of the reader. You will note that two page numbers appear on almost every page in the reader - the original page number of the article and the page number of the reader. We suggest that you stick to the page numbers of the **reader** and therefore also give the date of publication for the reader in both your references and list of sources and not that of the specific article.

3.1.5 Reference to websites

Often websites include the names of authors, and sometimes even page numbers. If this information is known, refer to the website in the same way as you would to any other source, for example:

The World Bank (2002:1) argues out that poverty is much more than income alone.

If the author is not known, refer to the institution or organisation whose website you are using. Your reference may look as follows:

As Oxfam (www.oxfam) reminds us: "Climate change costs lives".

In section 3.2.5 below we give advice on how to compile the bibliographical details for these two sources.

3.1.6 More than two authors

In the case of three or more authors, mention all the authors when you refer to them for the first time. After that mention only the first author followed by the words "et al." (et al. means "and others").

First reference:

Porter, Lawler and Hackman (1995:234) said ...

Second and following references:

Porter et al (1995:235) mentioned ...

3.1.7 Contributions in a collective work

Collective works consist of original contributions by different authors, such as conference papers, chapters, or contributions in a book dealing with a specific topic. Let us look at a book entitled Introduction to development studies, as an example of a collective work. H Swanepoel and F de Beer are the editors of the book, but there are different authors for the different chapters. In your reference you should refer to the author of the specific contribution and not to the editor. Let us imagine that you used the chapter by Anso Kellerman. Your reference will look as follows:

Kellerman (2000:191) mentioned the eight elements ...

3.1.8 Special cases

3.1.8.1 Newspaper articles

If the author of a newspaper report is known, the reference is entered under the author's name.

Unemployment figures of the last month ... (Havenga 1998:5).

If the author of a newspaper report is **not known**, the reference is made to the headline of the article:

Unemployment figures of the last month ... (New growth in the economy 1998:5).

3.1.8.2 Government publications

You refer to a South African White Paper or a law as follows:

(South Africa 1995:112).

3.1.8.3 TV

When you use information from a television programme, you refer to it as follows:

Desertification is becoming an everyday reality (50/50 2007).

3.1.8.4 Interviews

In some cases you may have had a personal or telephonic interview. Let us imagine that you had an interview with a Mr B Maluleke from the Department of Public Works. You will refer to this interview as follows:

According to Maluleke (2008) the delivery of services ...

3.1.8.5 *More than one work by the same author in the same year*

You may find that you use more than one work by an author that was published in the same year. In this case you would add an "a", "b", and so on to the year of publication:

McMichael (2004a:152) said that ...

McMichael (2004b:12) mentioned the ...

3.2 **Compiling a bibliography**

At the end of the assignment you need to list all the sources you have used. This is done in alphabetical order, according to authors' surnames. Please note that the information is given in the language in which the source was published.

3.2.1 ***Bibliographical details of books***

You need to give the full bibliographical details of all the sources in this list. The bibliographical details are the following:

- the surname and initials of the author
- the year in which the book was published
- the title of the book
- the name of the town or the city where the book was published
- the name of the company that published the book

All of this information usually appears on the title and the following page of the publication.

A typical bibliographical entry will be as follows:

McMichael, P. 2004. Development and social change: a global perspective. 3rd edition. London: Pine Ford.

Please note that in the example above the edition number is given. Whenever there is an edition number available, you must refer to it.

3.2.2 ***Bibliographical details of articles***

Let us use the example of an article by Lloyd Sachinkoye called *The land is the economy: revisiting the land question*. This article appeared in a journal called African Security Review. The volume is 14, and the issue is number 3 of 2005.

In the bibliography we list the bibliographical details as follows:

Sachinkoye, L. 2005. *The land is the economy: revisiting the land question*. African Security Review 14(3).

Here you have given the surname and initials of the author, the date of publication, the title of the article, the title of the journal, the volume and number of the journal.

Note that the title of the journal is underlined and not the title of the article.

3.2.3 Bibliographical details of contributions in readers

If you are registered for DVA3705 and have consulted the article by Webster and Buhlungu in the reader, the entry in your bibliography would read:

Webster, E & Buhlungu, S. 2010. Between marginalisation and revitalisation? The state of trade unionism in South Africa, in Empowerment and popular initiatives: a reader, compiled by MJ Rakolojane. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Note: you must include the title of the article.

3.2.4 Bibliographical details of websites

In the case of published works, we are normally able to trace a work if we know who the author, the title and the publisher are. When using a website, we seldom have such information available. We therefore need to provide the full URL address from which we downloaded the information. Because information on websites are changed so often, we also need to provide the date on which we downloaded the document. The two examples referred to below are the same ones we cited under section 3.1.6 above. Look at them again to remind yourself why their bibliographical details differ so much.

World Bank. 2002. Voices of the poor: listen to the poor. Available at:
<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/listen-findings.htm> (accessed on 29/7/2002).

www.oxfam.org.uk (accessed on 6 October 2009).

3.2.5 Bibliographical details of more than two authors

In the case of three or more authors all the authors must be mentioned in your bibliography.

Amonoo-Lartson, R, Ebrahim, GJ, Lovel, HJ & Ranken, JP. 1984. District health care: challenges for planning, organization and evaluation in developing countries. London: Macmillan.

3.2.6 Bibliographical details of contributions in a collective work

Let us use the example of the book, Introduction to development studies, again. H Swanepoel and F de Beer are the editors of the book, but there are different authors for the different chapters. You used the chapter by Anso Kellerman. You will refer to it as follows in your bibliography:

Kellerman, A. 2000. Health and development, in Introduction to development studies, edited by F de Beer & H Swanepoel. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Please note that you refer to the editors only at the end and that their initials appear in front of their surnames. The title of the collective work is underlined and not the title of the chapter.

3.2.7 Bibliographical details of special cases

3.2.7.1 Newspaper articles

If the author of a newspaper report is known, the report is entered under the author's name:

Havenga, C.1998. New growth in the economy. Star, 27 April:5.

If the author of the newspaper report is not known, enter the report under its headline:

New growth in the economy. 1998. Star, 27 April:5.

Note that the title of the newspaper is underlined and that the specific date of the article and the page number (where available) is given.

3.2.7.2 Government publications

Refer to a White paper as follows:

South Africa. 1979. White paper on part 1 of the commission of enquiry on labour law. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Laws and statutes normally have lengthy official titles. It is general practice to give the shortened title, number and year (the year of the law, not the publication) of such works. If the shortened title cannot be established, the full title must be used.

South Africa. 1995. Labour Relations Act, no 47, 1995. Pretoria: Government Printer.

3.2.7.3 TV

The bibliographical details of a television programme is as follows:

50/50. SABC2. 27 April 2007.

3.2.7.4 Interviews

Let us take the example again of an interview with Mr B Maluleke from the Department

of Public Works:

Maluleke, B. 2008. Personal interview. 24 March, Pretoria.

Where it is applicable or available, you can give the position of the person:

Maluleke, B. Director, Department of Public Works. 2008. Personal interview. 24 March, Pretoria.

3.2.7.5 *More than one work by the same author in the same year*

You may use more than one work by an author that was published in the same year. In this case you would add an "a", "b", and so on to the year of publication:

Fair, TJD. 1985a. Sub-Saharan Africa and the population issue: the case of Kenya and Swaziland. Africa Insight 15(4).

Fair, TJD. 1985b. Rural-urban balance: policy and practice in ten African countries. Pretoria: Africa Institute of SA.

4 THE ASSESMENT OF YOU DOCUMENT

When your lecturers assess (mark) your document, they look at the following in particular:

- whether you have expressed yourself clearly
- whether you have avoided vague and contradictory arguments
- whether you have, in fact, answered the task at hand
- whether you have studied all the required sources
- whether you have digested and integrated the information from various sources
- whether the document is your **own** work (and not just a copy of the reading material)
- whether you have kept within the stipulated length (number of pages or words)
- whether you have met all the technical requirements (i.e. use of language, quotes, references and a correctly compiled bibliography)

Your lecturers will use an essay assessment sheet when they mark your task. They will attach this sheet to your marked task because it allows them to convey a great deal of information about their assessment of your task in a nutshell. This is what the assessment sheet looks like:

ESSAY ASSESSMENT SHEET: DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Lecturer's general comments on assignment:					
Rating scale	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Needs some more work	Needs much more work
Introduction and interpretation of title					
Content of essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical development • Insight and originality • Coverage of question • Use of sources • Understanding/analysis 					
Conclusion					
Other features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References • Spelling • Grammar • Length 					
Plagiarism (See Tutorial letter DVAALLD/301): subtract marks					
Specific aspects of your essay that needs more work			Specific aspects of your essay that your lecturer likes		

The key to the rating scale is given in the table below. Please look at the lecturer's rating of specific aspects of your assignment. The key below will help you to understand what this means for you.

Very good	Extremely competent. Your work exceeds the required level of competence.
Good	Competent. You have shown that you understand the assignment question and the conventions of academic work (such as references, style).
Satisfactory	Your work has met the requirements adequately. However, there is still room for further improvement.
Needs some more work	There is some evidence of competence. Further revision of the content and conventions of academic work (see tutorial letter DVAALLD/301) is required.
Needs much more work	You have shown little or no evidence of competence. You have either not completed the required task or have done it incorrectly. You need to revise your work thoroughly. Please note of the conventions of academic writing in tutorial letter DVAALLD/301.

5 TO SUMMARISE

Please remember to follow all these guidelines on the components of an assignment / proposal, report, review etc. on techniques to make your document logical and clear, and techniques for referencing and bibliography.

If you do so you will have the foundation on which to build a document of quality, in which you also show depth of understanding of the topic, intelligent argument, intelligent engagement with the literature, clear understanding of concepts, originality, and awareness of the real world.

We trust that you will find these guidelines useful and that they will help you to perform to the best of your abilities. Try to do as many drafts as possible before your submission due date. **You will master writing skills only by practising them regularly.**