Sections 4 and 5 of the Guide deal with the structures of written assignments, based on the PRODUCTS or OUTCOMES of writing. Here you will find descriptions and explanations of written assignments in terms of the characteristics that can be observed from examples of effective assignments. In Section 6, you will find explanations of the language and style of writing that characterize assignments, so again the focus is on the products or outcomes. This section of the Guide is complemented by Section 7 of the Guide which focuses on the PROCESSES of writing. You might prefer to begin by reading a process-oriented approach to writing, and then return later to this product-oriented section.

Usually the written assignments in your coursework subjects will be described in terms of the type of assignment you are expected to produce. Assignment types that are common in UTS:Business include essays, reports, and case studies, although there is considerable diversity, especially as you progress through the years of study.

However, sometimes these labels are not always sufficient to clarify the structure and style of writing that is expected, or the labels may not be used consistently in different subjects. For example, one subject may ask for an essay, and another subject may ask for a research report, yet the two tasks may actually be very similar assignment types. Or sometimes a critical literature review may be called a research report at postgraduate level. For this reason, you need to see each assignment as distinctive and be aware of different contexts and purposes. In some subjects, there will be time in lectures or tutorials devoted to discussing the assignment requirements, or you may be given additional written information to clarify the task.

The purpose of the assignment will tell you a lot about how it might be structured. Some writing tasks, especially in the early part of an undergraduate course, are designed to ensure you understand some basic concepts in a new field. Their purpose might be for you to describe the concept, to define it, or to explain it. Perhaps you will be asked to summarise an article or chapter to demonstrate your understanding. More complex tasks could ask you to critically evaluate an article, or to compare two different articles about the same topic. Gradually, the written assignments you confront will become more complex and more intellectually demanding.

As the task becomes more complex, the process tends to shift from re-telling of existing knowledge, towards transforming that knowledge, and the scope of the task becomes more open-ended with you having a higher degree of autonomy in defining and scoping the problem to be solved. Even in the most complex of tasks requiring the highest level of transformation of knowledge, this process depends upon being able to clearly describe and define concepts, that is, re-telling what is known prior to reshaping this for your own purposes.

**STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS: What are the elements of written assignments?**

There are many possible elements that can be included in the structure of written assignments, but each assignment task will have its own expectations about which elements need to be included. For example, a common structural
element for written assignments is an introduction, but not all assignments will require an abstract or synopsis. An important part of working out what is required for your written assignment is determining what the structural elements are. Equally importantly, you need to consider what the best sequence will be for these elements.

Often your assignment task or other information in your Subject Outline will explain particular requirements regarding the structural elements of your assignment, and in what order they should be presented. But on other occasions, a part of your problem-solving in preparing the assignment will be to determine for yourself what the structural parts and their sequence should be. Importantly, each written assignment task is different and may have different requirements for its structure, so you need to ensure you understand what is expected on each occasion.

The typical structural elements that are referred to below are presented in the order or sequence that they might normally appear in a written assignment, although no single assignment would have all these elements, so you need to analyse the task carefully to determine what elements are needed.

A TITLE FOR YOUR WORK

At more advanced levels of study involving independent research, for example, in higher degree research studies, the written outcomes (final thesis dissertation, journal articles for publication, etc) need to have a distinctive title created by the researcher.

By contrast, most coursework assignments do not require an original title to be prepared by the student since all students work on a common task. Instead, the assignment is usually labeled by the name of the subject and the particular assignment.

However, there may be occasions when you are required to prepare a title for your work. Here are some general principles to guide your choice:

- A title’s purpose is to attract a potential reader, and to help make the work discoverable through electronic searching.
- An effective title should include the main key words which indicate the topic area(s) of the work. That is, the title needs to convey WHAT the work is about.
- As well as the main key topic words, an effective title can also include something about WHY or HOW the work was undertaken, and/or indicating what were the significant or distinctive findings from the work – or SO WHAT.
- It can be useful to separate the title into two segments – the WHAT segment, and the SO WHAT segment – with the two parts separated by a colon. This can convey a significant amount of detail to help the reader determine whether the work is likely to be interesting for them.
- For a title to endure, it may be advisable to avoid titles which depend upon local knowledge or highly topical events or issues.

Here is an example of a title which began as a simple WHAT title, and finished as a more focused, precise and informative SO WHAT one. The first title is a simple knowledge-telling title, suggesting the work will be like an encyclopedia entry (summarizing everything there is to know about the topic). By contrast, the final title indicates that the work will provide an analytical and critical perspective.
Example of an evolving title

Focus on WHAT the work was about
The COP Registration System

Focus on WHY / HOW the work was done, that is, its purpose / method
An Evaluation of the COP Registration System

Focus on WHY / HOW the work was done, and WHAT sub-group the work investigated
An Evaluation of the COP Registration System: The Perspective of Service Providers

Focus on SO WHAT, that is, what the impact of the work has been
An Evaluation of the COP Registration System: Service Providers Creating Partnerships to Improve Quality

TITLE PAGE
A title page is not normally necessary for coursework assignments if you are required to attach an assignment cover sheet to the front of your submission. Check your Subject Outline for details about these requirements. The assignment cover sheet includes all the information that would normally be included in a title page, and also provides a declaration that you sign certifying that the work is your own and the assignment was prepared in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and scholarship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
A Table of Contents is usually needed when an assignment is quite long and complex, as a guide to help the reader see the structure at a glance and find sections by their page number. It is commonly used for reports, and sometimes discussion or position papers, but not often for essays and literature reviews. As well as listing the sections and sub-sections of your assignment with their page numbers, the Table of Contents should also include tables, figures and other visual material, as well as Appendices. Normally, two levels of internal headings would be included, although very long reports may show three levels of headings. This Guide has a Table of Contents which shows three levels of headings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
An acknowledgements section would normally only be included in an assignment or research report of substantial size, or in a thesis or article for publication. An acknowledgements section can simply constitute a list of names of those who have contributed in some way, or a brief summary of the nature of the contribution may also be included. It is usual to acknowledge:

- Individuals who have assisted substantially with the research or writing
 Organizations which have provided financial or other support (for example, a scholarship or grant)

 Your supervisor (for research higher degree students)

 Individuals who have provided peer review and/or editorial feedback

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The inclusion of a brief summary (‘Executive Summary’) is standard reporting practice and is meant to act as a guide to the contents of the report and to highlight major conclusions and recommendations. The Executive Summary derives its name from the practice of providing the executives of an organisation, that is, those responsible for making decisions and taking appropriate action, with a concise outline of the major points in a report to save them time. The detail can be pursued in more depth later by a complete reading of the report. The structure of the Executive Summary should follow the structure of the report and include brief statements on the following:

- definition of the problem
- aims and objectives
- methods/data sources
- key findings
- conclusions
- any recommendations for action.

The Executive Summary should be brief and succinct, and may use point form to achieve this. As a rule-of-thumb, allow one page for every 5,000 words up to a maximum of five pages, and using headings in longer Executive Summaries. The inclusion of an Executive Summary is not a substitute for discussion/exposition in the full report.

**Example of an Executive Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem context &amp; Purpose of report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the current and prospective profitability, liquidity and financial stability of Outdoor Equipment Ltd. Methods of analysis include trend, horizontal and vertical analyses as well as ratios such as Debt, Current and Quick ratios. Other calculations include rates of return on Shareholders’ Equity and Total Assets and earnings per share to name a few. All calculations can be found in the appendices.

Results of data analysed show that all ratios are below industry averages. In particular, comparative performance is poor in the areas of profit margins, liquidity, credit control, and inventory management.

The report finds the prospects of the company in its current position are not positive. The major areas of weakness require further investigation and remedial action by management. Recommendations include:

- improving the average collection period for accounts receivable
- improving/increasing inventory turnover
- reducing prepayments and perhaps increasing inventory levels

The report also investigates the fact that the analysis conducted has limitations. For example, as current information was not available, the results are based on past performance, and forecasting figures are not provided.

Adapted from Woodward-Kron, R. 1997, *Writing in Commerce: a guide to assist Commerce students with assignment writing*, (Revised edition), Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, The University of Newcastle.
An essay assignment sometimes requires a Synopsis or Abstract, in a similar way to the use of an Executive Summary for a report (see above). An abstract is often just a single paragraph. Your Subject Outline or other details you have been provided about the assignment task will clarify whether you need to include this.

Like an executive summary, a Synopsis or Abstract serves the purpose of helping the reader to see in advance what the main points of the essay will be. It is important to ensure the key critical perspective or point of view is included in the Synopsis or Abstract, which typically follows a structure made up of brief statements on each of the following:

- purpose of the essay
- structure of the essay
- main critical perspective / point of view / thesis
- conclusion

The Abstracts that typically preface articles published in academic journals usually provide a good model of the way that an Abstract should be written for an essay. The following example is the Abstract for a published journal article about an empirical research study with statistical findings, but its structure is basically similar to an Abstract that would be written for an essay.

### Example of an Abstract

**Orientation to topic**

(IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC)

**Focus (Hypothesis)**

**Purpose/goal**

**Key findings**

**Abstract**

There has been a lot of research done to better understand the effects of taxation on cigarette consumption. Since cigarettes are addictive, it could be expected that taxation would have little or no effect on the number of cigarettes smoked per day or the percentage of smokers within a given population. This paper aims to investigate these effects and, more specifically, to differentiate between adult smokers and underage smokers. It will be shown that the percentage of adult smokers does not change with taxation whereas the percentage of underage smokers decreases significantly when excise taxes on cigarettes increase. In addition, it will also be shown that the average number of cigarettes smoked per day decreases as well.


If your written assignment contains many specialist terms or ones whose definitions are very particular to the assignment and therefore requiring special explanation, it may be appropriate to list all such terms in a glossary, which should sit on a separate page. This is unlikely to be required for most smaller-scale coursework assignments.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

If your written assignment contains many specialist abbreviations or acronyms, it may be appropriate to collect together a list of these to sit on a separate page, allowing the reader to cross-refer to the list to check the meaning. In the body of the assignment, you should always provide the full wording of any such specialist shortened terms on the first occasion that you use them, but then subsequent reference to that term can be by use of the shorter form.

LIST OF TABLES/FIGURES

If your written assignment makes use of a lot of tables, figures and other visual material, it may be appropriate to collect together a list of these to sit on a separate page. Such a list should include the number and title of each item as well as their page number.

INTRODUCTION

An introduction is an essential element of any complete written assignment, whether it is an essay, a report, an oral presentation, etc. The introduction serves as a map for the reader to the whole assignment, and would normally be no more than 10% – 15% of the total length of the assignment. In longer assignments, the introduction may comprise multiple paragraphs, whilst in a research thesis it would normally comprise an entire chapter.

An introduction to an essay will normally comprise at least one full paragraph or up to several paragraphs for longer essays. Essay introductions often achieve several purposes, as demonstrated in the example below, although not all these stages are necessarily present in every introduction. Most essay introductions also include a statement of the ‘thesis’ or point of view that the essay will argue. Often lecturers will prefer you to include such a statement to help them understand your essay better.

Example introduction for an essay

Every manager has probably experienced ...... at some time in their career, and has probably wondered why it has occurred. Smith (2002) has commented that in spite of the hundreds of studies that have been reported, we are nowhere near a complete understanding of ....... Indeed, a survey conducted by Jones (2004) concluded that 73% of business failures were caused at least indirectly by ....... This paper will focus upon one of the more recent of....... The paper will review the research conducted upon the use of behaviourally anchored rating scales during the period from 1999 to 2005 in small and medium sized enterprises. The review is motivated by the search for practical methods that managers can use.

The first section of this paper will deal with the general confusion surrounding transactional leadership by raising problems of the diversity of definitions, lack of proper research designs, the cultural embeddedness of the concept and an over-reliance on anecdotal evidence. The review of literature will show that.... While a variety of definitions of the term ...... has been suggested, this paper will use the definition first suggested by Brown (2001), who saw it as .......
Introduction to a report

According to the UniLearning website, there are various stages that might be included in the introduction section of a report in Business:

- the background to the issue (i.e. why was the report commissioned),
- the objective or purpose of the report
- a definition of the research problem/topic
- a definition of the report’s terms of reference (the what, where, and when of the research problem/topic)
- an outline of the report’s structure
- an overview of the report’s sections and their relationship to the research problem
- an outline and justification of the scope of the report (the boundaries the report is working within)
- a description of the range of sources used (i.e. personal investigation, interviews, statistics and questionnaires)
- acknowledgment of any valuable assistance received in the preparation of the report


In the following example report by a student, only some of these stages are present, because the report is actually a case study analysis and does not therefore entail the collection of new data and so on.

Example introduction for a case study report

**Introduction**

This report provides information obtained through ratio analysis, regarding the profitability, liquidity and financial stability of Outdoor Equipment Ltd for the years 1993 – 1995.

This report will pay particular attention to the earning power, liquidity and credit management, inventory management and debt management, and will highlight major strengths and weaknesses while offering some explanation for observed changes.

The report will comment on the prospects of the company and make recommendations that would improve Outdoor Equipment Ltd’s current performance. These observations do have limitations which will be noted. This report will explain how a cash flow statement and a prospectus could enhance analysis.

Adapted from Woodward-Kron, R. 1996, *Writing in Commerce: a guide to assist Commerce students with assignment writing*, Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, The University of Newcastle.
THE BODY OF AN ESSAY

The body of an essay constitutes the major part (perhaps 80%) of the whole assignment, and is made up of its own internal structure which the essay-writer must develop. This is usually the most challenging part of essay writing, since the structure and sequence of ideas in the essay constitutes the student’s original way of looking at the topic and developing their particular point of view about it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Some assignments require a separate element for the review of literature. This is quite common in research reports or position papers. Essays, by contrast, do not have a separate element for the review of literature, because the evidence from literature is woven throughout the structure of the whole essay.

METHODS (METHODOLOGY)

A Methods or Methodology section typically occurs in formal reports of some original research conducted by the author of the report. For example, a marketing assignment that involves collecting some information about people’s perceptions would probably have a standard report structure which would include a Methods section. However, other types of reports may also include a Methods section, for example, where data sources and analytical methods could be outlined. In other assignment types, it is not usual to include a Methods section. Essays never have a methods section.

The Methods section provides an account of the procedures used in the research in sufficient detail to allow another investigator to repeat the study to verify results. Included in this section could be a description of:

- the research subjects and how they were chosen
- any equipment or instructions used
- exactly how the study was carried out
- descriptions of surveys or interview formats (with a copy provided in the Appendices of each instrument)

The Methods section may also:

- indicate the theories and principles underlying the approaches adopted
- indicate any assumptions or limitations of the methods
- highlight any ethical issues or dimensions raised by the methods and how these were dealt with

RESULTS

A separate Results section is normally only included in a report on empirical research conducted by the author. Results should be summarized using tables or graphs or other visual representations wherever possible, and all such material must be clearly labeled. Other library-based research reports, or case-based investigations would not normally be expected to have a separate section for Results.
DISCUSSION (FINDINGS)

Those reports which have a Results section would normally have a subsequent section for the Discussion of those results. Otherwise, this section might normally be termed Findings or Key Findings. Sometimes the Discussion or Findings section of a report may also include the conclusion, or otherwise the conclusion can be a separate section (see below).

In presenting and discussing the Findings, some of the following prompts may help to consider what to include:

- What were the most significant findings and how are they explained?
- Were there any unanticipated outcomes and how can these be explained?
- How do the findings compare with those of other researchers?
- Was the method appropriate for the research?
- How could the study design have been improved?
- What deductions or conclusions can be drawn from the findings?
- What implications do the findings have for theory or practice?

CONCLUSION

Just as any complete piece of writing needs an introduction, so too does it need a conclusion. What is common to all conclusions is that no new information should be introduced. Instead, everything in the conclusion must be related in some way to what has already been included in the whole assignment. This could be in the form of a consolidation of key points made, specific answers to questions asked at the beginning, particular implications of matters raised in the assignment, and so on. Thus the conclusion draws together and consolidates all the threads in the assignment to bring them to a point of closure about what has been learned.

Example of a conclusion to a research article

CONCLUSION

This study reports insights into the culture of management in the technical arm of a major Australian financial institution. The focus has been the ways in which leaders in corporate settings are identified and developed. As is evident from the results, the processes whereby managers secure career advancement appear to have little or nothing to do with HRM approaches to leadership identification and management, and a great deal to do with networks, patronage and group loyalty. In particular, the practices of ‘tapping on the shoulder’ and of sponsoring have been elucidated as being extremely important within corporate culture concerning the emergence of leaders, even though for the most part these processes are tacit in nature and are not part of the espoused HRM strategy.

The study draws on one set of data only. Though these data are rich, in terms of the number of managers interviewed and the quality of the data elicited, the themes identified from the results will now need to be further explored in other settings. One methodological conclusion from the data is, however, inescapable: it is not until managers are encouraged to talk about the various dimensions of their work culture that there is an indepth understanding of what is really going on in terms of the structures and processes that support the emergence of corporate leaders.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for future actions may be required in certain types of written assignments, and particularly in reports. These can be included as a separate section before or after the conclusion, or they sometimes appear as a part of the conclusion section, with a sub-heading saying ‘recommendations’. Recommendations should state what actions should be implemented based on the findings of the report. They must be logically justified by specific findings and therefore cannot just appear without the premise having been established by the report’s findings. Recommendations are usually framed from the perspective of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and by when; that is, these are actions for people to do, rather than reflective thinking by the author.

**REFERENCE LIST**

The Reference List provides the full bibliographical details of every source referred to in the written assignment. Reference lists are arranged alphabetically by the author’s surname, making it easier for the reader to locate them in the list.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

A Bibliography is like a Reference List except that it also includes source material that the author read and found to be helpful, but did not actually cite in the written assignment. The purpose of using a Bibliography is to help the reader locate other relevant material on this topic. It is not usual to use a Bibliography in written assignments, however, as there is an assumption that students will consult many sources to help them understand a topic, but will make sure they cite in their assignment those sources which were of central relevance. This ensures therefore their inclusion in the Reference List.

**APPENDICES**

The Appendices are where other information which has been referred to in the main part of your report is attached. The advantage of using Appendices is that the report itself does not become cluttered with a large amount of detailed information, but can concentrate on the key messages and brief summaries of the full information. The inclusion of the detailed information is important to justify and substantiate these key message. Cross-references need to be made from the report to the Appendices to guide the reader to the detailed information which can include a wide array of material, for example:

- Questionnaires/Answers to questionnaires
- Interview transcripts
- Consent forms
- Maps
- Articles/clippings
- Data Charts/Tables
- Diagrams
- Pamphlets
- Specifications
All written assignments are composed of paragraphs. They are the basic unit of longer pieces of writing, and they serve to break up the text into easily observed clusters or ‘chunks’ of related meanings. If a long text is just one long text with no paragraphs, it is very difficult to read. Their key feature is that it is a collection of sentences that develop a main idea. The length of a paragraph is not defined, although usually in an academic piece of writing, it will comprise at least several sentences.

Rather than defining a paragraph by its length, it is the logical clustering of the whole written assignment into paragraphs or ‘chunks’ of meaning which makes them effective. From the perspective of the reader, a page which has several paragraphs is likely to be easier to read than a page that has either no separate paragraphs, or too many. From the perspective of the writer, the planning of a written assignment according to its paragraph structure is a useful technique that many writers find helpful in working out what their main ideas are and how to sequence them.

However, just having paragraphs representing logical chunks of meaning is not enough in itself. There are two key aspects of paragraph structuring that are equally important in making the meaning clear and obvious for the reader: the paragraph’s own structure, and the transitions across paragraphs.

Paragraphs usually have their own internal structure of a beginning, middle, and end, and the first sentence of a paragraph is often a ‘topic sentence’ which tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about. The clearer this structure is, the easier it is for the reader to understand what the paragraph is all about. The connections from one paragraph to the next are also critical to revealing the way that the argument is being developed. Effective writing uses many ways of signalling these connections or transitions.

An example of writing with clear internal and transitional links

Contrastive link to the previous paragraph about ‘the impressive gains’
Links forward to the list of problems and tensions which this paragraph is about
Links back to the ‘cheap products’ referred to in the previous paragraph
Links forward to this paragraph which is about the cheap products

Despite the impressive gains of the era, there were problems and tensions. The rise of new economic and military powers caused much consternation. European, American, and Japanese colonial expansion threatened the sovereignty and sense of national identity of many in the developing world. Ethnic conflict wracked the Balkans and the Middle East. What we might now call anti-globalisation sentiment was growing, with movements against free trade.... And perhaps most worrying to residents of the industrialised world, cheap products were flooding into the rich countries from rapidly growing nations elsewhere, threatening the livelihood of millions of people.

The low-priced imports that caused such suffering a hundred years ago were the agricultural products coming into Europe from....


An excellent learning resource to practise writing cohesively is the Clearer Writing module published by the Learning Centre at the University of Sydney. http://learningcentre.usyd.edu.au/clearer-writing/index.html
Headings and numbering systems

Sometimes these structural elements will be presented with headings and sub-headings. The use of sub-headings is particularly useful in longer, more complex written assignments, as they help the reader by giving visual ‘road signs’ that mark the different sections of the whole piece. For example, a report’s structure might be illuminated by the sub-headings of the abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion and conclusion.

When sub-headings are used, they can be presented:

- as structural labels, which simply identify each element according to its role in the structure (for example, abstract, introduction, method, etc)
- as meaning labels, which provide an idea of the meaning (what it’s about) contained within each section, OR
- a combination of both structural and meaning labels.

Headings are normally single words or short phrases. Numbering systems can also be used in combination with headings to enhance this visual map or picture of the structure of your assignment, and formatting features such as indented text for each sub-headed level can further clarify the relationships. When using sub-headings, it is important to ensure you choose wordings that are parallel in their logical meaning and grammatical structure, as highlighted in the examples below.

Example 1 with poorly designed headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. PRELIMINARY COSTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1. Substantial costs of recruiting staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1.1. Management and clerical positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1. Salaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Computing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1. Workplace issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SECONDARY COSTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1. Etc etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 with improved heading design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. PRELIMINARY COSTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1. Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.1. Management positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.2. Clerical positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2. Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3. Salaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1. Computing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2. Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SECONDARY COSTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1. Etc etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. THE BASIC TYPES OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

ASSEMBLING THE ELEMENTS: What are the commonest assignments?

There are many possible types of written assignments that are set to assess learning in subjects within Business. In this section, you will find a summary of the main characteristics of the basic types of assignments in UTS:Business. Many assignment tasks may comprise a mixture of these basic types, hybrids that have characteristics from multiple types. Always the most important information that you need to refer to is your Subject Outline which should provide information about the type of assignment required in terms of its purpose, structure and other characteristics as well as the assessment criteria.

AN ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

An essay is a very common assignment type in disciplines taught within business studies. The writing of essays is very strongly associated with academic contexts of learning and assessment, although essays are also a familiar genre in literature and literary fields of endeavour. Essays are generally relatively short pieces (often 1,000 to 2,000 words although sometimes longer), and are generally written on a non-factual topic on which the essay-writer expresses their own argument or point of view.

The essay is a completely self-contained piece of writing which develops its argument through to a logical conclusion. Essays do not normally use headings and sub-headings to reveal their structure, although sometimes, especially in longer essay, a heading system can be used. This means that the reader needs to read the essay all the way through to understand the flow of the argument, rather than just dipping in to read particular sections in the way one might read a report. Sometimes, however, a synopsis or abstract is required to provide a map for the reader of what to expect in the essay.

The main purpose in writing an essay is to convince the reader that your position or point of view is valid, well-justified, and well-substantiated by relevant research. The process of arguing the case to arrive at the conclusion is as important as the conclusion itself. The evidence from scholarly literature which is used to substantiate the argument is woven through the essay rather than being collected in a separate literature review section.

Writing essays tends to be seen by many students as being the most persistently difficult type of writing in that the structure of an essay is not pre-ordained, in the way that structure and sequence are more predictable for reports, case studies, etc.

Two helpful guides providing an in-depth account of essay assignments are:


Morley-Warner, T. 2009, Academic Writing is ... a Guide to Writing in a University Context, Association for Academic Language & Learning (AALL), Sydney.
A REPORT ASSIGNMENT

Reports can serve many different purposes, but their basic purpose is to provide an account of something, for example, of an event or a situation. In business settings, reports provide advice and information designed to aid decision-making. There are many different types of reports including financial reports, annual reports, feasibility reports, incident reports, impact reports, project reports, research reports, and so on.

The common purpose of all reports is to present information. However, the type of reports that you are required to write in UTS:Business will almost always require more than information. You will also need to analyse the information, and evaluate it using a critical perspective. You may also need to identify problems and offer solutions, possibly in the form of recommendations for action, and you might also be expected to speculate about future trends and impacts.

Business reports are typically written for a non-academic readership, for example, in professional settings for ‘insiders’ such as a company director/board or a committee, or for ‘outsiders’ such as a client or the general public. Some assignment tasks specify the intended reader(s), and this is an important clue to you in determining the style of report required and the most appropriate structure and language to use.

However, it is important to keep in mind that your work will also be read by your marker, and a very important purpose for writing the report is so that an assessment can be made of your learning in the subject. Sometimes, your academic assessor will be more interested in the academic research side of your report than your imagined readers would be in an authentic business setting.

Reports of all types are typically structured using headings and sub-headings that make it easy for the reader to understand the structure, and to selectively read sections of the whole report rather than having to read the whole thing to make sense of it. In this way, a report is very different from an essay because the reader can just dip in to read its sections.

Report-writing assignment tasks will normally specify the elements making up the required report structure, although some elements are almost always present in all reports, in particular an Executive Summary, Introduction, Discussion of key findings, and Conclusion. However, the other elements in a report may vary according to its purpose. For example, a report on an empirical research study you have undertaken may have its main body framed in terms of its method, results, discussion.

By contrast, a library-based research report may be framed in terms of a discussion of the key findings from the literature and the implications for practitioners. It is therefore important to check the requirements of your assignment task carefully. You will find explanations about the common types of elements typically found in reports in Section 4 of the Guide.

The UTS BELL Program provides a step-by-step guide to the process of ‘Writing reports’ particularly focused on empirical research reports.

http://www.bell.uts.edu.au/awg/reports
A CASE STUDY ASSIGNMENT

A case study is a written factual account of a particular situation explaining the development or history of that situation. Case study assignments are often used in business education to give students a feel for both the complexities of the real world and how the theories, models and research being studied can be used in practice. Generally speaking, case study assignment tasks require you to do one of the following:

- To analyse a given case study which is given to you for the assignment task
- To research a particular problem or issue, using case studies that you find from the published literature as examples to illustrate and analyse the problem
- To collect information for yourself inside a particular organization in order to prepare a case study

It is more likely that case study assignments in the early years of undergraduate study will revolve around cases that your lecturer will provide for the task. Sometimes particular questions about the case will be asked, or it may be left open-ended for the student to identify the problems and questions from their own analysis of the case.

In the second type of case study assignment, you might be given a particular question to answer, for example, ‘Is there a different work ethics amongst between employees in Australian and Asian companies in the eco-tourism industry?’ Your task would be to locate relevant cases that will shed light on the question. In more advanced study and research programs, you may become the researcher observing and recording the situation in an authentic business setting to develop up a new case study.

Whether the case study is given to you, or you have to develop the information for yourself, the type of analysis conducted in a case study assignment follows much the same course. The approach is to diagnose what the problems or issues in the case are, and why they have occurred; to consider a variety of possible solutions; and finally to justify what you believe to be the best solution.

Effective case study written assignments demonstrate clear and logical analysis of the particular case supported by relevant research to explain the analysis and proposed solutions. The analysis of the case requires careful and critical reading of all the details of the case. The research may include relevant theoretical perspectives, published data, and information from industry.

The written assignment for a case study analysis is essentially a kind of report. You will probably be given a required way of structuring the assignment. If not, a common structure for presenting a case study assignment is:

- Introduction
- Outline of problems/issues in the case, their causes, and factors affecting the situation
- Relevant theories, concepts, models to help explain the case
- Implications of the problems/issues
- Possible alternatives to address the problems/issues
- Recommended solutions and reasons for these
- Reference list
- Appendices

You may also be required to include an Executive Summary, Table of Contents, and possibly other elements.
The process of reviewing the literature published in a particular field of enquiry is a fundamental part of any scholarly academic work, from the first stages of starting an undergraduate course through to the continuing work of expert researchers and scholars at the leading edge of their field.

In the early stages of an undergraduate course, you might be asked to locate one or two articles and critically review them. As your studies become more advanced, you might be expected to critically review many different sources on a topic and identify where their gaps and weaknesses are in order to justify that some research you are doing is worthwhile. It is important to understand clearly what the mix of objectives is for undertaking a literature review, but essentially there are two broad aspects:

- Reviewing published literature in order to discover (LEARNING)
- Writing a review of published literature in order to demonstrate and justify your point of view (DEMONSTRATING YOUR UNDERSTANDING)

As you become more expert and a more autonomous researcher, your purposes in reviewing the literature tend to move from telling, to transforming, and eventually to extending knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING</th>
<th>Telling</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATING YOUR UNDERSTANDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to learn about knowledge in a particular field</td>
<td>to demonstrate that you understand what is known in a particular field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to learn who are the leaders in generating knowledge</td>
<td>to acknowledge the work and achievements of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discover how knowledge in a particular field has been developed and accumulated</td>
<td>to explain how knowledge has been developed and accumulated over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to understand the differences in people’s explanations and interpretations</td>
<td>to explain how different pieces of research are related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to discover how others have made their discoveries</td>
<td>to replicate the approaches other people have used in your own research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to identify what is still unknown</td>
<td>to explain that there are gaps or weaknesses in current knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to confirm that your own research is worthwhile to do</td>
<td>to explain how your research is justified as needing to be done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to identify which researchers to contact for exchanging views</td>
<td>to present a deeper analysis and interpretation of your own research</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Literature reviews can constitute a whole written assignment in their own right, or they might be a part of a bigger assignment. Sometimes an assignment in the early years of undergraduate study might simply ask you to locate some relevant references on a particular topic and summarise their key messages, to help you learn more about that topic area. This type of assignment is sometimes referred to as an Annotated Bibliography, and it might be structured as a list made up of each reference, with notes or ‘annotations’ summarizing its key messages. Annotated Bibliographies can be sequenced alphabetically by the names of the authors of each reference included, or they can be organized...
into some sub-headings of relevant topic areas. Undertaking the development of a bibliography with annotations is a normal and fundamental part of the researching process, even at the most advanced level of study and research. The annotations that are written about each reference include both basic summary information as well as critical commentary.

A review of the literature is more than an Annotated Bibliography in that it focuses much more on the inter-relationships amongst the individual references. Its structure and sequence is not based on the individual references, but rather on the critical interpretation that the reviewer is making about these relationships. For this reason, a literature review assignment is often referred to as a Critical Literature Review. Usually such reviews in undergraduate subjects are intended to encompass what is known about a particular topic. However, in research programs, there is an additional intention for a critical literature review – namely, to justify that the researcher’s own research will make a worthwhile contribution to what is already known by extending on it.

For written assignments requiring a review of literature, it is important to understand what the purpose of the review is, as this will help you determine how to structure it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>a collection of relevant sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>a summary of relevant sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Review of a few sources</td>
<td>a critical analysis of several sources showing inter-relationships amongst them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literature Review on a topic</td>
<td>a critical analysis of relevant sources showing inter-relationships amongst them, and intended to encompass the existing knowledge in this field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Literature Review as part of a Proposal for your Research</td>
<td>a critical analysis of relevant sources showing inter-relationships amongst them, and intended to extend the knowledge in this field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a critical review of literature is required, it is very important that the structure of the review should not be as if it is just an annotated bibliography. The examples below show excerpts from two students’ writing for a critical literature review assignment. The first example is structured according to each individual reference being reviewed. This example represents the important first stages of reading and understanding the different sources being reviewed. However, this is not a critical literature review, but more like a series of individual summaries (a kind of annotated bibliography).
Example 1 (structured like an Annotated Bibliography)

The seven recent articles that were reviewed for this assignment are discussed in turn below.

(1) Smith (2003) reported on a survey of 287 senior managers in Victoria. Her study covered five major areas which were … Her results are summarised below … Smith (2003) concluded … While I agree with her about points A and B, I do not believe that she has presented sufficient evidence that X and Y should be related in the way she suggests.

(2) In a more detailed study, Jones (2004) carried out in-depth interviews with all middle to senior managers of an American insurance company. Jones (2004) was attempting to clarify the relationship between X and Y. Based on prior research, she hypothesised that … She concluded that … Although Jones’s (2004) study covers only one organisation, I would suggest that her explanation of the relationship of X and Y is more convincing than that offered by Smith (2003) or by Bloggs (2002). This is because … Bloggs (2002) …

The second example is structured according to the argument that this student has developed after having critically analysed all the readings.

Example 2 (structured like a Critical Literature Review)

The seven articles that were reviewed focused mainly on the following five major areas … Each of these areas will be discussed below, with a sixth section briefly commenting on some minor points which arose in only one or two of the articles.

(1) Relationship between X and Y

The relationship between X and Y was the major concern of the in-depth case study of an American insurance company by Jones (2004), and it was one of the five major areas covered in the survey of 287 Victorian senior managers conducted by Smith (2003). Bloggs (2002) also discussed this issue at a general level and the theory outlined by Young (2003) is also of some relevance. In essence, there appear to be two basic positions on this issue. Smith (2003), Bloggs (2002) and Young (2003) can all be seen as maintaining … Jones (2004), on the other hand … Overall, Jones’s (2004) position appears more convincing. This is because …

(2) The importance of A

All articles reviewed emphasised the importance of A except Jones (2004), who did not address this issue. To summarise the arguments for A, Smith (2003) found … Bloggs (2002) argued… etc.
6. THE STYLE OF WRITING IN ASSIGNMENTS

The style of writing for your assignments is determined by the purpose of the assignment and its intended audience. Academic writing often has a fairly high level of technicality and formality, although every writing task will have certain expectations regarding just how technical and formal the writing should be. If the task is to provide a detailed explanation of a complex topic for an expert reader (for example in an essay or academic research report), then the level of technicality and formality of language would probably be high.

However, if the explanation was intended for a non-expert reader (for example, a brochure written for the general public which makes a complex topic easier to understand), then the choice of language would tend to be less technical and formal. If the task is to maintain a personal reflective journal, then the style is less formal, less technical, and much more personal.

ACADEMIC OR NON-ACADEMIC STYLE: How is the language different?

It can be helpful to think of writing style as being the result of choices made in the language from a spectrum of options along a continuum. The more to the left of the continuum, the more academic the writing is; the more to the right of the continuum, the less academic it is.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC STYLE</th>
<th>NON-ACADEMIC STYLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very impersonal</td>
<td>Very personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very formal</td>
<td>Very informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very technical</td>
<td>Very non-technical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following example shows an excerpt from a student’s essay which is written in an inappropriate style with non-academic language that is too personal, too informal, and not technical.

Example 1: a non-academic style

Most people seem to think the immunization section of the record was okay, but you often hear people complain about how they use the vaccination record. As I said before, the Personal Health Record is currently being looked at by many health professionals as an immunisation record. Some time in the future, the law’s going to change so that you have to show proof that the immunisation has been done, and then this has gotta be presented before you enrol your child in school which is what they are proposing, and then this immunization section of the record may increase in importance.
The second example shows the same ideas redrafted in a more appropriate academic style for an essay.

**Example 2: same piece redrafted for an academic style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of an academic style of language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the record itself, which was the topic of the essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not mentioned directly but assumed as agents of these attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of more formal words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More simple clause structure with ideas more densely packed into just 2 clauses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The immunisation section of the record was generally well received and utilised, although the location of the vaccination record was a common complaint. As previously mentioned, the Personal Health Record is currently being regarded by many health professionals as an immunisation record. In the future, when legislation is enacted requiring proof of immunisation status (or of conscientious objection) to be presented prior to enrolment in school as is being proposed, this section of the record may increase in importance.

Sometimes particular lecturers might express their preferences about the style of language they would like you to use. For example, some lecturers might ask you to write in a more personal and subjective style about your ideas, whereas others may ask you to write in a more objective way. Always check your Subject Outline carefully for any particular requirements regarding the style of language to use.

An excellent learning resource to practise your style of writing is the Academic Writing section of the UniLearning site.

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/aca_intro.html

**GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY: How can I make sure my grammar is correct?**

Accurate grammar and sentence structure is essential in all written assignments you undertake, just as it is in professional business workplaces. If you are having problems with grammatical accuracy in your writing, it is important to find out what the problems are and to learn how to correct them for yourself.

To practise writing with grammatical accuracy, try the ‘Writing Sentences’ section of the UniLearning site.

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/writing/1a.html

To practise particular grammatical features, for example, verb tenses, and the use of the article (‘a’ and ‘the’) in English, try the ‘Grammar’ section of Monash University’s Language and Learning Online website.


For a reference booklet that outlines common problems of sentence structure and grammar, refer to the Guide to the Grammar and Usage of English for Students in the Faculty of Economics & Commerce at the University of Melbourne, available from the resources listed at the following site.

http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/students/study/booklets.html