

Complete Academic Writing Guide



From 'Harvard Referencing' through to constructing your essay, how to write a literature review, common grammatical errors and transitional link words.

Free to download and share.

Contents

<i>Grammar and Punctuation</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
<i>Parts of Speech</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Which Words to Use</i>	<i>Page 8</i>
<i>Common Grammatical Mistakes</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>Commonly Mistaken Words</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
<i>Structuring your Essay</i>	<i>Page 12</i>
<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>Page 13</i>
<i>Harvard Referencing</i>	
<i>Books, journals, newspapers, and magazines</i>	<i>Page 16</i>
<i>Websites, blogs, eBooks/pdfs and archive material</i>	<i>Page 17</i>
<i>Multimedia: Broadcasts, DVD/video/film, interviews, music/recordings, online videos, podcasts, lectures and presentations</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>In-text Citations</i>	<i>Page 21</i>



Grammar and Punctuation

Syntax refers to sentence structure. Very often a sentence can be made easier to understand by re-structuring it. For example, 'The way you put together a sentence requires much consideration. Just changing the order of words have a big impact on sentence clarity,' is more difficult to read than 'The clarity of a sentence can be improved by changing the order of the words. This sometimes requires a little consideration.'

Tenses are sometimes difficult to get right in academic writing, especially if English is not your first language. When introducing an author's arguments and theories it is important to use the present tense: 'Smith believes/states/argues that...'

The present tense is authoritative and lends conviction to your work. The most important thing though is consistency. Mixing tenses reduces the fluency of your writing so it is better to stick to one tense.

Colons and semi-colons have very different functions. Unless you are sure how to use them, don't! It's perfectly possible to write well without using them.

The semi-colon acts a paperclip. It clips together two sentences which are closely related but could equally be written as two different sentences. 'Smith argues that the difference between poverty and absolute poverty is just semantics; the outcome of poverty is the same regardless of the measures applied.' These sentences could be written as two stand-alone sentences, so the semi-colon works here.

Colons have different uses. One use is to introduce a list: 'The cost of unemployment is real: reduced access to healthcare, a negative impact on mental health, a negative effect on the ability to provide housing and clothing for one's family, and a decline in public service funds.'

They can also be used to separate an idea or a claim, from further explanation: 'He had only one job: to prepare him for his future in office.'

Apostrophes cause all sorts of issues and they are often used incorrectly, but they are not difficult to use properly. They have two functions; firstly, to show that a letter is missing and secondly, to show possession.

When used to show that letters are missing this is called a contraction, and they are best avoided in academic work. 'It's,' is a contraction of 'it is,' and 'he's,' is a contraction of he is. These would be written out in full in academic work.

For possession, the rules are simple. An apostrophe shows that an object belongs to a noun, to a person. If the house belongs to my mother, then it is written as 'my mother's house,' with the apostrophe showing that the house belongs to my mother. Similarly, it would be 'my brother's car', 'my sister's DVD' or my 'father's job.' With all these singular nouns (brother, sister, father etc), the apostrophe comes before the 's' because the objects belong to one person. If the noun is plural, for example if you had more than one brother and the car belonged to them both, the apostrophe would come after the s: 'My brothers' car.'

In short, for singular possession the apostrophe goes before the 's', plural possession it goes after the 's'.

Extra words don't add anything to your writing! Sometimes students fall into the trap of thinking that the more words they use to explain something, the better their writing is. Actually, it's the opposite! The more concise your writing is the higher the clarity and fluency will be. No-one wants to read a sentence ten times just to understand what you are trying to say. Take this example: 'Self-reflection is critical to my practice as a teacher. When I reflected on my work, I felt that it helped me to identify not only areas of weakness which I could work on in the future, but also areas of strength where it was evident that I had successfully made a positive impact on my pupil's ability to learn and develop in my classroom over the past 6 months.' That is a long and difficult paragraph. This would be much better: 'Reflecting on my practice in the classroom has allowed me to identify both strengths and weaknesses and how they have impacted on my pupils' progress.' The sentences say exactly the same thing, but the first one waffles and the second is concise. Good academic writing is clear and concise.

Commas are important and, like apostrophes, often mis-used. They have three main functions and once you understand these functions, they are easy to use correctly.

1) They are used to separate items in a list. For example, 'When I was shopping, I bought milk, eggs, bread, potatoes and butter.' It is up to you whether or not you put a comma before 'and' in the example above. I prefer not to, but simply decide which you prefer and stick to it.

2) They are used as a pair as a type of bracket to section off something that would still make sense if you read the sentence without it. For example, 'It is clear from this study, involving 350 patients, that stress was a big factor in the prevalence of high blood pressure among this age group.' In this example, the sentence still makes perfect sense if you take out the '350 patients' but it just adds a bit more information.

3) Commas are used to separate two adjectives, when the sentence would work with the adjectives either way around: 'The brown, heavy desk.'

Comma misuse: The most often way commas are used incorrectly is called either a 'comma splice,' or a 'run-on'. They both mean the same thing. This happens when a comma is used to separate two independent clauses. An independent clause is a sentence that can stand alone. Sometimes, people join these, typically very short, sentences together using a comma. 'She fell when she was running, she injured her leg' for example, would read better as 'She was running when she fell and injured her leg.'

Pronouns need to match their nouns. A common mistake is to mismatch these. 'She was working on his presentation' implies that there was a female who was helping a male to write his presentation. If the noun and the pronoun were matched, this would change the sentence completely, 'He was working on his presentation.'

1st, 2nd or 3rd person? Academic writing is usually written in the 3rd person using pronouns like, 'she', 'he' or 'they'.

Self-reflection pieces are written in the first-person using pronouns like, 'me' and 'I'.

No academic work is ever written in the 2nd person, using pronouns like 'yourself' and 'you.'

Abbreviations should be written out in full the first time you use them, with the abbreviation following in brackets. After this has been done, you continue to use the abbreviation throughout. For example, 'This has been a challenging year for those working in the National Health Service (NHS). Since the conception of the NHS in...'



Parts of Speech

Understanding the functions of different parts of speech can really help with the clarity of your writing so it's worth taking a little bit of time to understand them.

Nouns are objects or things; 'desk', 'train', 'house' and 'apple' are all nouns. These are called common nouns because the object it refers to is a common object, there are many of them in the world. Because they are common, these nouns don't have capital letters.

Proper nouns are the actual name of things. For example, university is a common noun because there are many universities. There is only one Swansea University though, so this is a proper noun, so capital letters are needed.

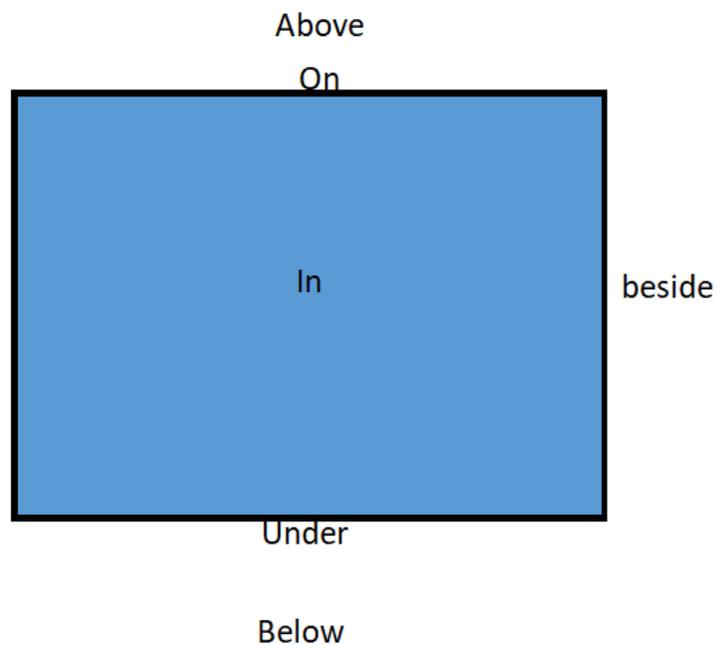
Pronouns are used in place of nouns: 'He', 'she', 'it', 'him' and 'her' are all pronouns. They are useful when writing to avoid repetition. For example, the sentence 'Erica is always at work. Erica is an editor and proofreader. Erica specialises in academic work and Erica is always pleased when people contact her for help with academic writing,' is tedious to read because of the overuse of 'Erica.' The sentence would be much better if it read 'Erica is always at work. She is an editor and proofreader and she is always pleased when people contact her for help with academic writing.'

Adjectives are describing words. They give a bit more information about the noun. For example, in the sentence 'the desk is by the window,' adjectives could be added to describe the nouns, 'window' and 'desk' could be made more interesting with an adjective to describe the table and the window: 'The brown, wooden desk is underneath the square window.'

Verbs are action words. They describe the action that the noun or pronoun is doing, for example, 'Erica is walking,' or 'She is walking.' Erica is the noun and the verb, the action word, is telling you that she is walking.

Adverbs describe the manner in which the verb is doing something. Adverbs commonly end in 'ly', like 'quickly' or 'slowly.' For example, instead of 'Erica is walking,' you could say 'Erica is walking slowly.' Alternatively, if I were talking, you could say 'Erica is/was talking loudly.'

Prepositions describe the position or movement of a noun. 'On', 'in,' 'under', 'at', 'by', 'below', 'above', 'with', 'before' and 'after' are all types of prepositions. Please see the diagram below for explanation.



Prepositions are also often used when describing a location. For example, 'The pub is **before** the church,' or 'The supermarket is on the left just **after** the garage.'



Which words to use?

Academic writing is different from every-day writing and it needs to be more formal. Some of this is achieved through syntax (see my grammar and punctuation guide), but a lot of it can be down to the words we use.

Key words you can use throughout your essay

Analyse, compare, argues, claims, confirms, states, determines, concludes, draws and demonstrates.

Link words for contrast:

Although/despite/but/even
though/contrary/whereas
however/in contrast/compared
to/still/whereas

Words to expand on something:

Furthermore/consequently
or as a consequence/ in
addition/moreover/
accordingly/since

Link words to illustrate something:

Although/despite/but/even
though/contrary/whereas/
however/in
contrast/compared
to/still/whereas

Words to show you are drawing to a conclusion:

Finally/therefore/as a result/it is clear then/in conclusion/as a result



Common Grammatical Mistakes

Their/they're/there

These are often confused because they are homophones, they all sound the same (depending on accent of course), but it's actually easy to know which one you should be using.

- Their indicates plural possession: 'It's their house' or 'I ate their sweets.'
- There refers to location: 'It's over there' or 'Their house is over there.'
- They're is a contraction. The apostrophe indicates missing letters, in this case, a missing 'a' from 'they are.' 'They're gorgeous shoes', or 'They're going to be late.'

Where/were/we're/wear

Again, the pronunciation for these 4 words is similar so they are easily confused.

Where: in or at what place? 'Where is the pub?' or 'where is the ticket.'

Were: Were is the plural past tense of 'are.' (second person). 'We are in the kitchen' becomes 'we were in the kitchen.' This means 'we used to be in the kitchen.'

We're: A contraction of we are. 'We're going to be late or 'we're going to town.'

Wear: To have on the body. 'She wears her green coat all the time.'

Who's/whose

Who's is a contraction used either for who is, or who has. 'She has a brother who's in college in London.'

Whose is possession: 'Whose house is this.'

Your/You're

Your is possessive. 'It's your house' it's your coat.'

You're is a contraction of 'you are': 'You're wearing glasses?' or 'It's raining outside. You're going to get wet if you don't wear your coat.'



Commonly Mistaken Words!

Except/accept

Except is something that is the exception, something that is different from everything else - 'everything was lovely except the bread, which was stale.'

Accept is to say yes to a gift, a belief or a situation - 'She gratefully accepted the gift' or 'She accepted that this was the only way.'

Loose/lose

Loose refers to something that is not tight - 'the screw in the wall was too loose to hold the picture.'

Lose refers to when you don't win or when you misplace something - 'She was running so slowly she had to lose the race' or 'She is always losing things.'

Cite/Sight/site

Cite is to quote or mention as you do in your essays - 'Smith (2015) argues that...'

Sight refers to your vision or something you can see - 'Her sight was poor' or 'He had it in his sights' or finally 'They went to see the sights.'

Site refers to a website or a specific location - 'I saw it on the site you shared with me' or 'We went to the geological site.'

Than/then

Than is used to compare - 'His hair is curlier than his sister's hair,' or 'The weather is wetter in Wales than in England.'

Then relates to time - 'It was then that she noticed.'



Structuring your Essay

You structure an essay for purposes of clarity. You may have an amazing argument, all backed up by current research, but unless you can get that down on paper, clearly and informatively, you won't get any credit for them!

Essays usually have four main components: Introduction, main body, conclusion and references.

Introduction: This is telling your reader what this essay is about, what you are going to do, and how you are going to do it. It also tells the reader you are aware of other research in this area. It's basically setting out your plan for the essay.

Introduce the topic, defining any key words if necessary – this demonstrates understanding.

Describe what you are going to, are you including a literature review, are you going to compare arguments from other authors, are you going to be using data to support your response etc.

You are describing the question being asked, and your plan to answer the question.

Main body This is the development of your argument. You need to be logical here to maximise impact. This section should be split into paragraphs addressing different points. Each paragraph must have a reason, a main point. If the paragraph is very long, consider 'wrapping it up' in the last sentence just to keep everything focussed. Because each paragraph contains a main point, it is important to link these paragraphs so that the reader can see they are all related to one another and not just a collection of random points.



I prefer to work with subheadings. I write down each little sub-topic or heading than plan my paragraph for each – if you do this, you obviously need to remember to delete those before submission! It really helps me though, to have this clear plan of where I'm going and what each paragraph needs to address.

Conclusion Here, you summarise your main arguments. The concluding statement should answer the question. You don't want them to finish reading and wonder if the question has been answered! You can't leave them in any doubt.



Literature Review

A literature review can be a standalone piece of work, or a chapter in a larger thesis/dissertation. It does not include new/primary research.

What is the purpose of a literature review?

A literature review has a few purposes. It:

- 1) places each reviewed work in context of what it contributes to the understanding of the topic.
- 2) resolves conflict between papers which seem to have different arguments
- 3) describes the relationships to each other of all the works
- 4) identifies areas that have previously been explored so that duplication of effort is prevented
- 5) lets you lay out how your original work fits in with these already published works.
- 6) identifies gaps in previous research, and finds new ways to interpret them or sheds new light on them
- 7) identifies a path for further research.

Developing your literature review

- 1) What is your review doing?** Identify the field being examined and the issues it raises.
- 2) Literature.** Find your relevant literature.
- 3) Evaluate your data.** Decide which pieces make the most significant contribution to the topic.
- 4) Analyse and interpret.** Discuss the findings (including the conclusions) of the relevant literature.

A literature review should have the following:

- 1) An overview of the subject you are reviewing, and it should make clear its objectives.
- 2) Works grouped into categories: those that support a certain position, those against and those that offer an alternative viewpoint.
- 3) An explanation of how each work is similar to and different from the other works.
- 4) A conclusion of which pieces argue their point the best, which are the most convincing, and importantly, which of them make the biggest contribution to the understanding of the topic.

When you are assessing each piece consider:

Provenance: Author credentials, are arguments supported by evidence?

Objectivity: Is the article even-handed or does it demonstrate prejudice? Does it ignore contrary data and studies?

Value: Are the arguments and conclusions of the author convincing? Does it contribute to understanding?



Harvard referencing for books, journals, newspapers, and magazines.

(‘Riding the Waves’ is the book title, chapter title in edited books, and article in journals and newspapers).

Books

One author

Smith, J. (2008). *Riding the Waves*. London: Oxford University Press, p.156

If no edition is mentioned, it is safe to assume it is the 1st addition and this can be left out. If it is the 2nd/3rd edition etc, this goes between the title and the publisher:

Smith, J. (2008). *Riding the Waves*. 4th ed. London: Oxford University Press, p. 156.

Two or more authors

Remember to put the authors names as they appear on the book, not in alphabetical order:

Smith, J. and Abel, G. (2008). *Riding the Waves*. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 156-157.

Chapter in an Edited Book

Last name, First initial. (year published). Chapter title. In: First Initial. Last name, ed., *Book Title*, City: Publisher, Pages

So, where Andrew Hutchings wrote a chapter called ‘Surfboard Preparation’ in John Smith’s book, it would look like this:

Hutchings, A. (2008). Surfboard Preparation. In: Smith, J. *Riding the waves*. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 24-58.

Print Journals

Last name, First initial. (Year published). Article title. *Journal*, Volume ? (issue #), Page(s).

Smith, J. (2015). Riding the Waves. *British Sports*, Volume 55 (2), pp. 112-124.

Online Journals

Same as print journals. But put [online] after the journal title, and Available at: URL [Accessed Day, Month, Year] at the end.

Smith, J. (2015). Riding the Waves. *British Sports*, [online] Volume 55 (2), pp. 112/124. Available at: <http://www.journals4us.123456.html> [Accessed 8. Apr, 2020].

Print Newspaper

Smith, J. (2020). Riding the Waves in Cornwall. *The Daily Mirror*, pp.12-13.

Online Newspaper

Smith, J. (2020). Riding the Waves in Devon. *The Daily Mirror*, [Online], pp.12-13. Available at: <http://www.thedailymirror/123456.html> [Accessed 8th. Apr. 2020]

Print Magazines

Smith, J. (2020). Riding the Waves. *Surfing Rocks*, (24) pp.13-17.



Harvard referencing for websites, blogs, eBooks/pdfs and archive material

Websites

If author is listed:

Lloyd, E. (2020). Downloads/Academic Downloads. [Online] Erica's Edits. Available at: ericasedits.com/downloads/academicdownloads [Accessed 08 Apr. 2020].

If no author is listed:

Erica's Edits, (2020). *Downloads/Academic Downloads*. [Online] Available at: www.ericasedits.com/downloads/academicdownloads [Accessed 08 Apr.2020].

eBooks and Pdfs

The editions for these need to be included even if it is the 1st edition. Also, include whether it is a pdf or eBook in square brackets after the edition number.

Smith, J. (2008). *Surfing for the beginner*. 1st ed. [ebook] London: Oxford University Press, pp14-15. Available at: www.ebooksonline.com [Accessed 08 Apr 2020].

Print Newspaper

Smith, J. (2020). Surfing in Cornwall. *The Daily Mirror*, pp.12-13.

Archive Material

An archive is usually held by an organisation like a museum, library or university. They can have various things in them from artwork, through to letters and manuscripts.

Last Name, First Initial. (Year published). *Title of the material*. [format] Name of the organisation, Collection name, code, or number, City.

Smith, J. (2020). *Riding the Waves*. [watercolour painting] London University, The history of British Sport. London.

Blogs

Smith, J. (2020). *'Best Surf Spots in the UK'* [Blog] Surfing Blog. Available at: www.surfingblog/bestsurfspotsintheuk/11111.html

[Accessed 08 Apr 2020].



Harvard referencing for multimedia:

Broadcasts, DVD/video/film, Interviews, music/recordings, online videos, podcasts, lectures and presentations.

Broadcasts

Series title, (Year published). [Type of programme] Channel Number: Broadcaster.

Modern Family, (2010). [TV programme] 6: Abc.

Film/Video/DVD

The place of origin is where the film was made e.g., Chicago, Hollywood

The last name is the film maker. This can be the director, the studio or main producer

Girls Just Want to Have Fun. (1985). [Film] Chicago: Alan Metter.

Interviews

Last name of interviewer, Initial and Last name of Interviewee, First initial. (Year of interview). *Title or description of Interview*.

Lloyd, E. and Smith, J. (2020). *The Popularity of Surfing as a Growing Sport*.

Music/Recordings

Jackson, M. (1982). *Thriller*. [CD] West Hollywood: Epic

Barenboim, D. (2020). Piano Concerto in G KV 162. [2010] *Great Classical Music*. [CD] London: EM

Online Videos and Images

The last name and initial can be replaced by a corporation. Format in square brackets is either image or video.

Smith, J. (2013). *10 of the Best Surfing Tricks*, [video] Available at: <https://www.toptensurfingtricks> [Accessed 08 Apr 2020].

Podcasts

Smith, J. (2020). *Surfing tips ep. 1* [podcast]. Surfing Tips. Available at <https://www.surfingtips/surfingtipsepisode1> [Accessed 08 Apr 2020].

Lectures and presentations

Smith, J. (2020). How to re-design your surfboard for maximum speed.



In-Text Citations

One author

Smith's fascination with surfing tricks as a superpower was obvious (Smith, 2015).

Two or three authors

Remember again, to use the names in the order they are used in the book, even if not alphabetical.

“The unique place of surfing in Britain's sporting history demonstrates that sports develop in response to cultural and societal events (Smith and Able, 2015).

“The unique place of surfing in Britain's sporting history demonstrates that sports develop in response to cultural and societal events (Smith, Able and Johnson, 2015).

Four or more authors

First listed author's name, followed by 'et al.'

“ It was clear then that this approach had validate their argument (Smith et al., 2015).

No author but an organisation

Use the name of the organisation in place of the author.

The NHS (2018) argued that physiotherapy services for sports people are of higher importance than post-injury care.

No author or organisation

Title of text goes in the brackets instead of the author's name, followed by the date.

It demonstrates that arthritis was the main cause of professional surfers retiring early (Surfing Notes, 2015).

Author but no date

Just Omit the date and include the author.

“The unique place of surfing in Britain’s sporting history demonstrates that sports develop in response to cultural and societal events (Smith, Able and Johnson).

Erica's Edits