



Media and Communications Department

Style Guide

(incorporating Guides to Essay Presentation,
Referencing, Scholarly Communication
and Attribution in Journalism)
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A copy of this guide is available on the Media and Communications Department web site at
http://sydney.edu.au/arts/media_communications/resources/index.shtml

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Introduction

One of our teaching aims in the department is to produce graduates who can communicate in numerous genres and forms. Many of your units in news writing and media production are designed to help you do this. We hope that as part of your development as writers you learn to identify different genres and their conventions, and adjust your writing practice accordingly. Scholarly or academic writing is also a genre that has particular rules. Some of these relate to presentation, formatting and referencing. But there are also conventions around the idea of scholarly communication that are important.

Guide to Essay Presentation

Presentation and Style

Format

Your essay should be typed. You should also double-space your copy and leave margins of at least four cm on both sides of your page to allow the reader to comment. Text should only appear on one side of the page. For written essays a font such as Times or Palatino 12 pt is usually recommended. Page numbers and a word count should be provided.

Word length

Unless expressed otherwise in the unit of study outline, the word count includes everything except the list of references.

Consult your unit of study outline for specific penalties applied to excessive word length.

The structure

Your essay should include an introduction (in which you outline the theme of your essay and flag the issues you plan to address), a body (in which you explore the themes of your essay and present arguments supported by evidence, expert opinions and examples), and a conclusion (in which you briefly recap your arguments and draw conclusions). You may divide your essay into stanzas and use subheadings if you wish. Information central to your argument should be placed in main body of essay, rather than footnotes or endnotes.

Expression

Your goal should be to write as clearly and succinctly as possible. Avoid generalisations and always illustrate abstract concepts with examples taken from media texts where relevant or possible. Avoid jargon and make sure you explain any difficult concepts, quotes or specialist terms in your own words to demonstrate that you understand the concept.

Titles

When referred to in your discussion, titles of books, films, television and radio programs, newspapers, and websites should be italicised, or underlined if the work is handwritten or produced on a typewriter. Titles of articles, book chapters and unpublished manuscripts or papers should be enclosed in quotation marks. It is not necessary to refer to the title of every text you cite, as usually the author's name and year will be enough to track down the work in the bibliography. Obviously, there may be instances when including the title enhances the quote you are referencing and/or the argument you are making.

Quotations

Quotes less than three lines long should be enclosed by double quotation marks. Quotes within quotes should be identified by single quotations marks.

Quotes which are more than three lines long should be separated from the main text and indented. You should omit quotation marks.

For example:

In *The Elements of Style* William Strunk and E.B. White write:

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer makes all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

For further tips about essay structure and style consult *The Write Site* elearning web-site.
<http://writesite.elearn.usyd.edu.au/>

Guide to Referencing

The preferred Department style is APA 6th edition. There are numerous handouts that describe how to use APA

at <http://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/content.php?pid=160012&sid=1509941>

There is also an interactive guide

at <http://sydney.edu.au/library/elearning/learn/referencing/index.php>

While APA is the preferred system you may use any referencing system supported by the library as long as you use it **consistently** and you include all of the key bibliographic elements required (author, title, place, publisher, etc.).

The list of citation styles supported by the university can be found

at <http://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/citation>

Guide to Scholarly Communication

Scholarly communication can occur in a range of forms (spoken and written) and genres, from conference papers to debates or forums, to book reviews and essays. Academic essays have a special place in scholarly communication. They are a compact form for exploring an entire suite of skills: from researching, to formation of an argument, to page formatting and referencing (the latter being crucial to avoid penalties for plagiarism). The term ‘essay’ has links to the idea of ‘assaying’, weighing up. The essay is about examination, trial, testing, proving, measuring, adjusting and ascertaining. Essays are a very useful genre for exploring positions and arguments.

But essay writing is not the only form of scholarly communication and so it can be useful to think about its broader aspects. The principles of communication we are discussing here can apply to verbal discourse (discussion and debate) as well as writing (essay writing as mentioned, but also other kinds of written argument).

Having and conveying an argument is a defining aspect of scholarly communication. But what exactly does this mean when your lecturer says you need to find an argument, or make it stronger? Some key terms and ideas might be useful here.

1. *Focus*. An important term to think about in relation to argument is focus. This means addressing the topic under discussion or essay question at hand, and formulating a response to it. Sometime, this response will comprise a collection of points that are only loosely organised. This loose collection of points will often be lacking any strong conclusion. A more sophisticated response is to develop an argument and organise your points in a way that strengthens and demonstrates your argument.

2. *Defining your terms*. Every concept and term has in-built characteristics and limitations. One of the key responsibilities of scholarly communication is to define terms that you use. Don’t always use a dictionary, as a dictionary tends to give common meanings rather than special or technical ones. Often, the definition promoted by a key figure or theorist in the field is better.

3. *Assertions and Claims*. Every time you make an assertion or claim, you are assuming things about the state of the world. One of the dangers students run into is firstly making unsubstantiated claims, and secondly making claims that are far too general. Unsubstantiated claims lack support and evidence. General claims are by nature generalizing (e.g. ‘All people [without exception] think x’). Look at what claims you are making and whether you have explained them correctly and clearly, and whether you have supported them. A secret of scholarly communication is to make claims that are relevant and supportable – but note, restricting your claims to first person ‘I’ does not always give your claim strong support. ‘This is what I think’ is not a strong academic argument. ‘Based on these arguments, and these circumstances, backed up by these sources, this is what I argue,’ is stronger.

Making a claim based on the activities of unnamed figures, or basing a claim on generalisations, is not good practice. Common knowledge provides limited justification for statements, but you should be careful in relying on common knowledge. If you find yourself making unsubstantiated claims, you may need to adjust the claim you are making to make it less grand. This might mean going back to what your readings or textbook has said about a topic, and

building a claim more carefully, or grounding it more carefully. If you find yourself making claims which are too general, you may need to qualify your statements, or bolster the claim with evidence (sometimes both are important).

4. *Structure of argument.* An argument sometimes involves multiple parts; one claim followed by another. Special attention should be given to the structure and logic of the argument. This also means thinking about organisation. In your essay or presentation or even in classroom discussion, you will have identified many different points to make. But the issue is, which point should be made where, in which sequence? A point could work well in two places. This is where organisation comes in, as part of creating coherent paragraphs, stanzas, or sections that deal with similar bits of the argument. A good rule of thumb is to try to deal with all points relating to an issue in more or less the same place in your essay or presentation.

5. *Position.* An important term to think about when thinking about Assertions, Claims and Arguments is 'position'. Every time you make a claim or assertion you are taking or adopting a position in relation to some matter. Having an argument means on one level taking ownership of and responsibility for the position you are adopting. This means more than simply gathering together statements from lecture notes or materials. It means thinking about the position from which you are making meaning. You may also need to think about and anticipate obvious counter-arguments to your position. A very important area to think about here is quoting. Students sometimes quote from a text as a way of establishing a particular position. But a key principle here is that quotes are not in themselves self-evident. They need unpacking for the reader. They should be contextualised and explained.

6. *Dialogue.* The issue of position is related to the question of dialogue. Scholarly communication is to a large extent about exploring different positions, and putting positions into conversation with one another. This conversation can be in a class between your peers or across centuries with authors whom you have never met. Your reference list at the end of an essay is in a sense a record of such a conversation. One of the amazing things about referencing is that it can allow you to have a conversation with a thinker writing 400 years or more ago. This issue of dialogue is relevant in terms of distinguishing between opinion and argument; a distinction to which you should be sensitive. Opinion is the expression of a personal or group perspective or view. It is a response to a topic or event. Arguments are deliberated on. They are built out of what has previously been said and written about in a particular field (thus the importance of creating a position that sits in a kind of dialogue with what has been said about a topic before). Understanding dialogue is crucial to understanding why plagiarism is such a serious charge. Plagiarism is where you take the position of another for your own. You take credit for someone else's position or words.

7. *Critical Thinking.* This could form a topic of a paper in its own right, but for our purpose here critical thinking involves thinking about the claims made by yourself and others, examining the presuppositions upon which those claims are based, and also examining the implications of adopting particular positions (e.g. If I say this about something, does it automatically mean this?). Critical thinking involves an awareness of the premises upon which your argument is based and which guide your conclusion.

8. *Responsibility.* One of the key aspects of scholarly communication is responsibility. After all, teachers and students alike are custodians of this thing called a 'discipline', a 'field', a university, and of academia. This responsibility can manifest itself in different ways. We have already mentioned the responsibility of defining your terms. There is also a responsibility to your reader, to present as clear and well-argued a piece as possible. There is a responsibility to

accuracy, to representing the work of others correctly and fairly. One of the cardinal sins of scholarly writing is getting the quote wrong, which is why ellipsis and square brackets are used to indicate changes or additions to quotes. Another sin is lack of proofreading. Proof read your essay or any writing, don't just run a spell check. The spell checker will not pick up words that are spelt correctly but are not supposed to be there or bear the wrong meaning.

9. *Language*. Some might say we have a responsibility to language itself, to construct well formed and aesthetically beautiful sentences. Repetition of words is often frowned on in academic writing for this reason. The English language is diverse and rich and repetition can be regarded as sloppy and unnecessary. Try to avoid one-sentence paragraphs – they disrupt the flow of the essay. Consolidate different (but related) smaller paragraphs into larger ones. Smaller paragraphs are ok in reports and some journalism, but in essays the expectation is for paragraphs with greater organisation and coverage.

10. *Listening*. This is a key skill. Listening starts from the seminar room, where you should be listening to your fellow students, and finally applies to the writing process where you listen to yourself, and think about what you are writing. Listening can assist writing. Many academics read their essays aloud when writing them. Students under time pressure often don't leave time for re-writing and drafting. This means that grammar and proofreading can suffer, but it also means that there is less time to listen to what you are writing. A key part of listening that is worth highlighting is interpretation. Listening involves evaluating and interpreting what you hear.

11. *Engagement*. Scholarly engagement involves engaging with and evaluating the arguments of others. It is a unique form of activity. It involves assessing what the author is trying to do. It involves literature searches and keeping up-to-date with new developments. It often takes patience, and it helps to be curious. It is not always entertaining in the first instance, but this does not necessarily make it uninteresting or unrewarding. The fascinating thing is that you can learn as much from a failed argument as a successful one.

As you proceed through your course, hopefully you will begin to see the interrelationship between these terms. Engagement is intertwined with position, and a deepening knowledge of the field. Language is linked to responsibility and critical thinking. Although many of you will enter or are in professional fields, there are benefits knowing the rules underpinning scholarly communication.

Guide to Attribution in Journalism

Introduction

Print and online journalists (news reporters and feature writers) attribute sources in a different manner from scholarly writers. Journalism does not use footnotes or in-text parenthetical attribution.

Attribution of sources is incorporated into sentences in the body copy. These may be quotes or paraphrasing from:

- interviewees (direct speech, indirect speech, partial quotes, summary statements)
- documents such as reports or press releases
- books and journal articles
- or other media such as radio, television and websites

Identifying the source gives journalism credibility and guides your reader to the origin of your facts, opinions and quotes. The key to good attribution is never to leave your readers wondering where you got your information from.

Basic principles

There are some ideal attribution practices in print journalism:

- attribute any direct speech (full quotation), indirect speech (paraphrase) or partial quotes (mix of direct quote and paraphrase) back to the person or organization
- if you did not witness an event yourself, attribute the information to the person or source who did
- if a fact is ‘common knowledge’ it does not need to be attributed. Exactly what constitutes common knowledge will depend on the level of knowledge you can assume of your readership
- never fabricate (invent) a quote or a person
- if you are taking a quote, a fact, an opinion from another source, you **MUST** incorporate where and/or who that quote came from into your writing.
- Attribution must also accompany paraphrasing. For example, ‘Clinton told *The New York Times* that he did not have sex with his intern.’

Reporting Speech

News reporting and feature journalism have different methods when using speech tags to attribute quotes from interviewees.

a) News

In **news reporting**, the speech tag (also known as ‘verbs of utterance’) tends to be ‘he said’ or ‘she said’.

Avoid the temptation to use more colourful saying verbs (for example, he chortled, she bantered, he grimaced, she laughed). Although the standard saying verb ‘said’ may seem repetitive and dull, this is exactly the point. The aim is to draw attention to the quote as information, not to the journalist’s interpretation of the interviewee’s emotion or affect. If it seems essential to provide your reader with emotional information, write, for example, ‘she said with a snort’. You can also provide emotional background through your physical description of the interviewee or through the quote itself.

Place the speech tag after a short quote, or single sentence quote from your interviewee.

‘I am furious, unbelievably furious,’ he said. (Please note, the comma comes *before* the end quotation mark.)

If the quote continues for more than one sentence, put the speech tag at the first clause or sentence break. The aim here is to let your reader know who is speaking as soon as possible. Even for long quotes, only one speech tag is necessary unless the quote is interrupted with other material.

If you introduce an interviewee in a full sentence before the quote begins, a speech tag after the quote is not necessary. For example: Dr Emerson said that after yesterday's talks with the industry he believed the project was unworkable. 'For the site to be of great value to customers, ... [it] needs to be relevant at the individual store level.'

Try to avoid placing the speech tag at the beginning of the sentence. When this does occur, in news reporting the preferred punctuation is a colon, especially if there is more than one sentence following. For example:

Asked whether Wayne Swan should also co-operate, she said: 'I think the issue here is one for Mr Turnbull. 'Mr Turnbull has, of course, had his credibility squarely raised about these matters.'

Note here that the end quote mark is omitted until the quote is finished. Each new speaker requires a new paragraph.

b) Features

In **feature writing**, attribution style for speech quotes is slightly different. The preferred saying verb for the speech tag is 'says' – he says, she says. This depends on the effect the journalist wants to achieve. The present tense saying verb increases the story's sense of immediacy and can make the copy more lively. (This is known as the 'historic present'.)

In feature writing there is more room for including emotional or affective observation in speech tags. You might find more colourful saying verbs, such as 'she laughed' or 'he grinned'. Try not to overdo this style of attribution. The descriptive phrase after the neutral saying verb is often more effective, for example: 'he says with a grin'.

In feature journalism the colon is generally not used to introduce a quote.

Generally, use the comma (if you must begin a sentence with a speech tag). She says, " I really mean it!"

Quoting Secondary Sources

When quoting from secondary sources, attribution is important but in nowhere near the detail of scholarly referencing.

Books, journal articles, websites, press releases, reports and other media, are identified by title and author (if applicable) or organisation. Dates can be as general as 'recent' or 'this year'.

Websites can be shortened, leaving out the www. If a website is used extensively as a source, you can refer to the full website address at the end of your feature.

Honorifics

In **news reporting** people are always referred to as Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms or other honorifics (for example, Professor or Dr) with each use of their surname. On the first use of their name, use title and both first and second names. Thereafter, just use the title or honorific and surname.

In features, after the first introduction of title or honorific and both names, simply refer to the subject by their surname. This applies to Professors and Doctors as well as ordinary people.

Note that house style of different publications will determine whether the subject will be referred to by first or second name. And some publications will (rarely) use a colon before quotes.

Examine the house style of the publication you are writing for.

For a good discussion of attribution in journalism, see Steve Buttry, 'You can quote me on that'. Available: <http://stevebuttry.wordpress.com/2011/10/31/you-can-quote-me-on-that-advice-on-attribution-for-journalists/> [Accessed 29 January, 2014]

Online attribution

When writing for the web or intranet delivery you should follow basic print attribution conventions, but add hyperlinks to relevant source or contextual materials.

Hyperlinks, hotlinks or links, as they are most often known, are a form of attribution that directs users to online versions of:

1. your original documentary sources (for example, media releases, speeches, reports); and
2. other web materials that give useful interpretive background to your story (for example, biographies, timelines, journal articles).

Although you should write your links out in full on your final draft copy, for publication you or the sub-editor will 'embed' the link. This means choosing a phrase in your attributive sentence that indicates where the hyperlink will lead your website user. This phrase will become the link to the other text. For example:

Final draft: The Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has condemned a coal industry report on global warming responses <<http://www.coal2020.com.au/report.pdf>> that argues Labor's carbon trading scheme is a disaster waiting to happen.

Published version: The Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has condemned [a coal industry report on global warming responses](#) that argues Labor's carbon trading scheme is a disaster waiting to happen.

When you are embedding a link most content management systems (digital systems for creating, editing, storing and sharing content) will demand that you enter the full web address including the transfer protocol at the head (eg. <http://> or <https://>) and the full domain location including the www.

Not all users follow link trails, so it is important to properly attribute your sources in your text. However you may use shortened versions of book or report titles where you link to a document stating the full title.

Attribution practices online are in a process of flux as new forms of media practice emerge. For this reason if you are quoting material from another site it is imperative to first inform the author, to credit him/her fully and to link back to the original document on their site. There have been endless debates online about the level of permission required for this type of use, but this is the baseline attribution practice.

Many site owners will request you ask permission to link to them, so that they can monitor how you are using and attributing their content. Notifying site owners is a good practice to follow as they may alert you to out-of-date content or impending changes to site structure that would render your link useless. They cannot stop you linking to their site for purposes of comment or critique.

Links are also used to credit photographers or images makers for their work. An image will be captioned with the copyright owner's name and a link to his her business site or the original version of the image.



Main quad. Image: Fiona Martin <www.lucida.com.au>

For more discussion about attribution online see: Andy Baio (2009) 'Attribution and Affiliation on All Things Digital', Available:

http://waxy.org/2009/04/all_things_digital_and_transparency_in_online_journalism/

[Accessed 30 June 2009] 'Voices', *Washington Post Online*, Available:

<http://allthingsd.com/about/voices/> [Accessed 30 June 2009]