

School of Social Science
Guide for Written Assessments
Planning, Research and Writing

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1. Planning Your Time

Start with a clear plan at the beginning of semester. When is each piece of assessment due for each course? Use a calendar or diary to set your plan. Then, for each piece of assessment, work backwards to allocate time for:

- Reviewing and understanding the question
- Research
- Writing
- Referencing
- Proof-reading
- Seeking feedback from your tutor, lecturer or peers.

Some parts of the process will overlap. So, ensure you have left sufficient time for each phase, and do not leave your research and writing until the last minute.

See [Student Services](#) for advice and tips on time management.

2. Understanding the Question

When you are set a written assignment, carefully review the question or topic to be addressed. An initial review of the question will help you to understand what you need to do, what research is needed, and how to approach writing.

Break the question into parts if necessary. If there are multiple parts be sure to answer all of them in your assignment.

Examine the question to identify:

- **Key words and concepts:** Identify key words or concepts which must be considered and defined in your assignment. Often these key words and concepts need to be defined in the context of the topic and discipline.
- **Problem or issue set by the question/topic:** Assessment topics and questions in the social sciences often have an issue (or debate) which you need to address, explore and adopt a position on. Adopting a position allows you to be more analytical and successful in your writing.
- **Determining instructional words:** Look for words which direct what you need to do in the assessment. They will determine how you will research and structure your assignment.

See Student Services' guide on [Analysing the Topic](#).

Analyse	Break the topic matter down into parts and examine each part in detail to get to the heart of the debate.
Argue	Systematically accept or reject a position by presenting reasons and evidence for acceptance or rejection. Always indicate your awareness of opposing viewpoints.
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic description of the characteristics of the topic, emphasising the most important points.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument, presenting a point of view (whether yours or others). May entail description and interpretation, and your opinion should be supported by arguments and evidence both for and against.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in light of its apparent truth or utility. Include your personal opinion, supported by evidence, and consider both strengths and weaknesses.
Review	Critically examine, analyse and discuss the major points of a topic, in an organised and orderly manner.

3. Understanding Criteria Sheets

In addition to the set question, you will also have a criteria sheet, by which your assignment will be marked by your lecturer or tutor. The criteria include important information on what is expected of your work.

Criteria sheets will differ between courses and pieces of assessment. Review the criteria for a high distinction or 7.

Example Criteria Sheet

Criteria	Mark/20	85 – 100% (Grade – 7)	75 – 84% (Grade – 6)	65 – 74% (Grade – 5)	50 – 64% (Grade – 4)	<50% (Grade – 1-3)
Engage with the key theories and ideas presented in the course.		Excellent understanding of assessment question and subject matter	Very good understanding of assessment question and subject matter	Good understanding of assessment question and subject matter	Sound understanding of assessment question and subject matter	Limited understanding of assessment question and subject matter
Craft a clear argument, drawing together a range of ideas, supported by evidence.		Sophisticated use and critical appreciation of concepts and theories	Very good understanding of concepts and theories, used critically in argument.	Good understanding of relevant concept and theories. Used concepts well in argument.	Basic grasp of concepts and theories, basic application of theories to argument	Very little understanding and application of concepts and theories
Draw on academic literature, beyond what has been set for the course, and be critical in your choice of literature.		A sophisticated and original approach to the argument	Very good argument with some originality.	Sound argument	Evidence of an argument	Limited evidence of an argument – just listed points
Ensure your assessment is well structured and clearly written. Allot time to proof-reading. Follow the referencing guide closely.		Sophisticated understanding & application of relevant, including advanced, literature	Very good understanding & application of basic and advanced literature	Good understanding of basic and some more advanced literature	Understanding of relevant literature demonstrated at a sound level	Limited research, and/or limited understanding of relevant literature
		Very logical and concise, fluently/stylishly written and error free, accurate referencing	Clear structure, concise and well written, accurate referencing	Clear structure, good English expression, very few textual errors, accurate referencing	Basic structure evidence, sound writing with few errors, adequate referencing	No evidence structure, consistently poor spelling, grammar or syntax, or inadequate referencing
	Mark /100					

4. Research

Once you have identified the goal for the written assessment, begin research with resources that have been set for the course. These will usually include key concepts, theories and topics relevant to your assessment. Do not reference lectures unless instructed to do so by your course coordinator; it is best to locate the original sources.

Again – unless instructed otherwise by your course coordinator, go beyond materials set for the course. This will enable you to conduct comprehensive research. Most written assessments will have a distinct criterion related to research – ensure you read the criteria (see section on [Understanding Criteria Sheets](#)), and consult with your tutor or lecturer, to see what is expected, such as:

- a minimum number of sources required;
- sources and references of a particular kind, such as first-hand accounts or peer-reviewed work.

Based on the criteria and requirements, begin your literature search, using the key words you identified in the question analysis.

- **Following the ‘literature trail’:** Start with the textbook and readings set for your course, then go further. Textbooks will always have a list of references at the end, or *Further Reading* sections at the end of relevant chapters. You can also look at the reference lists at the end of any books or articles you find useful.
- **Searching UQlibrary for books and articles:** The library provides useful [‘search techniques’ guides](#) to assist in finding quality information effectively. There is also a self-paced online tutorial [here](#) that will guide you through all the things you should know about locating, using your Library and researching for your assignments.
- **Journal Databases:** The library subscribes to most journals electronically. The library provides a range of guides to identify key databases with [Subject Guides](#) and also assistance with your [search techniques](#). For the social sciences, you could start with JStor, Scopus, Proquest. There are also discipline specific databases. [You can find these databases here](#).
- **Google Scholar:** [Google Scholar](#) indexes a large range of scholarly literature, but please remember to [evaluate](#) the sources.

Reading and Researching Critically

You will need to ensure that the work you are reading, researching and referencing is valid, relevant and up-to-date. Read [‘critically’](#) – assessing arguments, possible bias and the validity of an argument. To begin, ensure the work you read and reference is:

- Relevant to the topic
- Relevant to the context (e.g., if a question asks you to look at an issue from an Australian context, ensuring that the research you read is also from Australia).
- Relevant to the discipline (anthropology, archaeology, criminology, sociology,)

- Fairly up-to-date.

Keep in mind, however, that 'up-to-date' is highly context dependent. This could mean sources from the last 12 months or 20 years, depending on the topic.

For more information, see Student Services' section on [Steps for Writing Assignments](#) and [Critical Analysis](#).

Understanding Peer Review

Articles that are 'peer reviewed' or 'refereed' have been submitted to a journal and evaluated for quality, value and credibility by a panel of experts. This process helps to ensure the quality and accuracy of research. Most journal articles have been peer-reviewed.

The library website allows you to focus your searches to only include peer-reviewed articles.

The screenshot shows the University of Queensland Library search results for the query 'peer review'. The page features a purple header with navigation links: 'Study', 'Research', 'Partners and community', and 'About'. A search bar at the top right contains the text 'peer review' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, the results are displayed in a list format. The first result is a journal article titled 'Peer review : emerging trends and key debates in undergraduate education', which is marked as 'PEER-REVIEWED'. The second result is a book titled 'Peer Review' by Ford, Emily, published in 2023. The third result is a book titled 'How to conduct an effective peer review' by Barczak, Gloria and Griffn, Abbie, published in 2021. The fourth result is a thesis titled 'AI and learning analytics to improve peer review and feedback in learnersourcing' by Darvishi, Ali, published in 2023, and is marked as 'OPEN ACCESS'. The fifth result is a book titled 'Peer review in an era of evaluation : understanding the practice of gatekeeping in academia' edited by Forsberg, Eva, Geschwind, Lars, Levander, Sara, and Wermke, Wieland, published in 2022. On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with 'Active filters' showing 'Reviews' and 'Newspaper Articles'. Below this, there are options to 'Adjust results', including 'Include results regardless of availability' and 'Search within full text'. The 'Sort by' dropdown is set to 'Relevance'. The 'Show only' section lists various filters: 'Available online (333,001)', 'Peer-reviewed (217,022)' (which is circled in red), 'Open Access (163,362)', 'Physical items (290)', 'Currently available in the Library (283)', and 'Access conditions apply (26)'. The 'Content type' section lists: 'Articles (225,264)', 'Conference Proceedings (33,679)', 'Newsletter Articles (23,168)', 'Book Chapters (12,003)', 'Theses (9,433)', and 'Books (7,952)'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there is a 'Show more' link.

Watch [this tutorial](#) by the UQ Library for a description of peer review.

Avoiding Non-Scholarly Internet Sources

Sources from the internet – Wikipedia, social media, think tank websites – are often dumbed down, badly researched, not peer-reviewed, or have particular ideological objectives. It can be difficult to gauge the quality or intention of what you read in such online forums.

Think Tanks such as the Australia Institute (progressive, Green, welfarist) and the Institute

of Public Affairs (libertarian, free market) and any number in the US and Europe, often containing papers that seem tailor made for your assessment. However, these and similar sources should be treated with caution. Think tanks usually have an explicit political agenda and funding base. Unless you recognise and acknowledge this, you should not use papers from these kinds of sources in your written assessment.

Information drawn from Wikipedia or similar sources cannot be referenced in academic work, as the accuracy of this information cannot be ensured. Instead, you can usually find the kind of details you need in academic sources.

5. Writing

Planning and Structure

Before you start writing, and as you research, work from a plan. Consider which concepts or ideas will go where and in what order. Work out the main ideas or key points you wish to make before starting to write. It is often helpful to draw a diagram or flow chart so you can visualise what you are going to write. Be sure to introduce each concept or argument in a logical order.

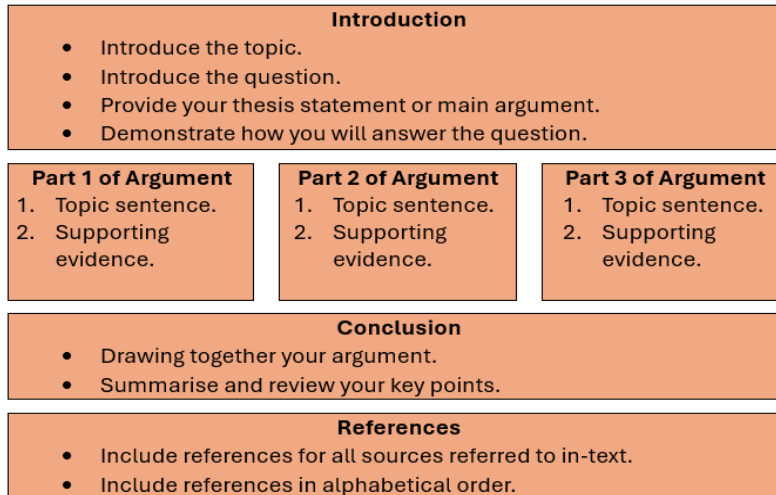
Your structure will depend upon the topic and question. However, written assessments usually adopt the following broad structure:

Introduction – Introduces the topic, outlines the question, and how you will answer the question. Tell the reader what you are going to be discussing, and the key arguments that will follow.

Body – Attends to each part of your overarching argument as separate paragraphs. The number of paragraphs will vary based on the length of the assignment and the required depth of analysis. For each paragraph, include a clear topic sentence that outlines what the paragraph will say, and how this links to the question or argument.

Conclusion – Draw together all the parts of your argument. Demonstrate how you have sufficiently answered the assessment question. Avoid introducing new information or ideas here.

An essay map, such as this, might help with your planning:



Student Services have more tips on [Structuring your Writing](#).

Defining Key Terms

Ensure you define key terms and concepts that you identified in your question analysis, as well as key theories and concepts that are central to your argument.

When you define your terms, don't use a dictionary definition, use articles and academic literature. Discipline-specific textbooks are a great starting point for defining key terms. Remember, the dictionary will have an accurate general description, but academic literature will describe how experts in your discipline use the term to represent a particular social phenomenon or idea.

Making Arguments

If the assignment requires that you make an argument, you need to choose your position on a topic, which you can support with evidence. Your research may reveal a range of positions on the topic - you will need to evaluate each position and decide why one is stronger in terms of validity and evidence.

State your position in a thesis statement – one or two lines – in your introduction. Each paragraph will need to support, and expand on, your thesis statement.

However, you should acknowledge *both sides* of an argument. For example, if you have decided globalisation is a positive phenomenon, you must also acknowledge that there are economic, cultural and environmental downsides to globalisation as well. You don't need to go into detail but demonstrate that you understand the breadth of a topic and debate.

Be careful about the word 'prove'. It makes a very strong assertion. We are rarely able to fully 'prove' things in the social sciences; the best we can normally do is to present a persuasive case, based on evidence and reason for a particular explanation.

Writing

Begin drafting your written assessment early so that you have plenty of time to review and revise, and do further research if required. As you write, pay attention to:

- **Readability and expression:** Including grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence construction, and use of academic language as opposed to slang/jargon/general terms.
- **Flow of ideas:** Ensure sentences link in a logical manner, and the essay overall has logical connections throughout.
- **Relevance:** Ensure that each sentence helps to answer the question, and links back to the question and argument with clear topic sentences.
- **Spelling:** Use Australian spelling (e.g., globalisation, generalisation), and be consistent throughout.
- **Use formal language:** Avoid clichés, questions, slang and conjunctions.
- **Avoid hyperbole:** Communicate your argument through foregrounding the argument and evidence.
- **Avoid broad generalisations:** Social science writing is 'scientific': that is, the aim is to learn about and understand societies based on research and data. Therefore, all of your statements should be supportable. Don't make unsupported generalisations or rely on speculation.
- **Discriminatory and judgmental language:** Be aware of the impact of particular phrases and expressions, particularly when talking about minority and marginalised groups.
- **Acronyms:** At first use, write out acronyms in full, and then follow with acronyms. For example, "According to the United Nations (UN)....." followed by, "The UN argues that...".

Proof Reading

It is very important to proofread your work for grammatical and typing errors, as well as to check that your argument is concise, logical, and says what you intend it to say. If taken alone, does each topic sentence (first sentence of each paragraph) flow on logically from the last?

The most effective way to proofread is from a hard copy or table rather than a laptop or desktop screen. It can also be useful to read your work out loud.

Since it will be hard for you to see errors in work in which you are still immersed, it is usually a good idea to leave your assessment at least overnight before proofreading. It is also helpful to ask a classmate or peer to read your work, but make sure you have proof-read first, to develop skills as an independent scholar.

Student Services have useful tips for [editing and proofreading](#).

Checklist for Writing

- Does your written assessment have a clear, logical structure, with an introduction, body and conclusion?
- Does your written assessment clearly answer the essay question and align with the criteria?
- Does your written assessment use up-to-date and relevant literature and evidence?
- Is your written assessment within the word limit?
- Have you proof-read your written assessment ?

Use of AI

Some assessment pieces do not permit the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, while others may allow AI with some limitations. Ensure you check your course profile before using AI in your assessment.

Any permitted use of AI for assessment must be acknowledged appropriately. Your course coordinator will provide guidance on how to reference the use of AI tools. Some examples include:

- an assignment coversheet
- citing or referencing in the text or list of references
- inclusion in your methodology
- an appendix including a full transcript of any prompts and AI-generated responses

If you use AI in your assessment without permission or appropriate acknowledgment it may be considered [Academic Misconduct](#).

Further information on using AI tools for assignments can be found [here](#).

6. Referencing

'Referencing' is the act of acknowledging other authors when you use their ideas in your writing, using their name and date of publication to identify a particular publication. Unless indicated otherwise by your course coordinator, you **MUST** include in-text references, and a reference list at the end of your written assessment. You will see different referencing styles in the articles and books you read for your course.

The purpose of using referencing is to acknowledge the work and ideas of other people as used within your own written work. Referencing conventions should be followed when you are:

- quoting the exact words of another author;
- closely summarising a passage from another author; or
- using an idea or material which is directly based on the work of another author.

Referencing conventions are used to:

- assist a reader's further research in the same area of study;
- add an expert's authority to your claims; and
- give credit to the work of others.

There are different styles that have different directions for formatting. In the School of Social Science we typically use an author-date style. Your lecturer will tell you which style they want you to use. APA is a popular option. The library guidelines supporting your understanding of [APA](#) are comprehensive.

All references cited within your written assessment must be acknowledged in an accompanying reference list which should be alphabetically-ordered beginning on a separate page at the end of your assignment. It is not a convention in this School to do bibliographies. Only sources cited in your written assessment should be included in your reference list.

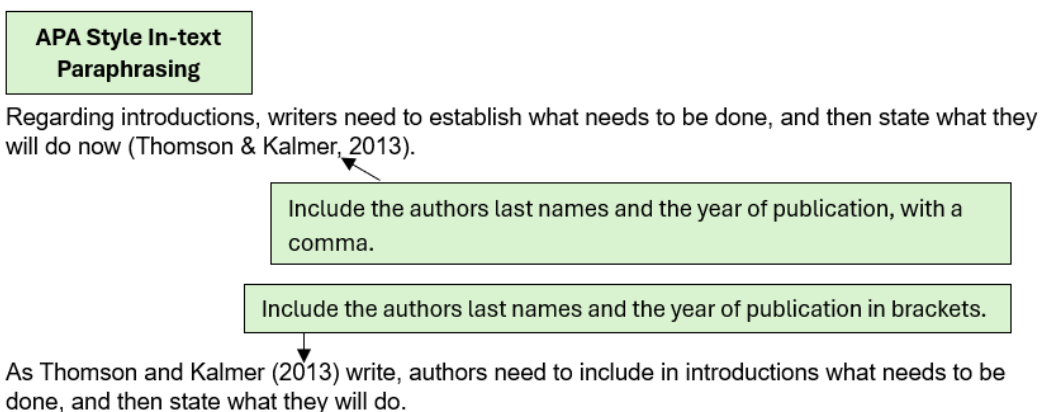
There is no set number of references, however, for an assessment of up to 2000 words it is expected that you will have consulted at least eight to ten works. Be sure to keep a record of the works you consult as you are researching.

Any permitted use of AI for assessment must be acknowledged appropriately. Further information on how to acknowledge and reference the use of AI tools can be found on the [UQ AI tools for assignments](#) link. If you use AI in your assessment without permission or appropriate acknowledgment it may be considered [Academic Misconduct](#).

Referencing paraphrased ideas

When you find important and relevant information in a source, you can paraphrase or rephrase this work, re-writing using your own words, expression and sentence structure. You then need to acknowledge the original author/thinker/researcher using an in-text reference.

An example of in-text referencing for paraphrasing using APA is presented here.



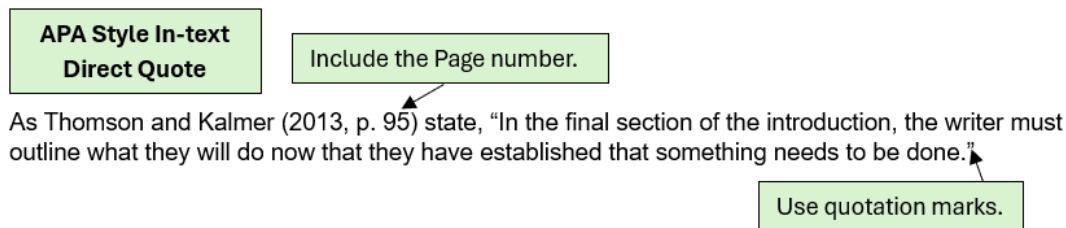
Referencing direct quotes

Where appropriate, you can also include direct quotes from sources. Use direct quotes sparingly – it is preferable to use your own words, to demonstrate your research and comprehension.

Ensure your quotes aren't 'floating' – this describes when quotes are incorporated as stand-alone sentences. Instead, you should incorporate direct quotes into your own work, providing the reader with explanation and interpretation of how the quote supports your argument.

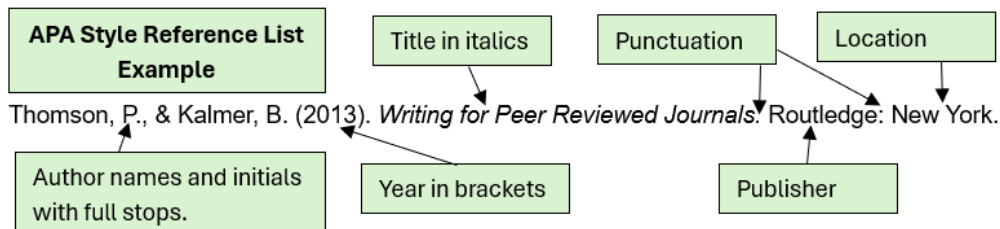
If the citation is a direct quote of an author's work, quotation marks should be inserted around the words used.

In APA, if the quotation is greater than 40 words in length, the whole quotation is separated from the main text by a new line and indented from the left. Quotation marks are left out.



Reference List

At the end of your assessment, you must include a list (in alphabetical order of authors) of all works you have referred to throughout your essay, whether quoted directly or not. However, do not include any sources you have read but not cited.



Checklist for Referencing

- Have you included references for all ideas that you have drawn from your research?
- Have you included all in-text references in your reference list?
- For each reference, are all required details included?
- Is your reference list in alphabetical order?

7. Formatting

Directions on formatting may vary. Check your course profile or with your course coordinator. Generally, it is suggested that you use a standard font, such as:

- Ariel
- Times New Roman

- Cambria
- Calibri

Other standard formatting conventions include:

- 11 or 12-point font
- Double or 1.5 line spacing
- Including page numbers
- Regular margins
- If including tables, photos or graphs, provide clear labels and refer to them in text
- Avoid headings for short written assessments

8. Submitting

Via Turnitin

- Access Turnitin via your course blackboard website.
- There is no need for a coversheet, as Turnitin will ask for your details.
- Turnitin will generate an 'originality report' which will highlight sections that match other texts. Review to ensure you have correctly referenced.
- Double check to ensure you received an email confirmation report.
- Make sure you submit on time to avoid any penalties.
- Email your tutor or lecturer if you have technical problems with Turnitin. If further assistance is required, contact [UQ IT Support](#).
- The library have a tutorial and instructions on using Turnitin [here](#).

Due Dates and Extensions

Due dates for submission of written work are designed to allow you to budget time and to prepare in advance. You must adhere to due dates.

If you are unable to meet the due date, you must [apply for an extension of assessment](#) as soon as becomes clear you require additional time. Your request should be submitted no later than the assessment item's due date and time. For a list of acceptable reasons for an extension, please view the following link: [Applying for an assessment extension - my.UQ - University of Queensland](#)

Further information on the maximum period of extension for each assessment can be found on the Course Profile, under 'Assessments'.

Work submitted late without an authorised extension of time may attract penalties. Note these penalties are per calendar day (including weekends and public holidays). See each Course Profile for further details.

Any student with a disability who may require alternative academic arrangements, including assessment, in the course/program is encouraged to seek advice at the commencement of the semester from a Disability Advisor at Student Support Services. Please refer to:

- [Reasonable Adjustments - Student Policy](#)

- [Disability Action Plan \(2023-2025\)](#)
- [Diversity, Disability and Inclusion Services](#)

Checklist for Submission

- Have you saved the most up-to-date version of your assessment for uploading?
- Have you proof-read your assessment ?
- Have you correctly formatted your assessment?

9. Academic Misconduct

Academic Misconduct can happen when students:

- Use another authors' work they have read without acknowledgement
- Work together with other students and submit the same work independently
- Copy another student's work
- Buy, are given, or steal essays
- Take notes into exams, or have someone else sit the exam
- Make up references or data
- Hide library books, cut out pages or delete texts
- Lie about medical conditions to get extensions
- Have someone make major editing and proof-reading corrections to assignments
- Use AI to draft all or part of the assessment, where this is not permitted by the coordinator for that assessment and/or
- Use AI without referencing its use

What is Plagiarism?

UQ has adopted the following definition on plagiarism ([Student Code of Conduct Policy / Document / Policy and Procedure Library](#)):

Plagiarism means the act of misrepresenting as one's own original work the ideas, interpretations, words or creative works of another either intentionally or unintentionally. These include published and unpublished documents, designs, music, sounds, images, photographs, computer codes and ideas gained through working in a group. These ideas, interpretations, words or works may be found in print and/or electronic media.

Plagiarism includes (without limitation):

- collusion, where a piece of work prepared by working closely with one or more individuals or in a group is represented as if it were the student's own work. This includes:
 - a) producing the piece of work together;
 - b) determining the method or approach to a question or assessment task together; or
 - c) sharing answers or giving access to questions and answers, completed assessment tasks or partially completed assessment tasks;
- acquiring or commissioning a piece of work, which is not their own and representing it as if it were their own, by:

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- a) purchasing the assessment task from a commercial service, including from internet sites, whether the work is pre-written or specially prepared for the student;
- b) submitting an assessment task or part thereof produced by a third party, including a friend, family member, fellow student or a staff member of the University; or
- c) duplicating the same or almost identical work for more than one assessment item without permission;
- copying ideas, concepts, research data, images, sounds or text without appropriate acknowledgment, including piecing together work of others and representing them as original work;
- paraphrasing a paper from a source text, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form (e.g. article spinning, text rewriting and content creation tools), without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting as one's own work all or part of another student's work, even with the student's knowledge or consent.

The following are examples of plagiarism if appropriate acknowledgement or referencing of the author or source does not occur:

- Direct copying of paragraphs, sentences, a single sentence or significant parts of a sentence;
- Direct copying of paragraphs, sentences, a single sentence or significant parts of a sentence with an end reference but without quotation marks around the copied text;
- Copying ideas, concepts, research results, computer codes, statistical tables, designs, images, sounds or text or any combination of these;
- Paraphrasing, summarising or simply rearranging another person's words or ideas without changing the basic structure and/or meaning of the text;
- Offering an idea or interpretation that is not one's own without identifying whose idea or interpretation it is;
- A 'cut and paste' of statements from multiple sources;
- Presenting as independent, work done in collaboration with others (including AI);
- Copying or adapting another student's original work into a submitted assessment item.

Plagiarism can also include:

- Unintentional plagiarism - Careless or inadequate referencing, or failure to reference and intentional plagiarism.
- Intentional plagiarism, which will be treated as [academic misconduct](#).

To ensure academic integrity:

- ensure you correctly and fully reference ideas and quotes in your essay, by following the reference guides and keeping track of your research;
- complete the [Academic Integrity Modules](#); and
- review the policy on [Student Integrity and Misconduct](#).

10. Further Assistance

Consult with your tutor or lecturer. They will have standard consultation hours or request that you make an appointment, or discuss over email . While tutors and lecturers cannot read drafts of essays, they can give advice on structure and arguments.

[Student Services](#) offer [regular workshops](#) in study, research and writing skills. Student Services also have a range of [online resources and tutorials](#) for learning skills. Student [Advocacy Support \(SAS\)](#) provide welfare and wellbeing support for legal, visa and job preparation assistance.

The Library offers a range of research support, in person and online. Assistance and advice is also available via the [ASKUS](#) service in person or online via Chat.