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Academic Writing and Referencing for your Policing Degree

**CRITICAL
STUDY SKILLS**

JANE BOTTOMLEY, STEVEN PRYJMACHUK AND MARTIN WRIGHT

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Meet the series editor and authors	vii
Introduction	viii
Chapter 1 Academic writing: text, process and criticality	1
Chapter 2 Coherent texts and arguments	31
Chapter 3 Referring to sources	55
Chapter 4 Language in use	75
Chapter 5 Preparing your work for submission	99
<hr/>	
Appendix 1: English language references	114
Appendix 2: Grammatical terminology	116
Appendix 3: Key phrases in assignments	119
Answer key	120
Index	130

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Introduction

Academic Writing and Referencing is the second book in the *Critical Study Skills for Policing* series. The *Critical Study Skills for Policing* series supports policing and law enforcement students as they embark on their undergraduate degree programmes. It is aimed at all policing students, including those who have come to university straight from A levels. The books will be of use both to students from the UK, and international students who are preparing to study in a new culture – and perhaps in a second language. The books also include guidance for students with specific learning difficulties.

Academic Writing and Referencing provides you with the knowledge, language, skills and strategies that you need in order to develop your academic writing skills and succeed in writing assignments. It introduces you to typical policing writing assignments, and explores important areas such as the writing process, coherence, referring to sources, academic style and grammatical accuracy. It helps you to develop important skills such as planning and editing. It reflects the centrality of criticality in writing by referring to it throughout the different chapters, and shows how it is achieved through a multi-layered approach, including development of stance and argument, choice of language, and considered reference to sources. The book also helps you to prepare your work to a professional standard for submission.

Between them, the authors have many years' experience of both policing practice and academic study skills. All the information, text extracts and activities in the book have a clear policing focus and are often directly linked to policing and procedures as advocated by the **College of Policing**. There is also reference to relevant institutional bodies, books and journals throughout.

The many activities in the book include reflections, case studies, top tips, checklists and tasks. There are also advanced skills sections, which highlight particular knowledge and skills that you will need towards the end of your degree programme – or perhaps if you go on to postgraduate study. The activities often require you to work things out and discover things for yourself, a learning technique which is commonly used in universities and policing. For many activities, there is no right or wrong answer – they might simply require you to reflect on your experience or situations you are likely to encounter at university; for tasks which require a particular response, there is an answer key at the back of the book.

These special features throughout the book are clearly signalled by icons to help you recognise them:



Learning outcomes;



Quick quiz or example exam questions/assessment tasks;



Reflection (a reflective task or activity);



Task;



Case studies;



Top tips;



Checklist;



Advanced skills information;



Answer provided at the back of the book.

Students with limited experience of academic life in the UK will find it helpful to work through the book systematically; more experienced students may wish to ‘dip in and out’ of the book. Whichever approach you adopt, handy **cross references** signalled in the margins will help you quickly find the information that you need to focus on or revisit.

There are four appendices at the back of the book which you can consult as you work through the text.

We hope that this book will help you to develop as an academic writer and to become a confident member of your academic writing community. We hope it will help you to achieve your goals and produce written work to the very best of your abilities.

A note on terminology

In the context of this book, the term ‘policing’ should be taken to include ‘the public police and allied law enforcement professions’, wherever this is not explicitly stated.

Chapter 1

Academic writing: text, process and criticality

Learning outcomes



After reading this chapter you will:

- understand what it means to be part of the academic writing community;
- be aware of the different text types you might need to produce as a policing student;
- have developed a more effective, systematic approach to the academic writing process;
- better understand what it means to write critically;
- have learned about the foundations of different academic text types in policing, in particular, the critical essay.

There are many challenges facing you as you embark on your policing degree. You need to assimilate a great deal of information, and engage in new ideas and intellectual processes. What's more, you need to become proficient in academic writing, and learn how to produce the different types of text that are common in policing.

Academic writing is central to your university studies, as written assignments and exams will be one of the main ways in which you are assessed. This chapter explores the nature of academic writing in universities, and helps you to develop an effective, systematic approach to the academic writing process. All assignments are different, and universities vary slightly in terms of the types of writing assignments they employ. This chapter focuses on some general principles which can be applied to most academic writing, including what it means to write 'critically'. It also discusses some of the most common features of individual text types in your discipline, with a particular focus on the critical essay.

Academic writing at university: a new start?

Reflection



- 1) Do you enjoy writing? Why/Why not?
 - 2) What kind of things have you written in the past (eg essays, reports, exams, articles, blogs, stories, poems)?
- ↓

- ↑
- 3) Do you have recent experience of writing academic essays? (If English is not your first language, were these in English or your first language?)
 - 4) What comments have teachers or other people made about your writing in the past?
 - 5) How do you feel about starting your first/next written assignment at university?

Policing students in the UK come from a range of backgrounds: some come straight from A levels (or Scottish Highers); some have been away from formal education for some time; some come from other countries to study in the UK. This means that students starting university differ in terms of their writing abilities, their experience of academic writing, and how confident they feel about tackling written assessments.

So where do you fit in?

You may be feeling confident. You may be relishing the prospect of writing your first assignment, seeing it as an exciting opportunity to explore your subject and demonstrate your knowledge and ideas. You may be able to draw on recent experience of academic writing and positive feedback from teachers.

Conversely, you may be feeling rather apprehensive about your first written assignment. Like many students, you perhaps see academic writing as one of the most difficult challenges of university life. There are a number of reasons why you may be feeling apprehensive. You might not have much experience of academic writing. Or maybe you do have experience, but it might have been a long time ago, or in your mother tongue, not English. You may have struggled with writing in the past and received some negative comments from teachers. All of these things can make the prospect of that first written assignment rather daunting.

When starting to write at university, it is important for students to draw on any strengths they have in terms of ability and experience. But it is also important for all students to identify aspects of their writing which can be improved on. At university, you are part of a **writing community**, comprised of students, lecturers and researchers, and all members of that community are constantly striving to improve as writers, even those who publish in journals and books.

You should commit yourself to improving as a writer throughout your degree programme, and beyond, in your professional life. It is not a question of achieving perfection; it is rather a case of committing yourself to making many small improvements over time, and not giving up when faced with a disappointment or hurdle. University lecturers see many students develop into very good writers after a shaky start. What these students have in common is a positive attitude, an ability to reflect on and critically assess their own work, and a willingness to seek and act on advice.

This book will support you in your development as a writer by helping you to approach writing in a systematic way. It will enable you to:

CROSS
REFERENCE

Chapter 2,
Coherent
texts and
arguments,
Editing and
redrafting for
coherence,
The truth
about writing!

- analyse and respond to writing tasks;
- plan and structure your writing effectively;
- achieve clarity and coherence in your writing;
- produce writing which is accurate and academic in style;
- write critically in assignments;
- use and reference sources appropriately;
- prepare assignments to a high professional standard for submission.

This chapter sets you on your way by exploring the context of academic writing at university and providing guidance on how to approach writing assignments during your policing degree.

Academic writing for policing undergraduates

Undergraduate policing students may be asked to produce a number of different types of academic writing, including essays, written reflections, exams, reports, reviews of journal articles, and dissertations. This chapter sets out a general approach to academic writing that will help you with all types of assignments. It also provides specific information on essays, written reflections, exams and dissertations. Advice on practical writing tasks in policing is provided in *Communication Skills for your Policing Degree*.

- **Essays.** There are different types of essays. The main one, sometimes called a 'critical' or 'analytical' essay, requires you to explore a particular topic in depth, usually in response to a question or statement, and to explain your own viewpoint, or 'stance', supported by arguments and evidence. A 'reflective' essay requires you to analyse and evaluate a particular experience, explaining its impact on your understanding and future practice.
- **Written reflections.** Policing students are often required to produce written reflections on their policing practice, usually as part of a **professional portfolio**.
- **Exams.** In exams, you may be required to provide short or long written responses to questions or statements. These are usually designed to demonstrate that you have assimilated and understood the core work covered in a particular module. They may require you to recall factual information and/or to explain and support your viewpoint on a particular issue you have examined as part of your studies.
- **Dissertations.** A dissertation is a long evidence-based or research-focused essay written in the final year of your undergraduate studies.

Each of these types of academic writing will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

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*Communication
Skills for your
Policing
Degree*

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*Studying for
your Policing
Degree,
Chapter 6,
Assessment*

The writing process

Writing is a process and it involves a number of stages, including:

- ‘unpacking’ (analysing and understanding) the writing task and any guidelines provided;
- drawing up a provisional plan/outline;
- identifying relevant material that you need to read;
- reading and gathering information;
- drafting, redrafting, editing;
- revisiting and reworking your plan/outline;
- formatting your text;
- double-checking the assessment guidelines;
- proofreading.

It is important to fully engage with the writing process, and to understand that the *writing* process is part of the *learning* process. Writing is not just a question of getting fully formed thoughts down on paper (apart from in exams); it is a way of *clarifying your thinking* on a particular topic. Woodford (1967, p 744) put this nicely many years ago:

The power of writing as an aid in thinking is not often appreciated. Everyone knows that someone who writes successfully gets his thoughts completely in order before he publishes. But it is seldom pointed out that the very act of writing can help to clarify thinking. Put down woolly thoughts on paper, and their wooliness is immediately exposed.

CROSS REFERENCE

Chapter 2,
Coherent
texts and
arguments,
Editing and
redrafting for
coherence

Top tips



Engaging with the writing process

- 1) Try to develop good writing habits. Write little and often, particularly if your experience of academic writing is limited or non-recent.
- 2) Adopt a write-read-edit-read approach to writing (discussed in Chapter 2). When you stop to read what you have written, stand back from the text. Put yourself in the reader’s shoes and make sure that everything hangs together, makes sense, and flows smoothly.
- 3) Try to get some feedback during the writing process. You may have the opportunity to submit a first draft to a lecturer, or you could ask a fellow student to read something and give feedback. If you do ask a friend or fellow student, it’s a good idea to ask them to *summarise* what they think you are trying to say. If you only ask them if they understand what you have written, they may just say yes to be polite!

Your exact approach to the writing process will depend on the particular context of the assignment and your individual way of working, but some essential aspects of the writing process are discussed in the following sections.

Approaching a writing assignment

A writer needs an audience, a purpose, and a strategy, and these things are interconnected (Swales and Feak, 2012, p 10). When approaching a writing assignment, ask yourself:

- Who is reading my work? (your audience)
- Why am I writing? (your purpose)
- How will I achieve my purpose? (your strategy)

Your purpose is to meet the requirements of the assignment, and satisfy the needs and expectations of a particular reader. To determine your purpose, you need to analyse the wording of the task or question carefully. It may specify certain aspects of the topic that you should cover, and the verbs it uses, such as 'describe', 'explain', or 'evaluate', will determine how you treat this content. However, notwithstanding these specifications, there is no single 'right answer': different students will respond to a task in different ways. The task, together with your individual approach and strategy, will determine:

- the selection of content (information, arguments, evidence etc);
- the way this content is structured and organised.

The person reading your essay must be able to discern *why* you have included particular content and organised your essay in the way that you have.

The question of the 'reader' is a tricky one. Of course, the actual human being reading your assignment is your university lecturer – probably the one who set the task and taught the module. However, lecturers often ask (or expect) you to imagine a 'hypothetical' or 'target' reader. This is usually someone with a similar level of knowledge to your own, or someone with a similar level of experiencing in policing. Lecturers want you to write for such a reader because they want you to *demonstrate* your understanding, and it can be hard to do this if you assume too much knowledge on the part of the reader. It is not uncommon to ask a student about something which is unclear in their essay, only to have them explain that 'the lecturer already knows this'! But this is not the point. The lecturer wants to know that *you* know this, and that you can explain it to other people, including non-experts, in a clear way. Always ask yourself:

- What can the target reader be expected to know?
- What does the target reader need me to explain?

A good writer anticipates the reader's questions, and does not ask them to guess, fill in gaps, or work out how one thing relates to another.

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Analysing
a writing
assignment

CROSS
REFERENCE

Appendix 3,
Key phrases in
assignments

CROSS
REFERENCE

Chapter 2,
Coherent
texts and
arguments,
Editing and
redrafting for
coherence;
Developing
a coherent
argument and
expressing
criticality

CROSS
REFERENCEAppendix 3,
Key phrases in
assignments

Analysing a writing assignment

One of the most common – and perhaps surprising – reasons for low marks in written assessments is a failure on the part of the student to read the assignment title or question thoroughly enough. A student may go on to produce something which is interesting and of a good standard, but if they do not directly address the specific task, they will not meet the actual requirements of the assignment and so will end up failing. It is therefore essential to start any assignment by carefully analysing the assignment title or question.

You should read the title or question several times to ‘unpack’ it and get absolutely clear in your mind what is expected of you. It is helpful to highlight **key terms**, including verbs commonly occurring in academic assignments such as ‘assess’, ‘discuss’, and ‘compare and contrast’.

Assignments usually come with a set of assessment **guidelines** and marking **descriptors** detailing the various criteria that you need to meet in order to achieve success. These criteria relate to areas such as:

- task achievement;
- content and organisation;
- relevance to policing practice;
- writing style;
- referencing.

Be sure to read and digest these guidelines and descriptors as they are the very same ones that assessors will use to mark your work.

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your Policing
Degree,*
Chapter 6,
Assessment,
Feedback on
academic
work

Task



Unpacking essay titles and questions

Look at the essay titles below. What are the key terms? What are you expected to do in your essay? What will be your purpose in writing? What type of content and organisation could help you to achieve this purpose? (Make some notes before you look at the model analyses provided.)

A

Given the many factors which might influence the offending behaviour of an individual, consider the question: ‘Can the police really influence offender behaviour?’

B

‘The core skill for police officers is the ability to communicate.’ Using appropriate evidence, explore the arguments for and against this proposition.

Appendix 1

English language references

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of resources, but rather a selection of those that we think you may find most useful.

Dictionaries

There are many online dictionaries, but if you prefer to feel the weight of one in your hands, then Chambers is a good choice:

Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1999) Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd.

A good online dictionary, especially for students whose first language is not English, is the Cambridge Dictionary. The definitions are very clear and easy to understand, and there is an excellent pronunciation tool:

Cambridge Dictionary [online]. Available at: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org> (accessed 22 August 2019).

Grammar books

Caplan, N (2012) *Grammar Choices for Graduate and Professional Writers*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Caplan's book is aimed at postgraduate students (known as 'graduate' students in the USA, where this book is published). Nevertheless, if you are looking for a systematic analysis of English grammar in the context of academic English, you may find this book very useful. It contains many clear examples of grammar in use in real-life academic writing.

Hewings, M (2015) *Advanced Grammar in Use*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R (2015) *English Grammar in Use*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R (2015) *Essential Grammar in Use*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Grammar in Use series is particularly useful for students whose first language is not English. The books present each grammar point in a clear and systematic way, and provide exercises and a self-study answer key. There are also lots of multimedia features in recent editions.

Other resources

Academic Phrasebank [online]. Available at: www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk (accessed 22 August 2019).

Academic Word List [online]. Available at: www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist (accessed 22 August 2019).

Baily, S (2011) *Academic Writing for International Students of English*. 3rd ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Bottomley, J (2014) *Academic Writing for International Students of Science*. Oxon: Routledge.

Peck, J and Cole, M (2012) *Write it Right: The Secrets of Effective Writing*. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Swales, J and Feak, C (2012) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. 3rd ed. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Appendix 2

Grammatical terminology

GRAMMATICAL TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
adjective	a word which describes a noun	a <u>young</u> child a <u>diagnostic</u> test
adverb	a word which adds information to a verb or an adjective	read <u>daily</u> a <u>very</u> difficult test
article	the words 'a/an' and 'the', used with nouns	<u>a</u> cell <u>the</u> stop and search
clause	a structure containing a verb , forming a sentence, or joining with other clauses to form sentences	(1) <u>This essay aims to explore current approaches to community policing.</u> (1) <u>The police officer could not make the arrest</u> (2) <u>because of a medical emergency.</u> (1) <u>Introduced in the late 1980s,</u> (2) <u>the current system is ineffective.</u>
conjunction (linking word/phrase)	a word or phrase that joins words, phrases or clauses	He was arrested <u>but</u> only received a caution. The child could not be taken home (main clause) <u>because</u> of his parents' suspected drug abuse (subordinate clause). <u>If</u> the policy is to succeed (subordinate clause), it must be adequately funded (main clause).
contraction	two words joined by an apostrophe	<u>She's</u> in the office. <u>It's</u> time for a rethink
countable noun*	a noun which can be counted and so can be used in the plural	a <u>gun</u> , <u>guns</u> the <u>child</u> , <u>children</u>

GRAMMATICAL TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
main clause	the clause containing the main idea in a sentence	<u>This essay aims to explore approaches to community policing.</u> <u>The police officer could not make the arrest</u> because of a medical emergency. Introduced in the late 1980s, <u>the system is no longer adequate.</u>
noun	people, places or things	officer, station, honesty, training
participle clause	a clause with an ‘-ing’ or ‘-ed’ verb form adding information to the main clause	<u>Introduced in the late 1980s,</u> the system is no longer adequate. The study investigated officers’ attitudes to drug abuse, <u>using a mixed methods approach.</u>
plural	the form of a noun that refers to more than one, usually ending in ‘s’ in English	books, officers, guns (regular) women, children, criteria (irregular plurals)
possessive	a word or phrase which denotes belonging	<u>her</u> child <u>Mrs Brown’s</u> child the child is <u>hers</u>
proper noun	a noun written with a capital letter, as it is the name of a person, place, company etc	Susan, Doncaster, National Police Association
sentence	a group of words usually beginning with a capital letter and ending in a full stop, and containing a subject and a verb ; the main building blocks of writing	Students are advised to make an appointment with their academic adviser. Individual research projects also have much to tell us. A prolific contributor to this debate has been Gemma Moss. Moss makes the case that community input is ‘crucial’.
singular	the form of a noun that refers to one of something	a cell an officer

GRAMMATICAL TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
subject	the person or thing which the verb relates to and agrees with in number	<u>Students</u> are advised to make an appointment with their academic adviser. <u>Topping found</u> that attitudes towards crime were varied.
that-clause	a subject/verb structure that follows certain verbs etc that are usually followed by 'that'	Topping found <u>that attitudes towards crime were varied.</u>
uncountable noun*	a noun seen as a mass which cannot be split or counted, and so cannot be plural	pleasure, time, energy, flour, life
quantifier	a word or phrase which denotes 'how much' of a noun	<u>few</u> people <u>a large amount of</u> money
verb	a word expressing an action or state	be, is, go, write, take, deliver, improve Students <u>are</u> advised to make an appointment with their academic adviser. Topping <u>found</u> that attitudes towards crime were varied.

*This is often about how a noun is interpreted in a particular context, rather than an absolute concept. Many nouns can be countable or uncountable depending on the context, eg:

- He did it three times.
- Time is of the essence.
- You only get one life.
- Life is a gift.
- Cats are said to have nine lives.

Appendix 3

Key phrases in assignments

PHRASE	LEVEL	MEANING
analyse	Mostly levels 5 and 6, especially with the word 'critically'; rarely level 4	Look at the concepts and ideas under discussion in depth; the addition of 'critically' means look at the concepts and ideas in depth and with a critical eye
assess	All levels, though common at lower levels	Make comments about the value/ importance of the concepts and ideas under discussion
compare	All levels, though common at lower levels	Look for similarities between the concepts and ideas under discussion
contrast	All levels, though common at lower levels	Look for differences between the concepts and ideas under discussion; often used with 'compare' (see above)
define	All levels, though common at lower levels	State precisely what is meant by a particular issue, theory or concept
discuss	Level 5 and above; sometimes level 4	Give reasons for and against; investigate and examine by argument
evaluate	Mostly levels 5 and 6, especially with the word 'critically'	Weigh up the arguments surrounding an issue, using your own opinions and, more importantly, reference to the work of others
illustrate	All levels	Make clear by the use of examples
outline	All levels, though tends to be used with the lower levels	Give the main features of
review	All levels, though 'critically review' would imply level 5 and above	Extract relevant information from a document or set of documents
state	All levels, though tends to be used with the lower levels	Present in a clear, concise form
summarise	All levels, though tends to be used with the lower levels	Give an account of all the main points of the concepts and ideas under discussion
with reference to	All levels	Use a specific context, issue or concept to make the meaning clear

Index

Note: *italicised* page numbers are illustrations, **bold** page numbers are tables, and the suffix 'a' refers to the Appendix at the back of the book.

- abbreviations, 61, 65, 66, 103
- abstracts, 9, 10, 29
- Academic Phrasebank, 10
- academic style, 75–85
- Academic Word List, 85
- acronyms, 102
- active listening, 13, 14, 39, 47, 49
- adjectives, 45, 89, **117a**
- adverbs, 83, **117a**
- analysing (unpacking) a writing assignment, 4, 5–6, 7, 31–2
- analytical (critical) essays, 3, 8, 18
- anonymous authors, 63
- apostrophes, 88–9, **117a**
- arguments, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16–17, 18, 20, 28, 31, **34**, 50–2, **68**, 100, **120a**
- assessment guidelines, 4, 6, 19, 22, 99, 100, 104, 107, 109, 112
- author-prominent sentences, 71, 127

- bibliographies, 28, 60
- bold font, 65, 103, 104, 109
- Borton, T, 20, 21, 24, 25
- brackets (parentheses), 59, 64, 65, 84, 89, 102, 126

- capitalisation, 66, 101–2, **118a**
- CARS model (Creating a Research Space), 10
- cause and effect, 14, 32, 122
- caveats, 13
- citations, 56
- clarity, 31, 76–7, 88, 106
- classification, 32, 122
- coherence, 11, 20, 31–55, 76, 102, 106, 113
- cohesion, 38–50, 109
 - see also* linking ideas
- collusion, 73, 105
- colons, 14, 47, 59, 65, 84, 89, 90, 92, 96
- commas, 88, 89, 90–2, 93, 94, 96–7, 129
 - in referencing, 57, 58, 65
- communication as core teaching skill, 6, 7, 8, 16–17, 18, 34–5, 37, 38, 49, 122–3
- compare and contrast, 6, 12, 18, 21, 32, 48, **68**, 95–6, **120a**, 122
- complexity, 13, 76, 90
- concise language, 75, 77–8, 100, **120a**, 128
- conclusions, 9, 12, 19–20, 21, 21, 28, 34, 35, 38, 122, 123
- conferences, referencing, 62
- conjunctions, 91, 93, **117a**
- contractions, 84, 88–9, **117a**
- countable nouns, 83, 86, **117a**
- critical (analytical) essays, 3, 8, 18
- critical incidents, 20–1, 22, 25, 26
- Critical Publishing, house style of, 58, 60
- criticality, 11–17, 45, 50–3, 70
- Crystal, David, 88

- dashes, 14, 84, 89
- diagrams, formatting, 109–10, **110**
- discussion section, 29
- dissertations, 3, 28–9, 62
- DOI (digital object identifier), 62
- drafting, 4, 35
- Drummond, A, 45

- editing, 4, 11, 35–7, 101–4
- 'effect'/'affect', 87, 88
- electronic sources of information, 62, 64–5
- English as a second language, 2, 9, 21, 85, 113
- essays, 3, 18–24, 37–8
 - critical (analytical) essays, 3, 8, 18
 - dissertations, 3, 28–9, 62
 - reflective essays, 3, 20–4, 122
- 'et al', 60, 65
- ethics, 28, 29
- evaluation, 5, 7, 11, 12, 21, 21, 22, 28, 32, 38, 40, **68**, **120a**
- evidence, 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17–18, 20, 40, **40**, 52, 69, 85, 99
- evidence-based dissertations, 28
- exams, 3, 26–8
- exemplification, 14, 15, 32, 40, **40**

- feedback, 2, 4, 27, 113
- fonts, 100, 112
 - bold, 65, 103, 104, 109
 - italicised, 103, 104
- formal language, 18, 22, 75, 79–81, **81**, 82, 83–4, 128
- formatting, 4, 67, 85, 99, 101, 104, 105, 106–10
 - line spacing, 100, 106–7, 108–9
 - paragraph formatting, 107–9
 - tables and diagrams, 109–10, **109**, **110**
- fragments, 89–90, 92–3
- full stops, 65, 66, 89–90, 93, 95, 102, **118a**

- general information, 32, 37, 39, 40–1, **40**, 51, 77, 123
- Gibb's Reflective Cycle, 20, 21, 21, 24, 25
- grammar in academic writing, 31, 36, 39, 83, 85–97, **95**, 101, 104, 105, 113, 116a, **117a–19a**

- 'hanging ('dangling') participles', 93–4
 Harvard system of referencing, 57–65, 67, 125
 highlighting language, 103–4
 house styles, 58, 60, 65
 hyphens, 89
- IMRAD structure, 28–9
 informal language, 26, 28, 79–81, **81**, 82, 84, 89
 information-prominent sentences, 70, 71, 127
 in-text, 56, 57–8, 59–60, 64, 65, 66, 67
 introductions, 9, 10, 19, 28, 37–8, 49, 122
 italics, 103, 104
- journal articles, 3, 8, 9, 28, 84
 referencing, 60, 61–2, 65
 journals, reflective, 24
- key terms, 6, 26, 32, 37–8, **40**, 42–3, 104, **120a**
- line spacing, 100, 106–7, 108–9
 linking ideas, 36, 39, 41, 46, 47–50, 51, **68**, 77, 125
 see also cohesion
 literature reviews, 28
- main clauses, 86, 91, 92–3, **117a**, **118a**
 malpractice, 64, 73–4
 collusion, 73, 105
 falsification, 73
 plagiarism, 10, 56, 57, 59, 67, **68**, 73–4
 mathematics, 11–12, 13, 19–20, 33, 41
 methodology, 28–9
 Microsoft Word, 105, 107, 112
- neutral language style, 49–50, 77, **81**, **81**, 82
 new information, 41–7, 49, 51, 123–4
 newspapers, 63, 79–80
 non-verbal communication, 14, 33, 35, 39
 nouns, 66, 86, **87**, **118a**
 countable, 83, 86, **117a**
 and pronouns, 43–4, 45, 46, 77, 86, 94, 124
 proper nouns, 66, 88, **118a**
 'summary ('signalling') nouns', 45, 46, 52
 uncountable nouns, 83, 86, **119a**
 nuance, 12–13, 105
- old information, 41–7, 51, 123–4
 organisational frameworks, 32–5
 originality, 69, 73
 outlines, 4, 7–8, 19, 32
- paragraphs, 26, 38–41, **40**, 100, 107–9
 'paralanguage' (non-verbal communication), 14,
 33, 35, 39
 parallel structures, 95–7
 paraphrasing, 10, 37, 67, **68**, 71–3
 parentheses *see* brackets (parentheses)
- participle clauses, 90, 91, 93, **118a**
 PDFs, 62, 64
 placements, 24–5
 plagiarism, 10, 56, 57, 59, 67, **68**, 73–4
 planning a writing assignment, 3–4, 7–8, 11, 31–2
 portfolios, 3, 24
 possessives, 88–9, **118a**
 postgraduate study, **121a**
 precise language, 75, 77, 78, 100, **120a**
 presentation, 99, 106, 110–12
 problem-solution, 32, 122
 pronouns, 66
 and nouns, 43–4, 45, 46, 77, 86, 94, 124
 personal, 22, 24, 26, 83–4
 possessive, 88–9, **118a**
 referring back, 37, 43–4, 77, 86, 94
 proofreading, 4, 7, 36, 85, 101, 104–5
 proper nouns, 66, 88, **118a**
 pseudonyms, 23, 24
 punctuation, 36, 47, 59, 84, 85, 88–92, 94–6, 101, 104, 113
 apostrophes, 88–9, **117a**
 brackets (parentheses), 59, 64, 65, 84, 89, 102, 126
 colons, 14, 47, 59, 65, 84, 89, 90, 92, 96
 dashes, 14, 84, 89
 full stops, 65, 66, 89–90, 93, 95, 102, **118a**
 hyphens, 89
 quotation marks, 26, 59, 103, 104, 126
 in referencing, 57, 58, 65
 semi-colons, 59, 89, 92, 93, 96
 see also commas
- quantifiers, 86, **119a**
 quotation marks, 26, 59, 103, 104, 126
 quotations, 37, 52, 59–60, 65, **68**, 74, 126
- reasoning, 12, 13, 14–15
 redrafting, 4, 35–7, 104
 referencing, 6, 7, 9, 17, 29, 52, 56–74, 80, 99, **120a**,
 125–7
 electronic sources, 62, 64–5
 final reference list, 56, 58, 60–7, 100, 126
 Harvard system, 57–65, 67, 125
 punctuation in, 57, 58, 65
 software for, 67
 tables and figures, 109, 110
 Vancouver system, 57, 64, 67
 referring back, 41, 42–7, 51, 52, 77, 124
 reflections for journals/portfolios, 24–6
 reflective essays, 3, 20–4, 122
 reflective models, 20–2, 21, 23, 24–5
 relative clauses, 88, 94
 relevance, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 99
 repetition, 37, 42–3, 45, 46, 49, 77, 82, 95–6, 100
 see also referring back
 research-focused dissertations, 28
 results section, 29

- retelling, 48, 92
run-on sentences, 89–90, 92–3
- secondary references, 64
semi-colons, 59, 89, 92, 93, 96
sentences, 42, 83, 86, 89–95, **118a**
author-prominent, 71, 127
information-prominent, 70, 71, 127
length of, 76, 77
run-on, 89–90, 92–3
topic, 40
- ‘signalling (‘summary’) nouns’, 45, 46, 52
signposts, 37–8, 49, 50, 51, 52
software
plagiarism, 73
referencing, 67
sources, 8, 15, 67–73, **68**, 74, 80
see also referencing
specific information, 32, 39, 40–1, **40**, 51, 77, 123
spelling, 48, 50, 85, 86–7, **87**, 88–9, 95, **95**, 101, 104, 105
stance, 3, 7–8, 11–13, 15, 16, 19, 28, 45, 51, 52,
53–4, 81
‘summary (‘signalling’) nouns’, 45, 46, 52
synonyms, 43, **68**, 81–2
- tables, formatting, 109–10, **109**
tenses in academic writing, 22, 24, 26
that-clauses, 91, **119a**
‘there’/‘their’/‘they’re’, 48, 87, 88, 89
thesaurus, 43, 81–2
title pages, 110–11, *111*
topic sentences, 40
Turnitin, 73
- umbrella statements, 40
uncountable nouns, 83, 86, **119a**
unpacking (analysing) a writing assignment, 4, 6,
7, 31–2
- Vancouver system of referencing, 57, 64, 67
verbs, 5–6, 37, 38, 54, 71, 86, **87**, 91, 92–3, **118a**, **119a**
VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), 100, 107
- Woodford, P, 4
- word choice, 15, 22, 26, 39, 43, 53–4, 80, 81–2,
81, 85
word counts, 11, 19, 77, 100, 112
word order, 42, 94
writing process, 4–10