

The Good Writing Guide

INTRODUCTION

Good writing is important. The ability to write clear and accurate text is the most useful skill that you will learn at university. Whatever subject you specialise in, and whatever career you choose after you graduate, a command of language is a valuable asset. When employers offer a job to an MA graduate they are *sometimes* interested in how much he or she knows about the structural analysis of myth or cross-cousin marriage, but they are *always* looking for someone with good analytic and communication skills and an eye for detail. In almost any job, you will spend time working with a range of texts. You may produce written reports, letters or marketing copy. You may also give lectures or presentations. If you are aiming for a career in which you can use language stylishly, such as journalism or creative writing, it is equally important that you know the rules of good plain English.

This booklet will help you to think about how you write. It will also improve your reading skills. While you are a student you will often be a reader, absorbing information from other sources or analysing the structure of a text. When assessments come along, you will be a writer, and someone else will read and analyse your work. Reading and writing are closely connected. Improving your skills in one area will have a knock-on effect in the other. Set yourself high standards in both these areas. One of the simplest ways to improve your own writing is to read actively and to look at how authors mould the language to their own purposes. Try to develop an eye for style and sentence structure as you read. This will help you to assess your own writing and expand your language skills.

While you are at university, 'good writing' means being able to produce a clear, grammatical, logical argument to answer a question in an exercise, an essay or an exam. This is not the place to be innovative or poetic. Chances to be creative with language are available elsewhere. Academic writing should be clear, clean and correct. It should display your knowledge and express your ideas. Good writing is always aimed at a particular audience. Your audience is the teacher(s) who will mark your work. Your teachers are highly qualified, and are likely to be the kind of people who have an obsessive interest in grammar and spelling. They will consider a command of language as important as any ideas you might want to share. If your grammar is so poor that it obscures your argument, you may fail the assessment. Markers cannot give credit for what they think you might have wanted to say. What is on the paper is all that counts. Good writing is not an optional extra to a degree; it is the core of the education system. Make this your primary goal at university. Everything that you study can be channelled towards making yourself a more perceptive reader and a more accurate writer. Get this right and you will understand more of what you read. You will also be able to express your own ideas with force and clarity.

This booklet is divided into three sections. Section A contains advice on reading a text for analysis, and on setting up your answer to a question. It looks at planning, structure and paragraphing, and it explains some technical terms. Section B deals with language. It highlights some common problems, and it offers advice on how to sharpen up your prose. Section C deals with using sources. It explains referencing and how to use critical material. If you are studying more than one discipline you may find that there are slightly different expectations about referencing between departments. Use the Quick-Fix pages as checklists every time you submit a piece of writing. Each section also has some recommended further reading. At the back of the booklet there is an index so that you can find things in a hurry. Many of the points have been numbered so that your marker can point you to the relevant section when things go wrong.

If, after all that, you would like some more advice about good writing there are several things you can do:

- Consult your tutor. This is one of the reasons that tutors have office hours, and it is remarkable how few students take advantage of this opportunity for some individual advice. Remember to reread your tutor's comments on your previous essay before you write the next one. You will find this very helpful.
- Contact the Student Learning and Service Unit (SLS), Regent Building, Tel: 273030, or visit www.abdn.ac.uk/sls to find some helpful advice online. SLS runs workshops and courses on study skills and can also offer individual consultations, including support for dyslexia.
- Use your own network. Ask a friend or flatmate to proofread your work before you hand it in. So long as they do not change the content or borrow your ideas this is not cheating. Choose someone you can really trust. A friend on a different course is ideal. You can return the favour and improve your own proofreading skills. This is excellent practice for a career in marketing, publishing or journalism. Develop an interest in writing, and discuss with your friends what works and what does not. This is one of the best ways to learn.

This is The Good Writing Guide. I hope it is useful.

Dr Hazel Hutchison, 2005

(Adapted for Anthropology by Dr. Alex King, 2007)

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SECTION A: PLANNING

1. READING FOR WRITING

Everyone has their own way of approaching a text. Some people like to take meticulous notes as they go along. Others prefer to read through swiftly and then return to look at the text in depth. Develop your own style of reading. However, here are a few things to remember.

Keep an open mind about the text. One of the most valuable things you can learn as you study anthropology is the ability to suspend your own preconceptions as you read. Learning to see things from different perspectives is a vital part of the reading process. Do not attempt to make a text fit your own agenda as you go along, or dismiss it because it challenges what you believe. You do not have to agree with the text, but give it a chance to speak for itself. If you react strongly to something, try to work out why. Alternately, do not accept uncritically everything a text is trying to convey. Identify the assumptions and critically assess the argument as you read.

Think about language. It is easy to be carried away (or confused!) by exotic ethnography or intriguing theoretical perspectives, but keep one eye open for the language the author uses. Develop an eye for style. What makes Geertz different from Levi-Straus, or Sapir different from Radcliffe-Brown? What kind of words do they choose? Do they use a lot of adjectives or a lot of verbs? Is their language formal or colloquial? Is their language abstract and philosophical or concrete and particular? These simple questions give you an insight into the author's underlying concerns and preoccupations. Language does more than tell a story. It creates a world of ideas. What makes a degree in anthropology really worth having is an understanding of how this process operates. Do not just look at what the text says. Try to work out *how* it conveys ideas and elicits certain responses.

Think about structure. This will depend on what kind of text you are reading. The rules of form for ethnography, social theory, and anthropology are constantly evolving. However, it helps to have some idea of conventions and techniques, so that you can see when something interesting or unusual is happening. Compare the text to what you already know about the area, or problems being discussed. Ask yourself how the text is put together and whether it seems to be following a convention or defying it. If something jars, or seems out of place, there may be a good reason for this. Explore it.

Read between the lines. Be careful about this, because you could end up supplying a whole heap of ideas that the text does not support. However, authors often manipulate the unspoken and the unseen as carefully as the things they tell. Identify the author's assumptions. What are their key terms? Are they explicitly defined, or can you identify implicit definitions? What time period is covered in the description? Have things changed since then?

Take notes. This is obvious, but vital. If you see something interesting or have a good idea, write it down and note the page number. You will save hours trying to find it again later.

2. READING THE QUESTION

The easiest way to fail an exam or assessment is not to answer the question. Make sure you understand what the question is looking for. Be especially careful if the question includes technical terms such as ritual, kin, culture, etc. These vary among anthropologists and are rarely used in the same way as in common parlance. Thus, a standard dictionary can be

misleading. If you are unclear about this you can discuss it with your tutor and clarify exactly what they want. Alternatively you can look the terms up in anthropological texts for the course or previous courses you have taken. Make it clear in your essay exactly how you are using the term, and back this up with an outside source if possible.

Think about the kind of course to which the assessment belongs. Anthropologists are looking for evidence of anthropological thinking. Insight from psychology, sociology, art history, and other subjects may be helpful, but make sure you are writing anthropology and not something else.

It is often worth considering more than one question while you are doing some background reading for an essay. You can then choose the one that you find most interesting or stimulating as you go along. This way you avoid heading up a blind alley and then having to start all over again. Keep your question in mind as you write. Everything you say should be connected to it. Avoid rambling. You will not get credit for including irrelevant information, however interesting you may think it is. Indeed, excessive rambling will count against you. Answer the question.

3. STRUCTURE

Markers often complain about poorly structured essays, but by then it is too late to do anything about it. Bad structure in an essay is usually the result of a failure to read the question carefully, a lack of understanding of the subject, or a rushed job. Taking time to plan out your work helps in many ways. It ensures that you connect your essay with the question. It reduces the stress of writing, as you know where you are going next. It produces a well-rounded piece of writing.

3.1 Making a plan

However you like to take notes and marshal your ideas, at some point you are going to need a linear plan for your essay. It is always worth doing this, especially in exams when time is tight and nerves are likely to make you forget a good idea which seemed very clear fifteen minutes ago. The classic layout for an essay is an introduction, followed by three sections, followed by a conclusion. This is based on the rules of Classical rhetoric, in which the speaker offered an introduction, a statement, a counterstatement, a resolution between the two and a conclusion. There is not a set rule about this, but this tried and tested system works well and usually produces a satisfying read. In anthropology essays, this plan often evolves into an introduction, three sections dealing with relevant ideas and examples and a final section tying these together. But, remember that you are not just making lists of what you know. You are answering a question and the whole thing should form a logical *argument*.

A plan should operate as a skeleton for your essay. Ideally it should be possible for a reader to reconstruct your plan from the finished article. This is basically what you are doing when you take lecture notes. Paying attention to how this process works will make planning your own written work a lot easier. Most lecturers think carefully about how they want to present material to the class. It might seem random, but if you listen they will give you markers about what the main headings are, and when they are filling out these sections. Look over your lecture notes and think about some of the techniques lecturers use. Try to see the shape of the lecture. Is the lecturer moving outward from the text to the wider historical context? Or perhaps they are focusing in, beginning with background information, looking at a particular political problem or cultural issue, and then exploring how one text contributes to this debate. Alternatively, are they working through the text section by section?

Or are they offering a spectrum of views on the text? These are all approaches you can use in structuring your written work. A clear plan makes it easier to fulfil your intentions.

Look at the contents page of this booklet. That is a tidy version of the plan I am using as I write. Ideally you want something that looks a bit like that, but shorter. You should also have a good idea of what goes in each section. I have chosen a plan that moves from general principles that you should think about before you start, through useful tools that you need as you go along, to some details that apply specifically to anthropology and which will give your work polish. Sometimes you will have information that could belong in more than one section. For example, you will find information about choosing secondary sources in Section C, although it would also have been useful here. Use your judgement about where things go and what belongs together. Try to give your essay direction, and keep thinking about the question.

3.2 Introductions and conclusions

Have one of each in every piece of work. Avoid repeating the question in the introduction, but do offer an outline of the areas you will discuss. If you have a particularly juicy quote or a fascinating fact, this may be a good place to show it off. Do not make wild generalisations about indigenous peoples, 'most anthropologists', 'middle-class people', etc. However if you have found a particularly outrageous generalisation in something you have read, do feel free to start by quoting this and then contradict it. Read some academic journal articles and see how other writers kick off. This is usually the hardest bit of an essay to get right.

Imagine you are answering this question: **Explore the connection between marriage and money in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.** A weak introduction would be something like this:

Marriage and money are important themes in *Pride and Prejudice*. This essay explores the connection between marriage and money in Jane Austen's novel. First I will look at the theme of marriage, followed by the theme of money. Then I will look at the connection between the two. From this we will be able to see what Austen is trying to say about the link between them.

There is nothing really wrong with this, but it does not open up the question in an interesting way or provide anything to grab the reader's attention. A good introduction offers a sense of where the essay will go. Something like this is better:

The connection between marriage and money lies at the heart of *Pride and Prejudice*. From the opening sentence to Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement, this novel highlights the desirability of financial security in marriage. However, this novel also shows the dangers of marrying purely for gain. This essay will explore the different models of marriage which Austen presents in *Pride and Prejudice*: marrying for money without love, marrying for love without money, and marrying with both. These models allow Austen to examine the place of the marriageable woman within the society of her period.

This demonstrates a knowledge of the text and some intelligent thought on the question. It also maps out the plan of the essay that is going to follow. If you can do this in advance then your way ahead will be much clearer. However, it is always worth going back to look at your introduction once you have finished the essay. Does it promise something that is not in the essay? Or could you flag up an interesting idea in a more stylish way? Most good writers re-write their introductions after they finish the conclusion. Think of this as the shop-window for your work. Show what you have in store in a way that will encourage a closer look.

Conclusions are also hard to handle gracefully, but it is better to try than to ignore the problem. Return to the issues which were raised by the question and show how what you have said proves your point. Avoid introducing any new ideas or material here. Do not save up your main idea as a punch-line. Similarly avoid repeating what you said earlier, although you can, of course, refer back. As with the introduction, a short, well-chosen quote can help. Although it looks good if you explore a range of arguments during the essay itself, a conclusion should always conclude. Push your thinking towards some sort of resolution. Do not just sit on the fence. Answer the question one way or the other.

3.3 Subheadings

These can be useful in honours dissertations. In 2000-word essays, however, it is better to create a flow of connected ideas without stopping and starting. In a dissertation, subheadings will show your marker where you are going. They also allow you to see whether one section of your dissertation has outgrown the others. If this is a problem, you might want to consider revising your plan to accommodate your material. However, a few subheadings go a long way. Only mark major sections.

3.4 Paragraphs

Ideally the structure of your essay should be obvious from your paragraphs. Each paragraph should be a step forward in your argument. Think of each paragraph as a mini essay in which you introduce a new idea, present some evidence to back it up, and draw a conclusion from it. Once you have done this, start a new one.

Within a section you can link paragraphs together by connective words and phrases, such as 'however', 'consequently', 'moreover'. But make sure that these words really justify their presence. There is no use saying, 'it follows that,' if it is not obvious how one idea leads to the other. Similarly, avoid pompous declarations such as 'it is the case that' and 'it is a useful observation to note that' etc. Avoid starting paragraphs with vague pronouns such as 'it' and 'this'. If you cannot use a real noun, you might want to stop and ask yourself exactly what you are talking about. If you want to pick up an idea from the last paragraph and explore it further, make sure that you name this idea, so that the reader can see what you are doing. Be specific. Use nouns and verbs.

Markers are suspicious of paragraphs consisting of less than three sentences or rambling on for more than a page and a half. Read through your essay once you are finished. If you find any paragraphs that are too long or too short, consider revising where the breaks fall. Do not use novels or newspapers as models for paragraphing, which are aiming for very different effects. Journalists rarely have more than one sentence in a paragraph, and often do not write complete sentences. They are playing a different game altogether. Here again, journal articles or ethnographies will offer good examples, so pay attention to this as you do your research.

A paragraph should be identified by a topic sentence. These often come early in the paragraph, but they can be first, in the middle, or the last sentence. Make sure you can identify the topic sentence of every paragraph you write. Equally important are transitions between paragraphs. Writing flows more smoothly and is easier to understand when paragraphs are connected to one another. Thus the last sentence in a paragraph may introduce the topic of the following paragraph. Alternatively, the first sentence of a paragraph may refer to the topic of the previous paragraph and take it forward a step to the new topic of the present paragraph.

Indent the start of every paragraph by hitting the tab key to the left of Q on the keyboard. This makes it very obvious where your paragraph starts. Do not indent your first paragraph or a new paragraph after a subheading. Do not indent after a quotation, unless you are starting a new paragraph. For more advice on layout of quotes see pages 43-46.

4. LAYOUT

You can lose the goodwill of your marker before they even start by presenting an essay that is hard to read. There are several things that you can do to make your essay look good. These will not get you extra marks, but they might stop you losing some. They will also put your marker in a better frame of mind.

Put the question at the top. It might be obvious to you which question you are answering, but believe me, it is not always clear to the marker. Having the question on your essay also helps you keep the question in mind as you write. In exams there is no need to rewrite the question, but mark the number clearly both on your answer and on the front of the paper.

Double-space the text. The reason for this is so that the marker has space to correct your work in between the lines. It is for your benefit, even if it does not feel like it.

Leave a 1"/2.5cm margin. This leaves room for comments and corrections. These will be useful. Make sure you read them.

Use a sensible font. Palatino is one of my favourites, but Times New Roman, Arial, or Verdana are also easy to read and familiar to the eye. Use 11 or 12-point text, some judgement is necessary. For example, 11-point Palatino is about the same size as 12-point Times. Anything smaller is hard to read. Anything bigger suggests that you might be trying to cover up for a short piece of work. Do not put quotations in italics, unless that is how they appear in the text you are quoting. Only use italics for titles of books and plays or words in a foreign language.

Give clear references. It is easy when you know how. See pages 46-51.

Always include a list of works cited or references used. Even if you only have one or two texts to list, please do so. It looks professional and it is a good habit to form. See page 51 for how to do it.

Include a word count. Writing to length is a useful skill which you will need later on. Learn to tailor your work to the requested word length. You will not be penalised for an essay that is within 10% of the stated word count, either over or under. However, you will be penalised for lying about it. When marking essays for a whole class, it is usually easy for the marker to tell when something is too long or too short, so be honest here or face the consequences.

5. SUBMITTING YOUR WORK

Make sure you know the submission dates and regulations for your course. You can get this information from your course guide. If you need an extension, you must ask the course coordinator before the deadline. Try to let your tutor know about a problem as quickly as possible.

Your course guide and the relevant level handbook will also have information about marking criteria and how to interpret the Common Assessment Scale. It is worth understanding how the marking system works, so have a look at the level handbook. Also look at the cover sheet which you should attach to your essay before depositing it in the box. This cover sheet gives you a good idea of what your marker wants to see in your essay.

Return of written work usually takes two to three weeks. Most courses operate a system of essay moderation. This means that once your tutor has marked your work they pass it on to another member of staff who looks at a random sample and any borderline cases. This means the system is fair, but can take a bit of time, especially in the middle of

term when we have other things to do. Please be patient, and try not to pester your tutor for your work. This will only slow them down.

Further Reading

- Clancy, John and Brigit Ballard. 1998. *How to Write Essays: A Practical Guide for Students*. Harlow: Longman.
- Clifford, James, George E. Marcus (eds). 1986. *Writing culture : the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Greetham, Bryan. 1999. *How to Write Better Essays*. London: Palgrave.
- Hennesey, Brendan. 2002. *Writing an Essay*. Oxford: How to Books.
- Marcus, George E. & Dick Cushman. 1982. *Ethnographies as Texts*. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11, 25-69.

QUICK FIX: PLANNING

1. Read the text carefully, but do not focus so closely on your chosen question that you miss out on everything else. Take notes as you go along. It saves time later.
2. Make sure you understand the question. If you are unclear about anything, look it up or ask your tutor. It is better to look a bit silly at this stage than after the event.
3. Think about the question, and try to work out why your marker has set it. How does it connect with issues and ideas explored in lectures and tutorials? Work out which issues you are going to concentrate on.
4. Make a plan. Remember that your essay is an argument that should persuade the reader. Try to give it direction and purpose. Focus everything towards answering the question you have chosen. Work out at this stage which material you will use in each section.
5. Avoid using the plot of the text as the structure for your essay. Demonstrate that you can step back and view the text as a series of connected ideas or strategies. Do not simply follow the events and comment on them as they unfold.
6. If you are writing a comparative essay on more than one text, make sure you integrate the texts fully. Do not simply talk about them one after the other. Create a plan that allows you to bounce ideas between the texts and build up a bigger picture.
7. Use your introduction to outline where you are going in the essay. Avoid simply restating the question. Try to be interesting.
8. Use paragraphs to distinguish between separate ideas and to move your argument forward.
9. Use your conclusion to point out how the evidence you have given answers the question. Make sure you answer the question. Do not sit on the fence.
10. Lay out your essay neatly and with enough room for comments and corrections.

SECTION B: LANGUAGE

6. REGISTER

Writing well involves presenting your material in a tone appropriate to your audience and to the task in hand. You would use different styles of language for a business letter, a newspaper report, a text to a friend or a short story. It is important to develop a suitable tone, or register, for your written work. A university essay is a formal document and requires a formal register. Students often struggle to find a balance between formal, intellectual language and open, accessible English. Many reputable scholars struggle with this too, which is why some academic books are so hard to understand. However, even the most complicated ideas can be articulated clearly. Your marker will be delighted to see complex thought presented in plain English. They will also notice if you dress up weak thinking in flowery language. Pay attention to the register of your writing and remember who will read your work.

As you read anthropology look at the way in which they use language. If it seems too dense and formal then do not copy their style. However, if you find a book that is lucid, interesting and readable, try to work out what makes it so clear.

Avoid being too personal: Your name appears on the front of your essay, therefore your marker already knows that everything in the essay is your opinion. Do not keep saying 'in my opinion' or 'it seems to me that' etc. Have the courage of your convictions and state what you think. If you can back up your views with evidence from sources, there is no need to apologise or hesitate. You do not need to fear the first person, but don't overdo it. Present your work as a piece of cohesive thought rather than as collection of your own responses. Avoid using phrases such as, 'I want to look at'—just get on with it.

Avoid being too clever: Some of the worst grammatical errors are caused by students trying to write long, complex sentences. A short sentence is the most powerful way to make a cogent point. However, one short declarative after another quickly rings wooden. Similarly, do not use words that you *think* you understand. If in doubt, look them up instead of leaving them out.

Avoid slang: This does not just cover words and phrases. It also applies to informal expressions and sentence constructions. Do not say, 'Turner's description of the ritual blew me away. You know what I mean?' You can express the same idea by saying, 'Turner's description was vivid and engaging,' or, 'This ethnography demands a strong response from the reader.' Avoid using 'you' or 'us' for the reader of the text. 'One' sounds formal in everyday speech, but it is very useful in this setting.

Tenses: Use the past tense for anything that happened in the past. If you use the present tense to refer to an author's argument ('Tedlock says x, y. Hymes argues that ...') then stick with that consistently. The present tense may be the most appropriate for certain generalizations ('Rituals serve many functions in society. '), but make sure they really do apply to the present day.

7. PUNCTUATION

Punctuation matters. It does not simply tell the reader when to start and stop. It organises the text into meaningful units. Getting it wrong can seriously damage the sense of the text. To see the power of punctuation, look at this example from Lynne Truss's book, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*:

Dear Jack,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feeling whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy — will you let me be yours?

Jill

Dear Jack.

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn! For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours, Jill ¹

It makes you think, doesn't it?

7.1 Apostrophes

This is the most common problem in written English. One can see apostrophes in the wrong places in shops, theatre programmes, adverts, newspapers, restaurant menus and more. There is always some public debate going on about whether we should retain apostrophes in the language or abolish them because so few people seem capable of using them properly. I would like to ban them; German gets on fine without them, but the fact is that they still exist, and we still expect you to be able to put them in the right places. Before writing this guide, I asked my colleagues what they thought was the biggest problem in students' written work. Wrong use of apostrophes was overwhelmingly at the top of the list. The reason this annoys markers so much is that the rules are pretty simple. Here they are:

APPROPRIATE APOSTROPHE USE:

Signalling possession by adding 's to a singular noun: Susan's book, King's College, the boy's father, the woman's coat, the banana's skin, the piano's keys.

If the noun or name already ends in **s** then go ahead and add 's as normal: Boas's theory, Hymes's measured verse, the bus's driver.

A plural noun ending in **s** takes an apostrophe after the **s**: the boys' fathers, the Trobrianders' gardens, the Nuers' cattle.

A plural noun not ending in **s** takes 's: the women's rights, the children's school.

Get into the habit of taking a moment to check if the apostrophe should be before or after the **s** every time you use one. Do not be tempted to tuck the apostrophe into a name that already has an **s**: Hyme's narratives, or into possessive pronouns (see below).

Indicating a missing letter in a contraction such as don't, won't, wouldn't, isn't, it's. However, these contractions are informal and should not appear in academic essays, except when they appear in quotations from texts. Write out these

¹ Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero-Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (London: Profile Books, 2003), p.9.

phrases in full: do not, will not, would not, is not, it is, etc. Note however that 'cannot' is one word.

DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE FOR

Plurals of nouns ending in vowels such as banana's, piano's, tomato's instead of bananas, pianos, tomatoes. This is known as the 'greengrocer's apostrophe', but crops up everywhere. There is no excuse for this; it is just plain wrong.

Possessive pronouns such as **hers, yours, theirs, its, ours**. These are complete words, like **his** and **mine**.

It's and **its** are commonly confused, but this really annoys your marker, so get this one right. **It's** should never appear in your written work. If you mean **it is**, then write this out in full. If you mean **belonging to it**, then there is no apostrophe. Run a search on your essay and correct any **it's** that you find lurking in your text. Also look out for **who's** and **whose**.

7.2 Commas

I used to be a sub-editor on a daily newspaper. I would get a rough and ready news story from a reporter, and I would cut and correct it. I would put their commas *in the right places*. I would send it to the chief sub-editor who would look over it and put my commas *in the right places*. He would send it to the night editor, who would approve it, and put all his commas *in the right places*. We all thought we were correct. Different writers vary their use of commas, which can be confusing when you are getting to grips with the rules. In the last forty years, English has shifted quite radically to using as few commas as possible. Someone who went to university in the 1960s will have learned different rules from accepted contemporary practice. However, this does not mean that you can put commas wherever you like. Commas provide the internal structure or map of each sentence. They mark out which bits of the sentence are essential to its meaning and which bits are supplementary. They show where clauses start and stop, and they separate items in lists. Getting them in the right place keeps the movement of the sentence clear, but having too many can slow down your reader and make the sentence seem cluttered and fussy. Here are some rules which you should learn to observe:

USE A COMMA:

To link two sentences with a conjunction (**and, but, because, etc**):

This makes a **compound sentence**. There are three examples of this kind of sentence in the passage above. For example, the second sentence could be split into two:

- ✓ I would get a rough and ready news story from a reporter. I would cut and correct it.

I have chosen to link the two sentences with a comma and the word **and** to emphasise that I want the reader to take both sections as part of the same event. However, **a comma cannot link two sentences by itself**. If I insert a comma but miss out the word **and**, I create a **comma splice** (see page 23). The second last sentence has a similar structure. Here I have used **but** to emphasise the contrast. Technically it is possible to link together several sentences with commas to make a very long, complex sentence. Karl Marx and Pierre Bourdieu do this all the time in their writing, but you should avoid it. Limit yourself to one conjunction per sentence where possible. It is always better to write short, clear sentences in essays.

After connective adverbs: These words are very useful at the start of sentences in essays as they show how your argument is moving from sentence to sentence. **However, yet, still, nevertheless, therefore, thus, moreover, for example,** etc, can be used to suggest a connection or contrast between two sentences without formally joining them. A comma is required after one of these when it appears at the beginning of a sentence.

✓ However, you will always make occasional mistakes.

However is particularly problematic. If you leave out this comma, it sounds like the whole sentence is a subordinate clause which should lead to some other statement. If **however** is operating as part of a subordinate clause, the comma goes after the clause:

✓ However much you try, you will always make occasional mistakes.

This is easy to get wrong, so look out for this one.

Though and **although** cannot be used as connective adverbs at the start of sentences:

X Although, many people try to do so.

They can, however, be used at the start of a subordinate clause:

✓ Although Lévi-Strauss has been thoroughly criticized, his ideas remain influential.

To separate items in a list: This works for nouns and adjectives:

✓ Edward Sapir wrote grammars of several languages, a general book on language, essays on personality and even poetry. He was remembered by his colleagues as having a piercing, inquisitive mind.

If you have three or more items, use **and** between the last two. Avoid listing verbs and adverbs. One at a time is quite enough.

To signal parenthesis: Commas can be used like brackets to insert an extra piece of information, interesting or otherwise, into a sentence. Reread that last sentence without the words between the two commas. It still makes sense. The phrase between the commas is not a complete sentence. In this case it is a **modifying phrase**, which adds some extra information or comment about the preceding noun. The first comma signals a short diversion from the sentence. The second comma shows that this is finished, and the sentence picks up where it left off. You could insert a different kind of phrase or clause here, such as 'or even a witty aside' or 'if you have any extra information to insert'. Parentheses have great comic potential, but try to resist the temptation to use them in essays for hilarious remarks that probably will not seem so funny to your marker. Also avoid using them to include lists of things that you would like to mention but cannot be bothered to include properly in a working sentence:

- X *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* describes many aspects of Trobriand life, gardening, making canoes, trading kula, magic, etc., which give us a sense of the 'impoderabilia' of daily life.

Here it would be better to say:

- ✓ *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* describes many aspects of Trobriand life. It covers gardening, kula transactions, magic spells, and kinship relations, which combine to give the reader a sense of the social complexity.

This version sounds less muddled. Also, avoid long, rambling diversions in sentences, or diversions within a diversion. One short phrase is fine, but if your parenthesis is any longer than ten words, you should consider putting this information in a sentence of its own. If you do use commas to form a parenthesis, make sure you close it. You would not use just one bracket. In fact, avoid using brackets and dashes wherever possible. Good use of commas is much more elegant.

To mark out clauses: If you are hazy about what a clause is, you need to read something that will explain the basics of grammar slowly and carefully. See the list at the end of Section B for some further reading. Traditional grammar is very careful to note every shift in the syntax of a sentence by inserting a comma. (See two letters on page 11.) Modern writing is more relaxed about this. Look at sentences four and five in the opening paragraph about commas on page 12. These sentences are grammatically identical, but I have only put commas in one of them so that you can see the two styles in action. Aptly enough, the chief sub-editor liked to take commas out whenever possible, while the night editor liked to put them back in. In that particular case it does not make much difference. The syntax works either way. Some clauses do not need to be separated by commas, especially when a linking word such as **that, whenever, since** etc is used. However, commas can make a dramatic difference to the meaning of a sentence. Leaving them out can make a sentence ambiguous. Use commas to make your meaning apparent, not just to provide pauses where you think the reader needs a rest. The easiest way to get this right is to be absolutely clear in your own head about what you want to say, and to say it as simply as possible in short sentences. You will find a quick explanation of clauses on page 17, which should help.

To introduce speech: A comma is used to introduce speech or a quotation when it forms part of the preceding or following sentence:

- ✓ Dima said, 'Without deer there is no culture, nothing.'
or
✓ 'Without deer there is no culture, nothing,' said Dima.

You can also use a colon to introduce a quotation or speech:

- ✓ Dima said: 'Without deer there is no culture, nothing.'

Always use a colon when the quotation follows a complete sentence:

- ✓ Dima told me one of those perfect statements that I had to write down immediately: 'Without deer there is no culture, nothing.'

DO NOT USE COMMAS

To join sentences without a conjunction: This creates a **comma splice**, which comes a close second to dodgy apostrophes on the marker's hate-list. A comma splice looks like this:

X Some markers are sent into a rage by comma splices, they will give themselves a hernia with fury, and will cover your essay in red pen.

It should read:

- ✓ Some markers are sent into a rage by comma splices. They will give themselves a hernia with fury, and will cover your essay in red pen.
- or
- ✓ Some markers are sent into a rage by comma splices; they will give themselves a hernia with fury, and will cover your essay in red pen.

Oddly enough, this quirk was tolerated more in the nineteenth century. So, you will sometimes see comma splices, which would now get red pen all over them, used by very stylish and correct writers, such as Robert Louis Stevenson or Ralph Waldo Emerson. This just proves that the language is alive and constantly changing, but it is not worth arguing this point with your tutor. Learn the current rules and follow them. My experience as a marker suggests that the comma splice is a common mistake of bright students who read quickly and think coherently. Sometimes certain ideas seem so connected that one instinctively wants to put them in the same sentence. However, linking these is no longer the job of the comma. If you really want to run together two sentences that seem to connect, consider a semi-colon (see below). It is an under-used punctuation resource. Alternatively include a conjunction, **and, but, so, or, for etc.** Connective adverbs such as **however, yet, still, nevertheless, therefore, thus, moreover** etc. are not strong enough to join two sentences. If you want to use one of these, stop the sentence and start again. If you are a fast reader, keep a special lookout for comma splices as you proofread.

7.3 Semi-colons

Few people know how to use a semi-colon well, which is a pity, as this is an elegant element of style. It has two main functions in prose:

To connect two sentences: This is a good antidote to the comma splice. It works especially well for short sentences where the sense follows on directly into the second sentence, and where the two halves are of equal importance and length:

- ✓ I opened my notebook; I began to write.

It is also possible to use a semi-colon with a connective adverb:

- ✓ I opened my notebook; however, I did not begin to write.

This is more cumbersome and should be used sparingly. The golden rule of using semi-colons to join clauses is that each half of the completed sentence should also operate as a grammatical sentence in its own right. In other words, only use a semi-colon where you could put a full stop. Therefore, you should avoid putting a semi-colon next to conjunctions, such as **and, but, so** etc, or relatives, such as **that,**

which, when etc. You do not need these. The semi-colon does the job of linking well enough by itself.

To separate items on a list: This is especially useful when the list is long and the individual items on the list include commas:

- ✓ There are many typologies of symbols used by anthropologists: Peirce's icon, index, and symbol; Sapir's referential and condensation symbolism; and signifier and signified provided by Saussure.

This way the reader can easily tell where the important divisions between the items occur. If this list only contained commas, it would be very confusing. When using semi-colons in a list, it is often a good idea to introduce the list with a colon to show where the list begins.

7.4 Colons

Like semi-colons, these are rarely used but are not as confusing as many people think. The function of a colon is to introduce information of some kind:

To introduce a list: A colon announces that something important is about to follow. This makes it ideal for kicking off a long list, as above. The list can also be a sequence of short items separated by commas:

- ✓ You will need four ingredients to bake a cake: flour, sugar, butter and eggs.

To introduce a quotation or speech: This is very useful in essays, and works well before a large, indented quotation. Always use a colon to introduce a quotation which follows a complete sentence.

To introduce an explanation or statement: In this case the colon is used to create some sort of anticipation. It is often used when reporting speech or when summarizing or expanding the first half of the sentence:

- ✓ Schneider's message is clear: societies are not partible into kinship, economy, religion, and politics.
- or
- ✓ Sahlins pulls no punches: opponents to the culture concept are whiners.

DO NOT place a colon between a verb and its object or a preposition and its complement.

- X In the available space, write: your name, address, and phone number.

Not every list need be announced with a colon.

7.5 Dashes

Unlike semi-colons and colons, dashes are over-used. They are often used by writers who are unsure which punctuation mark to choose. Dashes should NOT be used instead of brackets, parenthetical commas, semi-colons, full stops, or colons before lists and quotations. Avoid all of the following constructions:

- X The Bongo Bongo — a very obscure tribe — provide exceptions to any general rule.
- X Elizabeth makes her feelings obvious — she despises Mr Collins.
- X Elizabeth feels only one emotion for Mr Collins — contempt.

All of these can be rewritten using more appropriate punctuation. However, dashes do have their place, whatever some may say. When you use one make sure you type a long dash (—) not a short hyphen (-). Press Ctrl, Alt and the hyphen key at the top right of your keyboard. Dashes are useful where the sense of the sentence is interrupted in some way, or where a long qualification or description has led away from the main point of the sentence. The dash provides a breathing space in which the sentence can reorganise itself:

- ✓ Asdiwal is young, enthusiastic, intelligent, successful, courageous to the point of foolhardiness — the classic tragic hero.

The final phrase does not fit easily into the syntax of the sentence, but it is obviously referring to the subject of the sentence, Elizabeth Bennet. If you were to put a comma after 'stubbornness', the final phrase would get lost in the list of adjectives. You could create a new sentence: 'She is the classic Austen heroine.' However, this lacks the immediacy and movement of this version. A dash seems justified in this case. Here is another one:

- ✓ Hamlet's indecisiveness, his arrogance, his suspicion of others, his passionate, brooding, introspective nature — these all contribute to his downfall.

In both these sentences you could quite correctly substitute a colon. However, the effect of a colon is to lead the reader forward into the following section. A dash is more like a bucket of cold water flung in the reader's face, jolting them back to the starting point of the sentence. Colons point forward, and dashes point backward. Nobody wants this experience too often, so, once more, use with extreme caution. If you can replace a dash with another punctuation mark, you probably should.

7.6 Quotation marks

In British usage, speech and quotations are signalled by single quotation marks:

- ✓ Evans-Pritchard asked a Nuer informant his name and got, 'Do you want to know my *name*?'

Quotations and speech within quotations are signalled by double quotation marks:

- ✓ 'When a Zande says about a mishap, "It is witchcraft", he means that it is due to a witch but he does not know to which particular one,' explains Evans-Pritchard.

You will see this done the other way around, with double quote marks on the outside and single quotes within. This will probably be in books or journals published in the US, where the system is reversed. Please use the British system. For more on quotations, see Section C.

7.7 Exclamation marks

Do not use these, unless they appear in quotations (see above). An academic essay should persuade by force of reason and evidence. Exclamation marks do not fit in the formal register of academic writing.

8 GRAMMAR

If you want to express interesting ideas then a sound grasp of grammar is essential. Your understanding of grammar may be more developed than you realise. If you have studied a foreign language, you may have a very sophisticated knowledge of how it works. Most speakers use grammar well without knowing all the terms for the techniques they are using. This is fine when it works, but it can help to stop and think about what you are doing. Markers tend to use technical, grammatical terms when pointing out problems in your work, which is not much use to you if you do not know what they are talking about. This section will point out a few common problems, and offer definitions of some terms that may crop up in your markers' comments. If you have serious problems with the grammar of the prestige variant of English used in academic writing, this booklet will not solve them. If your markers consistently complain about your syntax, sentence structure, tenses, pronouns and the like, you probably need some help from one of the sources listed on pages 2-3.

Syntax is the order of elements. English is an 'SVO' language, which means the normal order of elements is subject-verb-object. 'The man bit the dog,' is clear in its meaning, if weird. Problems can develop, however, when a writer starts to pile various modifying elements (subordinate clauses, temporal phrases, etc.) at the beginning of a sentence. Then it is possible to lose track of the subject, the verb, and the object (complement).

8.1 Clauses

Clauses are the internal sections of a sentence, which fit together to build up meaning. Every clause has a noun and a verb, sometimes called a subject and a predicate. However, not all clauses are of equal weight and value. The clauses of a sentence are like the internal walls of a house. Some can be moved around or altered without doing too much damage. One is always essential and cannot be removed without the whole thing falling in. Clauses which are essential are **main clauses**. A compound sentence (see page 20) will have two main clauses. A main clause requires a noun and a verb:

I know.

However, it can also be more elaborate:

I know some useful things about grammar.

A main clause is the bit of a sentence which can make a sentence all by itself. 'Know' is the **principal verb** of this sentence, which means it is the verb in the main clause. 'I' is the **subject** of the sentence, which means it is the noun doing the verb, also called the **predicate**. 'Some useful things about grammar' forms the **object** of the sentence. This is the noun phrase which represents the thing that 'I know'. Subjects, objects and predicates can all be made up of single words or phrases to make up the main clause.

Subordinate clauses: Onto this main clause one can attach other clauses, which support and describe the main clause. These are called **subordinate clauses**. All the subordinate clauses in the following examples are underlined. Subordinate clauses can often be moved around without changing the meaning of a sentence:

I know some useful things about grammar, which is lucky for you.

or

It is lucky for you that I know some useful things about grammar.

A subordinate clause is a section of a sentence which contains a subject and a predicate (i.e. a noun and a verb), but which is doing the job of an adverb or an adjective. It is not part of the main action of the sentence. It is describing a thing or an action in the main clause or in another subordinate clause. A sentence can have more than one subordinate clause. They can follow and/or precede the main clause.

Because my mother drilled prescriptive grammar into my brain, I know some useful things about grammar, which is lucky for you, as you can draw on these to improve your writing.

By now, however, this sentence is getting a bit long and complex for my liking. Once you have more than three clauses in a sentence, it is very easy to get muddled up about which is the important one. I advise against sentences any more complex than this. They are hard to write well and hard work to read. The real danger is when the main clause gets missed out, and you end up with something like this:

X Because I have studied English, which is lucky for you, as you can draw on these to improve your writing.

This is not a sentence. It has no main verb, only a succession of subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause is often flagged up by a word such as **while, which, if, that, whenever, although, as, despite**, etc. This kind of clause describes the subject, the object or the predicate of the main clause. A phrase containing a **participle** (usually a verb ending in – **ing**) behaves similarly. These cannot form sentences in their own right, even though you will find them in *The Sunday Times*. In your written work, therefore, you should avoid things like this:

- X Although this is not the case.
- X However much you try.
- X Rarely appearing to do so.
- X Being of sound mind and judgement.

All of these are **sentence fragments**. They do have nouns and verbs, but they lack a principal verb and are not valid as stand-alone sentences in formal written English. Charles Dickens, who was once a journalist, uses these often in his fiction for dramatic effect. However, they have no place in academic essays. The Microsoft grammar check will not always pick up sentence fragments, so correct these carefully yourself. I have found using MS Word's grammar checker to be of little use beyond mild entertainment.

Dangling elements: You also need to make sure that the different bits of the sentence match up in a way that makes sense. A subordinate clause or participle phrase can cause complications when it is not quite clear to which bit of the main clause it refers. My mother's favourite example of a dangling modifier recalls her own days driving an XKE:

Full of curves, the young woman drove her sports car down the mountain road.

This is called a **dangling modifier**, because the first phrase dangles ambiguously from the main clause and modifies the (apparent) wrong noun. This sentence highlights the curves of the woman, when the road's curves were probably what the author had in mind. In this sort of sentence, try to keep the subject of the main clause as the subject of the subordinate clause, so that the two halves of the sentence are talking about the same thing or person. This may require some rewording.

The young woman raced her sports car down the curvy mountain road.

Look out for other elements in sentences that ‘dangle’. Make it clear what each bit of the sentence describes. Remember that pronouns usually refer to the most recent available noun. (See section on pronouns page 34.) Make sure that what you have written makes sense to your reader, not just to you.

Relative clauses: A relative clause is a subordinate clause which refers to a preceding noun or pronoun. It usually starts with **who**, **which** or **that**. In the following sentence the relative clause has been underlined:

The ethnography which we read last year is out of print.

There are two kinds of relative clause: **defining** and **non-defining**.

A **defining relative clause** is essential to the meaning of the sentence because it gives important information about the preceding word. This identifies it in some way, marking it out from all other possible occurrences of the word. The example above is a defining relative clause. It makes clear that the sentence is discussing one particular ethnography studied last year, in contrast to ethnographies studied this year or two years ago.

A **non-defining relative clause** offers information that describes but does not specify; it is doing the same job as a modifying clause in a parenthesis (see page 21). Like this, it must be enclosed in commas to keep it out of the way of the main action of the sentence:

✓ Boas, who was born in 1858, wrote grammars of languages as well as ethnographies.

When the clause defines, there are no commas. When it does not, it is surrounded by commas, or by a comma and a full stop, if it ends the sentence. Remember to add the second comma after a non-defining relative clause. Avoid things like this:

X Boas, who was born in 1858 wrote grammars of languages as well as ethnographies.

It is important to decide whether a relative clause is defining or non-defining, since the commas alone can change the meaning completely. Compare the two pairs below:

He answered all the questions which were on kinship.

He answered all the questions, which were on kinship.

Were all the available questions on Shakespeare or not? My personal favourite in this category is:

All the sailors who were in the lifeboat were saved.

All the sailors, who were in the lifeboat, were saved.

The first sentence implies that some sailors did not make it into the lifeboat and came to a sorry end. The other one says that all the sailors were in the lifeboat and survived. Who says punctuation is not a matter of life and death?

That and which: If you use your Microsoft grammar check as you write, you will find that it constantly makes a fuss about whether you use ‘that’ or ‘which’ at the beginning of relative clauses. The people at Microsoft, for reasons of their own, will not let you start a defining relative clause with ‘which’. If you type a comma followed by ‘which’, a green line appears under the text. Microsoft insists on:

The play **that** we studied last year is out of print.

or

He answered all the questions **that** were on Shakespeare.

You can do it this way for a quiet life, but the rule above about commas is the important one. Microsoft is not the ultimate authority on grammar, and I do not see why it should be allowed to boss everyone around. I reserve the right to use 'that' and 'which' in both defining and non-defining clauses as appropriate. You should too. *Fowler's Modern English Usage* has an intelligent discussion of which and that, if you want to learn more.

8.2 Agreement

Subject and verb agreement: A singular subject should have a singular verb. A plural subject should have a plural verb. This sounds simple, but can be confusing when the subject of the sentence is a short phrase:

X The number of passes have risen to fifty.

The verb should be *has*:

✓ The number of passes has risen to fifty.

The main subject of this sentence is 'the number'. The phrase 'of passes' is only a modifier of the subject. 'Number' is singular and requires a singular verb. However, a phrase containing 'a number of' would take a plural verb, just like a phrase containing 'a lot of' before a plural noun:

✓ A number of passes are just above the borderline.

✓ A lot of passes are just above the borderline.

This is because 'a number of' and 'a lot of' behave like modifiers, such as 'many'. Be especially careful of this issue if you have a list in a sentence, or some sort of qualifying or relative clause:

X Hamlet's failure to take control of the situation, act decisively, and regain his rightful position as ruler, are disastrous.

Hamlet's 'failure' is the subject of the sentence. So this should read:

✓ Hamlet's failure to take control of the situation, act decisively, and regain his rightful position as ruler, is disastrous.

Collective nouns: Some writers relax the rule about singular subject, singular verb for collective nouns. These nouns denote groups and therefore imply their members, such as **army, audience, committee, family** and **jury**. It is often acceptable to say:

My family **are** delightful.

But if you start this sort of thing, it can be hard to know where to stop. What about the **government**, the **university**, the **community**, the **fire brigade**, the **company** etc? For the sake of consistency and accuracy, it is better to obey the singular rule and to write.

✓ My family **is** delightful.

If you want to make it clear that you are talking about the members of the group then do so:

- ✓ All the members of my family **are** delightful.

Indefinite pronouns. The rules about collective nouns become harder if you include an indefinite pronoun in your sentence such as **everybody, everyone, somebody, someone, anybody, anyone, nobody, no one, none**. These words all take a singular verb.

- ✓ Everybody in my family **is** delightful.

Watch out when the indefinite pronoun is used after a plural.

- X None of my relatives **are** delightful.

- ✓ None of my relatives **is** delightful.

This seems counter-intuitive until you remember that ‘none’ is just a short version of ‘not one.’ All the pronouns listed above follow this rule. However, they are sometimes linked to the plurals **they, their** and **them(selves)**:

Everybody is entitled to **their** opinion.

or

If someone does not like poetry, I would not make **them** read it.

This is done to avoid a gendered pronoun. In earlier centuries **his** or **him** was often used in this context as an indefinite pronoun. However, as many people pointed out, using masculine pronouns as the default is part of an andocentric bias, which is no longer acceptable. One can say ‘his or her’ and ‘him or her’, but it sounds a bit clumsy, and raises the problem of who should go first: girls or boys? Many other languages have a non-gendered pronoun, a human version of **it**, for this sort of situation, but English does not. Some older writers object to **their, theirs** and **them** in this context, but the language is definitely moving towards this as the solution to the problem. On the whole, I think this is better than trying to turn the clock back to a sexist way of seeing the world.

8.3 Tenses

Make sure that you only write in one tense at a time. It is easy to get this mixed up if you are using a conditional case or reporting speech. As with everything else, look at what you are writing carefully. Make sure you are clear what you want to say and that it cannot be read in a different way. Write about ethnographic facts in past tense (unless you really do mean ‘right now’) and theoretical generalizations in present tense. (See page 10.)

8.4 Pronouns

A pronoun always refers to the most recent plausible noun. This is called the **law of antecedents**. It works like this:

The cat dropped the mouse. It ran away.

This says that the mouse ran away, not the cat. However a gendered pronoun will match up with the most recent gendered noun, or proper name.

The girl dropped the mouse. She ran away.

In this case it is the girl who runs away. Technically, of course, it might be a female mouse. However, we are not told the mouse's gender, so the girl is the most likely candidate for 'she'.

Pronouns can get out of hand when there are too many of them in a sentence, especially if this sentence contains an indefinite pronoun or two, such as 'it' and 'this'. For example, what does this mean?

It is useful to note that Hamlet's indecision about killing his uncle takes more time than it should, but this doesn't mean that it is morally wrong, and this might be the case because he gets to think about it first.

Is it Hamlet's indecision or the killing of his uncle that may or may not be wrong? What might be the case? Who gets to think about it first: Hamlet or his uncle? A student who writes a sentence like this may have an idea in their own head what they mean, but they have not exactly made their point clear. On the whole, you should avoid starting sentences with 'it' and 'this' whenever possible, and be aware that pronouns later in a sentence may be misread if not clearly attached to an earlier noun. There is no law against using a noun or name twice in a sentence if it helps clarify the point. Always strike out pointless phrases such as 'it is useful to note that'. Write shorter sentences.

9. SPELLING

There is no short cut to good spelling. You just have to learn what each word in the language looks like. However, there is one simple thing you can do which will help: buy a dictionary. A good dictionary will be the most useful book you buy during your time at university, so do not grudge the money for it. Get into the habit of taking your dictionary (and this booklet) with you when you are writing, and look up words you are unsure about. This will not just help with your spelling. Make sure that you also read and understand the definition of the words you use. It is easy to get similar words confused. Using a dictionary rather than the spell check on your PC can help you avoid some embarrassing errors.

Microsoft spell check is a useful function, and can help you spot typing errors that your eye might otherwise miss. However, it is not foolproof. It will not notice the difference between **their** and **there**, or **it** and **is**, or **allusive** and **elusive**. It will clear anything in its own dictionary, without checking to see if this word belongs in your sentence. If you rely on it too heavily, you can end up with sentences like this:

During this scene, the ghost of Hamlet's father can be seen hoovering in the background.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan rallies the fallen angles.

Do not automatically accept any corrections that the spell check suggests. Be especially careful with names. A fourth-year student recently submitted an essay where the names of the characters Hagar and Ishmael had been changed throughout to 'Haggard' and 'Fishmeal'. How we laughed... Always read through your essay carefully after you have printed it out. You will notice mistakes that you did not pick up on screen. If there are only a few of these, your marker will not mind if you correct these by hand. It is better to show that you have read through your work than to present a pristine text full of errors. If you find a lot of mistakes, go back and print out the essay again. Remember that the ability to produce a clean, polished text is an important skill in its own right. It is worth spending time and effort

on this. Not only will good spelling earn you extra marks for each essay during your time as a student; this is a skill that will also be useful in the workplace later on.

9.1 Common errors

There may be no short cut to good spelling, but there are some common pitfalls which you can avoid. Here are some areas which need special care:

Words ending

— ant/ent	eg: dependent, dependant
— ance/ence	eg: observance, correspondence
— ite/ate	eg: infinite, obstinate
— ible/able	eg: fallible, reasonable
— ibility/ability	eg: fallibility, disability
— arate/erate	eg: separate, desperate
— ege/edge	eg: privilege, acknowledge
— cede/ceed/sede	eg: precede, proceed, supersede
— ice/ise	eg: noun practice, verb practise

Words beginning

— de/di	eg: despair, divide
— im/in	eg: impossible, inconceivable

Words including

— ie/ei	The old rule is a good one: I before E except after C, when the sound is E. (see US/UK spelling below)
double letters	this often becomes or before a suffix
— our	eg: vigour/vigorous

Words which sound like other words

eg: principle/principal, affect/effect

Trust your dictionary, not your ears.

9.2 Capitals

Proper nouns (names) such as Fiji, Spain, Scandinavia, the Amazon, Lake Michigan, Mont Blanc, etc, have an initial capital letter. In English, adjectives and nouns denoting nationality and language do as well: English, Old English, Chukchi, Sanskrit, and Italian. Historical periods are treated in the same way: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance.

Words denoting religions, movements or 'schools' and peoples, together with the adjectives referring to these, and words denoting people belonging to them, have an initial capital: Christianity, Christian; Dadaism, Dadaist, Dadaistic; Fabianism, Fabianist, Fabian; Islam, Islamic; Jew, Jewish. The Bible, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Koran all take capitals, as do all book titles. However, the adjective 'biblical' does not.

A common noun is often capitalised when it forms part of a name or a title. Thus the Anthropology Department gets capitals, but the phrase 'studying anthropology' does not. Claudius in *Hamlet*, is 'the King', just as one would write 'the Queen' when referring to Elizabeth II or some other specific queen. But king or queen used in a general way, does not have a capital letter. For example, 'The king of a country should not hold too much power'. God gets a capital when one is naming the God of Christian, Islamic or Jewish faiths. Words used as names for God are often capitalised too, such as the Almighty, the Creator etc, although the practice of capitalising pronouns referring to God (Him, His, Thy will be done,

etc.) is dying out. Writing of 'gods' from other cultures does not require capitalization, unless they are named.

9.3 US v UK Spelling

Please use UK spelling at all times in your own writing. However, some of the texts which you read will be printed with US spellings, so it is useful to know the main differences.

British **ll**/ American **l**: A single consonant at the end of a word is often doubled before a suffix in UK English, but not in US English: revelling/reveling.
British **re**/ American **er**: centre/center, metre/meter, theatre/theater
British **ogue**/ American **og**: catalogue/catalog, demagogue/demagog
British **our**/ American **or**: colour/color, humour/humor, vigour/vigor
British **se**/ American **ze**: criticise/criticize, analyse/analyze

It is acceptable to reproduce US spellings in quotations, if you are quoting from an American text, such as Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken':

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.²

Further Reading

- Burchfield, R. W., ed., *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Gee, Robyn, and Carol Watson, *Usborne Guide to Better English: Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation* (London: Usborne, 2004)
- Partridge, Eric, *Usage and Abusage: A Guide to Good English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999)
- Peck, John and Martin Coyle. *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1999)
- Ritter, R. M. ed., *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Strunk, William and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (London: Longman, 1999)
- Truss, Lynne, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero-Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (London: Profile Books, 2003)

² Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. by Edward Connery Lathem (London: Cape, 1971; repr. 2001), p.105.

QUICK FIX: LANGUAGE

1. Write in clear, simple, formal English.
2. Get apostrophes in the right places. **It's** should never appear in your essay. If you mean **it is**, write it out in full. If you mean **its = belonging to it**, there is no apostrophe.
3. Avoid comma splices; use a semi-colon or start a new sentence.
4. Think about clauses. Do not have too many in one sentence. It is always better to write short, clear sentences whenever possible. Do not present subordinate clauses as complete sentences. These are sentence fragments.
5. Make sure that single nouns have single verbs and that plural nouns have plural verbs.
6. Write about authors in past tense (unless they are still alive). Write about fictional characters and events in present tense.
7. Use pronouns with care. Make sure that the pronoun refers to the most recent available noun. Avoid vague pronouns such as 'this' and 'it', especially at the start of sentences.
8. Do not rely on Microsoft to sort out your grammar and spelling.
9. Always read through your work carefully once you have finished. Correct any mistakes that you find, by hand if necessary.
10. Buy a dictionary and use it.

SECTION C: SOURCES

10. CHOOSING SOURCES

Choosing and using sources is an integral part of studying. Finding useful texts can seem rather daunting, especially if most of the texts recommended in the course guide have been checked out of the library. However, there is no need to panic and log on to Google. There are thousands of books and hundreds of thousands of journal articles in the Queen Mother Library. Dozens of these will be relevant to your essay topic. The trick is knowing where to look. Your tutor will not be impressed if you give up searching, and write a superficial essay built up of information from lecture notes and things downloaded from the Internet. However, if you are prepared to look a little bit harder in the library, you will find some wonderful sources, which will inform your work and give you original ideas.

Other disciplines: There is no law that says you have to stay on Floor 1 of QML. Think creatively about your essay question. If it has a historical angle, you might want to look at something which will give you some background knowledge of the period. Books on cultural history and philosophy can be especially interesting, as they explore many of the same issues that anthropology does.

Academic Journals: It is easy to forget about these, but short articles are often more use than books. They are quicker to read and sometimes more interesting. There are several ways of searching for articles online, which you learned about in the pathfinder exercise.

Internet sources: There are many interesting and scholarly pieces of work on the Internet. There is also a lot of superficial and inaccurate information. Be very careful about what you use from the Internet. Sites which are sponsored by universities or academic publishers are likely to give you very good information. You can often get journal articles on the Internet which are not available in QML. Scholarly societies also often have good biographical information about regions and topics and useful lists of recommended reading. However, be wary of study-notes sites, which are aimed at school students and will not bring your work up to the level we would like to see. Discussion boards and essays which are not published through an academic site often contain information which is not correct. There is nothing to stop you posting your work on the Internet, so what you find there could be the work of an enthusiastic undergraduate with some IT skills. Your marker will get twitchy if more than one item of your bibliography is made up of Internet sites. Use a mix of sources as you do your research. Wikipedia is just another encyclopaedia, and using encyclopaedias in academic writing is pitiful.

11. USING SOURCES

Effective use of multiple sources is crucial. It is almost impossible to write a really good essay without multiple sources. Even for a critical analysis, it is a good idea to pick up some discussion about the author's ideas from other anthropologists who agree or disagree with him, and then compare what they say about the text. Learning from other thinkers and writers is what being at university is all about. You will also find that reading other people sharpens up your own ideas. However, you need to know how to incorporate other writers' work into your own. Good use of material shows that you have done your research, and that you are also confident about your own opinions. It is an essential element in a first-class essay. Using sources well is much more than avoiding plagiarism. It is about showing off your knowledge, and making your sources work to back up your ideas.

11.1 Argue with people

Just because someone has spent a lifetime researching a subject and is an internationally recognised authority on a particular region or theory does not necessarily mean they are right. Feel free to challenge anything and everything that you read. In fact, when you read anthropology, you should probably start with the assumption that you are going to disagree but you are prepared to be persuaded if they make a good enough case. This is called critical thinking. Students often discard any article that they do not agree with. This is like taking the springs out of a trampoline and then wondering why it does not bounce. Critical material that you can prove is missing the point is a gift. Roll your sleeves up and get to work on it. Just make sure you can back up your position with examples from other people. Sometimes pure logic will do the trick too. This is the sort of thing that makes an essay sparkle. So, be assertive with critics. They are only human after all.

11.2 Acknowledge the critic in your text

It is not enough to drop in a footnote at the end of a sentence, or name a book in the bibliography. You must acknowledge your sources more actively than this. Make sure you say who said what and whether you agree. For example, 'In his study of the subject, Alexander King argues *a*, which is a useful approach to interpreting this myth because of *b*. However, he overlooks the issue of *c*, which is a vital element in the religion.' There are good reasons for naming the author like this:

It sounds good. Academics all enjoy a bit of name-dropping, and like to see that you have considered an idea put forward by an important critic or literary figure. Essays are all about showing what you have read and learned. Knowing about the key players in a debate is part of this.

It helps your marker: Remember that it is your job to make your essay accessible to the reader. Your marker may not have read *all* the books you refer to, so some help in sorting out who said what is often appreciated. For example, do you have any idea how many books there are in QML on culture? Alternatively, your marker *may* have read all your sources, in which case they will expect you to give credit to the anthropologist where it is due.

It makes for clarity: One of the hardest skills in writing about anthropology is making it crystal clear which ideas come from outside sources, which are based on common knowledge (or hearsay) about a time, region etc, and which are your own thoughts on the subject. You want to sell the last category, but your marker will not know what your thoughts are, unless you make it clear where other people's ideas stop and yours start. Do not assume you can fudge this to your advantage. Academics tend to be cynical by nature, and will assume that you have absorbed ideas from somewhere else unless you mark this out neatly.

It helps with structure: Naming the critic makes it easier to refer back to this idea later in the essay. E.g.: 'F. R. Leavis takes a completely different line to Hutchison on this matter. He argues *x*, *y* and *z*.' This helps to hold the whole essay together and makes it look like a well balanced piece of writing.

12. LAYOUT OF QUOTATIONS

12.1 Very short quotations

Quotations of a few words should be incorporated into a longer sentence like this:

- ✓ Pip's 'great expectations' prove to be not at all what he imagines.
or
- ✓ Joe's repeated phrase, 'what larks,' represents his lack of education as well as his affectionate, boyish relationship with Pip.³

Always reference the source when you quote from a text.

12.2 Quotations of up to three lines

These may also be incorporated into your text. They should be preceded by a colon or comma when appropriate:

- ✓ Charles Dickens sets Pip's story in a landscape similar to that of his own childhood: 'Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea.'

The colon or comma is not needed if a word such as **that**, **which**, **whether** introduces the quotation. In this case, the quotation functions as a subordinate clause, and is an integral part of the wider sentence. When the quotation appears within a sentence, the final full stop should appear outside the quotation marks, even if the full stop is part of the original sentence. A page number in brackets should go inside the full stop when the quotation is run on in the text:

- ✓ Charles Dickens sets Pip's story in a landscape similar to that of his own childhood. Pip tells the reader that 'Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea' (*GE*, p.1).
or
- ✓ Pip believes Miss Havisham is the source of his 'great expectations'.

12.3 Quotations longer than three lines

These should be set apart in an indented paragraph of their own. Leave a line, indent the whole paragraph one tab space from the margin, and set out the passage *without* quotation marks, except for those that may appear in the passage quoted:

- ✓ This ritual language is not only expressed in speech and ideas, but also in styles of house building, burial practices and religious sacrifices, to name a few arenas of social expression. Leach notes that in terms of the facts on the ground,

The only practical difference between gumsa and gumlao at this level is that the gumsa respect the 'idea' of a chief and claim that the land is the property of one particular lineage of aristocratic origin and that the village headman is a member of this lineage, while gumlao repudiate the idea of chieftainship and say that all lineages in the villages are of equal standing. (Leach 1964: 234)

³ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861; repr. London: Everyman, 1994), p.193.

After an indented quote there is no need to indent the first line of text, unless you intend to start a new paragraph, which is not recommended. You should have a lot to say on the same topic following such an important quote.

12.4 Ellipses

To signal that you have omitted a short section of a quote use ellipses in square brackets [...]. The brackets signal that these ellipses are yours:

- ✓ At such a time I found out for certain [...] that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (*GE*, p.1)

Make sure that the quote still makes grammatical sense in its own right. You must also make sure that you do not corrupt the content of the author's original sentence. Only use ellipses to travel a short distance within a text. Use it to join sections of the same sentence, or possibly adjoining sentences. If you wish to quote clauses or phrases that are further apart, do so in two separate quotations. Do not use ellipses to indicate a large section of text which all seems relevant to your argument, but which you cannot be bothered to sift through for the important phrases or sentences:

- X Charles Dickens sets Pip's story in a landscape similar to that of his own childhood. He quickly connects Pip's identity with this landscape and with the day on which he meets Magwitch: 'My father's family [...] beginning to cry, was Pip.' (*GE*, p.1)

12.5 Make quotations make sense

Every quote must be integrated into the grammar of the sentence or paragraph into which you wish to place it. Avoid dropping quotations into a sentence as though in brackets, like this:

- X Pip, whose sister, 'I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks', does not treat him well, has an unhappy childhood.

This does not make grammatical sense. The quotation simply lands in the middle of the sentence. This sentence would be better like this:

- ✓ Pip's older sister contributes to his unhappy childhood. Even as a small child, he is aware that her treatment of him is unfair. He recalls: 'I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks.'

Respect the text you are quoting. Take your time and use your sources carefully. Write something that reads well.

13. REFERENCING

Good referencing demonstrates that you care about the accuracy and the reliability of your sources. It also shows that you are attentive to details, which gives your argument more authority. People will always be more willing to listen to your big ideas if you can get the small things right. This is not just the case within the university, so referencing is a good chance to practise taking care with facts and figures: another skill that you will find useful in

all sorts of contexts. Evidence, statistics, quotations, ideas and concepts should be carefully attributed so that you get the credit for your reading and so that, if we think a mistake has been made, we can check back to see who made the mistake.

There are several kinds of referencing styles around, and even within anthropology, different journals require different their own particular style. Being able to follow directions is an important transferable skill, so put all the commas and full stops in the right places. What you cite should be what you actually read rather than the original. So if what you know about Marx comes from reading Giddens, then cite Giddens as the source. The idea is to tell the reader where you got your information. Both direct quotes and paraphrases must be referenced .

There are two parts to the referencing system we recommend: that which goes in the text of the essay and that which goes in the bibliography at the end.

13.1 In the text

- a) If you mention the author's name, follow the name or the full sentence with a bracket containing the year of publication (found on the reverse of the book's title page) and the number of the page from which the idea comes. *As Duncan (1985: 32) says ...*
- b) If you do not mention the author, add it in the bracket. *As recent research shows ... (Duncan 1985: 32).*
- c) Where there are two authors, name both. Where there are more than two, use the first name and 'et al.' (abbreviation of the Latin *et alii* (masc. plural) or *et aliae* (fem. plural) or *et alia* (neut. plural) for 'and others'). *As recent research shows ... (Duncan et al. 1985: 32).*
- d) If you read about what an author said in a book by someone else cite as follows. *Capitalism emerged from ... (Weber cited in Macionis and Plummer 2002: 214).*
- e) If citing a web page give the author of the page you have looked at or the individual or organisation who maintain the site and a date. The rest can go in the bibliography

13.2 In the bibliography

Follow the format similar to that used in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. List all the works you have cited, in alphabetical order of author (and by date where there is more than one work by the same author), giving the following details where applicable:

Books: Author, Initial. year of publication. *Title of book*. Place of publication: Publishers.

Chapters in books (edited collections), Author, Initial. year of publication. Title of chapter. In Editors, *Title of book*. Place of publication: Publishers. Pp. page numbers.

Journal articles: Author, Initial. year of publication. Title of article. *Title of journal*. Volume number (issue number), page range. See Hymes below.

Websites: Author or organisation running the site, date of the article or when page last updated. Title of the page you looked at. Web address. See Engender and Marx below. Give as much information as you can, *just the web address is not enough*. The point of all this is for the reader to be able to trace the very page of the same version you have read.

Sample bibliography

Anderson, D.G. 2000. *Identity and ecology in Arctic Siberia : the number one reindeer brigade*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Berard, T.J. 1999. Dada between Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy and Bourdieu's Distinction: Existenz and Conflict in Cultural Analysis. *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, 141-165.
- Engender. 1999. Women and the Scottish Parliament. May 16, <http://www.engender.org.uk/scotparl/index.html> [accessed 2 Sept. 2003].
- Gable, E., and R. Handler. 1996. After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site. *American Anthropologist* 98, 568-78.
- Geraci, R. 1997. The Il'minskii System and the Controversy over Non-Russian Teachers and Priests in the Middle Volga. In *Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg: Multiple Faces of the Russian Empire* (eds.) C. Evtuhov, Boris Gasparov, Alexander Ospovat, Mark VonHagen. Moscow: O. G. I. Pp. 325-348.
- Hitchcock, R.K. and M. Biesele. 2000. Introduction. In *Hunters and Gatherers in the Modern World: Conflict Resistance, and Self-Determination* (eds.) M. Biesele, P. P. Schweitzer, and R. K. Hitchcock. New York: Berghahn Books. Pp. 1-27.
- Hymes, D. 1985. Language, Memory, and Selective Performance: Cultee's 'Salmon's Myth' as Twice Told to Boas. *Journal of American Folklore*. 98, 391-434.
- Marcus, G.E. and D. Cushman. 1982. Ethnographies as Texts. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 11, 25-69.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. 1848. The Communist Manifesto. <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html>. [Accessed 30 August 2003].
- McConvell, P. 1988. Mix-im-up: Aboriginal code-switching, old and new. In *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (ed.) M. Heller. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. Pp. 97-124.

14. PLAGIARISM

The University defines plagiarism as 'the use, without adequate acknowledgement, of the intellectual work of another person in work submitted for assessment'. It may have been acceptable to copy and paste text from Internet sources into a project at school, but at university we want you to be careful and transparent about all the sources which you use. All information should be traceable back to a reliable source. We are keen for you to explore outside sources, but you must show where you found your information. Plagiarism is the failure to do this. If you have copied something, even a short phrase, word for word out of a book, or if you have copied and pasted anything from an Internet site, you must put it in quotation marks and give a reference. Changing one or two words, or paraphrasing a sentence does not release you from the obligation to name your sources. If you summarise someone else's argument, make sure that your marker can see what you are doing. Make sure that your own opinions emerge distinctly as well:

- ✓ Ernest Jones argues that Hamlet's behaviour can all be traced back to his repressed desire for his mother. Hamlet's confusion about his feelings towards his father and his uncle are due to his jealousy at their relationship with Gertrude. However, this seems implausible, as Hamlet clearly loves and reveres his father, a detail which Jones fails to fit into his Freudian reading.⁴

This make it clear which ideas are Jones's and which are the writer's.

Academics do not just regard plagiarism as laziness or cheating. They see it as a form of stealing. Academics make their living by having ideas. If you use these ideas without giving credit for them, it is a bit like having a meal in a restaurant without paying. Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offence in a university. Students who are caught are called up in front of the Head of School and sometimes the University Court. Serial offenders will be

⁴ Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1949).

expelled from the university. To a marker, it is often obvious if a phrase or a whole paragraph has been lifted from an outside source. English lecturers are astute, sensitive readers who have devoted their lives to analysing variations in style and tone. If you can find something on the Internet in five minutes, your marker can get a funny feeling about it and Google it just as fast. The stupid thing is that the effort required to plagiarise effectively is probably about the same amount of effort required to use the same sources in an argument and reference them properly. There is information about avoiding plagiarism in every course guide, in the Student Handbook and on the English website. Every time you hand in an essay, you sign a declaration on the cover sheet saying that you have read and understand the rules. Make sure that you have.

Students often worry about how to incorporate information from lectures and seminars into their written work. Information given in a lecture becomes public knowledge. Feel free to use it in your work; that is what it is for. There is no need to cite it formally. However, lecturers do not like to see their own phrases parroted back to them in written work. Apart from anything else, this makes them suspicious that you have not done much other reading on the subject. If you can digest the information given in lectures and express it in your own words, your lecturer will feel that they have done a good job. If you want to use a quote from a class handout, look it up in the library, or email the lecturer and ask where you can find it. Do not cite the handout as though it were a published text.

If you have an inspired idea about a text, only to find that some clever critic got there first, do not panic. There are very few truly original ideas. The fact that someone else wrote it down and got it published shows that you are thinking along the right lines. Using this idea is not plagiarism, but the smart thing to do here is to use the critic to back you up. This makes you look better, not worse.

- ✓ Hamlet's relationships with women are all problematic. His supposed romance with Ophelia never demonstrates any shared affection or sexual attraction. He is unnaturally close to his mother, which complicates his relationship with his uncle, as Ernest Jones points out in his Freudian reading of the play.

Name your sources. Give references. Show your knowledge.

And finally...

Good writing is a skill that takes years to develop. As with playing a musical instrument or training for a sport, there is always something new to learn, or a different approach to explore. This booklet is designed to give you some basic advice to help with your written work at university. However, a love of language and an interest in the way words work can last a lifetime. You will find that these are useful tools for life, which will open up the world around you in surprising ways. Keep reading, and keep writing.

HH/AK

Quick Fix: Sources

1. Leave yourself a realistic amount of time to find useful books in the library. It may take a whole day to find what you need. This is an important part of studying. Consider this a good day's work, not a waste of time.
2. Do not limit yourself to the recommended reading in the course guide. There are thousands of books in QML. Dozens of these will be of interest to you. Think creatively about your question, and keep looking until you find something that is useful. Read journals.
3. Use your sources to back up your argument. Name the scholars in your work, so that your marker can see who said what. This helps your idea to emerge more clearly.
4. You do not need to agree with everything you read. An essay that has some sort of debate going on within it is much more interesting than a sequence of similar ideas or viewpoints.
5. Give accurate references. Account for all the information you use, and follow the referencing conventions for different kinds of text.
6. Use Internet sources with caution. Only use information from good sites. Much of the information on the Internet is unreliable. If you cannot be sure of what you have found, do not use it. Never cut and paste from the Internet into your essay without giving a reference.
7. Provide a list of works cited, even if you only have one or two books to list. It is a good habit to form for careful scholarship.
8. Avoid plagiarism. If you give good references and account for all the information you use, this will not be a problem.
9. Show your knowledge. Your marker wants to see what you have been reading and what you have learned.