

Improving Your Writing
 Student Learning Service
 Centre for Learning & Teaching
 University of Aberdeen

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Homepage

Academic writing is one of the cornerstones of university study. In all disciplines, students (and their teachers) need writing to express their ideas clearly. In the words of George Orwell: 'Good prose is like a windowpane.'¹ At the Student Learning Service we think this is a useful metaphor: you want your reader to 'look through' the writing to the ideas behind. If things like paragraph structure, verb tenses, or spelling and punctuation are not as they should be, your reader may well be distracted or even confused by these surface problems – just as when we look out a mud-splattered windowpane, we have difficulty appreciating the view beyond. When the window is clean, we are unaware of the windowpane and notice only what we see through it.

It is rather easier to learn to clean a window, however, than it is to master academic writing. However, we have created this guide as a help to you. We understand that few students today are trained in formal English grammar (unless they have learned English as a second language). Our writing guide takes you through various aspects of academic writing without assuming that you know grammatical terms. You can choose which areas of writing you want to review, and you can test your understanding of them. (Just click on the sidebar to go to one of the sections of the writing guide.)

We wish you happy writing!

¹George Orwell, 'Why I Write,' in Peter Davidson, ed., The Complete Works of George Orwell, vol. 18 (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 320.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs help your reader to understand, at a glance, that your ideas are grouped together with some sort of logic. The force of a piece of writing will be very much diluted if the reader is unable to see where paragraphs begin and end – or if, when reading them, he or she cannot grasp what the point of each paragraph is.

Paragraph division

A first consideration is what format you will adopt to show the reader where your paragraphs begin and end. Some essays and texts start each paragraph at the left margin with no indentation, but leave a space in between each paragraph. Another format is to leave no space between paragraphs, but to indent the beginning of each paragraph. Whichever you choose, be consistent.

Paragraph Division Exercise

Which of the following clearly show paragraph divisions?

1.

Struebat iam fortuna in diversa parte terrarum initia causasque imperio, quod varia sorte laetum rei publicae aut atrox, ipsis principibus prosperum vel exitio fuit. Titus Vespasianus, e Iudaea incolumi adhuc Galba missus a patre, causam profectionis officium erga principem et maturam petendis honoribus iuventam ferebat, sed vulgus fingendi avidum disperserat accitum in adoptionem.

Materia sermonibus senium et orbitas principis et intemperantia civitatis, donec unus eligatur, multos destinandi. augebat famam ipsius Titi ingenium quantaecumque fortunae capax, decor oris cum quadam maiestate, prosperae Vespasiani res, praesaga responsa, et inclinatis ad credendum animis loco ominum etiam fortuita. ubi Corinthi, Achaiae urbe, certos nuntios accepit de interitu Galbae et aderant qui arma Vitellii bellumque adfirmarent, anxius animo paucis amicorum adhibitis cuncta utrimque perlustrat: si pergeret in urbem, nullam officii gratiam in alterius honorem suscepti, ac se Vitellio sive Othoni obsidem fore: sin rediret, offensam haud dubiam victoris, set incerta adhuc victoria et concedente in partis patre filium excusatum. sin Vespasianus rem publicam susciperet, obliviscendum offensarum de bello agitantibus.

(Tacitus, P. CORNELI TACITI HISTORIARVM LIBER SECVNDVS
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/tacitus/tac.hist2.shtml>)

Does the above clearly show paragraph divisions?

Yes

No

2.

Struebat iam fortuna in diversa parte terrarum initia causasque imperio, quod varia sorte laetum rei publicae aut atrox, ipsis principibus prosperum vel exitio fuit. Titus Vespasianus, e Iudaea incolumi adhuc Galba missus a patre, causam profectionis officium erga principem et maturam petendis honoribus iuventam ferebat, sed vulgus fingendi avidum disperserat accitum in adoptionem. Materia sermonibus senium et orbitas principis et intemperantia civitatis, donec unus eligatur, multos destinandi.

Augebat famam ipsius Titi ingenium quantaecumque fortunae capax, decor oris cum quadam maiestate, prosperae Vespasiani res, praesaga responsa, et inclinatis ad credendum animis loco ominum etiam fortuita. ubi Corinthi, Achaiae urbe, certos nuntios accepit de interitu Galbae et aderant qui arma Vitellii bellumque adfirmarent, anxius animo paucis amicorum adhibitis cuncta utrimque perlustrat: si pergeret in urbem, nullam officii gratiam in alterius

honorem suscepti, ac se Vitellio sive Othoni obsidem fore: sin rediret, offensam haud dubiam victoris, set incerta adhuc victoria et concedente in partis patre filium excusatum. sin Vespasianus rem publicam susciperet, obliviscendum offensarum de bello agitantibus.

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<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/tacitus/tac.hist2.shtml>)

Does the above clearly show paragraph divisions?

Yes

No

3.

Struebat iam fortuna in diversa parte terrarum initia causasque imperio, quod varia sorte laetum rei publicae aut atrox, ipsis principibus prosperum vel exitio fuit. Titus Vespasianus, e Iudaea incolumi adhuc Galba missus a patre, causam profectionis officium erga principem et maturam petendis honoribus iuventam ferebat, sed vulgus fingendi avidum disperserat accitum in adoptionem. Materia sermonibus senium et orbitas principis et intemperantia civitatis, donec unus eligatur, multos destinandi.

Augebat famam ipsius Titi ingenium quantaecumque fortunae capax, decor oris cum quadam maiestate, prosperae Vespasiani res, praesaga responsa, et inclinatis ad credendum animis loco ominum etiam fortuita. ubi Corinthi, Achaiae urbe, certos nuntios accepit de interitu Galbae et aderant qui arma Vitellii bellumque adfirmarent, anxius animo paucis amicorum adhibitis cuncta utrimque perlustrat: si pergeret in urbem, nullam officii gratiam in alterius honorem suscepti, ac se Vitellio sive Othoni obsidem fore: sin rediret, offensam haud dubiam victoris, set incerta adhuc victoria et concedente in partis patre filium excusatum. sin Vespasianus rem publicam susciperet, obliviscendum offensarum de bello agitantibus.

(Tacitus, P. CORNELI TACITI HISTORIARVM LIBER SECVNDVS
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/tacitus/tac.hist2.shtml>)

Does the above clearly show paragraph divisions?

Yes

No

Paragraph content

Paragraphs group your ideas into clear points. Since the aim of most academic writing is to convince the reader of a particular interpretation or hypothesis, it is vitally important that your writing guide the reader through a

series of logically-ordered points (the *argument*). By organising your ideas into paragraphs, you help the reader understand where your argument is going.

Paragraph Content Exercise

Which of the following are examples of well-structured paragraphs?

1.

So we can see by the end of Act One that Martha not only wants a child, but a job. The audience is left wondering: how will she get a child? There are several possibilities, Robert being one. But he is obviously not a reliable kind of guy, and probably wouldn't be a very good father, which is somewhat worrying! Right after the gambling scene, which Molly doesn't actually know about, she is talking to Miss Marina about working as a cleaner. However, Molly does get a clue that Robert is undependable when Sally comments: 'My three-year-old would do a better job of looking after that horse!'

Is this a well-structured paragraph?

Yes

No

2.

We see by the end of Act I that Martha wants two things: a child, and a job. Of these two desires, Martha's yearning for a child is the deepest. She tells us "I want a baby to hold more than anything else in the world!" (Act I, Scene 3, line 5) The great question facing her – and by extension the audience – is: who will Martha try to have a baby with? The beginning of Act II focuses on the character of Robert, whom Molly is very attracted to. We see, through his reckless gambling in Act II, that Robert is probably not going to be a reliable father. The problem is that although we the audience have seen him gambling his paycheque away, Martha has not: she is offstage during this scene. For the rest of the play, we must watch as her longing for a child obscures her judgement of Robert's true character.

Is this a well-structured paragraph?

Yes

No

Answers to the exercises

Paragraph Division Exercise 1

Does the above clearly show paragraph divisions?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. We can clearly see two paragraphs here. The first one is perhaps on the short side because it is only two sentences long, and this is really too short for academic writing. But this example does clearly show where each paragraph begins and ends.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. Although the first paragraph is perhaps on the short side because it is only two sentences long, which is really too short for academic writing, this example does clearly show where each paragraph begins and ends.

Paragraph Division Exercise 2

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. The above does not clearly show paragraph divisions.

(‘No’) **Correct**. The above does not clearly show paragraph divisions. It is just a long stream of writing – as was the Latin original, presumably because when each letter had to be carved into stone, an indentation or skipped line would have been considered a waste of space! However in an age of paper and easy changes on the word-processor, we expect writers to show us where each paragraph begins and ends.

Paragraph Division Exercise 3

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. Although a different format from Example 1, this also clearly shows where each paragraph begins and ends.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. Although a different format from Example 1, this also clearly shows where each paragraph begins and ends.

Paragraph Content Exercise 1

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. This paragraph is not well focused. This would be a fine first draft, but it needs to be edited. As it stands, the reader is not sure what the main point is: the desire for a baby? The need of a job? Robert? [The tone of this draft is also too informal. When editing, the writer needs to replace ‘kind of guy’ with something less chatty, and ‘doesn’t’ should be ‘does not’ because you should not use contractions in academic writing.]

(‘No’) **Correct**. This paragraph is not well focused. This would be a fine first draft, but it needs to be edited. As it stands, the reader is not sure what the

main point is: the desire for a baby? The need of a job? Robert? [The tone of this draft is also too informal. When editing, the writer needs to replace 'kind of guy' with something less chatty, and 'doesn't' should be 'does not' because you should not use contractions in academic writing.]

Paragraph Content Exercise 2

Is this a well-structured paragraph?

(Yes) **Correct.** This paragraph has a clear focus. The first sentence sets the scene for zooming in to the question of Martha's desire for a baby and her choice of a father. The last sentence leads us on into further discussion of this strand of the play.

(No) **Incorrect.** This paragraph does have a clear focus. The first sentence sets the scene for zooming in to the question of Martha's desire for a baby and her choice of a father. The last sentence leads us on into further discussion of this strand of the play.

Sentence Structure

Reading aloud can be a great help when trying to craft well-made sentences. Most people can improve their writing more when they read it aloud than when they read it to themselves silently.

Incomplete sentences

An incomplete sentence is usually one which is lacking a subject (= what or who is doing the action) and/or a verb (= the action). We use incomplete sentences all the time in speech, and in informal writing, and they can be very effective. However, in academic writing they give an impression of sloppiness and lack of seriousness.

Incomplete Sentence Exercise

Which of the following is a complete sentence? Click on what you believe is the correct answer below:

1. Which numerous followers of the group have since adopted.

Is this a complete sentence?

Yes

No

2. After a great deal of thought, the foreman decided to use the pneumatic drill.

Is this a complete sentence?

Yes

No

3. And furthermore the studies are flawed due to lack of hard data.

Is this a complete sentence?

Yes

No

Overly-long sentences

You may well find some academic writing has very long sentences. Indeed students sometimes try to imitate this style, thinking that the more complicated their writing is, the more impressed their marker will be. This is a mistaken assumption. When you are editing your work (but not necessarily when writing a first draft) try to keep sentences from rambling on.

Sentence Length Exercise

Which of these sentences could use some pruning?

1. The theory of particle density, which Nelson was the first to propose and which was thoroughly proved by Anderson in the 1930s, has since been found to be seriously flawed.

Does this sentence need pruning?

Yes

No

2. Nelson was the first to propose the theory of particle density following on from work done by other scientists previously, and Anderson took this up and did more research on Nelson's theory, which was subsequently accepted by the scientific community but has now been disproved on the grounds that it is seriously flawed.

Does this sentence need pruning?

Yes

No

Stray bits and structure

When you are editing, look out for what grammarians call *dangling articles* and *dangling modifiers*: These are stray bits of sentences that need to go in a different place in order to make sense. Watch out also for the *comma splice*: this is when a writer uses a comma to link two pieces of language that should instead be separated by a full stop or an explaining word.

Sentence Structure Exercise

Which of these examples needs changing?

1. This essay argues that theories of learning are outmoded, they do not take into account new technologies.

Does this sentence structure need changing?

Yes

No

2. He examined the methodology of the study which had been greatly debated.

Does this sentence structure need changing?

Yes

No

3. When a mere first-year student, Edward's adviser had nudged him in the direction of theoretical physics.

Does this sentence structure need changing?

Yes

No

Answers to the exercises

Incomplete Sentence Exercise

1. Is this a complete sentence?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. This sentence is incomplete because we need to know what the 'Which' refers back to. It can be fixed by including this missing information, which might well be in the previous sentence. For example:

'Belsen's safety manual contains many good tips for working with lions, and numerous followers of the group have since adopted it.'

You could also make two sentences, each of which can stand alone: 'Belsen's safety manual contains many good tips for working with lions. Many followers of the group have since adopted it.'

('No') **Correct**. The sentence is incomplete because we need to know what the 'Which' refers back to. It can be fixed by including this missing information, which might well be in the previous sentence. For example: 'Belsen's safety manual contains many good tips for working with lions, and numerous followers of the group have since adopted it.'

You could also make two sentences, each of which can stand alone: 'Belsen's safety manual contains many good tips for working with lions. Many followers of the group have since adopted it.'

2. Is this a complete sentence?

('Yes') **Correct**. This is a complete sentence.

('No') **Incorrect**. This is a complete sentence.

3. .Is this a complete sentence?

('Yes') **Correct**. This is a complete sentence. However, you should never begin a sentence in academic writing with 'And' or 'But'. 'Furthermore, ...' would work well here.

('No') **Incorrect**. This is a complete sentence. However, you should never begin a sentence in academic writing with 'And' or 'But'. 'Furthermore, ...' would work well here.

Sentence Length Exercise

1. Does this sentence need pruning?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. This sentence is not overly long, and could stand exactly as it is. However, the sentence could also be divided, either by putting parentheses around '(which Nelson... in the 1930s)' or by making two sentences.

('No') **Correct**. This sentence is not overly long, and could stand exactly as it is. However, the sentence could also be divided, either by putting parentheses around '(which Nelson... in the 1930s)' or by making two sentences.

2. Does this sentence need pruning?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. This sentence definitely needs some pruning! The writer firstly needs to look at which elements of the sentence are necessary for understanding. For example, do we need to know that the theory was accepted ‘by the scientific community’ or is that not already implicit? Secondly, the sentence needs to be reshaped into something resembling example 1, or even two shorter sentences.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence definitely needs some pruning! The writer firstly needs to look at which elements of the sentence are necessary for understanding. For example, do we need to know that the theory was accepted ‘by the scientific community’ or is that not already implicit? Secondly, the sentence needs to be reshaped into something resembling example 1, or even two shorter sentences.

Sentence Structure Exercise

1. Does this sentence structure need changing?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. The writer has used a comma where an explaining word needs to be, e.g.: ‘This essay argues that theories of learning are outmoded *because* they do not take into account new technologies.’ Putting two clauses together with only a comma is known as a *comma splice*.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence does need changing, because the comma is used incorrectly. The writer has put a comma where an explaining word needs to be, e.g.: ‘This essay argues that theories of learning are outmoded *because* they do not take into account new technologies.’ Putting two clauses together with only a comma is known as a *comma splice*.

2. Does this sentence structure need changing?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. The sentence needs to be changed because it does not make clear **what** exactly had been greatly debated.

- a. If it was the **methodology** which was the subject of debate, we could write: ‘He examined the methodology of the study, which had been greatly debated.’ This structure implies that ‘of the study’ is secondary to ‘methodology’: the reader should understand that the ‘which’ therefore refers to the methodology. However, to be absolutely clear we might also write: ‘He examined the methodology of the study. This methodology had been greatly debated.’ (And we might need to go on to explain why!)
- b. If it was the **study** itself which had been greatly debated, we could write: ‘He examined the methodology of the study. The study itself had been greatly debated.’ Or indeed, we might want to shift emphasis and explain a

bit more, e.g.: 'The study had been greatly debated. He decided that he would need to examine its methodology in order to settle the debate.'

('No') **Incorrect**. This sentence does need changing, because it does not make clear **what** exactly had been greatly debated.

3. Does this sentence structure need changing?

('Yes') **Correct**. The problem here is that the subject of the first part of the sentence is not perfectly clear – we don't know who 'when a mere first-year student' is referring to. [It is a *dangling modifier*.] We can fix this by putting the subject in right away: 'When Edward was a mere first-year student, his adviser had nudged him in the direction of theoretical physics.'

('No') **Incorrect**. This sentence does need changing, because the subject of the first part of the sentence is not perfectly clear – we don't know who 'when a mere first-year student' is referring to. [It is a *dangling modifier*.] We can fix this by putting the subject in right away: 'When Edward was a mere first-year student, his adviser had nudged him in the direction of theoretical physics.'

Punctuation

Punctuation is the name for certain marks that we use in writing. When used correctly, punctuation is an invaluable aspect of making meaning clear.

Commas

Commas let the reader know that there is some kind of gap or separation in thought. When reading aloud, the comma indicates where you would take a breath or pause slightly. The joke behind the title of Lynne Truss's bestseller *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* revolves around an extra comma. The panda reads the dictionary definition as 'Eats, Shoots and Leaves' and goes on a rampage. In fact the dictionary definition of 'panda' was 'Eats Shoots and Leaves' – an entirely peaceable activity.

Here are three important situations where you need to use commas:

- Lists: there should be a comma after every item in a list, except for the next-to-last item, which should be followed by *and*: One, two, three and four.
- When using words like 'however,' 'therefore,' 'furthermore' or 'thus':

If you begin a sentence with one of these words, use a comma after it:

Nevertheless, this will be a short sentence.

If you use one of these words in the middle of a sentence, use a comma before and after it:

This, furthermore, will be a short sentence.

- When your sentence has a *subordinate clause* within it:
The alarm was raised when Mrs. Cameron, who had been known to wander off on her own at night, was found to be missing.

(A *subordinate clause* is a piece of language that could stand on its own as a separate sentence. For example, one could write two sentences: Mrs. Cameron had been known to wander off on her own at night. The alarm was raised when she was found to be missing.)

Comma Exercise

Which of these examples shows correct use of the comma?

1. Logical empiricism, epistemology, phenomenology are all philosophical theories.

Does this show correct use of the comma?

Yes

No

2. The major contribution of her work however was the foundation of refuges for women.

Does this show correct use of the comma?

Yes

No

3. The repeated use of harsh sounds, so often apparent in Smith's poetry, gives the last stanza of 'Banners' an almost percussive effect.

Does this show correct use of the comma?

Yes

No

Semi-Colons & Colons

A semi-colon (which is a full stop over a comma) is generally used as a full stop would be. It is most effective when joining two clauses, which could

stand alone as separate sentences, when you want to accentuate the contrast between them.

Example: 'Nelson believed he could reach the summit; however, his team was to fail him before he reached 11,000 feet.'

A colon (two dots one over another) introduces something. It is commonly put before a quotation, a series or an example.

Example: 'Many things can affect immunity: nutrition, exposure to infection and hygiene can all be factors.'

Semi-Colons and Colons Exercise

Which of the following is correct?

1. No-one who saw it will forget the sight: a tiny white flag slowly raised over the parapet.

Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

Yes

No

2. No-one who saw it will forget the sight; a tiny white flag slowly raised over the parapet.

Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

Yes

No

3. Parenting is the art of beginning each day anew; teaching is the art of linking each day to the one before.

Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

Yes

No

4. Parenting is the art of beginning each day anew: teaching is the art of linking each day to the one before.

Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

Yes

No

5. Studying in the 21st century poses some of the same problems as it did two thousand years ago: 'Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.' [Acts 26:24]

Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

Yes

No

Apostrophes (its vs. it's)

The correct use of the apostrophe causes many people difficulty nowadays. Perhaps in time to come we will enter a new, apostrophe-less, phase of English. However, unless and until that happens, the correct use of the apostrophe is considered one of the hallmarks of good writing. Job application cover letters have been discarded due to a misplaced apostrophe, so it is worth mastering its use.

1. The apostrophe used in contractions: when two words are combined to form one, in many cases an apostrophe will mark the missing letters. It is important to understand how contractions work, but in fact you *should not use contractions in academic writing*

Apostrophe in Contractions Exercise

Which of the following examples of informal written English are correct?

i. I can't abide tapioca.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

ii. I can'not abide tapioca.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

iii. Dont look at me like that.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

iv. It's not worth talking about.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

2. The apostrophe showing belonging

a. To one person or thing [a form that grammarians call *the possessive*]: Often – but not always – we use an apostrophe to show that something belongs to someone (or something). Examples are: *Mark's car* or *the film's scariest moment*.

The big exception to this rule is that when something belongs to 'it' there is NO apostrophe. 'It's' only ever means 'it is' or 'it has'.

Apostrophe Showing Belonging Exercise I

Which of the following are correct?

i. This is not Gerards salad!

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

ii. I hate it when the kettle's cord gets all tangled up.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

2.

b. The apostrophe showing something belonging to more than one person or thing: We also use the apostrophe in this case, but when the something belongs to more than one person or thing, that plural word usually ends in s. In this case, we put the apostrophe *after* the 's'. For example: *the students' rooms* means that several students possess more than one room, whereas *the student's rooms* means that one student possesses more than one room.

Apostrophe Showing Belonging Exercise II

Which of the following are correct?

- i. The girls' nose was hurt.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

- ii. The libraries' collective holdings are vast.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

- iii. The plays' ending is unrealistic.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

- iv. The plays' endings are very exciting.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

- v. The women's dresses were fabulous.

Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

Yes

No

Answers to the exercises

Comma Exercise

1. Does this show correct use of the comma?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. A list of items needs 'and' before the last item in the list. Thus we should read 'Logical empiricism, epistemology *and* phenomenology are all philosophical theories.'

('No') **Correct**. We need 'and' instead of a comma between 'epistemology' and 'phenomenology' because they are the last two items in a list.

2. Does this show correct use of the comma?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. If you use words such as 'however' and 'therefore' in the middle of a sentence, they need to have a comma both before and after in order to set them clearly apart from the main sentence. This is correct: 'The major contribution of her work, however, was the foundation of refuges for women.'

('No') **Correct**. 'However' needs to be preceded and followed by commas.

3. Does this show correct use of the comma?

('Yes') **Correct**. The 'so often apparent in Smith's poetry' needs a comma before and after, just as if it were a 'however' or 'therefore'. This way the reader can clearly see which part is the main sentence and which part is added in (what grammarians call a *subordinate clause*).

('No') **Incorrect**. This sentence is fine. The 'so often apparent in Smith's poetry' needs a comma before and after, just as if it were a 'however' or 'therefore'. This way the reader can clearly see which part is the main sentence and which part is added in (what grammarians call a *subordinate clause*).

Semi-Colons and Colons Exercise

1. Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

('Yes') **Correct**. The first half of the sentence introduces what follows.

('No') **Incorrect**. The first half of the sentence introduces what follows.

2. Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. If the second half of the sentence were not incomplete then it could perhaps stand alone, in which case a semi-colon might work. For example: ‘No-one who saw it will forget the sight; a tiny white flag slowly emerged from behind the parapet.’ This is correct because each half could be a sentence on its own.

(‘No’) **Correct**.

3. Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. Each half of the sentence could stand alone, but the meaning is also closely linked, so the use of a semi-colon to join them is appropriate.

4. Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. The statement about parenting does not logically introduce the statement about teaching.

(‘No’) **Correct**.

5. Does this show correct use of colons and semi-colons?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. The colon is used correctly because it introduces the quote, and the semi-colon is used correctly to join two clauses which are closely related but could each stand alone.

Apostrophe in Contractions Exercise

1 Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**: *can’t* is a contraction of can+not. The apostrophe stands in for the missing letters *no*. However, if you want to use this sentence in an academic piece of writing, use ‘cannot’.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**.

2 Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. The word ‘cannot’ is not a contraction and does not have an apostrophe.

(‘No’) **Correct**.

3 Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. ‘Don’t’ either needs an apostrophe for non-academic writing (it is a contraction of do+not and the apostrophe stands in for the missing letter *o*) – or in academic writing, you should use ‘do not’.

(‘No’) **Correct**.

4 Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. (in non-academic writing). ‘It’s’ here means it+is. **‘It’s’ only ever means ‘it is’** (or sometimes ‘it has,’ as in ‘it’s been done’). Remembering this simple rule can save you a lot of headaches! In addition, you should never use ‘it’s’ in academic writing because it is a contraction.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**.

Apostrophe Showing Belonging Exercise I

i. Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. We need an apostrophe between ‘Gerard’ and the ‘s’: *Gerard’s salad*.

(‘No’) **Correct**. We need an apostrophe between ‘Gerard’ and the ‘s’: *Gerard’s salad*.

ii. Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This is the appropriate use of the apostrophe: the cord belongs to the kettle, so we write: *the kettle’s cord*.

Apostrophe Showing Belonging Exercise II

i Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect** because there cannot be a nose which belongs to more than one girl. Either ‘The girl’s nose was hurt’ or ‘the girls’ noses were hurt’ is correct.

(‘No’) **Correct**.

ii Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. This sentence is about the holdings of more than one library, and thus the apostrophe comes after the *s* of *libraries*.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence is about the holdings of more than one library, and thus the apostrophe comes after the *s* of *libraries*.

iii Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. The fact that the apostrophe is placed after the *s* on *plays* indicates that one ending belongs to several plays – which seems very unlikely.

(‘No’) **Correct** – unless several plays all share the same ending, which is unlikely.

iv The plays’ endings are very exciting.

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. Here we are talking about several plays, with several different endings.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. In this sentence there is more than one ending for more than one play, so the apostrophe must come after the *s* of *plays*.

v Does this show correct use of the apostrophe?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. Because the plural of *woman* does not end with an *s*, we must add ‘*s* to show belonging.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This is an exception that proves the rule: because the plural of *woman* does not end with an *s*, we must add ‘*s* to show belonging.

Verb tenses

A verb is an action word, and the tense of the verb conveys when the action happens. For example, 'will go' is the verb 'to go' in the future tense. Likewise 'went' is the verb 'to go' in the past tense. There are many different tenses, but here are a few things to look out for in academic writing.

Correct Forms in the Past Tense

Sometimes, fluent English speakers get verb tenses a bit muddled – because English is a highly irregular language. Also in spoken informal English, people sometimes use verb forms that are considered to be incorrect in Standard English. An example of this would be: 'I seen him'. [The political correctness of expecting everyone to use Standard English is currently being debated. We at the Student Learning Service agree with the point made by Christine Sinclair, which is that students deserve to master Standard English in light of the fact that 'Standard English is the dominant dialect and the one used by the most powerful people in the UK.' (*Grammar: A Friendly Approach*, Open University Press, 2007, p. 22)]

If in doubt about the correct past participle for a verb, consult a good dictionary that gives examples of usage.

Past Tense Verb Form Exercise

1. He done it.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

2. They swunged past.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

3. She's wrote her essay.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

4. I been working at this all day.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

Layers of the Past Tense

There are several tenses which express action happening in the past. This is necessary because sometimes we write about a sequence of events in the past, some of which happened further back in the past than others. For example: Napoleon *changed* those countries which he *had conquered*. When we read this sentence, we understand that first he conquered countries, and then he changed them.

Layers of the Past Tense Exercise

Let us suppose the following sequence of events:

1. Smith hypothesises that pigs can fly;
2. Smith throws a pig off a tower;
3. Smith observes the pig crashing to the ground;
4. Smith concludes that pigs cannot fly, but that they are good at landing on all fours.

1. Smith had assumed that pigs could fly, until he threw one off a tower.

Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

Yes

No

1. Smith hypothesises that pigs can fly;
2. Smith throws a pig off a tower;
3. Smith observes the pig crashing to the ground;
4. Smith concludes that pigs cannot fly, but that they are good at landing on all fours.

2. Smith had concluded that pigs could fly once he had thrown one off a tower.

Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

Yes

No

1. Smith hypothesises that pigs can fly;
2. Smith throws a pig off a tower;
3. Smith observes the pig crashing to the ground;
4. Smith concludes that pigs cannot fly, but that they are good at landing on all fours.

3. Observing the pig land on all fours, Smith concluded that while pigs cannot fly they are good at landing on all fours.

Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

Yes

No

1. Smith hypothesises that pigs can fly;
2. Smith throws a pig off a tower;
3. Smith observes the pig crashing to the ground;
4. Smith concludes that pigs cannot fly, but that they are good at landing on all fours.

4. Having observed the pig land on all fours, Smith concluded that pigs cannot fly.

Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

Yes

No

1. Smith hypothesises that pigs can fly;
2. Smith throws a pig off a tower;
3. Smith observes the pig crashing to the ground;
4. Smith concludes that pigs cannot fly, but that they are good at landing on all fours.

5. Smith had hypothesised that pigs could fly, and launched one off a tower, before he concluded that they were incapable of flight.

Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

Yes

No

Conditional structures

There are several ways of expressing a 'what if' scenario, which vary depending on the time frame.

For those who are interested, there are three major conditional structures, using the following verb tenses:

If *present*, then *future* (ex: If I *exercise*, I *will get* fit)

If *past*, then *present conditional* (ex: If I *exercised*, I *would get* fit)

If *pluperfect*, then *past conditional* (ex: If I *had exercised*, I *would have got* fit)

Note that a sentence doesn't always have to have the 'if' clause first. Many sentences will begin with the 'then' clause. Either way round, the rules are the same. Therefore both of these sentences are correct:

If I exercised, I would get fit.

I would get fit if I exercised.

Conditional Structures Exercise

1. If he would have seen the rings around Saturn, he would have understood they were not satellite moons.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

2. The world will greatly benefit if a cure for cancer is found.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

3. Smith would of advanced his career if he had followed the queen's advice.

Is this correct?

Yes

No

Answers to the exercises

Past Tense Verb Form Exercise

1. Is this correct?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. ‘He did it’ is the correct form in Standard English. ‘Did’ is the *past participle* of ‘to do’.

(‘No’) **Correct**. It should be ‘He did it’ because ‘did’ is the *past participle* of ‘to do’.

2. Is this correct?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. It should be: ‘They swung past.’ ‘Swung’ is the *past participle* of ‘to swing’.

(‘No’) **Correct**. It should be: ‘They swung past.’

3. Is this correct?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. It should be either ‘she wrote her essay’ or ‘she has written her essay’. ‘She has written her essay’ implies that this has happened more recently than ‘She wrote her essay’.

(‘No’) **Correct**. Either ‘she wrote her essay’ or ‘she has written her essay’.

4. Is this correct?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. It should be: ‘I have been working at this all day’.

(‘No’) **Correct**. It should be ‘I have been working at this all day’.

Layers of the Past Tense Exercise

1 Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**: ‘had assumed ... threw’ tells us that first he assumed, then he threw.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence is fine because ‘had assumed ... threw’ tells us that first he assumed, then he threw.

2. Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. Putting both verbs as ‘had ... ed’ [the *pluperfect tense*] is confusing because it indicates that Smith concluded and threw at the same time – which is illogical.

(‘No’) **Correct**: putting both verbs as ‘had ... ed’ [the *pluperfect tense*] is confusing because it indicates that Smith concluded and threw at the same time – which is illogical.

3. Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**, since it is possible for Smith to observe and conclude at the same time.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence does make sense because it is possible for Smith to observe and conclude at the same time.

4. Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

(‘Yes’) **Correct**. This is even clearer than sentence 3, because ‘having observed’ tells us that Smith first observed and then made his conclusions.

(‘No’) **Incorrect**. This sentence makes good sense and is even clearer than sentence 3, because ‘having observed’ tells us that Smith first observed and then made his conclusions.

5. Is this correct (referring to the above sequence of events)?

(‘Yes’) **Incorrect**. ‘Had hypothesised’ is fine, because this tells us that he first hypothesised before he did other things. The problem comes with the next two verbs, ‘launched ... before he concluded’ – we can no longer be sure of

what happened first, second and third. You could fix this by splitting this sentence into two:

Smith had hypothesised that pigs could fly. He launched one off a tower and then concluded that they were incapable of flight.

('No') **Correct**. 'Had hypothesised' is fine, because this tells us that he first hypothesised before he did other things. The problem comes with the next two verbs, 'launched ... before he concluded' – we can no longer be sure of what happened first, second and third. You could fix this by splitting this sentence into two:

Smith had hypothesised that pigs could fly. He launched one off a tower and then concluded that they were incapable of flight.

Conditional Structures Exercise

1. Is this correct?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. It should be 'If he *had* seen... he would have understood'. This is an example of the rule: If *pluperfect*, then *past conditional* (ex: If I *had exercised*, I *would have got fit*)

('No') **Correct**. It should be 'If he *had* seen... he would have understood'. (If *pluperfect*, then *past conditional*.)

2. Is this correct?

('Yes') **Correct**. This is an example of the rule: If *present*, then *future*. (Here the 'then' clause comes first.)

('No') **Incorrect**. This sentence is an example of the rule: If *present*, then *future*. However, here the 'then' clause comes first.

3. Is this correct?

('Yes') **Incorrect**. The problem here is the 'of'. It should be 'would *have* advanced his career'. Although we often say the 'have' part of 'would have' as if it were the word 'of' – it is always spelled 'have'.

('No') **Correct**. It should be 'would *have* advanced his career'.

Active and Passive Constructions

Some teachers, lecturers and software grammar checkers get very upset by the passive voice. Students often end up thinking that somehow the passive is 'bad' but not understanding how or why. We at the Student Learning Service believe that the passive is neither inherently bad nor good – but that writers should understand its advantages and disadvantages, and choose accordingly.

What is a passive construction / the passive voice?

The best way to explain is by showing the difference between an active construction and a passive construction [we find 'construction' a clearer term than 'voice'].

- An active construction makes clear who does what:
My three-year-old smashed the windscreen.
 In grammatical terms, we have a subject (my three-year-old), a verb (smashed) and the object of the verb (the windscreen).
- A passive construction may well not make clear 'whodunit':
My windscreen is (was / has been) smashed.
 A passive construction is characterised by some form of the verb 'to be' with a past participle (usually ending in '-ed' for example, *smashed, refuted, rejected, etc.*)
 In grammatical terms, we have the direct object of the verb (the windscreen) and the verb in passive form. The subject of the verb is missing.
- Sometimes, though, a passive construction will add on a bit starting with 'by' which **does** make clear who did what:
My windscreen was smashed by my three-year-old
 Note that the construction is still passive. This is because grammatically, we have the direct object of the verb (windscreen) and the verb (smashed) in the main clause. The person who did the smashing (my three-year-old) appears in another secondary clause beginning with *by* and is not, strictly speaking, the subject of the verb.

2. Many women activists were arrested during the first years of the 20th century. Golf courses were ruined and meetings were interrupted as they fought for their rights. They were vilified by some and praised by others.

Confident & Clear

Not confident / clear

3. My laboratory assistants and I checked the test tubes every half an hour. We measured the rate of evaporation, and we ascertained the temperature differential. My laboratory assistants and I found that after a week there was no difference.

Confident & Clear

Not confident / clear

Answers to the exercises

Identifying Active and Passive Constructions Exercise

Which of the following constructions are active, and which are passive?

1.

('Active') **Incorrect**. Although this sentence does tell us who will carry out the studies (in the 'by' clause), this is a passive construction with the direct object (studies) and the verb in passive form (will be carried out).

('Passive') **Correct**.

2.

('Active') **Correct**.

('Passive') **Incorrect**. It is an active construction because we have the subject of the verb (the appropriate funding body).

3.

('Active') **Incorrect**. Although this sentence does tell us who carried out the action (in the 'by' clause), this is a passive construction. The main clause has only the direct object (the king's troops) and the verb in passive form (were routed).

('Passive') **Correct**.

4.

('Active') **Incorrect**. Like the sentence in no. 3, this is in the passive. In this sentence however, there is no 'by' clause informing us who did the routing of the king's troops.

('Passive') **Correct**.

5.

('Active') **Incorrect**. This is a passive construction. In grammatical terms, we have the direct object (the theory) and the verb (has been disproved) but no subject of the verb.

('Passive') **Correct**. In grammatical terms, we have the direct object (the theory) and the verb (has been disproved) but no subject of the verb.

Use of Passive Voice Exercise

1.

('Confident & Clear') **We agree** that this is fairly strong writing, because the writer has not withheld any information about 'who does what'. It might be improved slightly by using the active voice at the end of the second sentence: '—but both Jones and Reid have refuted this theory'. It depends on what sort of emphasis the writer wants to place. The writer could consider making the first passive construction ('boys are adversely affected by television') into an active one: 'Haley's theory says that television and computer games adversely affect boys'. Again, there is a slight difference of emphasis.

('Not confident/clear') **We disagree**. We think this is fairly strong writing because the writer has not withheld any information about 'who does what'. It is true that this passage might be improved slightly by using the active voice at the end of the second sentence: '—but both Jones and Reid have refuted this theory'. It depends on what sort of emphasis the writer wants to place. The writer could consider making the first passive construction ('boys are adversely affected by television') into an active one: 'Haley's theory says that television and computer games adversely affect boys'. Again, there is a slight difference of emphasis.

2.

('Confident & Clear') **We disagree** and think this passage needs some work. Here we have three passive constructions in a row. It is true that in the first sentence, common sense tells us that the police are the ones making arrests, so there is no real danger of confusing the reader. In the second sentence, however, it would be far clearer to be explicit about who ruined the golf courses and interrupted the meetings, for example: 'The suffragists ruined

golf courses and interrupted meetings'. In the third sentence, it is again clear who is doing what, so the writer can choose whether to keep it in the passive voice, or put it into the active ('Some vilified them; others praised them.'). If the paragraph goes on to discuss those who vilified and those who praised, highlighting them this way might be a good choice.

('Not confident / clear') **We agree** that this needs a bit more work. Here we have three passive constructions in a row. In the first sentence, common sense tells us that the police are the ones making arrests – so there is no real danger of confusing the reader. In the second sentence, however, it would be far clearer to be explicit about who ruined the golf courses and interrupted the meetings, for example: 'The suffragists ruined golf courses and interrupted meetings'. In the third sentence, it is again clear who is doing what, so the writer can choose whether to keep it in the passive voice, or put it into the active ('Some vilified them; others praised them.'). If the paragraph goes on to discuss those who vilified and those who praised, highlighting them this way might be a good choice.

3.

('Confident & Clear') **We disagree**. Scientific writing usually uses passive constructions because it is very clear who is doing what, and there is no need to constantly repeat 'My laboratory assistants and I'. This passage would be much easier to read if it used the passive: 'The test tubes were checked every half an hour. The rate of evaporation was measured, and the temperature differential was ascertained. After a week no difference was found.'

('Not confident / clear ') **We agree**. Passive constructions would be much better here, because it is very clear who is doing what, and there is no need to constantly repeat 'My laboratory assistants and I'. This passage would be much easier to read if it used the passive: 'The test tubes were checked every half an hour. The rate of evaporation was measured, and the temperature differential was ascertained. After a week no difference was found.'

Agreement

Agreeing means that if the subject of the verb is singular, the verb must have a singular form; likewise if the subject of the verb is plural, the verb must have a plural form. For example, we say 'he sings' (singular subject, singular verb form) and 'they sing' (plural subject, plural verb form). 'He sing' and 'they sings' are incorrect because they mix singular and plural forms.

This example is a very easy one, but sometimes problems with agreement can be harder to spot.

Subject/Verb Agreement Exercise

Which of these is correct?

1. Subjects will be asked to watch films that illustrates sexism.

Correct

Incorrect

2. There are a range of theories on childcare.

Correct

Incorrect

3. There is a range of theories on childcare.

Correct

Incorrect

Answers to the exercises

Subject/Verb Agreement Exercise

1. Subjects will be asked to watch films that illustrates sexism.

('Correct') **Incorrect**. *Films* is plural (i.e. more than one), and therefore the verb needs to agree and take a plural form. 'Films that illustrate' is correct for the same reason that 'films illustrate' is correct.

('Incorrect') **Correct**. *Films* is plural (i.e. more than one), and therefore the verb needs to agree and take a plural form. 'Films that illustrate' is correct for the same reason that 'films illustrate' is correct.

2. There are a range of theories on childcare.

('Correct') **Incorrect**. The subject of the sentence is 'range' and not 'theories' and therefore the verb should be *is*. What causes confusion is the 'of theories on childcare' part of the sentence. As a writer you need to realise that 'of theories on childcare' tells us something about 'range,' which is the subject of the sentence.

('Incorrect') **Correct**.

3. There is a range of theories on childcare.

('Correct') **Correct.**

('Incorrect') **Incorrect.** The subject of the sentence (and thus of the verb *is*) is 'range' and not 'theories'. What causes confusion is the 'of theories on childcare' part of the sentence. As a writer you need to realise that 'of theories on childcare' tells us something about 'range,' which is the subject of the sentence. (If the idea of there being a range is not important, you could always change the sentence so that 'theories' is the subject: 'There are several theories on childcare.')

Gender-Neutral Language

Language constantly changes, and one of the changes that academic (and also non-academic) English has gone through in the last thirty or so years is a shift to what is called 'gender-neutral' language. It used to be perfectly acceptable to refer to all people (male and female) as male. As society's view of gender roles has changed, so has language: many people are uncomfortable with using 'he' to mean 'he or she'. Now writers make an effort to be gender-neutral. There are several ways to do this.

For more information on gender-neutral language, go to the UNESCO guide:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950mo.pdf>

Gender-Neutral Language Exercise

Which of these is acceptable?

1. Each student should leave his key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

2. Students should leave their keys at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

3. Each student should leave their key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

4. Each student should leave his or her key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

Answers to the exercises

Gender-Neutral Language Exercise

Which of these is acceptable?

1.

(‘Acceptable’) **Incorrect**. Probably not acceptable in the early 21st century. Using ‘his’ to mean everyone is not gender-inclusive and may well offend people nowadays.

(‘Unacceptable’) **Correct**. Probably not acceptable in the early 21st century. Using ‘his’ to mean everyone is not gender-inclusive and may well offend people nowadays.

2.

(Acceptable) **Correct**. Using the plural (when possible) is a good way of being gender-inclusive.

(‘Unacceptable’) **Incorrect**. Using the plural (when possible) is a good way of being gender-inclusive.

3.

(‘Acceptable’) **Possibly**. Acceptable to some, and unacceptable to others. Some people are comfortable with the growing use of ‘they’ to mean ‘he or she’, and there are scholarly articles proving linguistic precedence for this usage. [In ‘The Rise of Epicene They,’ Mark Balhorn argues that this increasingly popular usage dates back to the 14th century. (Journal of English Linguistics, Vol. 32, No. 2 [2004] 79-104)]. Other people are very bothered by this ungrammatical mixing of singular (*student*) with plural (*their*). If in doubt, either ask your teachers what they prefer, or avoid this solution in academic writing.

(‘Unacceptable’) **Possibly**. Acceptable to some, and unacceptable to others. Some people are comfortable with the growing use of ‘they’ to mean ‘he or she’, and there are scholarly articles proving linguistic precedence for this usage. [In ‘The Rise of Epicene They,’ Mark Balhorn argues that this increasingly popular usage dates back to the 14th century. (Journal of English Linguistics, Vol. 32, No. 2 [2004] 79-104)]. Other people are very bothered by this ungrammatical mixing of singular (*student*) with plural (*their*). If in doubt, either ask your teachers what they prefer, or avoid this solution in academic writing.

4.

('Acceptable') **Correct.** 'He or she' and 'his or her' are a bit cumbersome, but there are occasions – when talking about *each* for example - when using the plural (*students*) is not possible.

('Unacceptable') **Incorrect.** 'He or she' and 'his or her' are a bit cumbersome, but there are occasions – when talking about *each* for example - when using the plural (*students*) is not possible.

Spelling and Vocabulary

Common Confusions - Spelling

There are many of these 'look-alikes,' and using the wrong word can cause certain readers to break out in a rash, so it is worth being careful. An online dictionary can be helpful.

Confusions in Spelling Exercise

Which is correct?

1. I except that your version of events is the most likely.
2. I accept that your version of events is the most likely.
3. When they'd read the essay I wrote, they were very complementary.
4. When they'd read the essay I wrote, they were very complimentary.

Common Confusions – Meaning

You have probably all seen the spell-checked poem where every word is correctly spelled and the whole thing is a nonsense. This can happen if we use a correctly-spelled word which sounds the same as the one we intend, but which has a different meaning.

Confusions in Meaning Exercise

Which of the following are correct?

- a. I looked threw all the papers.
- b. Is this the weigh to do it?
- c. We had to pore through all the books on armadillos.
- d. She should of known better.

Building Vocabulary

It is important to build your vocabulary while studying, if only to avoid being stumped by exam questions! Note down new words which keep coming up in your coursework, and find a system of keeping track. An old address book can be a good place to keep new vocabulary, or index cards if you want to test yourself on them.

Building Vocabulary Exercise

How good is your vocabulary? Here are 15 words that we found in past exam papers from 1st and 2nd year courses here at the University of Aberdeen. Do you know what they mean?

1. Depreciation
 - a. When something gets smaller
 - b. When something gets less valuable
 - c. An unkind remark
 - d. Going down

2. To confer
 - a. To attract
 - b. To give
 - c. To repel
 - d. To move slowly

3. Duality
 - a. When there is two of something
 - b. When something has two functions
 - c. When something has a good and a bad side
 - d. When two different things are combined

4. Subversive
 - a. Having an opposite quality
 - b. Affluent
 - c. Undermining
 - d. To do with handwriting

5. To disperse
 - a. To train
 - b. To separate
 - c. To send in different directions
 - d. To give money out

6. To infer
 - a. To make light
 - b. To make hot
 - c. To make obvious
 - d. To guess from information

7. Asymmetric
 - a. Opposite
 - b. With two non-matching sides
 - c. From before the conversion to metric
 - d. To do with numbers

8. Continuity
 - a. When something continues without being changed
 - b. When something is right next to something else
 - c. Having the quality of containment
 - d. When something is correct

9. Lavishly
 - a. In a colourful manner
 - b. In an old-fashioned manner
 - c. In an extravagant manner
 - d. In a pleasing manner

10. Implementation
 - a. Putting something to a better use than before
 - b. Using a tool
 - c. Putting a plan or system into action
 - d. Improving the design of something

11. Hierarchical
 - a. To do with inheritance
 - b. Producing an heir
 - c. Where things or people are ordered according to importance
 - d. Unfair

12. To advocate
 - a. To support an idea or method
 - b. To support a legal client
 - c. To call upon
 - d. To refer to

13. Criteria
 - a. Ideas to put forth
 - b. Rules to follow
 - c. Suggestions for improvement
 - d. Standards to judge by

14. Heretical
 - a. Unsatisfactory
 - b. Useful
 - c. Contradiction of authority
 - d. Against the law

15. To appropriate
 - a. To make right
 - b. To take
 - c. To allow
 - d. To include

Answers to the exercises

Confusions in Spelling Exercise

Which is correct?

1. **Incorrect.** 'Except' means 'with the exception of'.
2. **Correct.**
3. **Incorrect.** 'Complementary' means 'which goes well with' – as in 'these colours *complement* each other'.
4. **Correct.** 'Compliment' with an *i* means 'to pay a compliment'.

Confusions in Meaning Exercise

Which of the following are correct?

1. **Correct.** This should be: 'I looked *through* all the papers'.
2. **Incorrect.** This should be: 'Is this the *way* to do it?'
3. **Correct** – even if you see newspaper articles which mention people *pouring* over books! Unless they are talking about literally tipping water over them, the writer has confused *pour* and *pore*.
4. **Incorrect.** This should be: 'She should *have* known better'.

Building Vocabulary Exercise

1. Depreciation:
Correct answer is (b)
2. To confer
Correct answer is (b)
3. Duality
Correct answer is (d)
4. Subversive
Correct answer is (c)
5. To disperse
Correct answer is (c)
6. To infer
Correct answer is (d)
7. Asymmetric
Correct answer is (b)
8. Continuity
Correct answer is (a)
9. Lavishly
Correct answer is (c)
10. Implementation
Correct answer is (c)
11. Hierarchical
Correct answer is (c)
12. To advocate
Correct answer is (a)
13. Criteria
Correct answer is (d)
14. Heretical
Correct answer is (c)
15. To appropriate
Correct answer is (b)

Acknowledging Your Sources

It is extremely important, in academic writing, to give full acknowledgement when you are quoting or paraphrasing other people's ideas. Properly acknowledging your sources allows your reader to trace back where you found the ideas that informed your own analysis. As you will know, not properly acknowledging sources is called plagiarism. Committing plagiarism is something that you want to avoid, so it is important to understand how to acknowledge sources properly.

How do you acknowledge your sources properly? In brief, you should always:

- put quotation marks and give a reference when you use someone else's exact words; and
- give a reference when you write a paraphrase of someone else's words or ideas.

What is a reference? When you give your reader a reference, you state exactly where you found the words or idea. You do this either in a footnote, or in an endnote, or in brackets in the text, depending on which reference style you are following.

What is a reference or citation style?

There are several commonly-used styles of reference, also called citation styles. (The word 'style' in this context means a set of rules to be followed.) Four of the most common citation styles are: APA (for psychology), Harvard Style (social sciences, sciences, humanities), MLA (arts and literature) and Vancouver (medicine). Teaching staff should tell you which style they want you to use in your written work.

The University of Aberdeen produces a Referencing and Citing guide which sets out how to follow these four main referencing styles:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/guides/gen/uggen007.pdf>

What is common knowledge?

It is often said that:

- there is no need to give a reference when you are referring to something which is 'common knowledge'.

This sounds simple, but is not always so easy. We can all agree, for example, that knowing who the Prime Minister is should be common knowledge – we shouldn't have to give a reference stating that we read who the Prime

Minister is in *The Times*. However, in academic writing, 'common knowledge' is not so clear-cut. It usually means *knowledge common to your course or discipline*. For example, you might not expect the average person at the bus stop to know when Darwin published his book *Origin of the Species*; however, if you are taking a course on evolution, it might be *common knowledge in that course* that Darwin's famous treatise appeared in 1859.

Do I need to reference ideas from my course lectures?

It depends on the course and your teachers' preferences. Some teaching staff consider that the content of lectures is 'common knowledge' to the course and therefore does not need to be referenced; other teaching staff require students to reference ideas taken from lectures.

What is a bibliography and why do I need one?

A bibliography is an alphabetical list of the sources that you have used in your research. It comes at the end of your essay, on a separate page. It shows your reader all the sources that you have used throughout your essay at a glance, and for this reason helps the reader to gain a mental picture of your research. Some bibliographies have two sections: Works Cited (all the sources that you made a reference to) and Works Consulted (other sources that you used in the course of your research, but did not actually make a reference to). Your course guide and/or teachers may give you specific guidelines as to how they want you to format your Bibliography.

If you are using the Harvard system, you will have a Works Cited list at the end of your essay. Because the Harvard system works by referring the reader to the full reference in the Works Cited list, it is crucially important. For example, your reference in your essay might look like this: (Smith 2000, 4). Your reader needs the full reference in your Works Cited list to know that Smith wrote a book called *The Magical World of Physics*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2000. You have already told your reader that the information referred to is on page 4 of this book.

Plagiarism Detection Test 1 – below you will find a text, with examples of how a student might have used it as a source for an essay. Can you spot the examples that show properly acknowledged sources, and the ones that do not?

Text No. 1:

The French revolution, which began in the final year of Smith's life, however, was far less foreseeable as well as being far more problematic. Even in its initial stages it was unclear whether the train of events that began in 1789

offered a challenge to Smith's principles, or whether, as some of his followers in England and France believed, it marked a step towards realising goals with which his name was becoming firmly associated. Notoriously, Burke reached an early as well as adverse decision on all these matters in 1790 when he published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

This passage is taken from:

Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

Example 1

Some scholars have argued that when the French Revolution began, it was not clear whether political and social events in France confirmed or refuted Adam Smith's principles. (Winch 1996)

Does this properly acknowledge Donald Winch's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text No. 1:

The French revolution, which began in the final year of Smith's life, however, was far less foreseeable as well as being far more problematic. Even in its initial stages it was unclear whether the train of events that began in 1789 offered a challenge to Smith's principles, or whether, as some of his followers in England and France believed, it marked a step towards realising goals with which his name was becoming firmly associated. Notoriously, Burke reached an early as well as adverse decision on all these matters in 1790 when he published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

This passage is taken from:

Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

Example 2

Donald Winch has argued that, at the outset of the French Revolution, some of Adam Smith's followers in England and France believed that the revolution "marked a step towards realising goals with which his name was becoming firmly associated."¹

¹D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

Does this properly acknowledge Donald Winch's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text No. 1:

The French revolution, which began in the final year of Smith's life, however, was far less foreseeable as well as being far more problematic. Even in its initial stages it was unclear whether the train of events that began in 1789 offered a challenge to Smith's principles, or whether, as some of his followers in England and France believed, it marked a step towards realising goals with which his name was becoming firmly associated. Notoriously, Burke reached an early as well as adverse decision on all these matters in 1790 when he published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

This passage is taken from:

Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

Example 3

At the time of the French Revolution, many observers and analysts pondered whether the train of events that began in 1789 offered a challenge to Adam Smith's principles. Others felt quite the opposite, that Smith's ideals were synonymous with the revolutionaries' philosophy.

Does this properly acknowledge Donald Winch's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Plagiarism Detection Test 2 – below you will find a text, with examples of how a student might have used it as a source for an essay. Can you spot the examples that show properly acknowledged sources, and the ones that do not?

Text No. 2:

When two siblings perform at about the same level, the effects of closeness on identification should be minimal. However, where one sibling outperforms the other, there should be effects of closeness. The poorer performing sibling has a conflict. On the one hand, his/her better performing sibling would

make a good role model because of that sibling's good performance, so identification should go up; on the other hand, increasing identification, that is, relevance, could result in loss of self-esteem. Thus, it is difficult to make predictions about overall levels of identification. However, we can make a firm prediction about the effects of closeness. Since threat to self-esteem is a direction function of closeness under these circumstances, closeness should lead to *less* identification (decreased relevance) when a sibling does not do as well as a brother or sister than when a sibling performs about the same as, or on a higher level than, that of a brother or sister.

This passage is taken from:

Abraham Tesser, "Self-Esteem Maintenance in Family Dynamics," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1980, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 79.

Example 1

Studies of birth order have focussed on what is called *relevance*, that is to say a form of identification. Some sibling rivalry can be said to be the direct result of birth order. When two siblings perform at about the same level, the effects of closeness of age on identification with one another should be minimal. And where one sibling outperforms the other, there should be effects of closeness. But the poorer performing sibling has to decide whether the better performing sibling would make a good role model or not.

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text No. 2:

When two siblings perform at about the same level, the effects of closeness on identification should be minimal. However, where one sibling outperforms the other, there should be effects of closeness. The poorer performing sibling has a conflict. On the one hand, his/her better performing sibling would make a good role model because of that sibling's good performance, so identification should go up; on the other hand, increasing identification, that is, relevance, could result in loss of self-esteem. Thus, it is difficult to make predictions about overall levels of identification. However, we can make a firm prediction about the effects of closeness. Since threat to self-esteem is a direction function of closeness under these circumstances, closeness should lead to *less* identification (decreased relevance) when a sibling does not do as well as a brother or sister than when a sibling performs about the same as, or on a higher level than, that of a brother or sister.

This passage is taken from:

Abraham Tesser, "Self-Esteem Maintenance in Family Dynamics," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1980, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 79.

Example 2

Abraham Tesser has argued that "it is difficult to make predictions about overall levels of identification. However, we can make a firm prediction about the effects of closeness." It seems curious that one should be able to predict levels of identification but not closeness. Why is this? Tesser explains it by arguing that a poorer-performing sibling can choose whether or not to identify with a better-performing sibling, but the effects of closeness (in birth order) are consistently the same.

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text No. 2:

When two siblings perform at about the same level, the effects of closeness on identification should be minimal. However, where one sibling outperforms the other, there should be effects of closeness. The poorer performing sibling has a conflict. On the one hand, his/her better performing sibling would make a good role model because of that sibling's good performance, so identification should go up; on the other hand, increasing identification, that is, relevance, could result in loss of self-esteem. Thus, it is difficult to make predictions about overall levels of identification. However, we can make a firm prediction about the effects of closeness. Since threat to self-esteem is a direction function of closeness under these circumstances, closeness should lead to *less* identification (decreased relevance) when a sibling does not do as well as a brother or sister than when a sibling performs about the same as, or on a higher level than, that of a brother or sister.

This passage is taken from:

Abraham Tesser, "Self-Esteem Maintenance in Family Dynamics," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1980, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 79.

Example 3

Self-esteem is a very important factor in whether or not siblings choose to identify with one another. Abraham Tesser's work shows that a child who performs poorly, and who has a sibling who performs well, may regard the better-performing sibling as a positive role model at the risk of losing self-esteem. (Tesser 1980, 79) One could therefore argue that the poorly-performing child with greatest self-esteem is more likely to benefit from identifying with the better-performing sibling.

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Plagiarism Detection Test 3 – below you will find a text, with examples of how a student might have used it as a source for an essay. Can you spot the examples that show properly acknowledged sources, and the ones that do not?

Text no. 3:

The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal of a young man's intelligent face have led scholars to embrace *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* as a literal truth. They have also remarked on the informal nature of the painting, based on Rubens's apparently unstudied pose and the painting's non-hierarchical format, in which the sitter and the geranium compete for the sitter's attention.² As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art that favors candor over pretension, clarity over complexity, and the natural over the conventional.

In numerous catalogue essays, journal articles and newspaper items, the work has been praised for its visual delights and has been examined for its art-historical context.

²Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., for example, cited the painting as an example of Rembrandt Peale's "best work," which is "found not among his formal portraits and history paintings but rather in less conventional pictures he did of family and friends." See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., "Colonial Genius and the New Nation," in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Carol Troyen, and Trevor J. Fairbrother, *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760-1910*, exhibition catalogue Museum of Fine Arts (Boston 1983), p. 35.

This passage is taken from:

Carol Eaton Soltis, Rembrandt Peale's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger. *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32 (2002) nos. 1 and 2, p. 5.

Example 1

Both the informality of the painting, as well as the fact that neither Rubens Peale nor the geranium dominate the composition, has meant that, according to Soltis, "*Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art that favors candor over pretension, clarity over complexity, and the natural over the conventional."¹ It could be

argued that these values – candor, clarity and the natural – are particularly prized by Americans.

¹Carol Eaton Soltis, 'Rembrandt Peale's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger,' *The American Art Journal*, 32 (2002), nos. 1 and 2, 5-19, p. 5.

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text no. 3:

The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal of a young man's intelligent face have led scholars to embrace *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* as a literal truth. They have also remarked on the informal nature of the painting, based on Rubens's apparently unstudied pose and the painting's non-hierarchical format, in which the sitter and the geranium compete for the sitter's attention.² As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art that favors candor over pretension, clarity over complexity, and the natural over the conventional.

In numerous catalogue essays, journal articles and newspaper items, the work has been praised for its visual delights and has been examined for its art-historical context.

²Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., for example, cited the painting as an example of Rembrandt Peale's "best work," which is "found not among his formal portraits and history paintings but rather in less conventional pictures he did of family and friends." See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., "Colonial Genius and the New Nation," in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Carol Troyen, and Trevor J. Fairbrother, *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760-1910*, exhibition catalogue Museum of Fine Arts (Boston 1983), p. 35.

This passage is taken from:

Carol Eaton Soltis, Rembrandt Peale's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger. *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32 (2002) nos. 1 and 2, p. 5.

Example 2

Soltis argues that "The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal have led scholars to remarked on the informal nature of the painting. As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art."¹ This point of view can be challenged, however.

¹Soltis, Rembrandt Peale's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger. *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32 nos. 1 and 2.

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Text no. 3:

The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal of a young man's intelligent face have led scholars to embrace *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* as a literal truth. They have also remarked on the informal nature of the painting, based on Rubens's apparently unstudied pose and the painting's non-hierarchical format, in which the sitter and the geranium compete for the sitter's attention.² As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art that favors candor over pretension, clarity over complexity, and the natural over the conventional.

In numerous catalogue essays, journal articles and newspaper items, the work has been praised for its visual delights and has been examined for its art-historical context.

²Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., for example, cited the painting as an example of Rembrandt Peale's "best work," which is "found not among his formal portraits and history paintings but rather in less conventional pictures he did of family and friends." See Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., "Colonial Genius and the New Nation," in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Carol Troyen, and Trevor J. Fairbrother, *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760-1910*, exhibition catalogue Museum of Fine Arts (Boston 1983), p. 35.

This passage is taken from:

Carol Eaton Soltis, Rembrandt Peale's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger. *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32 (2002) nos. 1 and 2, p. 5.

Example 3

Theodore Stebbins believes that *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* is an example of Rembrandt Peale's best work.¹

¹Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., "Colonial Genius and the New Nation," in Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., Carol Troyen, and Trevor J. Fairbrother, *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760-1910*, exhibition catalogue Museum of Fine Arts (Boston 1983), p. 35.

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

Properly Acknowledges

Does Not Properly Acknowledge

Answers to the exercises**Plagiarism Detection Test 1****Text No. 1: Example 1**

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. It is very nearly properly acknowledged, but lacks the page number. It should read '(Winch 1996, 3)'. The page number must be given because the writer has paraphrased a specific passage which can be found on page 3.

This is a paraphrase of Winch's ideas rather than a quotation. The writer is using the Harvard System.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. It should read '(Winch 1996, 3)'. The page number must be given because the writer has paraphrased a specific passage which can be found on page 3.

This is a paraphrase of Winch's ideas rather than a quotation. The writer is using the Harvard System.

Text No. 1: Example 2

Does this properly acknowledge Donald Winch's work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Correct**. The writer is giving a direct quotation from Winch, preceded by a paraphrase from the same page. The writer is using the MLA citation style.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Incorrect**. This is properly acknowledged, by a footnote. The writer is giving a direct quotation from Winch, preceded by a paraphrase from the same page. The writer is using the MLA citation style.

Text No. 1: Example 3

Does this properly acknowledge Donald Winch's work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. This writer has used part of a sentence from Winch ('whether the train of events Principles') and has also paraphrased Winch, without acknowledging the source. This writer has

committed plagiarism because the writing makes it look as if this is all the writer's own thoughts. Even if the writer has listed Winch in the bibliography, this is still plagiarised.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. This writer has used part of a sentence from Winch ('whether the train of events Principles') and has also paraphrased Winch, without acknowledging the source. This writer has committed plagiarism because the writing makes it look as if this is all the writer's own thoughts. Even if the writer has listed Winch in the bibliography, this is still plagiarised.

Plagiarism Detection Test 2

Text No. 2: Example 1

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. The writer of this passage has copied large chunks of Tesser's text without acknowledging, as follows:

Studies of birth order have focussed on what is called *relevance*, that is to say a form of identification. Some sibling rivalry can be said to be the direct result of birth order. **When two siblings perform at about the same level, the effects of closeness of age on identification with one another should be minimal. And where one sibling outperforms the other, there should be effects of closeness. But the poorer performing sibling has to decide whether the better performing sibling would make a good role model** or not.

The writer has slightly altered Tesser's text but has made it seem that these are the writer's own ideas. This writer has plagiarised.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. The writer of this passage has copied large chunks of Tesser's text, with some slight alterations, and has made it seem that these are the writer's own ideas. The writer has plagiarised.

Text No. 2: Example 2

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. Although the writer of this passage has identified Tesser as the author that he/she has quoted and paraphrased, there is no reference given that allows the reader to find the exact source.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. The writer needs to do more than just give Tesser's name: a full reference is needed, so that the reader can find the original source if he or she wants.

Text No. 2: Example 3

Does this properly acknowledge Abraham Tesser's work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Correct**. The writer gives us the source for the paraphrase of Tesser's argument, using the Harvard System – that is, assuming that the writer has provided the full reference (title of article, journal name) in the Works Cited list at the end of the essay.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Incorrect**. The writer has given all the information needed within the text to identify the source of the paraphrase, using the Harvard System – that is, assuming that the writer has provided the full reference (title of article, journal name) in the Works Cited list at the end of the essay.

Plagiarism Detection Test 3

Text no. 3: Example 1

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Correct**. In the first sentence, the writer uses a paraphrase ('both the informality... has meant that...') as well as a direct quote. The writer gives a full and correct citation, using the MHRA citation format.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Incorrect**. In the first sentence, the writer uses a paraphrase ('both the informality... has meant that...') as well as a direct quote. The writer gives a full and correct citation, using the MHRA citation format.

Text no. 3: Example 2

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. The first problem here is that the writer has left out parts of the original text without indicating this to the reader. The quote should contain ellipses (an ellipsis is 3 full stops indicating some

text has been skipped over). It should also be appropriately altered so that it makes sense to the reader, by changing 'remarked' to '[remark]'. As so:

"The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal ... have led scholars to ... [remark] on the informal nature of the painting.... As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art."

The second problem is that the writer has not given the page number where the quotation can be found. The correct citation (using MLA Style) is:

¹Soltis, Carol Eaton. "Rembrandt Peal's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger*," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), p. 5.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. There are two problems here which need to be fixed. Firstly, the writer needs to include ellipses to indicate where original text has been skipped over, and the writer also needs to make the quotation readable by changing 'remarked' into '[remark]', as so:

"The carefully observed depiction of the material world and sensitive portrayal ... have led scholars to ... [remark] on the informal nature of the painting.... As a result, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* has repeatedly been viewed as an embodiment of an ideal in American art."

Secondly, the citation is missing the page number. Here is the correct citation following MLA Style:

¹Soltis, Carol Eaton. "Rembrandt Peal's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger*," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), p. 5.

Text no. 3: Example 3

Does this properly acknowledge Carol Eaton Soltis' work?

('Properly Acknowledges') **Incorrect**. This makes it look as if the writer never read or used Carol Easton Soltis's article, and as if the writer found the quote directly from Stebbins. The correct reference should be:

¹Quoted by Carol Eaton Soltis. "Rembrandt Peal's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger*," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), p. 5.

If, however, the writer had found the reference to Stebbins' work in Soltis' article, then located and read Stebbins' article, then the writer would be justified in citing only Stebbins.

('Does Not Properly Acknowledge') **Correct**. The writer needs to show that he or she found the quote by Stebbins in Carol Easton Soltis's article. The correct reference should be:

¹Quoted by Carol Eaton Soltis. "Rembrandt Peal's *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*: A Possible Source in David Teniers the Younger," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 32, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), p. 5.

If, however, the writer had found the reference to Stebbins' work in Soltis' article, then located and read Stebbins' article, then the writer would be justified in citing only Stebbins.

Resources

There are many resources to help you with writing academic English. Here are a few books that we have found helpful:

Diane Collinson et al., *Plain English*, 2nd edition (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001). This book has numerous exercises for practice.

Marion Field, *Improve Your Punctuation and Grammar*, 2nd edition. (Oxford: How To Books, 2003) Explanations, examples, and practice exercises.

Marion Field, *Improve Your Written English*, 4th edition (Oxford: How To Books, 2003) Explanations, examples, and practice exercises.

Christine Sinclair, *Grammar: A Friendly Approach*. (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007) Clear explanations and examples.