

How to use Academic Feedback

Examples of Academic Feedback

Here are some examples of tutors' comments on their students' writing. Click on the sentences below for specific advice on making the most of feedback you have received:

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Your writing needs to be more academic.

'Academic' Writing

If you have received feedback that your writing needs to be more academic, it probably means one of several things.

1. Your writing may not use enough citation & referencing.

Your claims need to be supported by suitable references and evidence.

Further reading: [Referencing](#)

2. Your writing may be too certain in its claims.

Make sure you are using suitable hedging/ academic caution to protect your claims, and avoid definitive statements or generalisations.

Further reading: [Cautious Language and Hedging](#)

3. Your writing may need to express more criticality.

Academic writing aims to explore and evaluate concepts and research findings, from the point of view of adding to our knowledge of the area.

Further reading: [Criticality](#)

4. Your writing may be aimed too clearly at a professional audience.

Many postgraduate students are competent writers in a professional sphere, but as a student research writer you will need to use a different tone.

As mentioned above, the aim of your writing at the Institute will often be to explore and evaluate concepts and research findings from the point of view of adding to our knowledge of this area, as a research community. This can be different from a professional context, where the aim may be to inform the audience or to recommend certain actions.

You may find that you need to write in a way that feels less authoritative and less practical than you are used to. Notice the tone of the research papers you read, and the way they interact with knowledge claims. Your reading is often your best writing teacher.

5. Your writing may be too colloquial (too casual).

Make sure you are using formal language, and avoid colloquial phrases such as 'every coin has two sides', or 'they've been left on the scrap heap'.

Take the lead from the texts you are reading, and use similar vocabulary and phrasing.

Text comparison

Compare the following two short texts, (A) and (B). How many differences do you see in the second text? What is the function/effect/purpose of each difference?

You will probably notice that (B) is more 'academic', but it is important to understand why.

(A) Extensive reading helps students to improve their vocabulary.

(B) Research conducted by Yen (2005) appears to indicate that, for a significant proportion of students, extensive reading may contribute to an improvement in their active vocabulary. Yen's (2005) study involved learners aged 15-16 in the UK, although it may be applicable to other groups. However, the study involved an opt-in sample, which means that the sample students may have been more 'keen', or more involved in reading already. It would be useful to see whether the findings differ in a wider sample.

(Please note that Yen (2005) is a fictional reference used only as an example).

More analysis of this point is necessary.

Critical Analysis

What does the term 'critical analysis' mean in the context of academic writing?

Showing critical analysis in academic writing could mean:

- Demonstrating your understanding of reading / evidence (This appears to demonstrate that...This implies...This could result in...);
- Showing reasoning and conclusions from your reading / reflections (Therefore...As such...);
- Considering questions such as 'why', 'what if', and 'so what';
- Showing you understand how different ideas / evidence / perspectives relate to each other (This is linked to Smith's concept of X...Building on Jones (2012), Green (2016) suggests...);
- Demonstrating an understanding of how theories or research apply in your practice / context;
- Identifying possible limitations of research / theory and how these relate to your own arguments or own context (In the context of international development...In terms of learning in the Science classroom...);
- Identifying how something could be interpreted or done differently (in relation to your reading and / or practice).

You need to present an argument.

Present an Argument

An argument, in simple terms, is a **claim** plus **support** for that claim. Make sure you use **language** which indicates that you are forming an argument.

Compare the following simplified examples:

Examples of Non-Arguments.

These three examples are claims, or series of claims, but they are not arguments.

- 1: There is no single accepted definition of ethics.
- 2: A new definition of ethics is needed. Here are some existing definitions of the concept of 'ethics'. In addition, here is a suggested new definition.
- 3: The existing definitions of the concept of ethics are too divergent to be useful. In addition, an updated definition of ethics is needed.

Examples of Arguments

These three examples are arguments. Notice the linguistic indicator.

- 1: The existing definitions of the concept of ethics are too divergent to be useful. **Therefore**, an updated definition of ethics is needed.
- 2: The existing definitions of the concept of ethics are too divergent to be useful. **This indicates that** an updated definition of ethics is needed.
- 3: A new definition of the concept of 'ethics' is needed, **because** the existing definitions are inadequate

for the current situation. Here are the existing definitions, and here is why they are inadequate. In conclusion, a new definition is required.

Sometimes, as in the simple examples above, the same information can be used either to construct an argument, or simply to write a description. Make sure you are using **language** which indicates that you are presenting an argument.

Try using very **direct language**, at least in your first draft. This will help you to make sure yourself that you really are constructing an argument.

Examples of Direct Language to show Argument

1: In this paper, **the main claim** I make is that a new definition of ethics is required. **I support this claim** with the following points. Firstly...

2: In this paper, **I argue** that a new definition of ethics is required. **I support this claim** with the following points. Firstly...

N.B. Argumentation can become complex. This page merely presents the difference between presenting an argument and a complete absence of argument.

You need to use more academic caution / You need to use hedging/ This claim is too strong.

Cautious Language and Hedging

Hedging is a type of language use which 'protects' your claims.

Using language with a suitable amount of caution can protect your claims from being easily dismissed. It also helps to indicate the level of certainty we have in relation to the evidence or support.

Compare the following two short texts, (A) and (B). You will notice that although the two texts are, in essence, saying the same thing, (B) has a significant amount of extra language around the claim. A large amount of this language is performing the function of 'hedging'.

Text comparison

Compare the following two short texts, (A) and (B). How many differences do you see in the second text? What is the function/effect/purpose of each difference?

You will probably notice that (B) is more 'academic', but it is important to understand why.

(A) Extensive reading helps students to improve their vocabulary.

(B) Research conducted by Yen (2005) appears to indicate that, for a significant proportion of students, extensive reading may contribute to an improvement in their active vocabulary. Yen's (2005) study involved learners aged 15-16 in the UK, although it may be applicable to other groups. However, the study involved an opt-in sample, which means that the sample students may have been more 'keen', or more involved in reading already. It would be useful to see whether the findings differ in a wider sample.

(Please note that Yen (2005) is a fictional reference used only as an example).

The list below provides some examples of language to use when making knowledge claims.

Try to find examples of hedging language in your own reading, to add to this list.

Phrases for Hedging - Language Function with Example Phrases

1) Quantifiers

some
a fraction
a minority/majority of
a proportion of
to some extent

2) Appearance

appears to
has the appearance of
is similar to
shares characteristics with
appears to be in line with

3) Possibility

might
may
could
can
has the possibility of
has the potential to
is able to

4) Frequency

sometimes
rarely
tends to
has a tendency to

5) Comparatively

in a simpler way than ...
more simply than ...
When compared to ...

6) Context

In the context of ...
...in certain situations...
Within some households...

7) Evidence

Based on ...
As indicated by ...
According to ...

8) Description in language

can be described as
could be considered to be
is sometimes labelled
can be equated to
the term is often used to mean
the term is often used to refer to
this may indicate that ...
this may suggest that ...

Could you clarify this point?

Clarify your writing

Clarify means 'make more clear'. In essence, look at your language choices, and also look at what you have **not** stated.

If you are told to clarify a point, you could try to rewrite it in shorter sentences, as a starting point. Next, add more detail, even if it seems obvious to you.

Compare these two sentences:

1. The common myths are revisited in this paper.
2. This paper includes a discussion of several contested areas, including x and y.

The second sentence is (arguably) clearer, as it has replaced the word 'myth' with 'contested areas', and instead of 'revisited', it uses 'includes a discussion of'. Examples also help to clarify, as they provide the reader with a more concrete illustration of the meaning.

Your conclusion needs improvement.

Conclusion - Basic Components

As with introductions, conclusions vary according to assignment types. In general, your conclusion probably needs to include some or all of the following basic components.

- **An indication that this is the conclusion:** If you are not using a subheading (e.g. '**Conclusion**'), you could start with a clear phrase that indicates this is the conclusion. (e.g. '**In conclusion...**', '**To conclude...**' or '**Overall...**'). Such signposting can help the reader to understand that they have reached the concluding section of your assignment.
- **Summary of the discussion:** This could reflect the aim/purpose and/or organisation/outline indicated in the introduction. (e.g. 'This essay has critically explored X in relation to Y...' or 'This paper set out to examine the relationship between X and Y...').
- **Re-statement of the central argument(s):** This might reflect the thesis statement in the introduction. (e.g. 'The discussion has highlighted the main.....', or 'It has been argued that the priorities for...').

- **Implications:** You could make recommendations for research or practice, or answer the question '**So what?**'. (e.g. It may be useful to investigate further...', 'One recommendation for classroom practice could be...', or 'The above discussion highlights the importance of').

Further guidelines

- You can include references in the conclusion, but it is advisable not to include any new references. This is because you do not have space in the conclusion to discuss any new references in enough detail.
- The conclusion is not generally the place for new ideas. Rather, it summarises what has already been stated.

You need to be more critical.

Critical?

If you have been told your writing is not critical enough, it probably means that your writing treats the knowledge claims as if they are true, well supported, and applicable in the context you are writing about. This may not always be the case.

Example extracts from a critical review

In these two examples, the extracts refer to the same section of text. In each example, the section that refers to a source has been highlighted in bold. The note below the example then explains how the writer has used the source material.

Example a

There is a strong positive effect on students, both educationally and emotionally, when the instructors try to learn to say students' names without making pronunciation errors (Kiang, 2004).

Use of source material in example a:

This is a simple paraphrase with no critical comment. It looks like the writer agrees with Kiang. (This is not a good example for critical writing, as the writer has not made any critical comment).

Example b

Kiang (2004) gives **various examples to support his claim that "the positive emotional and educational impact on students is clear" (p.210) when instructors try to pronounce students' names in the correct way. He quotes one student, Nguyet, as saying that he "felt surprised and happy" (p.211) when the tutor said his name clearly.** The emotional effect claimed by Kiang is illustrated in quotes such as these, although the educational impact is supported more indirectly through the chapter. Overall, he provides more examples of students being negatively affected by incorrect pronunciation, and it is difficult to find examples within the text of a positive educational impact as such.

Use of source material in example b:

The writer describes Kiang's (2004) claim and the examples which he uses to try to support it. The writer then comments that the examples do not seem balanced and may not be enough to support the claims fully. This is a better example of writing which expresses criticality.

You need to develop this point more. / This needs more development.

Developing a Concept

What can you do if the tutor says you need to 'develop this point' or 'develop this concept'?

Overall, to develop the point you need to help the reader to see other angles or aspects of this point.

Try adding the following information:

How to develop a concept

- add another example
- add a practical example ("To illustrate, ...")
- add a counter-example (something which seems to contradict the point)
- add some implications (e.g. "This can mean...", "The implications of this can be ...",)
- add some consequences (e.g. "As a result, ...")
- add a contrasting point, or a situation where the point may not be so relevant. This helps to outline the boundaries of the concept.
- add another perspective (e.g. "From an xyz perspective, it could be considered that...")

This needs more explanation.

Add More Explanation

Adding more explanation means writing down the reasons why something might be the way it is. These examples come from the a discussion of ethics within a student proposal.

In Example A, below, some claims are made without enough explanation. The writing appears vague, and the reader is left asking further questions about the claims.

Example a

The respondents may be worried about their responses, and there are various ethical considerations. Interviewing staff members also brings various ethical issues. Confidentiality will be central and I will need to use pseudonyms for the participants.

In Example B, below, the student has added more explanation. This includes reasons why something might be the case.

Example b

As the respondents will be discussing changes within a small organization, any individuals they mention may be identifiable to other organization members. As a result, respondents may worry that they will be seen to be passing judgement on friends and peers. In terms of ethical issues, uncomfortable feelings may be provoked, both for respondents and possibly for non-participant staff or students.

In addition, staff members may worry that if they speak freely about the small organization, some of their thoughts may be considered irresponsible, unprofessional, "discreditable or incriminating" (Lee & Renzetti, 1993:ix), for example if they were to talk about difficulties at work, or problems within the organization. This means that confidentiality will be central, to protect the respondents and to mitigate their concerns about speaking freely. I will ensure that the organisation is disguised in the way it is written up, and use pseudonyms chosen by the participants. I will also reassure the respondents about these measures before they participate.

I need a clear introduction telling me where you are going.

Introductions

Basic Components

The introduction to your assignment is likely to require some of the following basic components. Note that the guidance below is particularly relevant to **essays**. Other types of assignment may include some but not all of these elements, or additional ones.

- **Importance of the topic:** Open the assignment by introducing the theme(s) or issue(s) you address. This element is sometimes referred to as '**background**' or an '**issue statement**'.
- **Aim:** Inform your reader of the **purpose** of your writing. (e.g. This essay explores the concept of X in relation to Y, and critically evaluates.....).
- **Thesis statement:** This may not apply in all assignments, but, where appropriate, would indicate the line of argument or reasoning that the assignment takes. (e.g. It is argued/suggested that practitioners and policy makers need to consider).
- **Overview:** Guide the reader as to how the work is **organised**; this is sometimes also referred to as a '**synopsis**'. (e.g. First,...X is discussed, followed by Y).

You may also need a brief **definition** of your terms. However, if the definitions are more complex or contested, you probably need a separate section after the introduction. See the page on definitions for an example: [Definitions](#)

It is advisable to write or edit your introduction last (not first), to make sure it matches the assignment you have written. If you prefer to draft your introduction first (e.g. as bullet points initially), be aware that you may choose to change it later.

Example Introduction

Here is an example of the introduction from a report produced for a Masters module:

Underlying this report is the assumption that organisations, and the individuals within them, hold the intention to do their job well, and, if possible, to do their job better, within the context of their particular situation, abilities and priorities. Creating and developing coaching relationships within the organisation can be described as one form of an attempt to move in this direction. Accordingly, this report analyses the potential for an increase in coaching practice within one particular organisation. It will be suggested that coaching might usefully be incorporated into certain areas of the organisation. Coaching within organisations, for the purpose of this report, is taken to refer to a particular type of intentional conversation. This conversation may contribute to the development of the coachee while potentially enhancing the individual's work within the organisation (as discussed by Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize, 2006). The report will first consider a more nuanced definition of coaching, along with an outline of current themes in the way coaching is discussed in the literature. This is followed by an explanation and justification of taking a psychoanalytically informed approach to an analysis of coaching within organisations (Arnaud, 2003). After that, the specific organisational context of the [XYZ workplace] will be analysed, together with an assessment of the need for coaching within this organisation, and an evaluation of the existing potential to facilitate such conversations. At the same time, a brief strategy and implementation plan that details how these needs could be met will be presented.

Source: Blackwell, J. (2013) Advancing coaching and mentoring in and across organisational contexts. Organisational Report. UCL Institute of Education: Unpublished MA Assignment.

Analysis

Below, the elements of the example introduction are analysed in more detail:

Underlying this report is the assumption that organisations, and the individuals within them, hold the intention to do their job well, and, if possible, to do their job better, within the context of their particular

situation, abilities and priorities. Creating and developing coaching relationships within the organisation can be described as one form of an attempt to move in this direction.

These two statements set out the importance of the topic. The way this is done, and the information which is needed, will vary depending on the topic. Please remember that this is only one example.

Accordingly, this report analyses the potential for an increase in coaching practice within one particular organisation.

This sentence states the aim of the assignment, in the context of the abovementioned importance (Accordingly...). It also restates the assignment title/task.

It will be suggested that coaching might usefully be incorporated into certain areas of the organisation.

This is the thesis statement.

Coaching within organisations, for the purpose of this report, is taken to refer to a particular type of intentional conversation. This conversation may contribute to the development of the coachee while potentially enhancing the individual's work within the organisation (as discussed by Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize, 2006).

Here we have a brief definition of the key term, for the purpose of this assignment.

The report will first consider a more nuanced definition of coaching, **along with an outline of** current themes in the way coaching is discussed in the literature. **This is followed by** an explanation and justification of taking a psychoanalytically informed approach to an analysis of coaching within organisations (Arnaud, 2003). **After that,** the specific organisational context of the [XYZ workplace] **will be analysed, together with** an assessment of the need for coaching within this organisation, and an evaluation of the existing potential to facilitate such conversations. **At the same time,** a brief strategy and implementation plan that details how these needs could be met **will be presented.**

This final section provides the outline/structure/organisation, so that the reader knows what to expect.

This essay needs more organisation.

Tutor Feedback on Organisation

Organisation

If the tutor says you need to improve your organisation or structure, you may need to rearrange the ideas in the essay quite considerably. This will take time.

It may help to start on a new document rather than working from this original one, and only moving across the information that you really want to keep.

Try to start each paragraph with a transition phrase or topic sentence. Imagine if the paragraphs were all cut up and spread out on a table. Someone should be able to put them back together in the correct order, and they should be able to clearly see which paragraph comes next. Try to think of that as you are writing!

Your paragraphs need more work.

Paragraphs

If your paragraphs are too long, it could make them more difficult for the reader to follow, and can also mean ideas merge together too much. However, if main body paragraphs are too short, they may appear to lack depth.

If you need to **divide a longer paragraph**, it could be acceptable to include two paragraphs on the same topic, focussing on two slightly different aspects of that topic. You could potentially link them with a transition phrase.

If a main body paragraph is **too short** (fewer than 150 words), you may need to ask yourself the following questions:

- Could it fit somewhere else? Perhaps it links to another sub-theme elsewhere in the assignment.
- What does it add to the discussion? Perhaps state the significance, hence giving the paragraph more depth and making it longer.
- Does it need more detail and analysis? As stated above, perhaps make the significance explicit and answer the question '**So what?**'.
- Could it be removed?

Note that shorter paragraphs may be acceptable in some instances; examples may include introductory paragraphs to chapters (e.g. in a report or dissertation) or transition paragraphs.

Here is an example of several paragraphs all on the same 'topic' (definitions of the terms). Notice how the paragraphs are linked together:

Example Paragraphs

This extract is from the 'definitions' section of a Masters assignment.

Purpose and definitions of coaching

It is arguably worth outlining the boundaries and purpose of the term 'coaching' before proceeding with the discussion. In general, 'coaching' tends to be used within human resource management and organisational theory to refer to a particular type of helping relationship or conversation (Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize, 2006). The object of help **in this context** is subject to some divergences in interpretation. **Indeed**, one feature shared by articles about coaching seems to be that authors frequently point out how little agreement there is on the use of the term, and how inconsistently it is used (see, for example, Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize, 2006 or Gray and Goregaokar, 2010). Some go further, linking the widespread adoption of coaching to the range of interpretations, lamenting that "the very popularity of the approach has resulted in greater confusion" (Clutterbuck, 2008:9), or pointing out with apparent surprise that "despite its popularity, there is little consensus on the nature of executive coaching" (Gray et al, 2011:863). It has even been described as "a kind of 'catch-all' concept, covering whatever you want to put under it" (Arnaud, 2003:1133). Variations appear in areas including the stated aims, the specific approach, the location of the meetings, or the techniques and methods used (ibid). Somewhat paradoxically, there appears to be a general consensus only on the lack of consensus.

In response to the lack of an accepted definition, some authors have attempted to clarify what the term 'coaching' should refer to, and do so in particular by differentiating it from 'mentoring', a concept with which it is often associated. David Clutterbuck, who has been working in the field for at least 30 years, and who has published extensively on the topics of both coaching and mentoring, (David Clutterbuck Partnership, no date), has frequently attempted to delineate the two activities. In a relatively recent article (Clutterbuck, 2008:8), he suggested that the term 'coaching' should primarily be used when performance is addressed, rather than, say, holistic development, a recommendation which highlights that coaching takes place within the context of enhancing productivity at work. The focus on performance is echoed in more practical guidelines such as those written by Atkins and Lawrence (2012:44) in the industry publication *IT Now*, when they state "coaching is about performance, mentoring

is personal".

Although it is often cited, this division between 'performance' and 'personal' could be considered slightly artificial, and even unnecessary. Indeed, as performance is 'performed' by the person, it is interesting to notice what appears to be a denial of the potentially transformational aspect of conversations within a helping relationship. A full discussion of this denial is outside the scope of this short report, but it could be caused by various influencing factors. Those factors might include the wish to justify the allocation of resources towards an activity which should therefore be seen as closely related to profit and accountability, coupled with a suspicion of anything which might be construed as not immediately rational and goal-focused. In other words, to be justifiable within a business context, a belief may exist that coaching should be positioned as closely oriented to business goals. This belief could underlie the prevalence of assertions that coaching is connected more to performance management than to holistic development. **However**, this report takes the view that there may be a useful overlap, as described below.

Looking to research, the overlapping of personal development with performance management was recently addressed by Gray et al (2011), in a study which aimed to establish whether coaching was seen as primarily beneficial to the individual's development or to the organisation's productivity. In brief, Gray et al's (2011) paper indicates that although involvement in coaching might be experienced as therapeutic by many coachees, it is generally positioned in the literature and by companies which engage in it as something beneficial to the organisation, as mentioned above. The authors also concluded that coaching may enhance various management competencies. Overall, the study indicates that coaching may be of interest to organisations as something which may enhance staff performance and productivity. In addition, although it does not always appear as the primary focus, and is even denied as an intention by some authors as discussed above, it may be that participation in coaching could also bring developmental benefits to the individual.

In essence, this report takes the view that the term coaching refers to an arranged conversation or series of conversations within a work context, conversations which aim at allowing the coachee to discuss and gain clarity on various work-related challenges or goals. Although we will adhere to the general conception provided above of coaching as carrying the intention of enhancing performance or competencies, the potential for personal or holistic development will be acknowledged. Additionally, coaching is often linked in literature to leadership (Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize, 2006; Stern, 2004), yet this report does not adopt that pattern in a restrictive sense. In other words, we would either consider that participating as a coachee can be useful for any employee, not only leaders, or, alternatively, we would broaden the definition of 'leadership' to include any colleague who may have an influence within the organisation: a description which could arguably include any staff member. Overall, therefore, the report and its recommendations will prioritise the potentially beneficial outcomes of conversations which fall within the realm of coaching, rather than restricting the discussion to whether or not any particular activity can legitimately be given this term. This may be a broader usage of the concept than that followed by some writers, but is grounded in the intention to provide a practicable analysis of the needs for coaching within an organisation. Within this context, this report is predominantly informed by psychoanalytic theory and practice, justified below.

Source: Anonymous UCL Institute of Education Student (2013).

I cannot see evidence of your reading

Referencing FAQs

As Hyland (1999) describes, referencing is central to academic writing.

"Reference to previous work is virtually mandatory in academic articles [...] as a strategy for supporting current claims" (Hyland, 1999, p. 362).

What is the purpose of referencing?

The simplest way to think of referencing is to imagine that your reader might want to find out more about a piece of information, or check the facts for themselves. Your reference shows them where to look.

When do I need a reference?

It is important to provide correct references for any information which you give in your essay. Information could include ideas, facts, phrases, or anything else.

This means that you need to include references for all information, even if it is from something which you do not consider 'academic', such as an unregulated website. (Technically, it is probably best to avoid these sources of information anyway).

What if I use paraphrasing?

You need to provide a reference whether or not you are using the exact words. Even if you change the words, someone might want to find out more about the information you are referring to.

If you use the same words as the original, you need to use quotation marks around this section, followed by the reference. If you do not use the same words, you do not need the quotation marks, you only need the reference itself. Make sure you include a list of references at the end of your essay. See the referencing guidelines for how to do all of this.

Are there other reasons to reference?

Referencing makes your point more convincing. Your reference shows that this information has been published somewhere, and you did not just make it up. If it is an opinion, your reference shows that other people writing in this area also share your opinion, which makes the opinion more interesting for your academic reader.

What about my own ideas?

Sometimes you might want to think of your opinion as unique. It might be a coincidence that someone else thought of the same idea as you. Even if it is a coincidence, and you thought of the opinion by yourself, putting a reference to someone who also thought this way makes your opinion seem more valid to the academic community, as it is not simply one person's idea. Sometimes, it might be the case that you are the first person to have thought of an idea. If that is the case, you need to show how your idea is different from another person's idea. In all of these situations, you still need references!

How much referencing do I need?

It is a good idea to have a reference for every claim you make, if possible. Do not worry about using referencing too often. As a general rule, it is better to use the references too often than not enough. This does not refer to the number of different authors/texts, but the frequency of citing those authors. It should be high-frequency overall.

You may have been given some advice not to use too many references. This advice means you don't need to have a long list of authors that you didn't read properly. Instead, it is better to use fewer texts, but read them in more detail.

You may follow the examples on this site, or you may use a slightly different format. The most important aspect is to be consistent and use the same format for all your references.

What if I use an author who is mentioned by another author?

In this situation, you need to use 'cited in'. It is often useful to describe the secondary quotation a little more, and show how it fits in with the first author.

Here is an example. The writer had read Gray et al (2011) but wanted to mention another reference they used.

Example: Secondary citation

To further support their argument, Gray et al (2011:866) summarise a number of other studies which reported positive evaluations of coaching by coachees, including statistics such as "participants estimated return on investment of 5.7 times the initial cost" (McGovern et al, 2001, cited in Gray et al,

2011:866). Studies such as these appear to indicate that coaching can be worthwhile for the individual and the organisation.

Source: Anonymous UCL Institute of Education student (2013)

In this example, only Gray et al (2011) will appear in the reference list at the end of the assignment, as this is the only one that the student has read as a primary source.

What if I can't find a reference for the exact point I want to make?

You can often say that something is similar to an author's point, or connected to an author's point. You can even say that something contradicts an author's point. Using a reference doesn't only mean showing exactly where the information came from. It can also mean showing how information is connected to something that is published. It could also mean showing how an author's statement may be applied in a different context. Here is an example of something similar to this:

Example: Using a reference to show connections

As some of Bion's (1961) work has shown, groups can be particularly resistant to learning, preferring (if we can speak of a group as having a "preference") to preserve itself. As learning often means movement and change, it can be resisted by a group. Whether or not an 'organisation' can be considered equivalent to a 'group' in this context is outside the scope of this discussion, but insights such as those from Bion's work have been applied very usefully to analyses of the way that organisations may function in particularly conservative ways (see, for example, Armstrong, 2005). It can be useful to remember this when working with various staff members within an organisation.

Source: Anonymous UCL Institute of Education student (2013)

This needs a reference.

Referencing and Plagiarism

It is essential you record what you have read and referred to in your written work, both within the text (citing) and at the end of your written work (bibliography). It is vital that you acknowledge what resources – print and electronic (including the Web) - you have referred to in your assignment, dissertation or thesis. If you don't, you can be accused of plagiarism - the unacknowledged use of other people's words and ideas. This is cheating.

Check your course handbook or ask your supervisor about the preferred citation style for your School.

REMEMBER - you can lose marks for poor referencing.

Help and advice

Visit the [Student Learning Service](#) site for advice on how to avoid plagiarism.

Library Guides on Referencing

[Referencing and citing - an introduction](#)

[Referencing and citing - Harvard](#)

[Referencing and citing - Vancouver/Uniform](#)

[Referencing for Business students](#)

[Referencing for Education students](#)

[Referencing for Law students \(OSCOLA\)](#)

[Referencing for Music Students](#)

Is this relevant?

State the Relevance

State directly how each point, or each paragraph, is connected to the title or to the overall argument. If you feel that a point is relevant, but you have received feedback that your tutor does not, you could consider adding more explanation as to how or why it is connected.

Useful phrases include:

This is important because...

This is relevant to X because...

In terms of [the main topic], this means...

The significance of this is ...

This essay lacks structure.

Tutor Feedback on Organisation

If the tutor says you need to improve your organisation or structure, you may need to rearrange the ideas in the essay quite considerably. This will take time.

It may help to start on a new document rather than working from this original one, and only moving across the information that you really want to keep.

Try to start each paragraph with a transition phrase or topic sentence. Imagine if the paragraphs were all cut up and spread out on a table. Someone should be able to put them back together in the correct order, and they should be able to clearly see which paragraph comes next. Try to think of that as you are writing!

You have not addressed the title.

Titles and Instructions

You may be given essay or assignment titles which you will need to interpret. If you are setting your own title, you still need to make sure the writing matches the title.

The title is not simply an invitation to write anything you like about the topic. It will be asking for something specific, and is often closely related to the module content and the module reading.

What should I read for this assignment?

Reading is a very important part of any assignment.

Start with the recommended reading lists for the module, and for the session(s) which relate to this title (if relevant).

Although you will need to read more widely, do not try to 'start from scratch', or you will risk spending a lot of time searching through unrelated material. Start with your reading list, as the tutors have recommended these articles and books for a reason!

How can I analyse the title?

You can analyse your title using the following questions:

a) Which theory (or theories) is this question asking for?

Can you think of theories from the module which relate to this question?

b) What perspective(s) could you use to answer this question? Which perspective seems most suitable for you to use?

For example, a policy perspective, a critical race perspective, the perspective of the children, the perspective of a researcher.

c) What would you need to add to the question to be able to answer it?

For example, you may need to add the particular perspective you will use, or any definitions of terms.

d) Which terms would need to be defined for the purposes of your essay?

The page on definitions may help: [Definitions](#)

e) What position(s) could you take with relation to this question?

How could you actually answer the question? Is it a question where you could say yes/ no/ to some extent? Is it a question asking for a solution, or is it simply asking whether something is a problem? This is another way of saying what is your main thesis, or your main point.

f) Which examples could you use to help illustrate, support or explain your claims?

You may decide to use a combination of examples from your reading, examples from real-life experience, or even hypothetical examples. Remember that these examples will have different levels of importance within the essay.

Example titles

These example title formats may help you to devise your own title. You can also analyse them using the questions above, to help understand what tutors might expect when they set a title.

1. "The model of how people make choices presented by Krishnamurthy and Nagpal (2010) is too rational to be useful". Discuss.
2. To what extent might marketers be able to affect the decisions which consumers make?
3. Is there a solution to the problem of our insufficient understanding of how people make decisions?
4. What is the relationship between the order people view products, and their final choice of product? Discuss the possible significance of this relationship.
5. With reference to at least TWO studies, compare approaches to the study of how people make decisions.
6. To what extent are you convinced by Bruce's (2011) position regarding approaches to decision making?

I don't follow what you mean here, can you say a bit more?/ I'm not sure I understand this.

Clarify your writing

Clarify means 'make more clear'. In essence, look at your language choices, and also look at what you have **not** stated.

If you are told to clarify a point, you could try to rewrite it in shorter sentences, as a starting point. Next, add more detail, even if it seems obvious to you.

Compare these two sentences:

1. The common myths are revisited in this paper.
2. This paper includes a discussion of several contested areas, including x and y.

The second sentence is (arguably) clearer, as it has replaced the word 'myth' with 'contested areas', and instead of 'revisited', it uses 'includes a discussion of'. Examples also help to clarify, as they provide the reader with a more concrete illustration of the meaning.

Help and Advice

If you need further help or support in regard to Academic Feedback, please speak to your tutor or lecturer in the first instance, or you can make a 1-2-1 online appointment with the Student Learning Service: please complete the [study advice request form](#) or email: sls@abdn.ac.uk.

The information in this document has been kindly shared by the Writing Centre at University College London.