

YOUR ASSIGNMENT – THE FINAL CHECK

Assignment writing is a complex task. It starts as a rough draft and finishes with editing, proofing and checking details.

CHECK ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS

Check that your assignment matches the requirements set by the lecturer. Check:

- format (e.g., report, reflection, essay);
- word count (usually plus or minus 10%);
- presentation (including font, page size, spacing, coversheet); and
- referencing format (e.g., Harvard, APA).

If word count high:

Check the necessity of each paragraph, then delete or condense.

If word count low:

Check your plan, insert missing points or expand points.

CHECK CLARITY, LOGIC AND CONCISENESS

How to proof:

Use a ruler or card to focus your eyes to a single sentence.

Read assignment out loud.

Get a critical (and honest) friend to read it.

- Structure should be logically consistent; conclusion matches the topic and evidence supports your argument.
- Headings and subheadings (if required) need to be correct and consistent with the assignment question.
- Tables, figures and diagrams (if required) must be correct and support the assignment argument or question.
- Language should be clear and concise, and free of unnecessary jargon (except for appropriate discipline specific terms).
- Calculations must be correct.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR

- Check spelling, using spell check and a dictionary.
- Check that your sentences have a subject and a verb.
- Check that the sentence means what you want it to mean.
- Check that you have written in sentences, with capital letters and full stops.
- Make sure you have written in third person and not first or second (unless allowed specifically by the lecturer).
- Make sure your subject matches its verb and any pronouns used.
- Check you do not have sentences that are long and contain too many ideas (run on sentences).
- Check you have no sentence fragments.
- Check your use of apostrophes.

Using a ‘spell-check’

Use of the ‘spell check’ is essential when creating and checking your written assignment. But using the spell check alone is not enough. The spell check as its name suggests, deals only with spelling. It cannot confirm whether or not you have chosen the right word. For this you need to know what words you really want (e.g. from or form), and that the word is used in a grammatically correct way. Ensure that your spell check is in Australian English not American spelling. In specialist courses ensure that you have a subject dictionary to check discipline specific words.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR TROUBLESHOOTER

Improving your spelling

Each discipline has its own specialist words. You will be expected to know and spell these correctly. In this situation, prepare a list of words you find difficult. Use this list or a discipline specific dictionary when proofing your assignment.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used for a variety of purposes in writing. Some are acceptable in academic writing, others are not.

- Apostrophes used in words like **can't** or **don't** or **I've**, are **not acceptable** in academic writing. In these words the apostrophe is used when letters are omitted from a word; called a contraction.
- Apostrophes used in words like **cat's**, in the phrase, **the cat's paw**, are used to show ownership. This use of apostrophe is acceptable in academic writing.
 - Ownership for singular nouns ⇒ add an apostrophe S, after the noun e.g., ship's mast
 - Ownership for plural nouns ⇒ add an apostrophe only after the plural noun, e.g., ships' masts, or cats' paws
 - Some nouns do not add -s or -es to make a plural, e.g., children, men, women. Ownership for these nouns is like singular nouns. ⇒ children's status

The special cases of *its* and *it's*

- When using the word *its* to show possession, no apostrophe is used. For example - *This organisation has a well known welfare supporter as its president.*
- The word *it's*, is used only as a contraction of it is. For example - *It's (it is) an important piece of research on pollution.* - 'It's' is never used to indicate ownership.

Words that sound the same but are spelt differently.

They include words like: their and there, see and sea, practice and practise, effect and affect. You will need to check these words carefully. You may need to use your dictionary.

Use of the word *being*

The word *being* is not a verb when used alone. It is used to introduce a phrase.

The politician being concerned with children's welfare. - is not a complete sentence.

Being concerned with children's welfare, the politician opposed the reduction in welfare payments.

This is a complete sentence, but as it does not follow the pattern of subject + verb + rest of sentence, it is generally better to restructure the sentence and omit the word *being*.

The politician opposed the reduction in welfare payments because he was concerned with children's welfare.

'Run-on' sentences

Sentences should not be too long or contain too many ideas.

Smith (2006, p. 22) reported that all refugees were sent to location A, however, over eighty percent were in poor health when they arrived. - is a long complicated sentence and should be written as two sentences.

Smith (2006, p. 22) reported that all refugees were sent to location A. Over eighty percent of the refugees were in poor health when they reached their destination.

RESOURCES

- Other QUICK TIPS FOR STUDENTS <http://www.usq.edu.au/learningcentre/tipshtm>
- Online resources
<http://www.usq.edu.au/learningcentre/alsonline/gramwrit/>
- Talk with a tutor at The Learning Centre (tlc@usq.edu.au)