

# REPORT WRITING STANDARDS

These standards are typical of standards which an employer might require you to use. They are presented here as standards which a lecturer might specify that you must use.

## 1 Typing and Presentation Standards

### 1.1

Reports should be always be wordprocessed. Usually they will be printed with portrait orientation; but individual pages can be printed in landscape if required. Printouts should be produced on a laser or inkjet printer. Dot matrix or lineprinter output is not normally suitable. Assignment reports can be presented in a thin plastic folder.

Reports should be printed in 10, 11 or 12 point Arial font. The text should be aligned to the left with a ragged right edge.

The report title should be centred and emboldened and can be in a very large font.

### 1.2 Margins

A 2.5cm (or 1") margin should be used on the left- and right-hand sides of the paper. Margins of at least these dimensions should also be used at the top and bottom, although headers and footers will intrude into this space.

### 1.3 Paragraph, line and sentence spacing

- Single line spacing must be used within paragraphs.
- One blank line should be left between paragraphs.
- Widows and orphans should not occur - that is that a page must not contain only a single line of any paragraph. Many wordprocessing programs will do this automatically.
- Headings must occur on the same page as the start of their first paragraph.
  
- Each full stop, question or exclamation mark should be followed by 2 spaces.
- Each comma, and other punctuation within a sentence, should be followed by 1 space.
- Never put space characters before punctuation marks.
- Tab stops should be set to 1cm unless a wider spacing is essential.

### 1.4 Section numbering

A decimal system should be used to identify sections in the main report. Numbering should not extend to the appendices or abstract.

Main sections 1, 2, 3, .... in bold, capitals, 14 point font.  
Sub-headings 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, .... in ordinary 12 point font.  
Paragraph headings 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3, ....

It is not essential for every section to have a heading. It is not essential for every paragraph to be numbered. Only number paragraphs concerning a new sub-topic.

These section numbers should be used in cross references such as

"... This is expanded upon later see para 3.1.1. "

Technical note: Many wordprocessors provide facilities to automatically generate such numbering schemes and automatically keep the numbering correct after amendments.

## 1.5 Insetting

Each level of heading shall be inset by 1cm from the previous level. However it may be necessary to indent by 1.5cm (or more) where the paragraph numbers become rather long.

Paragraphs must not be inset from their paragraph heading. Also the first line of a paragraph should not be indented.

## 1.6 Lists

Items in a list should not be indented. Items should be indicated with bullet markers. However where there is some ordering to the items, or a specific number of them, they should be numbered.

Technical note: Most wordprocessors support lists using at least one level of bullet markers or numbering.

## 1.7 Illustrations

Illustrations should, wherever possible, be included in the text below the paragraph that refers to them. The use of an appropriate illustration or graph is often very helpful to the reader and may avoid the need to try to describe something complex with words alone. For instance in a document describing computer software a carefully composed screen dump can be invaluable. However illustrations, charts, tables or other graphics images should never, ever be used solely for decorative purposes.

Technical note: In Windows, screens can be captured using the 'Printscreen' key. This places the image on the Clipboard. Windows'

paste facilities, such as Ctrl+v, can be used to paste this screen into the document as needed.

Illustrations may be drawn in pencil or black ink but whenever possible they should be produced by computer. Colour, if available, should only be used if it helps communication and should not be used merely for decoration.

Illustrations should normally be numbered so that figure 6.3 is the third illustration in Chapter 6 or simply numbered through the report as, for instance, figure 13.

### 1.7 New Pages

A new page should be started for each new main section unless it is possible to combine two very short complete sections onto a single page.

Pages must be numbered at the bottom right, within the footer. The footer may also contain the organisation name, if required. The header should contain the author's name and report title.

### 1.8 Capital letters

The following should be typed in capital letters:

- Main headings
- First letter of first word of sub-headings
- First letter of first word of sentences
- First letter of proper names
- First letter of each item in a list
- Abbreviations (usually) eg UK, ISO, HCI

so it's 'Word for Windows version 6' and not 'word for windows Version 6'.

### 1.9 Brackets and quotes

Spaces must be included outside the brackets or quotation marks - not inside. For example

... takes place in the central processing unit (C.P.U.).

According to Gower (1998) this means that "the situation is at danger levels".

### 1.10 Underlining

Underlining may be used to give emphasis to words or phrases in the text but, since underlining disrupts the flow of the word-shape, emboldening is usually better.

### 1.11 Bold text

Bold text should be used for major headings and, in moderation, for emphasising individual words in the text.

### 1.12 Italics text

Italics can be used to indicate foreign words or some different form of text, maybe a quotation. It gives a less bold impression than even normal text.

## 2 Writing standards

You should write in a style to suit your audience. For most purposes you should aim to write for a reading age of 12 or under. This is equivalent of a Flesch fog index score of at least 70.

Whilst a report should not have any spelling or grammar mistakes, a low rate of errors (say about 1 per page) will usually be overlooked by the reader.

References must be given to all information sources used and listed at the end of the report, adhering rigidly to the following format:

Yeates, D. (1994), **Systems Analysis and Design**, London, Pitman Publishing

Rodgers, Simon, and Roethlisberger, David (1952), Barriers and Gateways to Communication, **Harvard Business Review**, July 1952, 10(4), pp 46-50

Within the report these must be referred to as (Yeates 1994) and (Rodgers and Roethlisberger 1952).

For more guidance on how to write references correctly, see below:

## REFERENCES, QUOTES AND PLAGIARISM

A crucial feature of all academic writing is the use of references and quotations. It is essential that you use them; it is essential that you use them correctly. Quotations and references are used to give credibility to your writing - they are your evidence for the points you are making.

There are three aspects to correct quoting and referencing:

- how to write a quote
- how to reference sources of ideas and quotes
- how to structure items in the reference and bibliography sections

### 1. Quotes

Quotes form an essential part of most academic writing and how you present them is important. Quotes should stand out from your text, but verify it, i.e. your quote should be there to make or support a point.

- Twenty words or less can be incorporated in the body of your text, in which case they need quotation marks round them.
- Quotes of more than twenty or so words should be indented. There is no need to put quotation marks around an indented quote.
- Quotes should be as short as possible and easy to read. If you want to leave bits out, put '...' to show that you have. If you need to add a word or two for it make sense, then put them in square brackets [ ]. For example:

Jones (1993) feels that "this debate [on politics] needs more discussion ... in the institution", although other authors (for example Smith 1998) disagree.

### 2. Referencing Sources and Quotes

**You must always reference information sources and quotes properly. This tells the reader where you got your information from.**

In the text, just after the quote, give in brackets: author's last name, date of publication, and, if possible, the page number. For example:

"This is not a very crucial issue for most readers." (Smith 1989 p13)

Similarly, when you mention a source of information you must reference it correctly, with author's name and date in brackets at the end of the sentence. **This is needed even if you didn't quote from it.** For example:

This theory has been refined and is now well understood and documented (Allen 1989).

To get your sentence to read correctly you can refer to the author in the sentence itself. For example:

Allen (1989) discovered that this was not always true.

If you have read four books which all say the same thing, you can refer to them collectively. For example:

As many writers (Smith 1989, Jones 1990, Matthews 1990, Ihenacho 1992) have said, the opposite is sometimes the case.

Sometimes you might want to repeat a quote extracted by someone else. This can be indicated as

"... this is an absolutely crucial matter but one which is often ignored" (Millar 1993 cited in Jones 1998)

and with both authors' works listed in the reference list.

### 3. Reference and Bibliography sections

References are needed for all material which you have directly referred to or quoted from in your report. They should be listed, in the Reference section, in alphabetical order of author's last name.

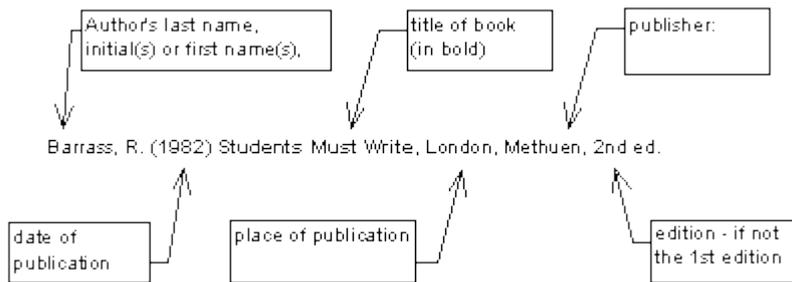
A Bibliography is the list of background material you have read or referred to for your work, but may not have used directly in your report. Some lecturers are happy for you to list the referenced and background material together in a Bibliography, some want them as separate sections, some don't want the background references at all. If in doubt, ask.

**Don't ever leave the references/bibliography out.** They give your work academic credibility. Even reports on practical issues should be supported by evidence of further reading. You are often asked to relate theory to practice. You cannot do this without reading, quoting and referencing.

### 4. Writing Reference and Bibliography items

There are several standard styles of referencing. However the style shown below, based on BS1629 (1989), gives precise rules as to how you should write references both in terms of the items of information which should be provided and in the order and way in which they are written.

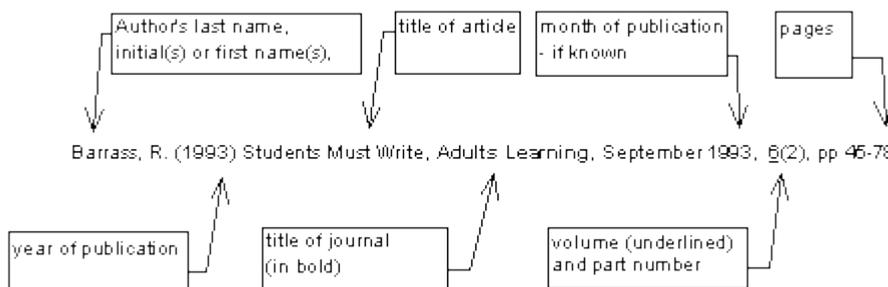
- **Books:** Author's last name, initial(s) or first name(s), (ed) if he/she is the editor rather than the author, date of publication, title of book, place of publication (optional), name of publisher, edition number.



and

Jones, K. (ed) (1997) **The IT Age**, My Press

- **Journal articles:** Author's last name, initial(s) or first name(s), date of publication, title of article, title of journal, details of journal, month, volume, part, pages, etc:



and

Rodgers, Simon, and Roethlisberger, David (1952), **Barriers and Gateways to Communication**, *Harvard Business Review*, July 1952, 10(4), pp 46-50

- **More than one author**

1. If there is between one and three authors, cite them all as they appear on the book or article. For example:

Coe, N. Ryecroft, R. and Ernest, P.

2. If there are more than three, cite the first one and then use '*et al.*' (meaning 'and others'). For example:

Coe, N. *et al.*

- **Internet URLs**

There are, as yet, no established rules concerning the format for internet URL references. However the same principles should be used. Often it will not be possible to identify a specific author but it is usually possible to identify the 'authoring organisation'. Give the date the pages were accessed in square brackets.

FALLA, Rob (1998), The Future of Forms, **Web Review**, [24 April 1998], URL: <http://webreview/wr/pub/98/04/24/feature/index.html>

School of Computing and IT, University of Wolverhampton (1998), **UK Sensitive Maps**, [27 January 1998], URL: <http://www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/ukinfo/uk.map.html>

## 5. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of using other people's words as if they were your own. It is an attempt to gain an unfair advantage and is therefore one form of cheating. It is a very serious academic offence since it is a violation of the objectives of a university education.

If you make a point, without saying where you got that idea from then the reader will assume that you created this idea. If however this is not the case then you have plagiarised it; you have stolen the idea and presented it as though it were your own. This is cheating.

**WARNING:** It is always obvious when a student has lifted words from a text without referencing, as there is a change of writing style each time. If you do not reference your work correctly, it will come across as if you had 'stolen' words or ideas from other sources. This is plagiarism, it is considered to be cheating and can have serious consequences.

Much of this appendix is extracted from Coventry University (1997), **Undergraduate Modular Courses** booklet which is given to all students at enrolment.