

The ECO Guide to Study Skills

CONTENTS

Making the most of lectures	2
Note taking	4
Time Management	7
How to get the most out of seminars	11
Planning and delivering a presentation	13
Essay Writing	19
Referencing your work	24
Avoiding plagiarism	28
Revision and Exam Skills	30
Skills you will acquire in ECO	33
Life after UEA	34
Appendix 1: Essay presentation and layout	35
Appendix 2: Grammar and punctuation	36
Appendix 3: Typing your essays	45

Making the most of lectures

Although your ECO lectures will provide you with the key points about the topic, it is important that you supplement your lecture notes by reading the additional material suggested in your module outline.

Preparing for lectures

Find out whether the seminars prepare you for the lecture, or follow up the lecture material. In ECO it is very likely that seminars will follow up the lecture material and give you opportunities to improve your understanding of particular topics.

Look at the recommended reading in your module outline and try to do this before the lecture. It will then be easier for you to understand the lecture material.

When you listen to the lecture, try and focus on the structure of the lecture content. You may be given a handout at the start of the lecture – this will provide you with the structure and you can easily make extra notes.

If you are not provided with a handout listen out for the lecturer's **verbal signposts** such as "My next point is" ; "Turning now to....".

These signposts will identify a new point and your notes can reflect this.

Other signposts include pausing and summarising.

Taking notes

- Use headings to order information
- Give each point a new line or number it
- Highlight examples and illustrations
- Separate digressions from the main points
- Use your own words and don't try to make detailed notes
- Use keywords to represent points
- Use abbreviations or develop your own 'shorthand'
- Make sure that you label diagrams correctly

Following up lectures

Ask for clarifications either in the lecture or at the end. Use seminars to discuss material and again clarify any points that you do not understand. Review your notes as soon as possible so that you can highlight any areas which need more information on, or which you do not understand.

Overcoming problems

Note taking during the lecture will help you concentrate. However, if you find that you cannot keep up then leave a space and compare your notes with another student's. Most ECO lecturers put detailed notes on the Blackboard site so you can go through the lecture and complete your notes in your own time.

Talking during lectures

Talking during a lecture is unacceptable and you may be asked to leave the room. Students who constantly talk during lectures are not helping themselves or their fellow students. Most students are mature enough to realise this and go to their lectures to listen and learn.

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. It has been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guide *Making the Most of Lectures* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Note taking

Making effective notes

The three main reasons for note taking are:

- to select
- to understand
- to remember.

Taking notes to select

When you are making notes for an essay, report or seminar paper, you will need to understand and select information. Use your essay title or question to provide the focus for your note taking and select your information accordingly.

Always make sure that a text is relevant to your needs. Do this by checking:

- the year of publication - how up to date is the information?
- the contents page and index - are there specific areas devoted to your topic?
- the introduction or preface - do they give an overview of the text?
- the beginnings and endings of promising chapters - are the chapters worth reading closely?

When you know the text has the information you need you can begin to make notes.

- Begin by recording the details you will need for your bibliography i.e. *author, date, place of publication, and publisher.*
- Use your own words to check you understand each point.
- Check that each point you record is relevant to the task in hand.
- Record the chapter and page number for use in referencing and so that you can easily retrace your steps should you need to check a point in your notes later on.
- Take down all quotations in inverted commas with full reference details. This will allow you to identify and acknowledge other writers' words in your essay or report.

Organising your information

- Use main and sub headings and numerical lists to organise your notes.
- Use keywords to summarise each point in the margin. A quick keyword reference is good for taking an overview of your notes.
- Use colour to categorise points, make headings stand out and show links between points and ideas.

Taking notes to understand

Use the following techniques to improve your understanding of the material

Underlining and highlighting

This will help you to identify the most important aspects of the text.

- Use underlining or highlighting in your own copy of texts or on photocopies, never on borrowed books. Small post-it notes could be used in borrowed books instead.
- As you read, select what seem to you to be central words and phrases that convey the key meaning of the text. Remember to be selective.

Using your own words

Putting the information into your own words is a more active way to engage with the text and gives you a chance to check that you understand the material.

Taking notes to remember

When preparing for exams, you will need to select, understand and remember information. The following techniques will help you recall the content of your notes.

(i) Use keywords to help you remember important information.

(ii) Using colour and image to help you visualise a page of notes in your mind – use different colours to represent different topics and themes. Choose an image that is humorous or has personal associations as this will be even easier to remember.

(iii) Use index cards to organise key concepts and ideas.

(iv) Use diagrams in your notes. These can:

- help you gather and hold large amounts of information on one page;
- enable you to create an overview of a large topic or subject area;
- help you see links and connections in your notes;
- provide a powerful aid to memory by using the association of word, image, number, colour and spatial awareness;
- attract and hold the interest of the eye/brain.

Further guidance and information

If you are still unclear about taking notes, you can talk to your lecturer or Personal Adviser, or make an appointment to see one of the **Learning Enhancement Tutors** in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 593676
Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk

There are further resources on many other aspects of academic writing available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website:
www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

Support for International Students

International Students for whom English is not the first language should take advantage of the range of academic English support programmes provided in conjunction with INTO, which are designed to assist non-English speakers with their studies. Further information on INTO courses can be found at <http://www.uea.ac.uk/into/>.

The Dean of Students Office also has a dedicated Learning Enhancement Tutor, [Anna Magyar](#). Anna is available to help and advise international students on all aspects of their academic studies, including assignments, dissertations and theses. Students can book an appointment in the Dean of Students office or by telephoning 592761. They can send a question via email (dos.help@uea.ac.uk). Anna is also available between 4-5 pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for brief enquiries.

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. It has been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guide *Effective Note Making* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Time Management

When you first start to study in ECO you may think that coursework deadlines, seminar presentations and examinations are a long way ahead. However, if you do not learn to manage your time effectively you may find that you struggle to meet deadlines later in the semester. As there are penalties for late submission of coursework it is important to plan ahead and not lose valuable marks by handing work in late.

Planning your time

Planning is an essential part of being organised. It involves predicting your future commitments and setting aside enough time to meet them. Successful planning gives you confidence and purpose.

Here are some steps to successful planning.

1. Looking ahead

An important first step is to establish:

- what you need to do (e.g. coursework/taught sessions/private study)
- when things need to be done by (e.g. deadlines for assessed work)
- how long they are likely to take (e.g. time spent in taught sessions/time required to write an essay or prepare for a presentation).

Read through your course handbooks and other information related to your modules to establish the demands that will be placed upon your time.

2. Making plans

Once you have established your commitments, it might be useful to enter these on a plan or calendar. Plan each semester at a time.

Continually review your long term plan, assessing your achievements or adding further information as it arises.

3. Breaking up time

To begin taking control of your time you will need to break it up into manageable amounts. Try the following strategies for planning each day a week at a time.

Planning the week

Your study time over a week will be divided into two broad areas:

- your contact time or taught sessions (lectures, tutorials, sessions in the computer lab)
- your private study activities (working on projects, reading for an essay, preparing for a seminar).

Draw up a timetable for the week showing each day and each hour within that day. Blank week timetables are available from the Dean of Students' office. Fill in your taught sessions for the week ahead. This will give you a clear idea of the time you can allocate to other activities, showing you when you have time and how much time is available.

Now begin to allocate time to your other activities. Make the best use of all the time – for example:

- use an evening to plan your essay
- use an hour between lectures to visit the library
- use a ten minute bus journey to review your lecture notes.

Try to fit the right tasks to the right time slots. Don't try to write a presentation in half an hour at the end of the day if you know you will be tired. Move this activity to a more suitable time when you will have the energy to complete the task to your best abilities. Instead, attempt more mundane tasks such as organising notes.

When planning your week, remember to balance your long-term commitments with your short-term ones. Effective time management involves doing the right thing at the right time.

Planning a day

Each day, review your week plan to make sure that it is up to date. Also, if you find it helpful, make a plan for the day.

- Use your day plan to add discipline to your working day.
- Be active with your plan. Tick off completed tasks and keep a check on uncompleted activity.
- Avoid overburdening your day plan - only set out to complete realistic tasks.

4. Setting priorities

You may find that within a week you will need to tackle more than one task at a time. Find a way of putting multiple tasks in order, establishing a list of priorities.

5. Reviewing progress

It is important to continually review your plan to make sure that it is up to date. It is possible that unforeseen circumstances have prevented you completing a particular task. You may need to rethink your next week's schedule.

Using your time effectively

It is important to find ways of motivating your mind and stimulating your thoughts when working for an extended period. Begin a work session by making sure that the task is achievable in the time set; you can always divide a big task into smaller tasks. Setting clear, attainable goals will improve your motivation considerably.

- Set a definite end point - *"I know I will have finished when..."*.
- Set clear rewards - *"When I have finished I will ..."*

If you have a few study tasks that you don't enjoy doing, try to do them first so you can then move onto the topics you find more interesting.

How to keep going

Make sure that you introduce variety into your work. If you do the same thing for too long you may cease to be productive. Break up long periods of activity by checking what you have achieved or reviewing your objectives. Make the most of natural breaks; pause when you come to the end of a chapter or complete an exercise. Take these opportunities to reward yourself and rekindle enthusiasm.

Taking breaks and knowing when to stop

Take breaks when and if you need to. This may be when your concentration is slipping, or when you have been staring at the computer screen for too long. However, keep thinking about your work - this is important if you are to resume work in a productive and focused way.

Once you have achieved your tasks, stop working. Maintain a sense of achievement and carry this through to your next work session.

Know your own obstacles

There are many reasons why we avoid using time effectively. Some of these include:

- lack of motivation;
- poor concentration;
- noisy working environment.

Try to be active in overcoming your personal obstacles.

Further guidance and information

If you are still unclear about organising your time, you can talk to your lecturer or Personal Adviser, or make an appointment to see one of the **Learning Enhancement Tutors** in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 593676
Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk

There are further resources on many other aspects of academic writing available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website:
www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. These have been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guides *Organising your time* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



How to get the most out of seminars

In ECO you are required to attend seminars - smaller group teaching - which will support your learning. Module leaders will take a register or circulate a sign-up list - it is your responsibility to ensure that your presence is recorded - remember that 5% of the module grade will reflect your level of academic engagement through seminar attendance.

The seminars will take different formats - some will involve problem solving at the board, others working on computers in one of the IT labs, there may also be debate style classes and finally some will involve teamwork and presentations. Your module outline will provide all of the details about the format and expectations, particularly relating to any assessment of seminar presentations or other forms of participation.

A seminar can be an enjoyable learning experience where students are keen to put forward alternative viewpoints and the discussion flows freely. Of course, the success or failure of a seminar depends on the aims and teaching skills of the tutor - **but it also depends on you and your fellow students**. The seminar is an opportunity for the students to take initiative, using the skills and knowledge of the tutor to assist in their learning.

Sometimes seminars are prone to long embarrassing silences and boring contributions. There may be some students who refuse to participate and others who take over the discussion. If all students are well prepared for the seminar, having done the necessary reading and given it some thought, the seminar will be much more rewarding for the students and the tutor.

If you are preparing a formal seminar presentation, make sure you know how long your tutor expects your presentation to last. If you are working as a team, make sure that you plan the presentation so that everyone has a chance to present. In many ECO modules presentations form part of the coursework assessment, so it is important for the tutor to see that everyone in the team has made a valuable contribution. Try to use visual aids and not just read your notes.

Remember that the presentation should engage your fellow students in a constructive discussion of the topic in hand. Once you have introduced the topic do not sit back and expect the tutor to direct the discussion thereafter. Also, avoid dominating it just because you have more knowledge of the issue than other students; the aim is to draw out their ideas.

If you are shy, don't worry - make sure you are well prepared and use visual aids. The other students will be looking at the overheads or Powerpoint slides rather than you.

Remember that most students are nervous when presenting their work. Be especially sensitive in the case of those fellow students who are evidently shy.

Take notes of points that came up in the seminar. Check them over as soon afterwards as possible and, perhaps, make a few additions. It can also be very valuable, as well as enjoyable, to go for a coffee with a few of the other students in the group and continue the discussion for a while.

Planning and delivering a presentation

During your time as a student in ECO you can expect to make presentations – many of which will be assessed. Learning to give a good presentation is one of the most important transferable skills that you will develop at University as most employers will expect that graduates are able to communicate effectively in this way. You should always plan ahead, especially if you are working as part of a team.

Planning your presentation

What makes a good presentation?

A good presentation makes the best use of the relationship between the presenter and the audience. It takes full consideration of the audience's needs in order to capture their interest, develop their understanding, inspire their confidence and achieve the presenter's objectives.

Planning a presentation

1. Preparation

Many factors affect the design of your presentation. A good presenter will acknowledge and address each of the following:

- objectives
- audience
- venue
- guidelines.

Objectives

You need think about the reasons for making your presentation. In ECO, presentations often form part of your coursework assessment so think about the key points that you wish to make and the best way to put them across to your audience. A presentation to a seminar group might require a balanced argument, so make sure that you read widely. Here are some points you need to consider:

- what do you want your audience to have understood?
- what action do you want your audience to take following your presentation?
- how can you best design your presentation to meet your objectives?

Audience

Your audience will have a variety of different experiences, interests and levels of knowledge. A good presenter will need to acknowledge these and prepare for and respond to them accordingly. Ask yourself:

- how much will your audience already know about your topic?
- how can you link new material to things they might already understand?
- will you need to win them over to a particular point of view?

If you are making a seminar presentation your audience should be familiar with the topic and be prepared to participate in a discussion. However, remember that this may not be the case – you may need to think about ways to generate a discussion after you have given your presentation.

Venue

A large lecture theatre might create a formal atmosphere. Similarly, a seminar room might create a less formal tone. Ask yourself:

- what kind of atmosphere do you wish to create?
- how might the room arrangement affect your relationship with the audience?
- can you do anything to change the arrangement of the room to suit your objectives?
- what audio-visual aids can you use?

Guidelines

Your ECO module outline may set out guidelines for your presentation – if not clarify these with your seminar leader. Where applicable, the module outlines will include a document telling you how your presentation will be assessed. Points to consider:

- how much time have you been allocated?
- are you required to stick to a common format or style?
- have any guidelines been set regarding the content of your presentation (i.e. a predetermined title, or a fixed number of overhead transparencies)?

2. Choosing your main points

Once you have thought about the *design* of your presentation, you can define your main points. Try presenting no more than three main points in a ten minute presentation. Always allow time for an adequate introduction and conclusion. It is difficult for an audience to follow a more complex argument without significant help from the presenter. A powerful presentation delivers information in a logical, structured manner, building on the previous point and avoiding large jumps in sequence.

Ask yourself:

- what are the main points you wish to make?
- are these points structured in a logical, coherent way?
- do these main points reflect your own objectives and take account of the needs of your audience?

3. Choosing your supporting information

The supporting information helps your audience understand, believe in and agree with your main points. This evidence might take the form of factual data, points of detail or an explanation of process. It might be presented in imaginative ways using diagrams, pictures or video segments. Think about:

- what will add *clarity* to your argument (explaining complex terms, reminding your audience of any supporting theories)?
- what will add *authority* to your argument (making connections with other people's work, quoting experts, offering evidence from your own research)?
- what will add *colour* to your argument (showing a video clip or a slide, using a practical example or a vibrant analogy)?

4. Establishing linking statements

The next stage is to develop the linear flow of your presentation. This can be achieved by using linking statements or 'signposts' to show clearly how your main points fit together. Common linking statements include:

- *"The next stage in our project was to ..."*
- *"Another important issue of consideration was ..."*
- *"By following this argument we can now see that ..."*

Linking statements send signals to your audience, highlighting the next point in your argument, linking to earlier ideas or clarifying the stage you have reached in your argument overall. This may be of particular importance in a lengthy presentation where even the most effective presenter has to work hard to keep an audience involved.

5. The introduction

The introduction to your presentation is crucial. It is your first point of contact with your audience; you can either capture or lose your audience's interest in a matter of seconds. Use your introduction to lay a clear foundation for the presentation to follow.

Try using the following structure:

- introduce yourself
- state *what* you will be talking about (a title or subject area)
- state *how* you will be talking about it (e.g. by comparing test results or reviewing the supporting literature)
- state what you intend to be the outcome of your presentation (an informed group, a lively discussion)
- state what you expect your audience to do (listen, take notes, read a handout, ask questions before/during/after).

Always give your audience a moment to absorb this information before moving into your first main point.

6. The conclusion

Your conclusion is important - you can use it to remind your audience of your main points, draw these points to a stimulating conclusion and leave your audience with a lasting impression of the quality of your presentation. The following structure provides a powerful conclusion:

- a review of your title or subject area
 - *"In this presentation I wanted to explore the relationship between X and Y."*
- a summary of your main points
 - *"We have discussed the following points..."*
- a summary of the process you have been through
 - *"By looking at X we have found that Y ..."*
- a conclusion clearly drawn from your main points (this must be supported by the detail of your presentation)
 - *"It is clear that there can be no substantive relationship between X and Y"*

- a parting statement to stimulate your audience's thoughts (this might be a question or a bold comment).

7. Reviewing your presentation

Once you have written your presentation make sure that you review its content. Ask yourself:

- does the presentation meet your objectives?
- is it logically structured?
- have you targeted the material at the right level for your audience?
- is the presentation too long or too short?

Delivering your presentation

Presentation as performance

When you make your presentation you need to think about how you can make an impact – your presentation should be both lively and interesting.

Here are some points to help you become a good presenter.

1. Practise

Make sure that you are familiar with the material; you will feel much more confident if you really know what you are talking about and this will come across to your audience. Try not to rely on reading your notes – use index cards which you can read at a glance, or visual aids such as Powerpoint or overhead transparencies. Practise delivering your presentation in an empty room, or ask a friend to be your 'audience'.

2. Assert yourself

Try to appear confident during your presentation – don't be afraid to ask you audience to settle down if you are ready to start. Also you should stand at the front while delivering your presentation but remember that your audience needs to see your overheads or slides.

3. Make contact with your audience

Here are some ways you can make contact with your audience:

- eye contact – this gives individuals a sense of involvement
- gestures – make sure these are controlled and precise
- spoken contact – at the start ask your audience whether they can hear you; during the presentation you can ask rhetorical questions such as "how do we know this was true?"
- your use of language – use language to involve your audience eg "what can we learn from this?"

4. Use your voice

Make sure that your voice is loud enough for your audience to hear you clearly. Raise or lower the volume to add emphasis.

5. Breathe

Remember to breathe steadily and deeply. Anxiety can make your breathing fast and shallow – this will affect your voice and your ability to speak clearly for long periods of time.

6. Drink

A warm drink will relax your throat and ease your speaking voice, whereas ice-cold water will constrict your throat and affect the quality of your voice. Take a drink with you if you have to speak for a long time.

Further guidance and information

If you are still unclear about planning or delivering a presentation, you can talk to your lecturer or Personal Adviser, or make an appointment to see one of the **Learning Enhancement Tutors** in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 593676
Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk

There are further resources on many other aspects of academic writing available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website: www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. These have been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guides *Planning a Powerful Presentation and Delivering a Powerful Presentation* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Essay Writing

Essay writing is an essential skill and one that ECO students need to acquire if they are to gain a good degree. Students are required to write essays for two reasons: (i) it is an effective way of learning and (ii) it enables tutors to see how much students have learned and understood. These two aspects are related in that tutors can monitor students' progress and provide feedback on it, thus aiding student learning.

A good essay presents material in a way that is well structured, follows a clear line of argument and includes relevant material. Preparation and planning are important and it is advisable to use an **essay plan**.

Planning your essay

Check your school's guidelines and take account of the requirements that are set out in all ECO module outlines. You need to know:

- how long the essay should be and the penalties that will be imposed if you fail to include a word count or your work exceeds the word length.
- when the deadline is, and the penalties that will be enforced if your work is handed in late
- relevant assessment criteria
- requirements for presentation, referencing and bibliographies.

The next stage

- Identify the keywords in the question
- Find the relevant resources
- Read and make notes from journal articles, text books, lecture material
- Organise your material – the essay plan allows you to try out different structures
- You may prefer to use diagrams for your essay planning. The Dean of Students Learning Enhancement Service has guides on planning essays and thought mapping.

There are further resources on many other aspects of academic writing available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website: www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

Starting your essay - the introduction

The introduction tells the reader how you intend to answer the question. You will need to show your understanding of the key issues and indicate the main areas your essay will cover. An introduction will answer the question: what does the reader need to know before he or she can understand the main part of the essay? It should have the following three elements:

- **Context and Background:** set the central issue in context and explain why it is worth examining
- **Interpretation of the Question:** use the words of the title to show your understanding of what is involved in answering the question, and define any terms
- **Outline of Structure:** describe how your discussion will be structured.

While writing your essay it is important to keep looking at your introduction; this will help you remained focused on the question and stop you from diversifying. Once you have completed your essay you may find that you need to change your introduction, as it is only then that you really know what you are going to say.

However, you should have a good idea of what you will say in your introduction before you begin writing the essay, as it will help you to understand your task clearly and focus your writing, even if it changes later on.

Paragraphs

You now need to use paragraphs to take your reader step by step through each section. Each paragraph you write should express clearly one point or one aspect of a point. Your paragraphs should link together to provide the reader with a sense of logical progression, using 'signpost' words and phrases such as *however*, *nevertheless*, *in contrast*. These signposts remind the reader of the overall structure outlined in the introduction. A paragraph can have its own internal structure which:

- introduces the paragraph's point and purpose
- presents and comments on evidence and illustrations
- makes a link to the next paragraph.

The use of evidence and/or examples – this is very important for ECO students

You should use evidence to illustrate and support your points. Evidence may be the opinion of an expert, your own findings, or the results of a study or experiment. It may be written or in diagram format.

Use the evidence to:

- add authority to your point;
- add credibility to your argument;
- add interest and useful illustration to your discussion

Opinions and evidence should always go together. Your essay should not state evidence without any analysis of what point it demonstrates, nor should your essay offer an opinion that is not justified by evidence.

Important point about referencing

Whenever you refer to someone else's ideas or opinion you must acknowledge your source through referencing. It may be in the form of a quotation, signalled by inverted commas ("...") or you may paraphrase or summarise an opinion or idea followed by a reference to its source. There are two main ways of referencing your evidence:

- the use of a number in superscript (¹) referring to a note at the end of the essay or bottom of the page;
- the inclusion of the author and date of publication in brackets in the body of the essay with the full details included in your bibliography.

At the end of your essay you must include a bibliography which lists all the books, journal articles and websites you have consulted in writing your essay, whether or not you have referred to them in your essay. A bibliography should include the details of author, title, date, place of publication, publisher and edition for each book (with editors and page extents for articles in edited collections). A journal article should include the title, year and volume number as well as the page extent of the article.

The conclusion

The conclusion is another signpost to your reader. It gives you the opportunity to:

- revisit the original question
- demonstrate that you have answered the question by summarising the main points of the argument and re-stating your point of view.
- you should not include new material in your conclusion, but you might:
- consider the wider significance and implications of your argument.

Drafting your essay

In the second year ECO requires all students to word process their essays. Although it is not a requirement in your first year, learning to write essays on a computer has many advantages. It enables you to make amendments and changes to your essay easily without the need to re-write whole parts of

the essay. If you find it necessary or useful to make a first draft by hand, then write each section on a separate piece of paper, so that changes can be made easily.

Do not try to make significant changes to the sequence of your material through re-drafting. Go right back to the planning stages and revise your original essay plan or make a new one. Remember that, just as the essay question should be your focus in the planning stages, you can regularly refer to the question in the writing of your essay. Use the essay question to check that you are keeping to the point and that all your material is relevant to answering the question.

Editing your essay

It is often difficult to edit your own writing. Read your work aloud, carefully adhering to the pauses of the punctuation you have used. This will help you identify problems with clarity of expression or sentence structure. Spell checks on computers are useful, but be aware that they do not identify an inappropriate use of a correctly spelt word. Have a break from your essay (preferably overnight) to make a final check more effective.

You must also ensure that you conform to the word limit set by your tutor. The word limit is designed to ensure that you write enough to engage fully with the subject, but that you do not write more than is absolutely necessary through lack of concise expression, focus or selectivity.

Further guidance and information

If you are still unclear about writing essays, you can talk to your lecturer or adviser, or make an appointment to see one of the **Learning Enhancement Tutors** in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 593676
Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk

There are further resources on many other aspects of academic writing available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website: www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

What your tutors are looking for in your essays

Here is a brief summary of some of the aspects your tutors in ECO will be looking for in your essays:

- Has the student worked sufficiently hard on the research and writing of the essay? Has he/she read sufficiently widely?
- Does the writer show a grasp of the key facts and arguments and an ability to organise them?
- Does the writer retain a focus on the essay question or title?
- Is the structure evident to the reader?
- Is there appropriate use of economic theory and evidence?
- Is there a satisfactory bibliography?
- Layout - Is the essay well presented and all diagrams properly labelled?
- Is the level of literacy of a sufficient standard (for example, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure)?

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. These leaflets have been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guide *Writing Essays* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Referencing your work

An appropriate use of quotations greatly enhances an essay. This is especially important when you want to take issue with an author's statement, because giving the precise wording allows your reader to judge whether your criticisms are fair. Note, however, that your essay should not rely too heavily on quotations; it is important that you include your own opinions.

Also beware of merely repeating what is generally agreed and already common knowledge, such as the fact that the Second World War ended in 1945 (if you do include a statement that is common knowledge it does not need to be referenced). The object is to allow the readers to locate sources of information, ideas or types of approach with which they may not be familiar, are out of the ordinary, or which are characteristic of some school of thought with which you are proposing to take issue. **Whether you quote or paraphrase, you must cite your source.**

Citation

The reason for citing sources is to indicate to your reader where you obtained your information. In any form of academic writing your ideas build on the work of other writers, researchers and teachers so it is essential that you acknowledge their contribution. You must be sure that the reader will be able to distinguish your thoughts and findings from those you have drawn from others. Citation is an important element of this process and you will have to learn and adopt the conventions for achieving it. Since the object is to allow readers to locate the sources of your information, it is essential that your citations are accurate and specific. For example, when citing a book you should normally give a page reference as well as details like author, title, date and publisher. (This may not be possible or necessary when you are referring to the overall argument in a relatively short article or chapter.)

Citation using the 'author-date' method

There are a number of alternative conventions for citation of books and articles. The author-date method is particularly convenient and commonly used in the social sciences. This style reduces or eliminates the need for footnotes or endnotes because it leads the reader straight to the page number of the book or article in the bibliography.

In the body of the text, the citation of the reference would normally consist of surname(s) of the author(s), followed by the date of publication and then the page reference. However, if the author is mentioned in the sentence then this does not have to be repeated in the citation. If you are citing more than one publication in the same year by an author, you must indicate this

by an appropriate letter of the alphabet. Sometimes, you will wish to cite several publications together. Here are three examples of citation:

Smith (1997:143-147) argues that inflation is no longer a threat. Some economists have argued that inflation is still a potential threat (Jones and Brown 1998: 57-59). There is considerable controversy among economists now over the risks of inflation (Smith 2001a: 48-50; Jones 2001: 137-143; Smith 2001b: 197-201).

When a publication has several authors, it is usual to give the surname of the first author followed by *et al* (an abbreviation of the Latin for 'and the others'). However, when there are only two authors both names are usually given.

When you read journal articles or your text books, note the ways in which other authors cite their sources.

Your bibliography

The bibliography should be in alphabetical order by author surname.

Book references should be in this format:

Jacques, I. (2006): *Mathematics for Economics and Business*, fifth edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited

Journal references should be in this format:

Taylor, P and Walker, A. (1994): The ageing workforce: Employers' attitudes towards older people. *Work, Employment & Society*, 8 (4), 569-591

Tables and Diagrams

Remember to include references to the source of any tables and diagrams that you include in your work. For example:

Table 1: Unemployment rates in different sections of the labour market: 2004 Q1 (taken from Sloman, 2006: Table 14.4 p.399)

e-journals

Internet journals are referenced similarly to paper journals. There are no page numbers to record, but you must include the URL and the date accessed.

For example, here is a quotation from an article found on the Economic Policy Institute website.

“Job seekers with college degrees and those age 45 and older have had an especially difficult time finding work, with long-term unemployment for those groups rising by 299.4% and 217.6%, respectively”. (Allegretto and Stetner, 2004)

Here is the bibliography entry:

Allegretto S and Stetner A (2004): “Educated, experienced, and out of work Long-term joblessness continues to plague the unemployed”. *Economic Policy Institute*

http://www.epinet.org/content.cfm/issuebriefs_ib198 (accessed 30 August 2007).

Footnotes and endnotes

Microsoft Word inserts footnotes at the bottom of the page concerned or endnotes to be placed wherever the author chooses (usually at the end of the essay just prior to the bibliography). A great convenience of these facilities is that, when a footnote or endnote is added or deleted, later ones are renumbered automatically. If you choose the footnote/ endnote method of citation, the rules for the formatting of the detailed references follow the same principles as for the author-date method.

If the author-date citation method is used, the main purposes of footnotes and endnotes are to provide a definition, additional evidence or elaboration of an argument where doing so in the body of the text would disrupt its flow.

Secondary referencing

Occasionally you may find that the author of an article you are reading cites a useful quotation or piece of information from another text. If you wish to use this quotation you should try and read the original document – it is possible that the author has misinterpreted the quotation and not given an accurate account of its meaning. The original work will be referenced in the book or article you are reading so you can use this information to find the original. You can then reference the quotation in the usual way.

if you cannot find the primary source, you can still use the quotation. However, you must make it clear that you have not seen the original, and must state in which book or article you saw the quotation or found the information. If it is impossible to find the original document and if you believe you can trust the accuracy of the author who quoted this work, then

you may use secondary referencing. Do not allow the reader/marker to believe that you have read the document.

**How to use secondary referencing?
(this information is taken from a Dean of Student's helpsheet on secondary referencing)**

Here is an example. Suppose the book you are reading is:

May, Tim (2001): *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Processes* (3rd ed). Buckingham: Open University Press. In it, on page 30, you find the following quotation:

'Theory aims at the production of thoughts which accord with reality. Practice aims at the production of realities which accord with thought. Therefore common to theory and practice is an aspiration to establish congruity between thought and reality.' (Cohen 1984:339)

Checking the bibliography, you find that this quotation is taken from:

Cohen, G. A. (1984): *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.339. This book is not available to you.

In-text referencing systems (e.g. Harvard, APA or MLA)

In the body of your text, you should begin with the name of the cited original author, and date of publication of the original research or writing. The you should write 'cited in' and the name and publication date of the book you found it in, as well as the page number on which you found the reference to it. The in-text part of the reference in your text would then look like this:

(Cohen, 1984:339, cited in May, 2001:30).

In your full reference list, you should usually include only the details of the book you actually read, not the original. If the reader wants to find out more about the original, they can find it through the references of the work you read.

This information is adapted from a help sheet produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. There are further resources on many other aspects of study available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website: www.uea.ac.uk/dos/let, or you can make an appointment with a Learning Enhancement Tutor.



Avoiding Plagiarism

What is plagiarism?

All ECO module outlines will draw your attention to the consequences of plagiarism.

The following text will be included in all outlines for ECO modules so please take notice of it:

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged use of another person's work. It can take the following forms: The reproduction (or "quotation"), without acknowledgement, of the work of others (including the work of fellow students), published or unpublished, either verbatim or in close paraphrase, including material downloaded from computer files and the internet. It can occur in 'open-book' examinations and/or coursework assignments which may take a variety of forms, including but not exclusively confined to essays, reports, presentations, dissertations, projects.

Plagiarism may arise because a student has deliberately cheated and tried pass the work of others off as his or her own. However, it is also likely that it is committed through misunderstanding, carelessness or the inability to reference correctly.

To avoid plagiarism, students must always take care to fully acknowledge the sources and ideas used in their work. (See the previous section on referencing).

First year students studying introductory microeconomics will take part in a plagiarism exercise. Students in other years may take part in a similar exercise.

It is very important that you learn from the plagiarism exercise and discuss any points you are not clear about with your seminar leader.

Further guidance and information

If you would like further guidance on referencing and avoiding plagiarism, you can talk to your lecturer or Personal Adviser, or make an appointment to see one of the **Learning Enhancement Tutors** in the **Dean of Students' Office**.

Telephone: 01603 593676

Email: dos.help@uea.ac.uk

Guidance material is available from the Dean of Students' Office and on its website: www.uea.ac.uk/students/.

This information is adapted from guidance leaflets on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. These leaflets have been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guide *Avoiding plagiarism* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Revision & Exam Skills

Revision

Revision is most effective as an **active** process. It involves reworking your course material to make it easier to understand, remember and adapt to specific questions. Also it is useful to work through seminar exercises and past exam papers. Passive forms of revision, such as trying to learn notes word for word, fail to develop an active engagement with the subject matter.

Organising Revision

Find out as much as you can about the format and scope of the exam. For example:

- Will you be required to write essays or short answers?
- Is there opportunity to select topics for revision or will you need a broad area of knowledge?

Look at past papers and ask your course tutors for further guidance.

Check that your notes are complete – Blackboard (<http://blackboard.uea.ac.uk/>) is useful here because most ECO lecturers put their lectures on this site.

If you will have a choice of questions, then select a range of topics to ensure good coverage for the exam. Revise at least twice as many topics as the number of questions you are required to answer.

Condense your notes into a form that is easy to understand and remember. Highlight key points; use revision cards if you find these helpful.

Check your exam timetable – you can then plan your time efficiently. Make certain that you are sure about the venue, before the exam, and allow yourself plenty of time to get there.

Be aware that some exams may take place on a Saturday.

Exam Technique

The best exam technique is to prepare and practise your approach **before** the exam.

Question analysis

Make sure you read each question carefully. Analyse each question to focus on its exact requirements, especially the subject and the instruction. This will help you to select and adapt the right material for your answer.

Planning answers

Under time pressure it is tempting to ignore the importance of planning your answers. A few minutes spent planning the answer will help you make sure that you:

- select relevant information for the question
- put this information into an order that is logical and coherent
- write your ideas down at an early stage to help you remember your key points
- monitor how much information you are covering in the time allowed.

For short answers it may be a case of jotting down a few keywords to stimulate your memory and organise your thoughts. If an essay is required, you will want to spend more time organising your material in the form of a list of headings, thought map or flow chart.

Using past papers

- Practise analysing questions and setting out plans to answers in order to test your recall and ability to adapt material to the set question.
- Practise writing a full answer in the time allowed.
- Review your answers by checking them against your notes and highlighting any missed or inaccurate information.
- Analyse your answer to see how it could have been improved.

Planning your use of time in the exam

If equal marks are allocated for each question then divide your time evenly. Where there is a weighting for particular questions or sections then your timing should reflect this.

Essays and long answers

- Begin by carefully checking the instructions on the paper. Highlight key instructions.
- Read through all the questions first so you can choose the best questions for you. Tick possible choices, and then go back and read them again.
- Start with the easiest question first. This boosts your confidence and gets your thoughts flowing. It does not matter in which order you answer the questions as long as you make sure you number the question on your script.
- Leave a few minutes at the end of each question to check your work for any obvious errors of expression or important omissions.

Exam nerves

The study guide **Exam Stress** (DOS guidance leaflet) has some practical advice on managing exam anxiety. It is also important to talk to someone about your worries if you are very anxious about taking exams. This could be a friend or your tutor, or one of the Learning Enhancement Tutors in the Dean of Students' Office.

This information is adapted from one of a series on academic writing produced by the Dean of Students' Office at the University of East Anglia. It has been adapted, with permission, from the Study Guide *Revision & Exam Skills* published by the Student Learning Centre at the University of Leicester.



Skills you will acquire in ECO

As well as the knowledge content of your degree programme, you will acquire a range of skills. Some skills are specific to knowledge content, for example how to interpret the intersection of supply and demand curves. Other skills are useful for a range of different study situations and may be important in employment, in being an active member of a club, or quite generally to being a good citizen. You may also acquire valuable skills from extra-curricular activities, such as organisational skills from being involved in student societies.

Skills which can be applied in situations outside those of the university are often referred to as transferable skills. Here are some examples:

Communication skills

Ability to express yourself clearly in writing using correct grammar and spelling.

Ability to express yourself orally. This is important for public speaking, presentations and job interviews.

IT skills

Keyboard skills

Using software packages such as Microsoft Word and Excel, SPSS for statistical analysis

Numeracy

Understanding of numbers: ability to analyse and manipulate them - and interpret their meaning

Ability to create and interpret tables of statistics and graphs

Problem-solving

Ability to analyse critical elements and their inter-relationships - and to resolve difficulties

Working with others

Ability to work effectively in groups

Getting the best out of others

Improving your own performance

Prioritising appropriately and meeting deadlines

Monitoring your performance, reflecting upon your learning process and thereby improving your capacity to learn effectively

You should try to become aware of the skills you are acquiring during your time at UEA. These skills are important when you enter the labour market or if you decide to undertake further study.

Life after UEA

When you eventually leave UEA you will wish to convince potential employers, or institutions for further study, that you possess the appropriate motivation, knowledge and skills. You will need to present yourself effectively in letters of application (or application forms), a curriculum vitae you have compiled and face-to-face selection procedures. Make sure that you and potential employers are aware of the subject specific and transferable skills that you have acquired. So, when you are near the end of your studies, think of all you have done in the way of extra-curricular activities, vacation jobs and part-time employment, as well as the skills you have acquired during your studies.

If you are at an early stage of your degree, some choices you make now will ensure that you gain the skills and knowledge that will help you in your chosen career. The Careers Centre can provide information on many different occupations and the sorts of qualities employers demand in each case. Accordingly, it may be to your advantage to think about your possible occupations at an early stage, find out what qualities you will need to demonstrate and choose modules and extra-curricular activities accordingly. However, remember that it is also important to select some modules because you find the topic interesting, regardless of whether it is directly related to your possible career. University education is an opportunity for you to enhance your personal development, as well as preparing you for the labour market.

Essay presentation and layout

Hand-written essays, providing they are legible, are acceptable in the first year of undergraduate studies but thereafter they must be typed. Here are some points to note on other aspects of layout.

- Pages should be stapled at the top left-hand corner. Make sure that staples do not obscure part of what you have written.
- Number pages consecutively.
- A completed cover sheet must be attached. This is available from the ECO teaching office (Arts 3.09).
- Provide a word count, either at the beginning or end, especially if you have been asked to write an essay according to a word limit.
- Leave margins of at least one inch at the top, bottom and sides. The marker needs this space for comments and queries.
- Use double spacing or one and a half spacing between lines.
- There should be a space after commas, colons and semi-colons and two spaces after a full-stop.
- Short quotations (i.e. of less than about 50 words) should be enclosed in single quotation marks and run on with the main text. Use double quotation marks for quotations within quotations thus: 'We have learned that "more" is not necessarily "better".' Longer quotations should be separated from the main text by being indented without quotation marks.
- Interpolations in quotations are permissible if enclosed in square brackets (never parentheses) thus: 'To be true to ourselves [he argued] we must be true to others.'
- Ellipsis, that is missing text within a quoted sentence, should be indicated by three ... full stops, taking care to leave a space before the first one; ellipsis at the end of a sentence should be indicated by four full stops.

Grammar and Punctuation

Few things are more annoying to readers (or more complained of by employers) than bad spelling and grammar. Some of the mistakes noted below are merely irritating; others have the effect of making what may seem perfectly clear to the writer completely unclear to the reader. No one wants to have to re-read a passage several times to find out what a writer is trying to say. However painstaking the research or thoughtful the argument, badly expressed essays are bad essays in the sense that they fail to convey their author's thoughts to the reader. In practice, avoiding most of the common errors is not difficult. Many could be eliminated by taking note of the points listed below.

Metaphors and clichés

Figures of speech quickly become clichés themselves. So try to avoid using metaphors, similes or other figures of speech which you are used to hearing or to seeing in print, such as:

at this point in time (instead of 'now')
in this day and age (instead of 'nowadays')
the bottom line (the result)
given the green light (go-ahead)
a different ball game (a different situation)
at the end of the day (in the end)
toe the line (conform)
 24 - 7 or even worse 24 - 7 - 365 (continuously, unceasingly)

Avoid mixed metaphors; think what such expressions **mean** before you use them. Here is a dreadful example:

When the bonanza was at its peak the crunch came.

Active and passive voice

Occasional use of the passive voice can bring welcome variety to an essay but excessive use produces dull and laboured prose. It is a matter of judgement as to what is excessive. Beware of the fact that passive sentences permit the source of an action to be lost from view and thus confuse both you and your reader as to what is actually happening. The active form is generally simpler and more forceful, as shown in the following examples.

Active: *The soldiers killed one of the demonstrators during the riot.*

Passive: *One of the demonstrators was killed by the soldiers during the riot.*

Passive: with loss of the actor: *One of the demonstrators was killed during the riot.*

Formality

The choice of words and type of sentence construction used in casual conversation is very different from that expected in an academic essay, even when the same ideas are being expressed.

For example, here is the first sentence on page two expressed formally:

Essay writing is an essential skill and one that ECO students need to acquire if they are to gain a good degree.

And informally:

If ECO students can't write essays properly, they may mess up their chances of a good degree.

The informal statement should be avoided in an academic essay.

Sexist language

Sexist language, whether in the form of derogatory terms or exclusion of women, is both offensive and misleading. There are usually good alternatives to words and phrases which make women disappear from the picture. Here are a few examples:

<i>Sexist word or phrase</i>	<i>Acceptable alternative</i>
mankind	humanity, men and women
man	person
the man in the street	people in general
man-made	synthetic, manufactured
to a man	everyone, unanimously
policeman	police officer
fireman	firefighter
founding fathers	founders

Of course, if you were referring specifically to a male police officer it is then perfectly acceptable to refer to him as a policeman.

The next sentence makes it look as if all students are males but there are several ways to avoid this quite false impression:

Each student brings his own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.

Acceptable alternative using plural construction: *Students bring their own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.*

Acceptable alternative using 'his or her': *Each student brings his or her own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.*

Acceptable alternative using 'her or his': *Each student brings her or his own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.*

Acceptable alternative using 'his/her': *Each student brings his/her own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.*

Acceptable alternative by using a plural pronoun with a singular verb: *Each student brings their own particular abilities to the task of writing essays.* (Note that this solution breaks the rule of agreement but it is a long-established usage).

Common grammatical errors

- a) Take care with phrases introduced by a verb-form ending in *ing*. (In the following incorrect example, it seems that it is the pub that walks down the street.)

Wrong: *Walking down the street, a pub caught our attention.*

Right: *Walking down the street, we saw a pub.*

- b) Use the correct preposition (i.e. words like 'in', 'on', 'for'):

different from (not 'than' or 'to')

fall off the wall (never 'off of')

based on (not 'around')

try to (not 'try and')

Use *compare with* to mean 'examine for likeness and difference'; this is probably the form you will use most frequently. However, *compare to* means 'liken', as in the quotation from Shakespeare, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day.'

- c) The word order of a sentence and the use of commas can completely alter the intended meaning. (You can detect such errors by reading aloud, pausing slightly at each comma.)

Wrong: *Some employers did not employ non-white workers because of their racial prejudice.*

Right: *Some employers, because of their racial prejudice, did not employ non-white workers.*

- d) Try to avoid split infinitives. (Some people regard a split infinitive as a serious grammatical sin but others are more relaxed about it as long as it does not sound too awkward.)

Wrong: *To boldly go where no man has gone before*

Right - or, at least, better: *To go boldly where no man has gone before*

Right - or, at least, better: *To go where no man has gone before, boldly*

Wrong: *To inaccurately say*

Right - or, at least, better: *To say inaccurately or inaccurately to say*

- e) Do not attribute wishes and feelings to inanimate objects. Indeed, it is often dubious to attribute wishes and feelings to collective nouns unless you are confident that the formulation can be expanded and made clear.

Wrong: *The book hoped that war could be avoided.*

Right: *The author hoped that war could be avoided.*

Dubious: *The nation yearned for a change.*

Dubious: *The working class was increasingly resentful about the policy.*

- f) Sometimes words can be combined into a single word - but sometimes not!

a lot (but not *alot*)

in fact (not *infact*)

all right and *alright*

in so far and *insofar*

Spelling

Here are some words, spelled correctly here, that are often mis-spelled:

argument

bureaucracy

Caribbean

commitment

conscience

conscientious

conscious

consciousness

consensus

definitely

deterrent

exaggerate

existence

fascist

fulfil

install

instalment

irrelevant

irresistible

knowledgeable

likelihood

maintenance

manageable

medicine

naive

necessary

occur

occurred

occurrence

omit

omitted

optimistic

overrule

parallel

permissible

quantitative

racist

refer

referee

reference

referred

representative

responsible

satellite

seize

separate

skilful

sovereignty

subtle (adjective)

subtlety (abstract noun)

subtly (adverb)

supersede

tariff

wilful

Easily confused words

Do not confuse the following; use a dictionary if in doubt.

affect and effect	economic and economical
allusion and illusion	eligible and illegible
Beveridge and beverage	eminent, imminent, immanent
block and bloc	exceptional and exceptionable
choose and chose	foreword and forward
cite, sight and site	imply and infer
complement and compliment	ingenious and ingenuous
contemptible and contemptuous	judicial and judicious
credible and credulous	lead and led
dependent and dependant	less and fewer
deprecate and depreciate	loose and lose
derisive and derisory	masterful and masterly
diseased and deceased	might and may
disillusion and delusion	militate and mitigate
disinterested and uninterested	momentary and momentous
moral and morale	simple and simplistic
popular and populist	systemic and systematic
precede and proceed	their and there
prescribe and proscribe	urban and urbane
principal and principle	waive and wave
refute and rebut	who's and whose

When you write your essays on the computer you should certainly run the spell check but it will usually fail to pick up errors where you have confused one word with another that sounds like it, so it is vital that you understand the differences. If there is even the slightest doubt in your mind about the meanings of the above words, you should check them with a good dictionary.

Perhaps the most frequently confused pairs in the above list are 'their/there' and 'affect/effect'. 'Their' is an adjective which indicates possession, as in the following example:

There are more suitable places for them to make their protest than there.

The most common meaning of 'effect' is as an abstract noun, meaning 'result'. The most common meaning of 'affect' is as a verb, meaning 'influence'. Here are some examples:

Government policy affected the level of unemployment.

The rise in unemployment was one significant effect of the Government's policy.

Unfortunately, students are sometimes confused because 'effect' and 'affect' have other somewhat less common meanings. 'Effect' can also be a verb,

meaning 'bring about'. 'Affect' can be an abstract noun, meaning 'mental state, particularly desire'. Here are some examples:

Government policy effected a rise in the level of unemployment.
Unemployed people sometimes become depressed and lacking in affect.

Apostrophe

Apostrophes are used for two quite different purposes, to indicate omission in common phrases and to mark possession in nouns. Examples of omission are: *they're*, *didn't*, *aren't*, *isn't* and *who's* (abbreviation for *who is*).

Examples of the use of an apostrophe to indicate possession are given below. Note that plural nouns which end in the letter *s* add an apostrophe after the final letter.

the student's class (the class of the student)
the student's classes (the classes of the student)
the students' class (the class of the students)
the students' classes (the classes of the students)
James's house (the house of James)
the Jameses' house (the house of the Jameses)

The apostrophe is not used in possessive pronouns: *yours*, *hers*, *ours*, *theirs* or *its* (when it means belonging to it). The exception to this is *one* and its derivatives (e.g. *one's essay*, *someone's essay*, and *someone else's essay*).

A common error is to confuse *it's* with *its*. *It's* is an abbreviation of *it is*, while *its* is a possessive pronoun. Note that *the 1960's* is incorrect; it should be *the 1960s*.

The semicolon and the colon

The semicolon can be used to separate what could have been two (or occasionally more) separate but very closely related sentences. With a semicolon they become a single sentence.

One use of a colon is to indicate the start of a list. (The second sentence in the above notes on the apostrophe provides an example of this use.) Another use can be understood by imagining that it means 'namely'. Here are a couple of examples:

One thing is certain: students will continue to make mistakes with punctuation.
After much soul-searching, he finally decided: he would tell the Dean.

The comma

The comma is used to indicate a pause within a sentence. If in doubt, read the passage aloud and note where you are pausing slightly. It is usually at these points that the comma is inserted. The following are examples of problems caused by the absence or the wrong placing of the comma:

- a) Failure to employ commas at both ends of a phrase when the passage you wish to 'fence off' falls in the middle of a sentence. (Note how the incorrect versions are at variance with the cadences of ordinary speech.)

Wrong: *The Conservatives who had adopted Eden as Leader in April 1955, won the general election a month later.*

Wrong: *The Conservatives, who had adopted Eden as Leader in April 1955 won the general election a month later.*

Right: *The Conservatives, who had adopted Eden as Leader in April 1955, won the general election a month later.*

- b) The employment of commas which arbitrarily interrupt the natural flow of a sentence, for example by separating the subject from the main verb:

Wrong: *The lack of firm leadership, did nothing to help matters.*

Right: *The lack of firm leadership did nothing to help matters.*

- c) The use of the comma to link together separate sentences, a very common error. Such 'run-on' sentences are a source of great irritation to the reader:

Wrong: *This advice is sensible, we hope that you will follow it.*

Right: *This advice is sensible. We hope that you will follow it.*

Right: *This advice is sensible; we hope that you will follow it.*

Right: *This advice is sensible and we hope that you will follow it.*

Wrong: *This advice is sensible, however many of you will ignore it.*

Right: *This advice is sensible. However, many of you will ignore it.*

- d) The opposite error to the above, treating a phrase as though it were a sentence, instead of employing the comma to attach these words to the sentence where they properly belong. A simple test will show up this mistake. If, when you read out a passage, one of the sentences makes no sense in isolation, something has gone wrong. In most cases this is because the main verb is missing. Take the following example:

Wrong: *Hypocrisy bred hatred. At a time when the use of contraceptives was spreading rapidly. Spokesmen of the middle classes declared themselves aghast at the atheists' shamelessness.*

Here the middle 'sentence' is clearly not a sentence at all. It is a subordinate clause which is presumably meant to qualify either the preceding or the following sentence. But which? The uncertainty causes the reader to stumble over the passage and to waste time pondering its probable meaning. Had the correct punctuation been employed, all would have been plain sailing.

Right: *Hypocrisy bred hatred. At a time when the use of contraceptives was spreading rapidly, spokesmen of the middle classes declared themselves aghast at the atheists' shamelessness.*

- e) The absence or insertion of commas, affecting how a particular phrase refers to a subject. In the following examples the phrase 'who disliked the Dome' is used respectively to characterise or restrict the category of British ministers to whom the verb 'condemned' applies.

British ministers, who disliked the Dome, condemned the new regulations.
British ministers who disliked the Dome condemned the new regulations.

The two statements are anything but identical! The first declares that **all** ministers condemned the new regulations because of their dislike of the Dome, whereas the second declares that only those ministers who disliked the Dome condemned the new regulations. Once again, you will quickly see the difference if you read the passages aloud, pausing wherever you reach a comma, but otherwise going straight on.

Can you see what's wrong with these sentences?

- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- Don't use no double negatives.
- A preposition is something you should never end a sentence with.
- Join clauses right like conjunctions should.
- About sentence fragments.
- Don't write a run-on sentence you have to punctuate it.
- Always be more or less precise.
- Watch out for irregular verbs which have crope into the language.
- Each pronoun agrees with their antecedent.
- In letters reports articles papers and things like that we use commas to keep a string of items apart.
- Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
- Its important to use apostrophe's right.
- As far as incomplete constructions, they are wrong.
- Make sure you hyp-henate properly.
- Be careful of dangling participles writing an essay.
- Don't abbrev.
- Check to see if you any words out.
- Shun and avoid unnecessary excess extra words that you don't need.
- Never go off on tangents, which are lines that intersect a curve at only one point and were defined by Euclid, the famous mathematician and geometer, who lived in the third century B.C. in Alexandria where he taught at the original Museum, part of the royal palace given over to scholarship, founded by Ptolemy I, son of one of Alexander's generals.
- Last but not least, avoid clichés.

Typing your essays

Check your spelling

Word has a very useful *speller* facility, which you should use to check through a near-to-final draft of your essay. However, there are three important points to note:

(i) There is still need to consult a dictionary when you have the slightest doubt as to the meaning of a word. It can quite easily happen that you think you understand a word from the contexts where you have read it - but it actually means something quite different.

(ii) You may consistently use a wrong spelling for an intended word but that happens to be the correct spelling of an unintended word, so the speller cannot detect it. For example, you might type 'sight' when you should have typed 'cite'.

(iii) The speller cannot check for meaning so there is no substitute for carefully reading through your essay to pick out missing words, words in the wrong order and so on.

Thesaurus and on-line dictionary

Word also contains a thesaurus, which enables you to find words with similar or related meaning to a given word. It also gives antonyms. This is a handy aid improving your writing style in helping you avoid repeatedly using the same word in a single paragraph. However, be aware that you can introduce an error if you simply substitute an unfamiliar word without checking in a dictionary. (For example, the thesaurus gave 'élan' as a synonym for 'style' but making that substitution in the sentence before this one would be nonsensical.)

The thesaurus can be used as a quick and rough check on the meaning of a word but it is better to use a dictionary. There are online versions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* available on the computers linked to the University network. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

Tables and graphs

You may be able to strengthen the line of an argument by inserting a well-designed table or graph. Word has facilities for creating tables that can enable you to present statistical data effectively. On the other hand, take care not to over use statistical material. The reader will not be impressed by irrelevant data. Ask yourself whether the data you are considering using

supports your argument. If it does, explain its relevance. If not, leave it out.

A table in one of your sources may simply be reproduced in your essay - or you may construct it from statistical data that you did not originally find in that form. Alternatively you can construct graphs and charts using Excel. These can be copied and pasted into your Word document.

When creating tables or graphs it is vital that they are given a reference label (Table 1, Figure 2 etc.) and an explanatory title. Axes on graphs must be labelled.

Maths and Equations

Make sure that you familiarise yourself with using standard mathematic notation and symbols – mostly Greek – and learn to use the Equation Editor in Word.

Typing and layout

A typed essay is easier for your tutor to read. It is difficult to give a fair mark if the essay is illegible.

Improving the layout and presentation is not an alternative to good content and structure but it can establish emphases intended to encourage your tutor to read it in ways that bring out its strongest aspects.

Keeping directories in good order

As you collect information and draft essays throughout your career as a student, you will be saving many documents onto your memory stick or your student drive. It will be an enormous help to you if you keep this information organised logically right from the beginning of your studies so that, at any later stage, you can rapidly find what you have written earlier and build upon that base of understanding. It is advisable to devise a structure of directories. An obvious way of doing this is to have a directory for each module; in it you can keep separate files for downloaded material, seminar preparations, references, lecture notes, notes from books and articles and essays. If you have exclusive access to a computer then you can keep this stored on the hard disc - but make sure that you take backups as well.

If you are using computers in the university, you should save files onto a working memory stick or disc - and back it up on another memory stick or disc. **Do get into the routine of making backups.** Keep your back-ups in a safe place. **When inserting a memory stick or floppy disc, you should always scan it to check for viruses.** A virus can wreck all your hard work and damage the computer.