ACADEMIC WRITING PART 2

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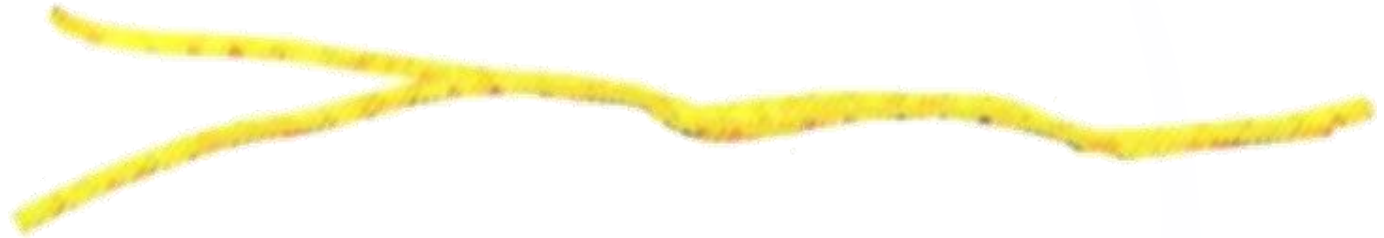2020

UNISA | college of graduate studies

IN ACADEMIC WRITING, DON'T FORGET THE …

?

STYLE, STRUCTURE, WORDS AND TERMS

It is much more difficult to write something that is easy to read … than to write something that is difficult to read!

STYLES AND SENTENCES

- Your writing style should be formal with an academic tone, e.g., use *do not* instead of *don't*

- Avoid strong adjectives, such as *huge, excellent*, except where undoubtedly appropriate.

- Be specific: Make a statement or omit the statement – do not soften it with words like *actually* and *really.*

- Words such as *however*, *nevertheless* and *although* can add value.

- Avoid *Also*… & *In addition*… **Use** *Furthermore...* & *Moreover*…

- Avoid sweeping statements, e.g. *Implementation of the XYZ strategy in middle management can transform retail banking.*

STYLES AND SENTENCES

- Do not be too dogmatic (strict/rigid).
- Avoid overuse of a term – check whether the same term, e.g. *indicates*, occurs three times in a short paragraph.
- Be careful of repetition/duplication of a point. It gives an immature impression. Combine sentences that say the same thing and choose the best words.
- Sentences should not be too long. Do not ramble. One idea or piece of information per sentence.
- In general, paragraphs should not be too short – they should not contain only one or two sentences.

STYLES AND SENTENCES… CONT.

– Multiple authors: cite all names the first time reference occurs: e.g. (Mabona, Green and Naicker, 2014), thereafter (Mabona *et al.*, 2014)

– Do not start with a numeric number, e.g.

'9 participants agreed'. ✗ 'Nine participants agreed' ✓

– Shorter sentences make your work easier to understand

– Remove 'clutter words' that do not add to the meaning

– Number subheadings, e.g. 2.2.1 then 2.2.2, 2.2.3, etc.

STYLE OF A PARAGRAPH

– Start with a lead sentence that indicates concisely what the paragraph is about

– Make the argument using the pattern: assertion-evidence- agreement or affirmation-discussion

– Mention contradictory beliefs and counter arguments. If everything is positive, examiners do not find it credible.

STYLES AND SENTENCES ... CONT.

Time to change something …?

There are impacts to **moving** *material – first leave it behind as well as move it*:

Use <Copy> not <Cut>, so as to keep original.

Then review the original place – decide on deleting or reducing what remains.

Deleting might leave a gap; a brief mention is often still needed.

STYLES AND SENTENCES … CONT.

Time to change something …?

Implications of changing/adding new info:

Re-read whole section where you added something to check that the thread is intact.

Does the new stuff fit the context…?

Is it duplication…?

You might need to rephrase text to make it flow.

STRUCTURE, SECTIONS AND PARAGRAPHS

- Avoid **l-o-n-g** sections of text – pages and pages ... Subdivide it!
- We can use hierarchical subheaders to 4th level, e.g. 3.5.2.2. (No full-stop after the final number) Fourth-level subheaders need not be in table of contents (ToC)
- You might prefer to go as far as 3rd level subheaders, then use non-numbered ***Bold italicised*** or **Bold** or *Italicised* subheaders to subdivide text that rambles on.
- List of aspects/points in a sentence: It is acceptable to have comma before the final 'and'. (...., and …)
- Can also use semi-colons to subdivide the points.
- Bullets are very useful.

HEADERS, TABLES, FIGURES

- Concise and to the point.

- Consistent in style.

- Choose word order of a header to emphasise meaning.

- Number tables and figures according to the chapter:

    - Table 5.1, Table 5.2, …" etc.

    - Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, …"

- Emphasis: Choose one style to emphasise key terms, e.g. italics, bold, or 'quotation marks'.

CONSISTENCY AND STYLE

- Consistency in **styles** of bullets
- Consistency in first-person: 'We…', 'I…' or third-person: 'The researcher surveyed…'
- Do not be influenced by publication you are currently reading and hence combine a variety of styles, including informal styles, e.g. 'It is important to understand the workplace of **your** participant'.

  Rather say, 'It is important to understand the participant's workplace'

SPELLING AND TERMS

- Be consistent.
  - Be internally consistent , e.g. Do not use 'online', 'on line' and 'on-line'. Choose one and stick to it.
  - 's' or 'z' – choose one approach: do not use custom**ised** and organ**ized** in the same document (we make use of the UK/RSA dictionary)
- Avoid Americanisms, e.g. 'behavior', 'color'. Use 'behaviour' and 'colour'.
- Style: don't say 'XYZ <u>comprises of</u> A and B':
  Say 'XYZ consists of A and B' OR 'XYZ comprises A and B'.

TENSES

- Discuss points from the literature in **present tense:**
  'Scott (2007) points out that …'; 'PQR is characterised by ABC (Scott, 2007)'; 'Tambo (2012) claims that…'.

- However, events that **occurred previously** and are reported in the literature should be **past** tense:
  'A study **was conducted** in China to …. (Chen & Shi, 2010)'; 'Mkhize (2009) **found** that…'.

- Use past tense when discussing your own research, e.g. 'Results of the experiment **demonstrated** that...'.
  'Findings of the survey **were** mainly positive…'

- Be consistent in tenses in the same section. This slip happens easily when rewriting your Proposal as Chapter 1.

- I <u>agree</u>, you <u>agree</u>, he/she <u>agrees</u>, they <u>agree</u>
- The participant <u>agrees</u>, the participants <u>agree</u>
- My dog <u>obeys</u>; my dogs <u>obey</u>; my dog <u>is</u> obedient; my dogs <u>are</u> obedient
- Scott et al <u>hold</u> the view that …
- Evidence <u>has</u> been found … ✔ Evidence <u>have</u> been found … X
- Many of these attributes <u>are</u> common
- M-Learning and e-learning <u>are</u> considered in Section 3.2
- This chapter <u>aims</u> to explain…
- Data can be viewed as singular or plural: 'The data <u>is</u> contradictory' ✔ or 'The data <u>are</u> contradictory'✔

HYPHENS

- When two words are used together as an adjective, use a hyphen, e.g. 'In a **problem-solving** situation, I need to call on my **decision-making** skills …'.

- When the two words together form a **noun**, a hyphen is **not** required, e.g. 'It's time for some decision making'.

- 'Subsections', 'subdivide', 'rephrase', etc. Current practice – without a hyphen,
i.e. not 'sub-sections', 'sub-divide', 're-phrase'.

CHAPTER INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Start each chapter or section with an **introduction** that
  - Overviews what is in chapter or section
  - Explains role of chapter, how it relates to previous and next
- Nice to have a theme diagram at beginning of each chapter that highlights focus of that chapter.
- Mention each subsection, e.g.: ' Section 3.1 **outlines** xx yy zz, while Section 3.2 **addresses** kkk. In Sections 3.3 and 3.4, the concepts of AAA and BBB are respectively **introduced**.
- Can be done concisely with parentheses, e.g: ' Xx yy zz is **overviewed** (Section 3.1), while kkk's are **listed** (Section 3.2).

CHAPTER INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS, CONT …

- Similarly, end with a **chapter/section conclusion**.

- Should include **summary** of what was covered, as well as important **interpretations** and conclusion.

- Explain **role** of chapter, how it relates to upcoming chapters.

- In general, discussion should occur in a 'Discussion' section before the conclusion.

- It is not usual to introduce a new point in the conclusion, (though there can be exceptions, e.g. an appropriate quotation or reference to a theoretical concept).

TABLES AND FIGURES

- Tables are used for summarising, presenting data, etc. Use left alignment and single spacing in the cells.

- Figures present visualisations. Picture is worth 1000 words

- Write a section about the table or figure. Emphasise its main facts. If you do not draw attention to what is inside, the reader might not read it!

- Position of labels:
    - Table headings above the table
    - Figure labels below the figure

TABLES AND FIGURES - EXAMPLE

- Introduce a figure or table by referring to it, e.g. 'Saunders' Research Onion is depicted in Figure 3.5'.
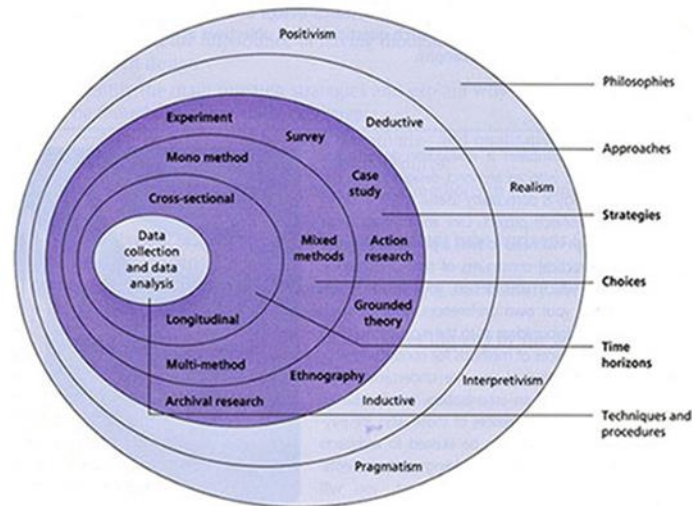
- Then present the figure or table:

Figure 3.5: The Research Onion Model (Saunders et al, 2007)

- Explain it: 'The six layers respectively represent…'.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

- Just the date in parentheses: e.g. 'In a field study by **Bekker and Smith (2005)**, it was found that the lackaby bird can fly backwards in cold conditions'.

- Author/s and date in parentheses: e.g. 'The lackaby bird can fly backwards in cold conditions **(Bekker and Smith, 2005)**' / **(Bekker & Smith, 2005)**'. Some journals require comma before 'and' or '&'

- The reference is part of the sentence and must come before the full stop, e.g. ' In this environment, business intelligence systems have facilitated managers' decision-making processes' (Lin, 2009).

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

- For a PhD, cite only original sources as references.

- For masters' degree, secondary referencing is OK but not ideal, e.g."A study in 2004 found that aaa bb … cccc ddd (Hollard, 2005, cited by Kline, 2011)".

- When citing a source just after its previous citation, you need not include the date, e.g. 'It has been shown that the food, *Firm and Fit*, causes a mean weight increase of 15% in female pigs and 10% in males (**Neverend & Nguni, 2009**). Furthermore, **Neverend and Nguni** found that the skin of the pigs grew darker and thicker'.

- Avoid multiple consecutive references to the same source. Put reference near beginning of the paragraph and/or again at the end, not after every sentence.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS, CONT..

- Include the **page number** when citing a direct quote or using a diagram as is, e.g., 'In such situations, the only sampling technique that should be used, is random sampling' (Frey, 2003:12).

- You may use the ampersand sign '&' when the full citation is in parentheses, as in '(Naidoo & Nguni, 2009)', but when the names flows in a sentence, as in 'Naidoo and Nguni recommend…', then use the textual word 'and'.

- Citation styles that can be used at the start of a sentence: 'For Naidoo (2009), …' and 'According to Naidoo (2009), …'.

- One day you will write a journal article! Use the prescribed style. For example, some require '(Naidoo, & Nguni, 2009)'.

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS, CONT..

- References should be current, including some very recent sources, e.g. 2015 to 2019, even 2020!

- When citing a dated, yet important source: refer to it as a 'classic paper' or 'seminal work' to indicate its relevance and validity. This depends on discipline and topic. A historical study or meta-analysis of publication does need older ref's.)

- Keep all sources – electronic or printed copies of journal articles; ideally both. Don't discard publications after use. **You may need to refer back** – even years later.

- When you consult a library book or borrowed book, make copies or scans of a **few** pertinent pages.

ACRONYMS

- Define acronyms early, e.g. 'This study took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)'. Thereafter use acronym.

- Alternatively, **on first use in each chapter,** it is acceptable to use the full version and redefine acronym.

- Include a 'List of acronyms' up front.

  You can also call it 'List of abbreviations'

WRITING NUMBERS

- For 1 to 9, write in words, e.g. 'five'.

- Above 10, use figures, e.g. '25'.

- As already stated, do not start a sentence with a number, i.e. do not write, '50 participants were from the DRC'.

- For a percentage, we do like to visualise it in figures, so if a percentage is first word of sentence, use dual approach, 'Forty five percent (45%) of the participants only used public transport.

PARTICIPANTS AND GENDER

- Do not refer to the 'subjects' of a study. It is appropriate to call them 'participants' or 'respondents'.

- Gender: This is a complex issue. The style in the past was to use masculine only: 'he', 'him', his'.
Now it is common to see 'he/she', 'his/hers', 's/he', or 'her/him'.

- An alternative is to use plural, e.g. 'participants', 'they', 'their', etc.

- If you prefer 'he' and 'him' or 'she' and 'her', write a disclaimer in Chapter 1, explaining your practice.

WORDS, PHRASES, TERMS

You need never be at a loss
for words again!

See lists in Word doc sent to you called
Informal tips for academic writing

Or use online *Thesaurus* for synonyms.

LITERATURE STUDIES

- In general, **integrate** sources in a literature study. This also helps us to avoid plagiarism.

- One accepted style is to put a citation/reference after each point or sentence. If, however, you have **integrated** several sources relating to a theme and making related points, you can combine the references in a bracket list at end of paragraph.

- Avoid a series of paragraphs, each devoted to work of a particular author.

- However, if we use a model/concept by a certain author as the basis of our research, it is fine to devote a lengthy section to that single author.

LITERATURE STUDIES

- It is important in a literature review to refer, not only to definitions and key concepts, but also to discuss *Related Work,* i.e. other similar studies. This can be helpful in *Gap Identification* to give a rationale/motivation for the topic you are investigating.

- It is not usual in literature studies to give one's own opinions or refer to one's own research while reporting the literature.

- But if you do need to do so, have a subheader: '*Application to the present study*'.

- This is particularly important when you construct, customise or adapt a model, framework, set of criteria, or set of principles to use in your own work.

LITERATURE STUDIES, CONT.

- A section called 'Discussion' can address various approaches.

- In some research, literature studies provide some of the data. In such cases, the information from the literature is called secondary data, while the data collected in the empirical study is primary data.

- You might consolidate a section with a table of points that will be your underlying principles, criteria or guidelines. Motivate each point; give its literature reference; and cross-ref to section in your own work.

- This can be the start of your own synthesised framework or model.

- When you start the empirical work, repeat the table with a column on practical implications for own research, i.e. a *golden thread.*

SUBMITTING A SECTION OF PROPOSAL TO SUPERVISOR

- That sense of relief when a draft is done... You can't wait to hit <Send> and catch up on your life...

   Now it's the supervisor's problem....!

   What's on TV?   Where's my fishing rod? Where's the baby?

   Now I can catch up at office... No food in the house!

- **But:** It is very difficult for supervisor to review a document full of slips and errors. Supervisors should concentrate on academic content and the holistic picture. It is not his/her task to do language correction, consistency checking, and technical editing.

- **You need to:** Re-read and check the draft meticulously before sending to supervisor for feedback. Reflect, self-evaluate, refine…

SUBMITTING A CHAPTER TO THE SUPERVISOR, CONT.

- Re-read and check draft meticulously. Reflect, self-evaluate, refine.

- If supervisors identify too many obvious mistakes (technical errors, duplication of content, repetition of the same word), they might return it for corrections and resubmission before they give feedback on content.

- However, when the draft does not have an excessive number of mistakes, some supervisors will advise on language improvements to make it easier for them to assess content in the next round. If this happens, it helps – it's a bonus, but it also slows down the review process.

TIPS FOR CHECKING

- Re-read the doc a few days **after** completing it.

- Eliminate obvious errors.

- Check language and technical issues such as section numbering, mention of each table and figure.

- Check the structure: Is there a logical flow and progression? Is there an advance organiser, i.e. a lead sentence or paragraph that sets out what is to come? Are there contradictions or inconsistencies?

- Pretend you are someone reading it for the first time. Will they understand what you are doing or going to do?

TIPS FOR CHECKING, CONT.

- Would some content fit better in another section?

- Are similar issues addressed in different subsections? If so, combine them.

- Are the links and relationships between sentences and sections clear?

- Has the same terminology been used for the same concepts throughout, or are different terms used for the same thing, depending on the sources you read when you wrote the section?

TIPS FOR CHECKING – HOW'S THE SEQUENCE?

- Can the sequence be improved? Is there is a strong build up of every concept.

- If you are making a point, does the sequence support your argumentation? Is there a **lead sentence**?

- When you reread it, do you find a sentence that sets things out so well, that it should appear early in the section? If so, make your Punch up front!

- Re-read each sentence. Ask yourself if the logic and structure can be improved; sometimes this can be done by changing the order of phrases in the sentence.

Thank you