

**Psychology**

# **A GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGY**

How to succeed on your scientific reports,  
essays and exams, and how you will be  
marked.

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**Postgraduate 2024 / 2025**

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**THINKING INTERACTING EXPERIENCING**



University of Essex

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## **1: Guide to Writing Research Reports and Your Dissertation**

The following set of guidelines provides psychology students at Essex with the basic information for structuring and formatting reports of research in psychology. During your time here this will be an invaluable reference. You are encouraged to refer to this document each time you write a lab report and when you write your dissertation. The more you practice refining your research report skills throughout the year, the more prepared you will be for your final dissertation.

The writing of research reports is an essential part of any practical module in Psychology. Learning to write research reports will provide you with a valuable and transferable skill.

This guide tells you about the **structure and style** that is required for a psychology research report. The simple rule for report writing is *remember the reader*. The purpose of a research report is to communicate to others the important points of a piece of research: (i) why you did it, (ii) how you did it, (iii) what you found and (iv) what you think it means. It is essential to follow a standard format (with correct headings) when structuring your report so that readers can locate the information that they require immediately without having to work through the entire text to find it.

### **General Writing Tips:**

- Make sure that each sentence follows on from the previous one so there is a logical argument. Hopping around from point to point makes it difficult for the reader to follow what you're saying.
- Make sure that all the material in the introduction is relevant to your study. Don't give lots of details about studies that are not directly relevant to your study.

- Remember to back up your statements with references to the literature.

Your paragraph should include (PEEL):

- **Point:** Make your point.
- **Evidence:** Back up your point with evidence
- **Explanation:** Explain how the evidence supports your point
- **Link:** Build a link to the next point or back to the main point (the latter can often work better as linking to the next point can sometime be difficult and disrupt the flow).

## Structuring Your Report and Dissertation

This standard report format typically includes the following sections: title, abstract, introduction, methods section (including participants, procedure, materials, design), results, and discussion (including conclusion) which are indicated by headings and subheadings. If you do not use these sections correctly you will incur marking penalties. Tips for how to write each of these sections are provided below. The numbers next to each heading are included here to structure these notes; they should not appear in the report itself.

### 1. Title

The title should explain what the study is about as concisely as possible. In many cases, the title will mention the independent and dependent variables. Thus, *The effect of sleep loss on the exploratory behaviour of gerbils* would be a suitable format for a title, as would *Exploratory behaviour in sleep-deprived gerbils*. It can also be beneficial to give some information about the outcome of the study, e.g. *Reduced exploratory behaviour in sleep-deprived gerbils*. Avoid making the title so brief that it contains little information about what the study investigated: for example, *Keeping gerbils awake* would not be a good title. Remember that your

reader will initially see the title and nothing else; the title needs to tell the reader whether or not the report is relevant to his/her research interests. Your title should be a brief, but *accurate* reflection of the content of the report.

## 2. Abstract

The abstract is a short summary of the report. The abstract should concisely cover (1) Why you did it, (2) What you did, (3) What results you found and (4) What you concluded. Avoid fine details such as numbers and the names of statistical tests here. The abstract should be 250 words or less: aim for a word count between 100 and 250 words. Write the Abstract *after* you have written the rest of the report. You may find it difficult to write a short abstract in one go. It may be easier to write a long version first, and then delete parts of it.

## 3. Introduction (Why you did it.)

The Introduction should present the reasoning behind the particular study which you are describing. This means that the reader, having read the introduction, should be able to anticipate what your study will involve. At the same time your introduction should allow someone who is not an expert to understand why you did this study. For this reason, the introduction should begin at a general background level and progress through to the specific reasons for and aims of the study. Start with a short, broad summary of the general research topic, and then narrow the focus to literature that is specifically relevant to the current experiment.

An introduction would normally include a review of past work in the area and an explanation of the theoretical or practical reasons for doing the study. A logical progression of content for an introduction might go something like this:

- (1) Describe and define the area that you wish to study, explaining why it is interesting and/or important.

(2) Describe previous work that is relevant to the topic of your investigation.

(3) Explain the motivation for your study, and what your study hopes to achieve. It may be that previous work had methodological problems, or perhaps there is plenty of scope for extending previous work. For example, you may be comparing different theories that had not been tested before. Explaining why previous work was inadequate should lead naturally on to the study that you have run. It should be clear how the present study addresses unresolved theoretical issues, and/or overcomes the shortcomings of previous studies, and/or how it extends our current knowledge.

End the Introduction with a clear statement of the purpose of your study. If your research is hypothesis-driven, then state your hypothesis/hypotheses clearly, i.e. what you expect to happen and why. If your work is experimental, state your hypotheses specifically in terms of your dependent and independent variables (predictive and predicted variables for a correlational design), so that it is clear to the reader how your hypotheses relate to the experiment, and what you expect to happen. If you are doing exploratory research in which you have no specific hypotheses, describe the aims of your study and what you hope to find out. This final part of the introduction is the real key to understanding the study itself, and the report. If this part is clear then describing and interpreting the results becomes much easier. Do not present your hypotheses in a list. The hypotheses should be described in sentences within the main text.

#### 4. Method (How you did it.)

The method section describes the key information about how you gathered your data. This section must contain enough information for the reader to be able to repeat the study, but should exclude any irrelevant

details. For example, if you are studying the effect of word types on the ability to remember lists of words, then the characteristics of the words that make up the lists are extremely important. You would not be expected to explain in detail how participants were seated at a desk, say, unless you were specifically studying the effects of seating arrangements on memory. Which details are relevant and which are irrelevant vary from study to study. When in doubt, consult a journal article that is related to your work and see which details have been included there.

Your memory for the methods should be clear when you write the method section. Therefore it is a good idea to write (or at least draft) this section as soon as you can after completing the study.

The method section should be divided up into a number of subsections, although the exact choice of subsections will depend on the nature of the study. The key is to ensure that all the key information is included. Keep in mind that the goal of the method section is that after reading it, someone should be able to replicate your exact study. Typically, the methods section will start with a section describing the participants. The following subsections (Participants, Design, Material, Apparatus, Stimuli, Procedure) may vary depending on the nature of the study

#### 4a. Participants

This should state how many participants were tested, who they were (i.e., from what population they were drawn), how they were selected and/or recruited (e.g., randomly selected sample, volunteers, module requirement etc.) and any other important characteristics (e.g., mean or median age, the age range or SD, composition in terms of males/females, educational level).

#### 4b. Design

The *design* of is a description of the experiment's structure. For correlational studies, tell the reader which variables are being correlated. For experimental studies, tell the reader (1) what the dependent and independent variables are, (2) what the levels occurred on each independent variable, and (3) whether each independent variable is a between or within subjects variable.

*For example: This experiment used a between-subjects design. The independent variable was drug dosage (high or low dosage). The dependent variable was the number of problems successfully completed.*

For all experiments, you should also explain how you decided which experimental condition was performed by which participant (between-subjects designs/factors) – usually by random allocation. For within-subjects design, you need to say in what order the conditions were presented. This can be done by *randomizing* the order of trials or by *counterbalancing* blocks of trials.

If the design is simple, then a separate design section may not be necessary, as all the information can be provided in the Procedure section. If your design is more complicated, it can be helpful to describe its structure in a separate Design section, where you can focus just on the experimental design, without being distracted by other details of the procedure. On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to define the different conditions without going into some aspects of the procedure; in this case, it can be difficult to split the information between separate Design and Procedure sections, and so it would be more appropriate to include the description of the design within the Procedure section, rather than having a separate Design section.



If you have a Design section, you should use this section to define the labels that you use to refer to the different variables (and the different levels of those variables). Use clear and informative labels, and make sure the rest of the report uses those labels consistently. In research where there are two or more conditions in the study, you should use clear and informative names for the conditions (not numbers or letters as labels).

#### 4c. Materials/Stimuli/Apparatus

Materials are things that were presented to the participants, e.g. instructions, words, pictures, problems, or questionnaires. Apparatus is the equipment that was used (usually to present the materials or take measurements or both). The software used to run an experiment would normally be described in the Apparatus section.

In many studies, there is an obvious distinction between the materials (e.g. images shown to the participants) and the apparatus (e.g. the computer that was used to display the images, or the EEG or fMRI machine that was used to record brain activity); in this case, it is sensible to have two sections, one labelled “Materials” or “Stimuli” and the other labelled “Apparatus”.

Some studies just involve trivial items (e.g., pencil, paper, stop-watch etc.), and so an Apparatus section is often not needed. The Apparatus section is only required when more complex equipment is used (e.g., a computer running special software). If purpose-built equipment is used, you should describe it in sufficient detail, using a diagram if necessary, to allow equivalent apparatus to be constructed.

The Materials section should describe the materials and how you devised them (or who did devise them if you did not). The criteria used to select the particular items that you used should be described. For example, if using words as your stimuli for a memory test you should tell the reader

about any features of their selection, such as word length, word frequency (in the English Language), or their grammatical role (noun, verb, concrete, abstract, etc.). For some materials it may also be useful to provide a list of the items. Please note that listing the materials is no substitute for explaining how you selected them. For extensive materials, listing the items is an inappropriate way of describing the materials within the main body of the text; if there is an extensive list, it should be provided in an appendix. If there are no materials in the experiment, then this section can be omitted.

In some studies, it may not be easy to draw a distinction between the materials and apparatus, and in that case a single section (e.g. headed "Materials and Apparatus") would be appropriate. You may also find yourself in a situation where it is difficult to describe the materials or stimuli without describing elements of the apparatus, or vice-versa. In this case, it would again be appropriate to combine the Materials and Apparatus sections so that you describe them together. Sometimes, the materials are so inextricably linked to the procedure (described below) that it makes more sense to include details of the materials in the Procedure section, instead of having a separate Materials section.

#### 4d. Procedure

Before or after you describe the Materials, you will also want to describe the Procedure, which is the order in which the materials were presented to participants. The materials and procedures are similar to a recipe: the materials are the ingredients in the recipe, the procedure are the steps people would need to take to recreate your study.

Be careful to decide which details are necessary for replication and which are not. You do not begin description of the study from the beginning of the afternoon when the lecturer started describing the lab class for the day, only from when you started testing participants. You should include a description of the instructions given to participants. You do not need to

quote the entire instructions in the main text unless the exact wording was important for your results. Any particular emphasis (e.g., instructing participants to be as fast as possible, or as accurate as possible, or to look closely at each item and try to remember it) should also be mentioned.

You must specify in precise detail the events that occur on each trial, such as any warning signal, how long the stimuli are presented for, how the participant responds, etc. Other details could include the rate of presentation of trials (e.g., one every five seconds), maximum times allowed to come up with an answer and other times, such as lengths of rest periods.

You also need to specify how much practice participants had before the main task (e.g., the number of practice trials) and how many measurements were taken (e.g., the number of experimental trials in each condition).

#### 4e. Data preparation

Begin this section with a description of how you pre-processed your data before doing the statistical tests. This means that you should describe how you got from all of the responses that were made by each participant to the scores that were analysed in the statistical tests. In the event that you discarded some data, you should say what data were discarded and why (i.e., give the “exclusion criterion”). A very common mistake is to forget to report how the raw data were processed before the statistical analysis. For example, if each participant has answered 40 questions, you might give each participant a single score (e.g. percent correct) and then analyse those “percent correct” scores, rather than analysing the responses to the individual questions. If this is how you processed your data before analysis, then you should say so. It’s important to explain this pre-processing stage rather than just saying something like “the data were analysed with a t-test”.

#### 5. Results (What you found.)

##### 5.1. Describe your data

Provide a concise summary of the data using descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation per condition for continuous variables and percentages for categorical dependant variables).

In simple experiments (e.g., 1 independent with 2 conditions and 1 dependant variable), this will often take the form of including the means and standard deviations for each condition in a paragraph at the beginning of your results.

In more complex studies (with several dependent measures, or three or more conditions), the descriptive statistics are often put in a table or a Figure. You should look at the results sections of relevant research papers to see how data tend to be presented for experiments similar to your own.

All tables and figures should be clearly numbered, and should include a title and, a caption giving more details. The relevant variables, conditions, and units of measurement should be made clear in the title or caption. Also, make sure that the axes are correctly labelled. Moreover, any time that you include a graph or table, you should refer to it from the text of the report. Refer to the APA Style Guide 7<sup>th</sup> edition for specific guidance on how to format your tables and figures.

Do not cut and paste output or a screenshot from a statistical package into the body of your report (but you may be asked to do so in appendices). You should always think carefully about which information is relevant and useful, and present it in the best way without repetition.

In your results section, use the same informative names for the conditions that you set out in your method section. This will help your reader.

## 5.2. Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics are statistical tests to test your hypothesis. You should link these to aims of the study, and the research hypotheses, as stated in the introduction. It should be clear what test(s) you have used, and on what data the tests were performed. For most statistical tests (e.g., a *t*-test) there is a test statistic that should be reported (e.g., the *t*-value) along with the *p*-value. Often, there is other information to be included (e.g., the degrees of freedom, measures of effect size). For each different test, you will need to learn what information to report – This will most likely be taught in your statistics class.

When reporting *p*-values, the preferred method is to report the exact *p*-value at 3 decimal places (e.g.,  $p = .045$  or  $p = .678$ ). If a computer package shows a *p*-value of 0.000, this means that the *p*-value is too small to be shown exactly with three decimal places, and this is generally reported as  $p < .001$ .

Here are examples to show you how an investigation of mean differences can be reported in a results section.

The mean (standard deviation) solution times for the primed condition was quicker than for the unprimed conditions: 45.0 (12.3) and 56.3 (14.2) seconds, respectively. An independent-samples  $t$ -test established that the solution times in the primed condition were quicker than the solution times in the unprimed condition,  $t(32) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .019$ . The effect size for this difference is large ( $d = 0.85$ ).

Note that this example includes a clear statement of the direction of any significant effect. In other words, we know that solution times are quicker in the primed condition – not just that there is a difference between the conditions (without being told which one gives the faster times).

Different research fields sometimes have conventions for reporting results that differ slightly from those outlined above. Where this is the case, guidance will be given on how to present your results (e.g., by project supervisors or lecturers for a laboratory class).

### 5.3 Organisation of the Results section

Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics can be presented in the same paragraph. It is usually best to structure your Results section by research question or hypothesis, rather than by type of analysis.

### 6. Discussion (What you think it means.)

This is the section in which you interpret the results of the study and discuss their meaning. It is important that your discussion relates to the issues raised in the introduction, since this presented the reasons for conducting the study. You should link the arguments made in the Discussion with the issues and research hypotheses raised in your introduction section.

In particular:

1. How do your results compare with your research questions and/or predictions?
2. How do your results compare with relevant published results?
3. What are the implications for future research?

It is a good idea to start with a clear statement of what your study found. When you do this, you will often need to remind the reader of the main goals of the study. Then comment on your results, referring to the predictions or research questions that your study addresses. Say which predictions are supported by your findings, and identify any unexpected results. In the next two parts of the discussion, consider the possible explanations for these findings.

Now, discuss your findings in relation to previous research on the same or related research questions. The most important thing is to say how your results shed light on the theories or previous empirical findings and answer the research questions that you outlined in your introduction. If relevant, this can begin with a comparison between your findings and those of other studies. For instance, is the general level of performance similar to previous studies, or is the distribution of individual scores comparable to previous research? Is the size of mean difference or the strength of relationships similar to that found in other research on this topic? It is in this part of the discussion where you should discuss some of the studies mentioned in your introduction. One suggestion is to look at the methods of other studies as a possible source of any discrepancies between your results and theirs. These comparisons with previous research may provide insight into your results, or may suggest alternative explanations for your findings. Remember, everything that you discuss should be relevant to the theoretical questions that your study set out to address. Make sure that you state which theories are supported by your

results, and say how theories may have to be modified in order to account for your findings.

Now that you have stated and discussed your findings, you ought to identify what unanswered questions remain and what new questions have arisen. This leads into what future research it is important to carry out. If there are alternative explanations for your findings, this will provide a good reason for suggesting new studies that could be conducted. You should try to be as specific as you can: say what kind of study should be done, and why it will help to determine which explanation is better. If there are ways that your study could be extended to address new related questions – for instance, by adapting one of the conditions, or modifying the dependent variable(s) – you can discuss these here. Be wary of being too speculative: always make clear the possible consequences and benefits of any changes you propose, backed up with suitable sources.

When discussing what further research is required, try justify these suggestions by explaining why these further studies would be useful or interesting. Never simply conclude that further research is required without saying what the further research possibly could be and why it is relevant. Never simply list a series of possible shortcomings, and say that these could have affected your results in some (unspecified) way. Always make sure that, whatever you say, it is highly specific to the study that you have done and not simply a discussion of general factors that apply to all or most psychological research. For example, if you decide to say that a gender imbalance across participants is an important limitation or future direction for your study, you must explain why you believe gender differences will influence your results and what you would expect to find in a new study. Your rationale should always be linked back to relevant literature.



## 7. References

The Department has a guide to referencing that must be used when reporting psychology research. It can be found in the Psychology on-line resources, and it is reproduced below in this Assessment Guide.

## 8. Appendices

The final, optional, section of the report is the Appendix section (or Appendices). The contents of the Appendices usually consist of examples of stimuli and details of stimulus preparation, etc. In some cases you will be asked to place the output of your statistical analyses to ensure that markers understand the analyses you report in the body of your report. Have a separate appendix for each type of material, instead of just 'lumping' everything together in one appendix and number your appendices.

For more comprehensive guides for writing reports:

- Howitt, D., & Cramer, D. (2011). *Introduction to research methods in psychology* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Pearson. (Chs. 5 and 6).
- Sternberg, R.J. (2010). *The psychologist's companion: A guide to writing scientific papers for students and researchers* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Please see your PS900/PS934 reading list on TALIS for additional resources to support strong academic writing.

## **Chapter 2: Additional Guidance for Writing Qualitative Reports**

This chapter explains how to write up a qualitative report that collects and analyses non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, audio). There are many similarities between writing up quantitative and qualitative studies, and you should read Chapter 1 (Guide to Writing Research Reports) for an overview and useful tips. As with quantitative research reports, a qualitative report should have a 'coherent narrative'. Present what you did and what you found in a logical way that is easy for the reader to follow. Just like a quantitative research report, you'll need the following sections: title, abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion and conclusion. However, there are some key differences in some aspects that are included in these sections. These differences are detailed below.

### **What makes a good qualitative research report:**

Displaying an awareness of the differences between quantitative and qualitative paradigms and using the right approach for your research question.

Including reflexivity. This involves acknowledging how as a researcher your own values, interests and standpoints shaped the research whether this is the topic you chose, or your analysis of the data. Reflexivity should appear throughout your report in relevant sections (e.g., introduction, methods, discussion).

The APA has produced some Style Guidelines for writing up qualitative papers for publication. You may not need all the sections, or as much detail, but the guidelines provide a good overview. You can download them at: <https://apastyle.apa.org/jars/qual-table-1.pdf>

It is also worth looking at a few qualitative papers in good psychology journals to see how they are written up. You will see that what is included

and where may vary between papers; there is no one perfect way to write up a qualitative study. But below are some guidelines for the key information you should include.

## Writing Tips:

Qualitative research tends to use first person language and active tenses to ensure that the researcher is present (rather than absent) from the report. Avoid using phrases around themes “emerging” from the data. Qualitative researchers tend to reject the idea that themes can miraculously appear in the data as it suggests no involvement of the researcher. Two researchers may well interpret the same qualitative dataset differently, with different themes generated based on their own positionality (background, beliefs, etc.) – this is why reflexivity is so important.

### 1. Title

As with quantitative reports, your title should succinctly convey the critical aspects of the topic and/or your key results. Your title may also include details of your sample (e.g., students, men, Ukrainian refugees) and the qualitative method used (e.g., participatory action research, interpretative phenomenological analysis, reflexive thematic analysis). Here are two examples. *“Participatory action research with and for undocumented college students: Ethical challenges and methodological opportunities”*. *“What it is to be shy: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.”*

Sometimes titles may include a short quote from participants that captures a core aspect of the results (in which case, there may be a little leeway on the word count). E.g., *“Real men don’t diet”: An analysis of contemporary newspaper representations of men, food and health.*

### 2. Abstract

As per the guidance in Chapter 1 you will need to say why you did the research, what you did, what you found and what you concluded.

### 3. Introduction (Why you did it)

As per the guidance in Chapter 1 you will need to include a review of any related theory or research in the area and explain why the study is being done. Why is it interesting? Why is it important? What is known already? What is the gap in our knowledge or understanding that this study fills?

#### 3.1 The present study (What you are going to do)

End your introduction with information about your present study. This should include the research question or objective, a brief reiteration of why it is important to address this question, the methodology used to tackle the research question (e.g., interviews) and your theoretical perspective.

##### 3.1.1 Research question

Be careful that your research question is qualitative. Qualitative questions are focused on describing/understanding/exploring experiences, perceptions, processes, representations, or how language is used. Qualitative research questions are NOT about establishing prevalence, cause and effect or testing hypotheses. Examples of qualitative questions are: “How do homeless people in London experience their daily lives?” “How do co-habiting same-sex couples think about and manage their finances” “What barriers to accessing healthcare are constructed in the ways men talk about it?”

##### 3.1.2 State your theoretical perspective

Here you need to state which theoretical approach you adopted (e.g., “The analysis was theoretically underpinned by...”) and summarise briefly what it means and how it influenced your data analysis. The theoretical approach you adopt will depend on the beliefs you have about reality (your ontological stance) and what counts as knowledge and how it is

created (your epistemological stance). It is important that the approach you choose fits with your methodology and analysis.

#### 4. Method (How you did it)

Here you should state what you did and how and why you did it. Your report will also have a number of sub-sections.

##### a. Sample

Here you need to specify how many participants were tested, who they were, how they were selected and recruited. You should provide a summary of any demographic information provided, but note that it will only make sense to provide means and standard deviations for gender and age if your sample has more than 10 participants. Sometimes, if your participants have intersectional identities that are relevant to the research question, you might want to list each participant in a table. For an example of this, look at this paper: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.19.1.02>

##### b. Procedure

Outline and justify the methods used to collect data. E.g., qualitative survey, interviews, focus groups, story completion tasks, analysis of secondary data (e.g., blog posts, social media, magazines). For interviews, how long did they take? For focus groups, how many in each group? If you used secondary data explain its source and how it was compiled (what did you decide to include and why). If applicable explain how any topic guides for interviews or focus groups were developed and include these in the appendices. Describe any materials (e.g., photos, articles, etc.) used to provoke discussions in focus groups or interviews.

### c. Data Analysis Approach

State which method of analysis was used (e.g., reflexive thematic analysis, discourse analysis, code book) and why, and the process that it involved.

Be careful that the analysis type you choose fits with the overall theoretical position you stated at the end of your introduction (e.g., if you stated that you were going to undertake an experiential analysis, then you should avoid reading deeper meanings into participants' narratives).

You should specify whether an analysis of the entire data set was undertaken or whether one particular aspect was focused on. This section should also explain whether the analysis was done inductively (based heavily on the data) or deductively (based more heavily on theoretical expectation), and whether themes were derived semantically (by taking what is said/written at face value) and/or latently (reading more into what is said/written).

It is important to be upfront about who undertook the analysis, and what characteristics they have that might have influenced the analysis (e.g., gender, race, education, religion)? Increasingly, qualitative researchers will include positionality statements (usually) within the last section of their method.

A good strong positionality statement will include a description of the researcher's lenses (such as their philosophical, personal, theoretical beliefs and perspective through which they view the research process), potential influences on the research (such as age, political beliefs, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs), the researchers' chosen or pre-determined position about the participants in the project (e.g., as an insider or an outsider), the research-project context and an explanation as

to how, where, when and in what way they might, may or have influenced the research process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

“Before I present the findings, and in the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as an educated Black American woman. I am not an avid participant in Black online spaces such as comments sections, but I have observed the interactions of other users, advocated for Black online spaces, and am intrigued by the use of language to mark and protect cultural identities. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced this project to some extent; my member resources proved to be important tools that helped me make meaning of the text.”

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Structuring your report

You should start with an overview of your results. This could take the form of a list of your themes, a thematic map (see Byrne, 2022 for an example) or a summary table stating your themes and some key illustrative quotes (see Niebuhr et al., 2014 for an example). In this overview you should illustrate or describe the structure of your themes and how they relate to each other (e.g., you may have overarching themes, themes or sub-themes or your themes may simply be linked in a non-hierarchical way). In this overview and throughout the results and discussion section, themes should be displayed in a logical and/or meaningful order. E.g., you might list the most prominent or salient themes first or you might choose to start with a theme that helps set the scene for subsequent themes.

After the overview, you need to have a subheading containing the name of each theme. Within each subsection you will need to provide a clear description of each theme and select quotes that illustrate the theme. Quote should provide a vivid and compelling account of the arguments made by a theme and should help demonstrate cohesion and diversity of

expression within the data set. You should also “contextualise” your results by explicitly linking them to relevant literature.

## 5.2 What makes a good theme?

Good themes are coherent (make sense). They should have a central organising concept whereby they capture and summarise the core idea of a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data. Themes need to make sense on their own while also fitting together to form an overall analysis that addresses the research question.

Themes should also be consistent with the data, and the analytical approach used. Themes should also be distinct from each other. If themes are very similar to each other than they may be better as subthemes under a superordinate term.

## 5.3 Naming your themes

Careful consideration should be given to the names of each theme, and it is important that names reflect what the underlying data is about in an informative, concise and memorable way. Qualitative research is about telling a story so imaginative labelling is encouraged.

## 5.3 Structuring your data

There is no “correct” number of themes as this will depend on your dataset and research question(s). However, it is important to try and strike a balance between too many themes and too few themes. This is because a very large number of themes can be difficult for readers to process, and may indicate that the data-set has not been appropriately structured. Too few themes, can also suggest that the dataset has not been sufficiently explored.



### 5.3 Quality Control: Striking the right balance between analytic narrative and illustrative quotes

You will need to explain the theme you have chosen and evidence examples of it using illustrative quotes. Anybody should be able to read your write up and understand exactly what you found in the data without having to sift through the data themselves. While you can and should provide illustrative quotes to explain your theme, try not to rely too heavily on what participants have said to convey what the theme means. It is up to you to describe what the theme means as you are the analyst and the one generating it.

## 6. Discussion

Start the discussion by providing a clear summary of your overall results, looking across your themes to highlight general points. If you have not already done so in the results section (often it is easier to do it here) then you should contextualise your results within existing literature, including any you cited in your introduction. This will involve discussing the research data and the understandings derived from them in terms of their contribution to theory, method and/or practical domains. As with a regular research report you will need to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your research, consider applied implications and outline directions for future research.

## 7. Conclusion

This should be a short paragraph reiterating your main results and that ends with the message you would like your readers to take away from your report.

## 7. References

See below in the Assessment Guide.

## 8. Appendices

In this optional section you can provide any additional information you feel would help the reader understand your method. This could include recruitment materials, topic guides, materials evidencing your coding process, any materials you used to promote or facilitate discussion, a paper trail evidencing the decisions you made during your analysis such as initial thematic maps and finalised thematic maps.

For further information please refer to:

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>\*this resource contains guidelines on what constitutes good practice in one of the most common qualitative methodologies, reflexive thematic analysis\*

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391–1412.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y> \*this resource works through an example of reflexive thematic analysis including illustrating what the report would look like\*

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage. \*This book contains strategic steps and skills for starting and completing successful qualitative research including the write up process. Online and hardcopy available through the library\*

Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher Positionality--A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research--A New Researcher Guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232> \*this gives lots of helpful guidance on how to write a positionality statement\*

Niebuhr, V. Niebuhr, B., Trumble, J., & Urbani, M. (2014) Online Faculty Development for Creating E-learning Materials. *Education for Health* 27(3), 255-261. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1357-6283.152186>

### **3: Guide to Writing a Scientific Essay**

The University has a good general guide to writing essays, with lots of useful advice on writing. It can be found [here](#). This Departmental Guide should be read alongside the University Guide.

Writing an essay on a scientific topic is different from writing an essay on other topics. The main goal of most scientific essays is to explain and/or evaluate one or more theories, accounts or positions. Often this will mean presenting an argument for one of these positions. Always, it will involve presenting evidence for your case. In psychology, evidence is almost always specific findings and conclusions from research that is published in books and journal articles.

Coursework and examination essays will usually take one of a number of specific forms. For instance, you may be asked to “explain”, “compare and contrast”, “assess” or “evaluate”. Give particular thought to what this is asking you to do. For example, if you are required to compare and contrast two theories, you should make sure that both theories are described, and that you set out how the two theories differ and what they have in common. When you present evidence that favours one of these two theories, it should be clear why this evidence supports one theory better than the other (e.g., maybe one theory is consistent with the findings of a published paper, but the other one is not).

Essay questions will ask you to focus on a particular topic. It is vital that your essay addresses this specific topic, and that you do not drift into a discussion of the general area or of a weakly related topic. A good tip is to read each paragraph that you have written, and to ask yourself how well does it answer the question that you have been given, and how well it fulfils the specific goal of your essay. For every paragraph, the point made, and the relevance of this point to the essay, should be explicit. In many cases, that extra short sentence that clearly demonstrates your

understanding of the material will make a difference between a distinction and a merit/pass mark.

All essays should have a clear and logical structure as follows: an opening paragraph that should lay out the specific goal and plan for the essay, the body of the essay in which you make your case and present your evidence, and a final paragraph in which you summarize the main points and your conclusion. For this reason, it is worth taking the time to thoroughly plan your essay, to provide focus for when you write. Planning involves deciding what material is relevant, and the order in which you are going to present this material. This order of presenting ideas and evidence should be informed by the conclusions that you are going to make.

The opening paragraph provides context to the reader. You should remember that it is an introduction to your essay, and not an introduction to the general topic or the module for which the essay is being submitted. By the end of this paragraph, the reader should have a clear idea of where your essay is headed and, in brief, what conclusions will be drawn. Like the abstract for a research report, this opening paragraph should be succinct.

The body of the essay is where you lay out your position, and will consist of several paragraphs (typically around 80% of your word count). You should give considerable thought to the content, order and organization of the paragraphs. The organization should reflect what you have been asked to do in the essay, and should have a logical flow and progression from one idea to the next. For instance, if you have been asked to evaluate a theory, one way that you might do so is to have one section that describes the relevant aspects of the theory, another section that sets out evidence that supports the theory, and a third section that identifies findings that are inconsistent with the theory. A fourth section would then draw the evidence that has been presented together to make a reasoned conclusion.

The final paragraph summarizes the main points and the conclusions that you have set out in the main body of the essay. Again, you should pay particular attention to what you have been asked to do in the essay (e.g., to evaluate, or to assess). The way in which the goals of the essay have been met should be highlighted in this paragraph.

Finally, there should be a references section in which you list the sources that you have cited in the essay. The format for this is the same as for a research report.

### General Notes on Style

Using an appropriate style can be very difficult, even if you have written formal reports before. In time, the conventions described below should become fairly automatic. Again, by reading journal papers you should learn and remind yourself of what the usual practices are.

#### 1. Use of personal pronouns (I, we, our, me, etc.)

Be sparing with the use of personal pronouns (we, I, our, me, etc.).

Frequent use of personal pronouns can make your writing sound anecdotal (i.e., based on limited evidence), or appear dependent upon your subjective interpretation (e.g., as if others would not draw the same conclusion from the evidence that you have presented). When writing a results section, it is rarely essential to use “I” or “we”. For instance, you would NOT need to write: “I conducted a *t*-test”, as it is obvious that you as the author of the report conducted the test. Similarly, you should NOT write: “I conclude that the result is significant”, as other people would draw the same conclusion given the same data and the same test result. Nor should you describe “our brain” or “our memory”. You should certainly never state that “I personally believe...” However, you may write that “We administered a questionnaire”.

Any time that you use a personal pronoun you should check that it is clear to whom “we” refers, and that this provides the best way to express what

you want to communicate. Conventions concerning the use of personal pronouns do vary from one area of research to another. You can expect to receive guidance where conventions differ from those described above (e.g., from your project supervisor).

## 2. Use of tenses

Tenses can be very difficult to use correctly. These guidelines can only be very general rules of thumb. Basically, anything that is history should be written in the past tense. When you write up your work, even your method and results will be history, and should be described in the past tense. The conclusions of previous workers are history, however yours are still current and should be described in the present tense. The theories and models that were derived from the results and conclusions still make predictions today (even if they are the wrong ones) and their predictions thus should be described using the present tense. Thus, for a previous piece of work that you are describing:

“Smith et al. (1970) found that... they concluded that...and developed the XYZ model. This predicts that...”

If you were discussing the results of *your* experiment:

“It was found that... and thus we conclude that.... the ABC model predicts that...”

## 3. Other Points to Note

Avoid contracting words (don't, can't, couldn't, etc.).

Always proof read your work for typos. For example, the spell checker will not alert you to 'trials' being incorrectly spelled as 'trails'.

The word “data” is plural. For example, write: “*the data were collected*”, not “*the data was collected*”.

Affect (verb): to have an influence on something: *“something has affected my experiment”*; something has changed my experiment.

Effect (verb): to cause something to happen: *“something has effected my experiment”*; something has done my experiment for me.

Effect (noun): a consequence or an outcome: *“this is a negative effect”*; this is a bad outcome.

Affect (noun): an emotional state: *“this is a negative affect”*; this is a bad mood.

Most common usages are affect (verb) and effect (noun): e.g., “The problems described above affected the results by diminishing the size of the experimental effect.”

Signposting: If you tell readers what to expect, it helps them to understand what you have written, and it can help you to organize your ideas.

For example: “Consider now the lines of evidence against Baddeley’s position.”

Use appropriate connecting words as part of your signposting – this helps readers to understand where they are on the ‘route’ that you have mapped out for them.

For example: “Turning to evidence from three types of experiment: First, ... Second, ... Finally, ...”

Use connecting words that relate the current sentence or paragraph to the previous one, and try to have some variety in the connecting words that you use (while always making sure that the word that you have chosen is appropriate).



For example: “However, ... Moreover, ... Additionally, ...” or “Conversely, ... ;whereas ...”

Summarizing evidence: Think carefully about the level of detail that is needed to make a point. Always check your writing to ensure that you are not repeating yourself unnecessarily, or using more words than are needed to express an idea. Sometimes, you will want to present the findings from several experiments that have shared the same method (or have very similar methods). In such cases, it will be efficient to describe the details of the method once, and then to present the findings for each study separately. When summarizing a study, it is often useful to make sure that your summary addresses the following three questions: What was done? What was found? What does it mean?

## **4: Referencing Guide**

The following set of rules provides psychology students at Essex with a quick and easy guide as to what level of referencing is expected when submitting written work, such as coursework essays and laboratory reports. It is based on a summarized version of the Publication Manual of the APA (American Psychological Association) 7<sup>th</sup> edition style guidelines, which are followed in most academic writing in psychology. The APA guidelines are updated every few years. APA 7<sup>th</sup> is the most recent and the one you should follow.

The library has a page linking to a 'How to reference' guide. See <https://library.essex.ac.uk/referencing>. You can also copy template text for different reference examples to paste into your reference list (don't forget to fill in the details for the work you are citing though!). More detailed guidance is available from the APA Style website, at <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples>. For questions about unusual cases, the APA style blog often has the answers: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog>.

### **A: Referencing in the main body of the text**

You must provide a reference in your text whenever you are (a) describing a study or theory, (b) making a claim that needs support, (c) or referring in some other way to previous work. You should always cite the original work, where possible, to give credit to the people who did the work (see Rule 4 below).

Rule 1: Each reference consists of author(s) and date

The reference should consist of the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication.

Example 1A: Reaction times and error rates have been shown to increase when planning more difficult puzzles (Smith & Jones, 1991).

Example 1B: Smith and Jones (1991) found that reaction times and error rates increase when planning more difficult puzzles.

Keen readers will spot that when the reference is not in brackets (as in Example 1B) then the year is in brackets, and the word “and” is used to link authors; but when the reference is in brackets (as in Example 1A) the year is separated from the names by a comma. And the ampersand symbol “&” is used to link the authors.

Nowadays, many journals will put an accepted article online immediately, but may take longer to assign it to a volume of the print journal and give it a page number etc. These articles are called “online first” or “advance online” publications and the in-text citation style is the same as for 1A and 1B, i.e., name and year. Note, there are differences in how to list these in your reference list (see next section for examples).

Rarely, you might learn of an article that is not yet completed (in preparation) or submitted to a journal but not yet accepted (submitted). This will probably only be the case when working with your research project supervisor, who can tell you about their unpublished works. Check the online referencing guide for how to cite these.

Rule 2: When providing multiple citations to support one statement, list the citations first alphabetically, then chronologically. The alphabetical ordering is strictly applied, even if a chronological sequence seems more logical:

Example 2A: In the last 30 years the department has carried out four major surveys (Abbott & Smith, 1988; Brown, 1996, 1999; Smith, 1981).

Note that the order is strictly alphabetical, but where two papers have the same author(s), then the references are chronologically ordered.

Keen readers may wonder what to do if two or more different papers are to be cited by the same author and the same year. In this case, use letter suffixes *a*, *b*, *c* to differentiate the sources. When writing your reference list, same author-same year articles will be listed in alphabetical order by whatever comes after the year – usually the title of the article. The suffix letter is based on this order. Cite in the text by whatever letter was assigned in the reference list.

Example 2B: In text.

Special educational needs (MacKay, 2000b) and poverty (MacKay, 2000a) have been argued to be important issues that should be addressed in the future.

Example 2B: In Reference list

MacKay, T. (2000a). A millennium without illiteracy? Breaking the link between poverty and reading failure. *Proceedings of The British Psychological Society*, 8, 12-15.

MacKay, T. (2000b). Educational psychology and the future of special educational needs legislation. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 17, 27–35.

This ordering of 2000a and 2000b is used because in the text following (2000), “A” precedes “Educational” in the dictionary, and is used when there is a tie between authors and dates.

Rule 3: Use “et al.” if the reference has three or more authors

If a work has three or more authors, cite only the first author name plus “et al.” (not in italics).

One author: (Smith, 1996)

Two authors: (Smith & Jones, 2001)

Three or more authors: (Smith et al., 2016)

If the abbreviation et al. leads to a confusion between two groups of authors, e.g., Hunt, Hartley, Bloggins and Davies (1983) and Hunt, Davies, Ford and Baker (1983), then cite as many of the authors as necessary to distinguish the two citations. Hunt, Hartley et al. (1983) and Hunt, Davies et al. (1983).

Rule 4: Use of secondary sources

It is expected that, wherever possible, you find and read the original source in order to avoid having to cite a secondary source. Only if it is not possible to access the original work, e.g., the work is out of print,

unavailable, or in a language you don't understand, then you can use an indirect citation. The in-text citation should include the author of the older work, followed by brackets showing where you read about it. In the reference list, you ONLY cite the one you read (the secondary source).

Example 4A (in text): Rubin (as cited in Sabini, 1992) studied forgetting of everyday events...

Example 4A (in reference list):

Sabini, J. (1992). *Social psychology*. W.W. Norton.

You may have noticed that the year of the Rubin paper is not included. Only add the year if there is more than one paper by Rubin that is cited in Sabini.

Rule 5: Direct quotes

General rule: don't!

Note that the use of direct quotes should be used sparingly, and reserved for when the exact wording used is critical to your point, rather than just what those words were conveying. Do not use direct quotes for regular summaries of work – for these use your own words. Being able to access, understand, and convey information is an important skill that you need to develop. Over-use of direct quotes will likely be marked down in your assessment.

If you do wish to use quotes, put the quote within quotation marks, provide the source and page numbers in the text. You do not need to put the page number in the reference list at the end.

Example 5A (in text): Baddeley admitted that he was sometimes uncertain of the theoretical framework within which to explain executive tasks, “at times I have described the central executive as the area of residual ignorance within the working memory system” (Baddeley, 1986, p. 225).

Example 5A (in reference list):

Baddeley, A. D. (1986). *Working memory*. Clarendon Press.

## **B: The Reference List**

The purpose of the reference list is to allow readers (or librarians) to find the original material. Most commonly, this could be to find out more about something that sounds interesting, or to double-check a statement that was made is accurate. To allow them to do this it is essential to include the following items of information for each item in the list: author or originator; year of publication; title of work; publication data, and DOI.

The DOI (Digital Object Identifier) is a permanent online link to a given piece of work. It should be included whenever it is available. The DOI system was launched in 2000, so older works may not have them. But many journals have now digitised their older content and added DOIs. Many important historical works may also have been digitised and provided with a DOI.

Finding the DOI: Sometimes it is given right under the article information. On some journal websites, it is given in the top right-hand corner of the page. There are probably other examples. Sometimes you have to hunt around a bit.

In APA 7, the DOI is given as a full URL (<https://doi.org/xxxxx>). If an article only gives the actual identifier (e.g., doi: xxxxx), make sure to add the full link. At present, the xxxxx part always begins with the number “10.”

If you are using the University library extension that gives you access to many online journals, the DOI might include some text specific to the University. For example: <https://doi-org.uniessexlib.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/jasp.12902>. This link will not provide access for anyone outside the University of Essex. You need to extract the ‘xxxxx’ part (10.1111/jasp.12902) and add it to the URL root, as above.

Note, not all journals or books will use APA style (or APA 7) in their titles, citations, and reference lists. Don’t just copy from the source – create the correct APA 7 reference using the templates below.

### Rule 1: Format of Individual References

Take care to check that all references cited in the text are included, and that dates and spellings of authors’ names are consistent in the text and the list. Note that the name of the book or the name of the journal and the journal volume number are *italicized*.

#### a. Journal articles

Surname, Initials. (Year). Title of paper. *Journal Name in Italics*, volume in italics(issue number if available), page numbers. DOI

Even if a journal article gives a full first name for the authors, use the initials only. Note, put full stops after initials with spaces between them. Always include a comma before the “&”, even if there are only two



authors. Full stop after all authors have been listed. Year in brackets with full stop. *Journal Name in Italics*, comma, volume in italics, issue number in brackets right after the volume, with no space, comma, page numbers. Don't put a full stop after the DOI. This may seem pedantic, but web links don't work if they have punctuation at the end!

The title of the paper only has a capital letter at the start (and after a semi-colon if there is two-part title (see examples below). Journal names, being names, are capitalised.

Example 1A:

Ojalehto, B. I., Medin, D. L., & Garcia, S. G. (2017). Grounding principles for inferring agency: Two cultural perspectives. *Cognitive Psychology*, 95, 50–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2017.04.001>

Example 1B:

Spates, K., Evans, N., James, T. A., & Martinez, K. (2020). Gendered racism in the lives of Black women: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 46(8), 583–606.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798420962257>

If a work has a large number of authors, APA 7 requires we list up to twenty authors, as follows.

Up to 20 authors: List all authors.

More than 20 authors: List the first nineteen then use an ellipsis (...) and list the name of the last author of the work (no ampersand is required in this case)

Online first articles will not have a volume, an issue, or a page number. Include the sentence “Advance online publication.” After the journal name and before the DOI.

Example 1C:

Greenland, K., West, K., & van Laar, C. (2022). Definitional boundaries of discrimination: Tools for deciding what constitutes discrimination (and what doesn't). *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12902>

If you find a PDF of an online first article with pages numbered 1 to 13, for example, these are just “first page” “second page” etc., and not actual journal page numbers.

Online-only journals:

Nowadays, some journals are online only. That is, they never create a print copy. Because there is no print version, page numbers are meaningless. These journals will instead give a piece of work an article number. List this instead of the page numbers, preceded by the word “Article”.

Example 1D:

Rozental, A., Forsström, D., Hussoon, A., & Klingsieck, K. B. (2022). Procrastination among university students: Differentiating severe cases in need of support from less severe cases. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 783570. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.783570>

## b. Books

In-text citations for books use the same author/year rules as for journal articles.

In the reference list, use:

Surname, Initials. (Year). *Book title in italics* (X<sup>th</sup> ed.). Name of Publisher. DOI (if available)

Note, the book title is not capitalised. Just the first letter. Only include the edition number if there is more than one. Do not include the publisher's location (this was included in previous APA versions). Many books published by major publishers nowadays are available online and may have a DOI assigned to them.

Example 1E:

Berkowitz, L. (1980). *A survey of social psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

## c. Edited books

Surname, Initials. (Ed.) (Year). *Book title in italics*. Name of Publisher. DOI (if available)

Use the editor's name in place of authors' names, before the year. If there is more than one editor, use "(Eds.)" without a comma before the "&". Give the name of the publisher as they themselves use, e.g., note "and Winston" in example 1E above and "& Sons" in example 1F below.

Example 1F:

Torino, G. C., Rivera, D. P., Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L., & Sue, D. W.

(Eds.). (2019). *Microaggression theory: Influence and implications*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119466642>

#### d. Chapters in edited books

Surname of chapter author, Initials. (Year). Title of paper. Initials and Surname of Editor(s) of Book (Ed(s).), *Title of edited book in italics*. (pp. page numbers of chapter). Name of Publisher. DOI (if available)

#### Example 1G:

Petrie, K. (1981). Life stress and illness: Formulation of the issue. In B. S. Dohrenwend & B. P. Dohrenwend (Eds.), *Stressful life events and their context* (pp.345–401). Wiley.

#### e. Citing internet documents

General rule: Don't!

Much of the information on the internet is informal: neither reviewed nor authoritative. The best advice we give is NOT to cite information unless it appears in a scientific journal, a scientific preprint repository like Psyarxiv, or in a book, because these sources have been checked for accuracy before publication. Sometimes, academic journals and book chapters are available on-line. If the article is published in a journal or book, then cite the reference as for a normal book or journal article.

Only use non-academic online sources if no academic source is available. Very occasionally, you may need to cite a more informal article from the internet that does not have full publication information (e.g., a news article [if the article reports on some new research, for example, look up the original research], or a data base of images that you have used to construct stimuli).

If you do have to cite an internet source, use the format:

For an individual author: Surname, Initials. (Date). *Title of article in italics*. Source Website. URL

Example 1H:

Clay, R. (2008, June). *Science vs. ideology: Psychologists fight back about the misuse of research*. Monitor on Psychology, 39(6).

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2008/06/ideology>

Note that in the text, this would be referenced as Clay (2008) just as any other source. It is also unusual for an online source to include a volume and issue number – this is only likely when it is a regular newsletter. If it's there, include it, but don't worry about it if it's not.

When the author is an organisation (and no individual author is listed):

Example 1G.

World Health Organization. (2019, October 23). *Adolescent mental health*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

Note, in example 1H, the source was the APA Monitor on Psychology newsletter but the author was Rebecca Clay. In this case, the writer is the author and the source comes after the title. In example 1G, the organisation is the 'author' AND the source. If you included the source, it would be exactly the same as the author, i.e., "World Health Organization" so there is no need to include it twice.

For the date of an online source, use the most specific date possible provided on the site (e.g. year, month and date; year and month; or year only). If there is no date use (n.d.).

You do not need to include the date you looked at the website (retrieval date) unless the page is designed to be regularly updated. In this case, include the retrieval date after the source.

Surname, Initials. [or Organisation] (Date). *Title of article in italics*. Source Website. Retrieved Month day, year, from URL.

#### Example 1J.

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *U.S. and world population clock*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved January 9, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>

#### f. Citing module handouts

General rule: Don't!

You are also dissuaded from referencing module handouts in your work, unless the handout is in *lieu* of a module textbook. They are often an unimpressive source of information: we aim to provide the notes so that you can read the articles and the textbooks we cite and recommend for yourselves.

Although we wish students to discontinue from using the handout as the primary source (use published sources instead), it is a worse crime not to provide any reference at all (and so risk accusations of plagiarism, if your

assessed work is in fact based on the handout). In this weak case, a reference to the module notes is needed and might be something like the lecturer (date). Module details. Location.

#### Example 1K

Ward, G. (2007). *PS415 Cognitive Psychology II, notes for week 17 (short term memory)*. University of Essex.

#### Rule 2: Order of references in Reference List

This should be based primarily on the alphabetical order of the surname of first author. In the event of a tie, the following determines the order (in descending order of importance):

- alphabetically on initials of first author;
- sole authors take precedence to multiple authors;
- alphabetically on subsequent authors;
- chronologically if authors tied;
- alphabetically by text if authors and date are tied (see Example 2B in section A above)

## **5: Categorical Marking Scheme**

Instead of writing a number on your assessed work, the marker will write a letter. The scheme will apply to examination essays, coursework essays, dissertations, and practical reports.

The meaning of the letters is as follows:

A+++	95%	Distinction
A++	90%	
A+	85%	
A	80%	
A-	75%	
B+	68%	Merit
B	65%	
B-	62%	
C+	58%	Pass
C	55%	
C-	52%	
D+	48%	Fail
D	45%	
D-	42%	
E5	36%	Uncompensatable Fail
E4	30%	
E3	24%	
E2	12%	
E1	0%	



A categorical marking scheme means that the marker can only give one out of a limited set of marks to each individual piece of work. For example, five marks are permissible within the MSc distinction category (95%, 90%, 85%, 80%, 75%), and three marks are permissible within the MSc pass level (58%, 55%, 52%). Please remember that only A, B and C grades indicate an acceptable passing standard for the MSc degree. There are five possible failing marks (36%, 30%, 24%, 12%, 0%).

When two markers give different marks, they must agree a categorical mark as the final mark.

## **6: Marking Guidelines for Research Reports**

For detailed guidance on writing a report, see the 'Guide to Writing Research Reports' section. The notes that follow provide additional guidance on the principles that underpin the marking of a research report.

### Marking Guidelines for Research Reports

*Terminology:* In the guidelines that follow, the study that is reported in the research report is referred to as the “target study”.

#### Abstract:

An abstract would ordinarily include:

- A statement of the main research question or hypothesis for the target study with some information about what motivated this question/hypothesis.
- A summary of the target study including: what was done in the study, what was found, and what the findings show.
- A statement of the key conclusion(s) of the study in relation to the main research question or hypothesis, with some justification for this conclusion.

An abstract that includes these elements is indicative of a Distinction or Merit standard; with the standard of the work being further distinguished by the clarity, level of detail, and efficiency of the writing.

An abstract of below Distinction or Merit standard may include these elements but be poorly organized with unnecessary information for some elements and insufficient detail for others. Alternatively, while some valid information is included, key elements may be missing.

Work marked below 50% may be highly disorganized, have substantial omissions, be difficult to understand, or may fail to provide a meaningful

summary of the target study (e.g., identify the topic area for the research with little mention of the target study itself).

#### Introduction:

The following elements would ordinarily be expected in an Introduction of Distinction standard:

- A detailed description of theory that focuses on those elements of greatest significance for the target study, with the relevance of this theory for the target study made clear.
- Description and critical appraisal of prior research, with a clear indication of the relevance of this research for the target study. In Masters research projects, there is considerable scope for initiative in identifying relevant research, for identifying strengths and weaknesses of this research, and for explaining its relevance to the target study.
- A clear communication of the importance of the research topic and of the target study in particular (e.g., explicitly identifying a gap in the existing literature).
- An organized Introduction that leads in a logical fashion towards the research question(s) or hypotheses that the target study will address.

If such elements are present *consistently* throughout the Introduction, this is indicative of a Distinction standard. An Introduction that includes the elements listed above – but with some lack of clarity, detail or consistency – would be indicative of a lower Distinction mark.

An Introduction of Merit standard would ordinarily outline relevant theory and prior research with reasonable clarity, and follow a logical order of presentation. However, the appraisal of this research may be limited, or the description of relevant theory may be *partially* incomplete or ambiguous, or the relevance of the theory/research may be made clear by implication rather than being brought out explicitly.

An Introduction with some relevant theory and research suitably identified and adequately described, but which is *highly* disorganized, is indicative of a Pass standard (e.g., where the link between theory and research is absent, or where the relevance of this research/theory to the target study is dubious or unclear).

Introductions below Distinction or Merit standard will often be unbalanced: covering mainly theory with little research described, or covering prior research but with limited reference to the relevant theoretical ideas. Alternatively, work of this standard will give a general introduction to the topic area of the target study, but will be inadequate as an introduction to the target study itself.

Work below 50% will often contain important factual errors, or will omit large amounts of material that is essential to an understanding of the target study.

*Note:* A report that demonstrates initiative, originality, or sophistication in the appropriate selection of material for the Introduction is indicative of work of a high standard – and this may compensate for some weaknesses elsewhere.

#### Method:

The following should be expected in Method section of Distinction standard:

- Appropriate choice of sub-sections for organizing the details of the study.
- Sufficient detail of description to allow replication of the study.
- If appropriate, justification or rationale provided for key features of the stimuli/procedure.
- Sufficient detail of description, with sufficient clarity of relationship to the study hypotheses, to support conceptual replications of the study.

- Appropriate choices regarding what not to include (e.g., not including trivial items of apparatus).

If these features are present consistently throughout the Method section with only very minor and occasional ambiguities or omissions, this is indicative of a high Distinction standard. Some ambiguities or omissions may be present in work of a lower Distinction standard, though these should not be weaknesses that are critical to the ability to understand or replicate the methods of the target study.

A Merit standard Method would be expected to include most of the features listed above, but may fall short in one or two key areas. For instance, some clarification of ambiguities may be required to allow exact replication of the study (e.g., counterbalancing of stimuli may be mentioned, but the exact system for this may be unclear). Alternatively, the Method may provide a faithful description of what was done, but give no rationale or justification for key details of the method.

Method sections below Merit or Distinction standard will generally be incomplete – and are unlikely to allow for exact replication of the study without considerable clarification or addition of detail. They may be some key omissions or errors, or there may be multiple ambiguities.

Work below 50% will often be poorly organized and contain several errors, or will omit large amounts of material that is essential to replicating the target study.

*Note:* Credit will be given for appropriate inclusion of study materials in appendices. However, if a good understanding of the study methods can be achieved *only* by reference to verbatim material in appendices, this will limit the credit that can be awarded to this portion of report. Where the justification of key features of the method shows particular insight or sophistication, this may compensate for some weaknesses

elsewhere. In longer research reports, some tolerance or compensation in marking is expected where the study design is particularly complex – thereby requiring particular skill in explaining the details of the study in a clear, succinct and well-organized fashion.

## Results:

The following can be expected in a Results section of Distinction:

- Clear description of any data manipulation to create composite or transformed measures (for subsequent analysis) from raw data. Note that in some cases it might be more appropriate to include this information in the methods section. The important thing is to ensure that this is included somewhere in your report.
- Clear descriptive statistics, which are suitable for communicating the findings with respect to the effects under investigation in the study.
- Measures or indications of the direction and size of effects appropriate to the effects under investigation (e.g., raw and/or standardized measures of effect size, as appropriate to the measures used).
- Appropriate selection and use of tables, text or graphs for presenting the results.
- Optimal choice of statistical techniques – accepting the limitations of what students have been taught.
- Appropriate reporting of statistical tests, with proper regard for standard reporting conventions.
- Appropriate statement(s) that provide valid interpretation of statistical tests, with clear statements of what inferences can (or cannot) be made from the data.
- Clear and economic written expression that avoids unnecessary repetition of information, with correct use of statistical terminology.

- Suitable ordering of material (e.g., of the descriptive and inferential statistics for a reported effect).

A Results section where most of these features are consistently present to a high standard will be indicative of a high Distinction standard. Work that falls short in one or two key areas – but which does not compromise the key findings of the study would be in keeping with a lower Distinction mark. For instance, a Results section that presents complete and correct information but which exhibits some inefficiency in the writing style, occasional minor errors, or some suboptimal choices regarding the best means of data presentation (e.g., tables vs. figures) may be awarded a mark in the lower part of the Distinction range.

Errors will be rare in work of Merit standard, and will generally be errors of style, convention or clarity rather than errors of fact or interpretation that compromise the accuracy of the results. A Results section of Merit standard will have most or all of the correct information, but may have some ambiguous or incomplete (as distinct from incorrect) reporting of data or statistical tests. Such instances could include: correct reporting and interpretation of test statistics but some degrees of freedom incorrectly recorded; mean differences correctly reported and analysed but standardized effect sizes or within-group variance missing on some occasions; interactions correctly identified but not fully described; correct and complete information that is poorly organized, formatted or expressed that forces the reader to work hard to follow the results.

Results sections of below Merit or Distinction standard will generally have some errors, ambiguities, or omissions that are substantive with respect to the effects under investigation – increasingly so for work of less than 50% standard. These errors might include: some key relevant descriptive statistics not included; inadequate reporting of analyses that makes it unclear what has been analysed or what has been found; using an inappropriate inferential statistical test (or omitting a test when one should

be used); incorrect inferences drawn from statistical tests (e.g., non-significant effects declared “significant”).

Work below 50% will have several major errors, or have sufficient omissions (e.g., no inferential statistics) such that the section barely takes the form of a standard results section.

*Note:* Where advanced statistical techniques are used, the challenges that this brings are acknowledged; therefore, some tolerance or compensation in marking is expected where students have (appropriately) used advanced techniques that increase the detail or sophistication of the data analysis. Similarly, in longer research reports, some tolerance or compensation in marking is expected where students have (appropriately) undertaken a large number or variety of analyses – thereby demanding a sustained ability to report a range of findings accurately and making the organization of the report more challenging.

Discussion:

Most or all of the following elements would ordinarily be expected in a discussion of Distinction standard:

- A summary of the key findings that clarifies the *meaning* of the reported results.
- An appraisal of the research question(s) or hypotheses outlined in the Introduction in light of the findings of the target study. Greater sophistication of appraisal is expected in later years of the degree.
- In final-year research projects, it is expected that the best students will show clear evidence of critical analysis, and a nuanced understanding of what can (or cannot) be concluded from the data.
- Presents conclusions that are clearly supported by the data, using appropriate academic language (e.g., neither inappropriately bold nor unduly cautious given the data).



- Appropriate use of psychological theory to shed light on the findings of the target study, and/or using the findings of the study to provide insights into or an evaluation of theory.
- Appropriate use of prior research to shed light on the findings of the target study, and/or using the findings of the study to provide insights into or an evaluation of other research studies.
- Where appropriate, an acknowledgement of any unforeseen weaknesses in the study, and/or suggestions for future research with a rationale provided for these suggestions.
- An organized discussion that leads in a logical fashion from what was found in the target study to the conclusions and implications of the study findings.

If such elements are present *consistently* throughout the discussion, this is indicative of a high Distinction standard. A discussion that includes the elements listed above – but with some lack of clarity, detail or consistency – would be indicative of a lower Distinction mark.

A Merit standard discussion would ordinarily show sound understanding of the findings in relation to the research question(s) or hypotheses and include discussion of relevant theory and prior research that relate to the target study. However, the appraisal the target study may be incomplete, or the relevance of the theory/research that is discussed may be implied rather than being brought out explicitly. Alternatively, a Merit standard discussion may be one that includes Distinction standard discussion of some of the elements listed above, but is weak in (or omits) other elements.

In work of below Merit or Distinction standard, the discussion of the findings will often be superficial: potentially relevant theory is identified but little detail is given and the relevance of the theory is either implied or unclear; mention is made of other potentially relevant research findings but their relationship to those of the target study are superficial, unclear or

perhaps tenuous. Weaker discussions will often include unjustified conclusions or speculative proposals that have little or no support from the data, or show a misunderstanding of the design of the study. Alternatively, a discussion of this standard may be unbalanced or incomplete (e.g., with most of the section devoted to summarizing findings with little reference to relevant theory or research), or show important misunderstandings.

Work below 50% will often contain important factual errors, or will omit large amounts of material that is essential to an understanding of the implications of target study. The weakest discussion sections may provide very little discussion that genuinely derives from the target study (e.g., simply re-introducing a few key points from the Introduction).

Overall structure and generic aspects of the report

A good report will:

- Have an informative title.
- Exhibit coherent links between the separate sections, with each section of the report adding to the understanding of the target study.
- When read as a whole, present a complete and coherent account of: why the study was done, the details of the study, the findings of the study and their implications.
- Have information placed in the appropriate section, and avoid unnecessary repetition of information across multiple sections.
- Be written in a scientific style, with clear written expression, good grammar and correct spelling.
- Make use of appropriate and informative citation.
- Include a complete and appropriately formatted Reference section

Credit should be given where a report shows a consistently high standard with respect to these elements. Obvious weaknesses – particularly those

that detract from an understanding of the report or the academic integrity of the assignment – will result in a lower mark being awarded.

## **Chapter 7: Marking Guidelines for Qualitative Research Reports**

The marking guidelines given for the quantitative research reports apply for qualitative research reports too. However, there are a few additional considerations.

### ***Clear research objectives rather than hypotheses***

Qualitative research does not demand specific testable hypotheses in the same way that quantitative research does. However, it is still important to be clear and specific about the objectives and aims of your research in the introduction. Consideration should also be given to where your study fits within relevant literature.

Below are some examples taken from the “Qualitative Psychology” journal.

E.g., “In this study, we aimed to uncover a deeper understanding of the experiences of racial microaggressions in the work place and their psychological and career related impact, along with coping strategies used by Black women corporate leaders who had broken through the concrete ceiling to career advancement”.

*“To contribute to our understanding of how marginalized individuals commit their lives to activism and create societal change, the present study seeks to examine the lives and experiences of three activists living in three distinct socio-political and geographic contexts”.*

### ***Appropriate Methods and Coherence in Research Design***

The chosen methods of investigation allow the research objective to be addressed. Similarly, there should be coherence between the stated ontological and/or epistemological position and the approach to qualitative

analysis. E.g., if a relativist approach is adopted where the research believes there are multiple versions of reality, then a critical approach to data analysis that involves the researcher more deeply interrogating participant's meaning may be more appropriate than an experiential approach to data analysis that involves the researcher taking participant's responses at face value.

## **Results**

The following criteria are indicative of high quality thematic analysis.

- a. Themes are coherent, consistent, and distinctive, and work together to address the research objective.
- b. Each theme has a central organising concept (i.e., captures and summarises the core point of a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data).
- c. Themes are aptly named, and illustrative of the data.
- d. If applicable, awareness of relationships between themes is acknowledged, and conveyed to the reader.
- e. Neither too few, nor too many themes, indicating full exploration of the depth and breadth of the dataset, but also appropriate and logical structuring.
- f. Analytic claims fits with stated theoretical position (e.g., if the researcher has stated they are undertaking an experiential approach then they should take participant's meanings at face value)

## ***Owning Your Perspective (I.e., positionality)***

Qualitative researchers will explicitly state their theoretical perspectives (I.e., their epistemology, ontology), and positionality (I.e., they will disclose how their own characteristics have influenced the research). A positionality statement will evidence strong reflexivity and demonstrate the

researcher has considered how their own world views and characteristics have influenced the research process.

### ***Use of Personal Pronouns***

Qualitative researchers uses personal pronouns (I, we, our, me, etc.) to acknowledge the role of the researcher in shaping the research questions, analysis and conclusion.

## **8: Marking Criteria for Postgraduate Essays**

Marking criteria are interpreted in light of the constraints associated with different assignments. Coursework essays (i.e., those completed outside of timed test conditions) are marked according to what can reasonably be achieved given the prescribed word limit. Examination/test essays (i.e., those written under test conditions) are marked bearing in mind what can be expected given the constraints of working to a time limit and without written sources available.

### **A++, A+++ 86-100, (High Distinction)**

Marks in this range are exceptional, but should be awarded for a piece of work that has a significant proportion of its content that is of publishable or near-publishable standard. If it is hard to articulate what a student might reasonably be expected to do to improve the piece of work, given the constraints of time or word limit within which they were working, a mark in this range should be awarded

### **A-, A, A+, 70-85 (Distinction)**

A distinction answer is not necessarily a perfect answer, but will consistently demonstrate a very good sense of what is relevant. The piece of work will be free from all but the most minor of occasional ambiguities or not-quite-fully-formed arguments. Ideas will be expressed fluently and in an appropriately succinct fashion. Some originality in thought, analysis, or organisation is expected. On occasion, sufficient originality may compensate for a shortage of information. If a candidate chooses to spend a high proportion of time in discussing original issues, there will be less time to devote to other issues. The omission of standard information will not prohibit the award of a distinction in such cases.

A distinction should be awarded if the piece of work consistently shows two or more of the following:

- exceptionally complete knowledge (considerable evidence of wider reading);
- expertise in problem solving or critical analysis;
- evidence of originality providing new insight into the taught material.

#### B-, B, B+, 60-69 (Merit)

Shows a good sense of what is relevant, and can discuss a range of relevant findings and theories. For marks in this band, answers will typically be effectively organised, and fully address all elements of the task or question. Consistent clarity of written expression is expected. Answers in this band will not necessarily be consistent in displaying originality, critical flair, and brilliance in problem solving. Nonetheless, for marks in the upper regions of this range, some evidence of higher or critical understanding or reasoning is expected, such as:

- complete knowledge (evidence of wider reading);
- expertise in problem solving or critical analysis;
- some originality of thought, analysis, or organisation.

(Such features need not be a consistent feature of the essay to be awarded a mark in this band – where such features are evident throughout much of the piece of work a distinction mark would be expected.) Work that has factual errors can only be awarded a mark in this range if there are clear compensating features such as those described in the criteria for a distinction).

#### C-, C, C+, 50-59 (Pass)

Shows a sound sense of what is relevant, and can discuss a range of relevant findings and theories. All elements of the question will be addressed. For marks in this band, answers will usually be organised in an appropriate fashion – though there will often be clear room for improvement in the effectiveness of the organisation of the material



included. Answers in this band will typically fail to show originality, critical flair, and brilliance in problem solving and may suffer from a lack of clarity in a few places. Answers will demonstrate sound understanding of what has been covered in class and in key readings – but will sometimes be lacking in deeper understanding, show only limited evidence of wider reading, or may have some factual errors.

#### D-, D, D+, 40-49 (Fail)

Shows some knowledge of relevant material but does not integrate it very well or show solid understanding of it. Answers that address some of the elements of the task or question appropriately, but fail to address important parts of the task or question will often fall in this band. Answers in this band will typically be poorly organised for a considerable proportion of the piece of work, and may often lack clarity in places. Answers commonly miss important points, or include significant errors, or include material that is of little or no relevance. The student reproduces some of what has been taught in class but contributes little or relevance from independent reading or thinking.

#### E4, E5, 30-39 (Low Fail – uncompensatable fail\*)

Has some knowledge, but it tends to be superficial, incomplete, unintegrated or ill understood. Frequent errors of fact or reasoning, and showing only limited profit from the module. When attempting a problem, tends to identify the area in which discussion must be conducted and contributes some relevant material, but makes errors in the solution of the problem that reveal a lack of discrimination or a failure to learn the whole of a principle or to understand how the parts of a subject relate to each other. Passages that are fluently expressed will be found on close examination to say rather little, or be inconsistent.

#### E1, E2, E3, Marks below 30 (Very Low Fail - uncompensatable fail\*)

Such marks would normally be appropriate for extremely brief and/or wildly inaccurate answers;

For example, for attempts to answer an exam question:

24% Full essay plan OR multiple minor points

Two paragraphs of vaguely relevant information that has at least one main point

12% One paragraph of vaguely relevant information.

A very skeletal plan - like a short list of a few ideas/theories/effects/tasks but nothing else (equivalent in space to a few lines).

0% Nothing of any relevance

Within all mark bands

Correct referencing and presentation in accordance with departmental guidelines is expected. Marks should be deducted if work does not conform to these guidelines.

\*Under the current rules of assessment, a module aggregate mark below 40 cannot ordinarily be compensated by marks on other modules. A module aggregate mark of 39 or below therefore normally precludes the awarding of a Masters degree. Note that this regulation does not apply to individual pieces of work – only to the aggregate achieved for all pieces of assessment on a module.

Important points for students to consider:

- Students are expected to show improvement in their work over the year. The markers will therefore take this into consideration when assessing students' work. For example, handing in work of equivalent quality all year will result in lower and lower marks. Similarly, failure to act on feedback, and therefore to improve

the quality of one's work, will also lead to lower and lower marks.

- More is expected of Postgraduate students than of Undergraduate students. For instance, it is expected that a Distinction examination essay will often integrate material from different parts of a module and/or include material that was not presented in lectures. Likewise, a higher level of critical analysis of theory and greater skill in evaluating evidence is expected (e.g., using a *set* of research findings to evaluate or contrast *competing* theories, or evaluating one study in light of the methods or findings of another study).

Presentation counts towards the overall mark for any piece of coursework. If work does not conform to the formatting regulations provided this will be reflected in the mark awarded.

## **9: Scoring Systems for Multiple-Choice Assessment**

MCQ assessments are marked using positive marking. This means that you get one point for a correct answer, and no points for an incorrect answer. Your score will be calculated as the number of correct responses divided by the total number of questions, and then multiplied by 100. For instance, in a 40 item MCQ, a pass mark (40%) would be 16/40, a 2:1 (60%) would be 24/40, and a first (70%) would be 28/40.

Any other variations used will be explained by module coordinators.

Note that with this marking system, it never benefits a candidate to leave a question unanswered.

**Sometimes an assessment may include questions with more than one correct answer per question, for which candidates are asked to identify as many correct answers as they can.**

**Note that where different question types that require, or allow for, different kinds of response appear on the same test or examination, this will be clearly indicated on the question paper. For instance, one set of questions may require a single answer, while another set of questions may invite candidates to identify or select multiple options. Candidates should always read the instructions carefully.**

**As noted earlier, any variations to these systems will be explained by module coordinators.**

## **10: Formatting Regulations for Coursework**

All students are required to word-process all assessed coursework and submit coursework electronically using the on-line coursework submission system, FASER. This applies to absolutely all coursework. Presentation of work and, in particular, deviation from the following criteria, will be taken into account when assigning a mark. All applicable coursework should be formatted in the following way:

Page setup: Use A4 settings in portrait orientation.

Margins: At least 2cm all round, and not more than 3cm all round. The preferred measurement is 2.5 cm. Text should be formatted as one single column and should not be right justified.

Anonymization: The originator of the work should be identified only by your registration number, and no name should appear anywhere on the work.

Line spacing: All body text must be double spaced.

Font size: The acceptable range is 12 to 14 points. The preferred size is 12 points. Unusual or decorative fonts will not be permitted.

Paragraphing: Paragraphing should be clear. For example, this may be achieved by EITHER (i) a 1cm indent at the beginning of a conventional paragraph, OR (ii) at least a 2cm gap between paragraphs.

Punctuation: There should never be a space before full stops, commas, semi-colons, or colons, when these are used for punctuating text. There should always be at least one, conventionally two, space(s) afterwards. The apostrophe is generally used to denote possession. However, for possessive pronouns, such as its, yours, hers, no apostrophe should be

used. An apostrophe is never used to denote a plural, e.g., “there were two student’s in each group” is incorrect.

Referencing: Must follow the procedures and formatting described in the referencing guide in this Handbook.

Use of figures and tables: Figures and tables in laboratory reports should conform to all standard formatting requirements (i.e., appropriately titled, both axes labelled on graphs, units made explicit). These should be computer-drawn and placed in the body of the text, rather than at the end of a report. The insertion of unedited computer printout /screenshots is not acceptable.

## **11. Using AI for Assessments**

### **What is “AI”?**

AI refers to a broad range of artificial intelligence programmes available online that generate written responses to question prompts and even images. For example, you may be familiar with programmes such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Bard, Claude, Bing or DALL-E.

You can read more about the University's AI policy here:

<https://essex.ac.uk/student/exams-and-coursework/artificial-intelligence>.

Your lecturers may also provide you with specific guidance regarding AI for individual assessments. If you are ever in doubt, please ask your lecturers what their position is on using AI for an assessment as they may have specific educational reasons for being more or less strict in their expectations depending on the aims of the assessment.

### **What Are Inappropriate Uses of AI in Assessments**

AI tools may seem like a convenient and efficient way to complete assessments quickly. However, there are serious limitations to these programmes that not only disadvantage students academically by robbing them of the opportunity to hone their own skills, but also put them at risk of a serious academic offense that could jeopardise their future in their course.

Here are some of the important things to keep in mind if you use AI to support your learning and assessments:

1. **Never submit work written by an AI as your own work.** Just like you would never copy-and-paste content directly from Wikipedia, or ask another person to write parts of your coursework for you, you must never present AI generated work as your own in an assignment. This is considered cheating and could result in you

failing the assessment and/or being referred for an [academic offense](#).

- 2. Never use an AI to generate data that you are meant to collect.** As a student of psychology, it is important that you uphold the standards and expectations that shape our field, which include important ethical standards associated with data collection and research. Asking an AI to generate data for you when you have been asked to collect the data yourself is considered data fabrication and fraud, a very serious academic offense.
- 3. Never accept AI statements as fact.** You may decide to use an AI tool to help you understand or explain certain concepts. However, it is important to remember that the way AI works is that it summarises *all* of the available information on a topic, without critically evaluating the source they are drawing from. AI can also make up, or misrepresent, certain topics, a phenomenon that researchers have described as “AI Hallucinations” (Townsen Hicks, Humphries, & Slater, 2024). This means that an AI tool could be repeating misinformation and inaccuracies that exist across the internet. It is important to always think critically about what an AI tool is telling you about a topic, and weigh this against what you have learned so far to avoid submitting inaccurate work that could result in poor marks.
- 4. Always cite your sources.** You must always cite and reference material included in your assessments that are not your own work and do not represent your own original thoughts. AI programmes like ChatGPT often include citations in their responses. However, much like with misinformed responses, “AI Hallucinations” often include citations that do not exist in real life, or which do not accurately represent what that source claims. The [Academic Skills](#) team can provide you with guidance and assistance on how to properly reference and avoid poor marks or academic offenses.



## What Are Some Appropriate Uses of AI in Assessments

Despite serious limitations, AI can still be a useful tool during your time at university, and there are many appropriate ways to use AI tools that do not violate ethical and intellectual expectations for students.

Here are a few examples of how AI could be used to help your learning:

- Asking AI to help create an essay plan to develop and improve the structure of an assessment. The [Library](#) and [Academic Skills](#) teams also offer many workshops and tools to help support students in their writing throughout the year.
- Using AI to help you improve your grammar or writing style by looking at how it constructs answers to questions.
- Asking AI to help explain a concept, theory, or text that you have difficulty understanding – but keep in mind the serious issues of “AI Hallucinations” described above!

## **12: Coursework Coversheet**

**DO NOT INCLUDE YOUR NAME ON YOUR COVERSHEET OR COURSEWORK. YOUR ASSESSMENTS ARE BLIND MARKED WHICH MEANS THE MARKER SHOULD NOT KNOW WHICH STUDENT SUBMITTED WHICH PIECE OF COURSEWORK.**

PLEASE COPY THIS DOCUMENT ONTO THE FRONT OF ALL YOUR SUBMISSIONS.

THIS INCLUDES ELECTRONIC AND HARD COPY COURSEWORK SUBMISSIONS.

INCLUDE THIS IN YOUR ELECTRONIC FILE AS A TITLE PAGE – **DO NOT UPLOAD IT AS A SEPARATE FILE.**

<p><b>University of Essex</b></p> <p><b>Department of Psychology</b></p> <p><b>The name of the module</b></p> <p><b>Type of Coursework</b></p> <p><b>The title of your manuscript</b></p> <p><b>Your registration number</b></p> <p><b>Date submitted: XX/XX/XX</b></p> <p><b>Word Count: XXXX</b></p>
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IF YOU ARE PART OF A GROUP, PLEASE ALSO INCLUDE THE GROUP NUMBER ON THE COVER SHEET.