

Conventions of Academic Writing

Successful academic writing involves adhering to a particular style and conventions.



Generally, you should:

- Keep your writing **formal**. Avoid emotive language and slang.
- **Avoid contractions**: can't/don't/wouldn't should be written as cannot/do not/would not.
- **Avoid rhetorical questions**. Generally, you should not directly address the reader with a question. Instead, you could rephrase it: 'the question arises whether ...'
- Keep the **tenses consistent**.
- **Do not use pronouns like I, We or You** (unless you are doing reflective writing). Keep the language impersonal: refer to what 'the essay' will do, rather than what you will do.
- **Avoid sweeping generalisations**. Be specific and always provide references where needed. Your language should be attentive to the fact that the issues you discuss may be subjects of academic debate.
- **Write small numbers out in words**, but larger numbers in figures: five years; 5,000 years.
- **Avoid over-reliance on quotations**. Do not copy large chunks of text: use either a few relevant sentences in quotation form or paraphrase, crediting the author by providing a reference. Quotations should be used in support of your argument and not instead of writing.
- **Academic writing should be objective (emotionally neutral)**. Most academic writing requires you to stand back and analyse dispassionately, as an objective onlooker.

Tip: Try to mirror the writing style of peer-reviewed writings in your discipline.

Formatting Conventions

Before you submit your work, double-check that it is presented in an appropriate format. Remember that first impressions count!

Always follow the **specific guidelines of your School**.

Generally, you should:

- Use a **standard font** in a **readable font size** (such as Times New Roman, 12).
- Use **double line spacing** and include **adequate margins**.
- Print your essay on **one side of the page only**.
- Ensure that your **paragraphs are appropriately sized** and that they are **formatted consistently**. Indent all new paragraphs, except the first (introduction) paragraph of the essay, using the TAB key. Do not skip a line between paragraphs.
- **Quotations** should be relevant to your argument and used judiciously in your text. Excessive use of quotations can disrupt the flow of your writing and prevent the reader from following the logic of your reasoning. Short direct quotations, up to two or three lines in your assignment, can be set in quotation marks (single or double – be consistent) and included in the body of your text. Longer quotations should be entered as a separate paragraph and indented from the main text. Quotation marks are not used in this case.
- For **abbreviations**, it is good practice to give the full details and put the abbreviated form in brackets the first time you mention it, and then subsequent mentions can just use the abbreviation. For example, first reference: National Health Service (NHS), and subsequently just use NHS.
- Include the **essay title** at the beginning of the essay (top of the first page in bold).
- **Number the pages** of the essay (go to 'insert' and the 'page number' option in Word).
- Include your **School's cover sheet**, if required.

QUB Information Services provides a helpful guide to using Word (as well as other Microsoft Office programs): go to your Queens Online home page, then look in the folder **IT and Library Guide** in the 'University Documents' box.

Or follow this link to directly access the PDF guide to Word: <http://bit.ly/XrNy8q>