

Academic Writing

The **very** short course

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Overview

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Analysing the title

When you first receive your submission title, take a top-down approach:

- How many words is it?
- Are there any special requirements (Formatting? Appendices? Abstract? **CHECK THE GRADING RUBRIC!**)

Next, analyse the title in terms of **task**, **content**, **controlling ideas**:

- **Task** is the question word- is it an analytical report? A discursive essay? A compare/ contrast- type essay?
- **Content** is the general idea
- **Controlling idea** is the focus

Consider the following question: “Critically evaluate, from a structural standpoint, the Burj Khalifa.”

- The **task** is clearly “critically analyse”, but what does this mean exactly?
- The **content**- the general idea- is the Burj Khalifa.
- The **controlling idea**- the focus- is the structural aspect.

This will inform your planning.

Planning and Structure

- In our previous example, we now have sufficient information to begin planning our essay. Make sure you stay on topic! Let's say we've checked the requirements, and we know it's going to be 1500 words, with an abstract and a reference list. This usually means that 1500 words starts at the introduction and ends at the conclusion- the abstract and references are usually not counted, but check this carefully!
- For 1500 words, if we assume that the introduction is going to be about 150 words (this is enough- it's almost never longer than about 250, even for long assignments), and the conclusion will be longer- say 250 (it has more information than the introduction), then we know that the body sections need to be about 1100 words. Call it 1000 to 1200 (there's usually some flexibility in the word count, like +/- 10%).
- Forget about the introduction and conclusion for now- in our plan, we just need to remember to leave enough words to write them later.
- So, we have 1000-1200 words to write. How many main points do we want? Two would give us 5-600 words per main point, three would give us 350-400. How much detail do you want to include? **You need to do some reading now.**
- Let's say we decided on three main points, after our reading- that's three body sections.
- We probably want two paragraphs per section- 175-200 words is a nice length for a paragraph. You can now make your plan, see the next slide:

Planning and Structure

Section	Main point/ sources	Sub point/ sources
Introduction	Background info, thesis, roadmap	Smith 2019, Jones 2020
S1 BP1	Location/ Site	Substrate (Musk, 2017; Gates, 2016)
S1 BP2		Zoning laws/ legislation (Schwarzenegger, 2013; Stallone, 2019)
S2 BP1	Properties of concrete	Reinforcement (Statham, 2021; Chan, 2013)
S2 BP2		Recycling (Thunberg, 2020; California EPA, 2016)
S3 BP1	Properties of steel elements	Strength in tension/ compression (Steele, 2010; Ferrigno, 1984)
S3 BP2		Corrosion resistance/ safety (Rust, 2018; Danger, 2027)
Conclusion	Restate thesis, summarise, make recommendations)	NO NEW SOURCES! (unless they support recommendations)

Planning and Structure

- Note- it's important to **note down the sources** as you read. Don't just copy what the sources say into your plan- use your own words (this will help you to **avoid plagiarism**, or copying)
- The plan we saw above is a very simple version of what you would produce for your own essay- there'd be a lot more detail in yours- but it illustrates the point.
- This example plan is also for a very specific type of task, but the basic process is the same. Analyse the task, plan, read, improve your plan, start writing your body sections.
- For other types of task- more based on primary research for example, or a reflective task- there may not be so much emphasis on sources. A "typical" structure for a dissertation, conference paper, journal article etc. is on the next slide.

Planning and Structure

Section	Comment
Abstract	Brief overview- like a mini conclusion. Not included in the word count.
Introduction	As all intros- Background, thesis, roadmap. Can include rationale (reason for writing this/ doing the experiment).
Literature review	Most (not all) of the citations are here.
Methodology (may incorporate rationale)	How you collected your data.
Findings	What the results were- simple description, no need to explain why at this stage.
Discussion	Analysis of the results- here, you do say why you think you got the results you did. Use tentative language (can may, might, possibly, probably etc.) as you can't prove anything, it's all hypothesis at this stage.
Conclusion	As all conclusions- restate your thesis, then summarise, then repeat your stance/ give recommendations.
References	Usually on a separate page. Nothing from here on is counted in the word count.
Image credits	A separate list, like the reference list, but this time in numerical order (not alphabetical).
Appendices	Any other pictures, files that you refer to in your body sections.

The writing process

- We said in the previous slide- start to write your body sections. Don't write the intro or conclusion just yet. Do these at the end.
- You write the conclusion last, for a very obvious reason- you can't summarise something you haven't written yet. But- why can't you write the introduction first?
- The answer is clear if you look at our plan. What does the introduction do?
Background info, thesis, roadmap.
- But- what does this mean? Background info is obvious- it's a general background to your topic. Thesis means what you are setting out to do- "This essay will analyse the most important structural considerations in designing the Burj Khalifa and conclude that this was not a simple task." Roadmap is the structure- "It will first discuss the location, then evaluate concrete as a suitable construction medium, and finally focus on the use of the steel elements used in the structure."
- You can write the background info, you can write the roadmap (from your plan), but your stance might change as you read and write- so your thesis might change.

Academic Style

- This is a complex area to master. You may want to look at Andy Gillet's excellent resource at <http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>
- Click on the tab at the left that says "features".
- Here are some common areas of concern:
 1. **Personal pronouns** (NEVER say "I", "we", "you" etc.
 2. **Balance of writer's/ authors' voice** (you are the writer, your sources are the authors. Try for a 50:50 mix. If you have over 50%, your writing is subjective and therefore not academic; if there are too many sources, then you're just summarising sources, and not analysing enough)
 3. **Colloquial language** (slang/ informal language, such as "great", "brilliant", "terrible" etc. Also avoid **phrasal verbs** (verb + preposition, e.g. "~~go out~~" vs "exit")
- There's a lot more, but for now- be careful of these features.



Paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism

- To paraphrase means to say the same thing in a different way. You should change two things: grammar/structure, and vocab.
- Consider this phrase (taken from the Wikipedia article about corrosion- NOT an academic source!):
Rusting, the formation of iron oxides, is a well-known example of electrochemical corrosion.
- We want to paraphrase it, then cite it to show it's not our idea.
- Let's look at the vocab first. There are lots of words we can't really change- that's OK, we'll change what we can. **Well-known example** can be changed. **Formation** can be changed. **Corrosion, iron oxide, rust-** we can't really find synonyms for these, but we can change the forms. We also don't really care about **electrochemical** either as we're not writing about chemistry, but there may be synonyms for this.
- Now, the structure- we can move rust to end of the sentence, that's quite easy. Let's just do that for now, and change some forms:

When **ferrous** metals such as steel suffer **corrosion** resulting from **chemical combination with oxygen**, this forms **rust** (Wikipedia.org, ND).

- Note- the meaning is the same (or close enough for what we want to describe about the Burj Khalifa), some of the vocab has changed, and the sentence structure (grammar) has changed. This is an acceptable paraphrase.

Source synthesis

- Remember what we said earlier about use of sources? There should be a balance of 50:50 writer's to authors' voice, and the sources should inform what you're saying. There's a bit more to it than that though. You're not simply describing what the sources say. You're using it to form your own opinions. A good way to do this is to use **concession-rebuttal**:

Bush (2008) **argues** that saving the environment is the second priority after US economic growth. **However**, Gore (2012) **reports** that if the environment deteriorates beyond a certain extent, the US economy will suffer permanently. **Therefore, it is apparent that taking remedial action on US environmental damage is an urgent priority. One way to mitigate this situation is....**

- Notice the balance of **writer's**: **authors'** voices? If we had completed the ..., it would be about 50:50. "**However**" is a **rebuttal** marker.
- It is also possible to combine two sources to make your argument stronger:

It is stated by both Smith (2014) and Jones (2016) that....

- Look at the **bold** words- **argues**, **reports**, **stated**. These are reporting verbs. Which ones do you agree with? If something is an **argument**, it is not a fact. The writer probably **disagrees**. If something is **reported** or **stated**, it is generally a fact, and the writer probably **agrees**. If something is **suggested** or **posited**, it is **tentative**- we may need to see **more evidence** before we agree. Use of reporting verbs is a useful way to show your stance.

Referencing and Citation



- There are many ways to reference- for Harvard style, you can look at online guides, such as the one at http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=9572296
- You can also use sites such as <https://www.citethisforme.com>.
- The easiest way however is to click the “ button below sources you find on Google Scholar- this will give you the citation in most of the common formats, or the Endnote data if you’re using that.
- For in-text citations, there are two types- integral and non-integral. Integral means the citation is grammatically part of the sentence, non-integral means it isn’t. Think of the example on the previous slide: **Bush (2008) argues that...** This is an integral citation, as Bush is the subject of the verb.
- We could also write: **It has been argued that saving the environment is unimportant (Bush, 2008).** The sentence is grammatically accurate without the citation, so it is non-integral. This is Harvard style but other styles are similar.
- Using integral citations is more sophisticated, as you can- as mentioned on the previous slide- use the reporting verb to show your stance.
- Whenever you use information that is not your own idea, **YOU MUST CITE**. If you do not, you are guilty of plagiarism, which is serious academic misconduct.

Example Page 1

Compare and contrast, **TWO** of the following four structures: Walt Disney Concert hall (US- LA), Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (UK- Liverpool), St Basil's Cathedral (Russia- Moscow) and the Colosseum (Italy- Rome); in terms of the following principles of design: balance, unity, and emphasis/ contrast.

This essay will draw comparison and contrast between Liverpool's metropolitan cathedral (henceforth: Liverpool Met) and the Walt Disney Concert Hall (henceforth: WD Hall) through the lens of three important design principles: balance, unity and emphasis & contrast.

In terms of balance, defined by designingbuildings.co.uk (ND) as a visual effect giving the impression of stability, Liverpool Met clearly achieves this through the use of the wider base and conical structure (see figure 1). Its shape is not only structurally very stable due to the nature of the loads being spread towards the base, but it appears that way to the human perception. In contrast, although the WD Hall is a structurally sound building, the slightly chaotic arrangement of the elements and large overhangs may not suggest this feature (see figure 2). The figure clearly shows an inverse wedge structure which humans may perceive as unstable. Murrani (2009) supports this in her analysis of the "incompleteness" of space where people intuitively expect to see solid structure.



Figure 1: Liverpool Met



Figure 2: WD Hall

Example Page 2

Balance is closely related to unity. Designingbuildings.co.uk (ND) states that agreement between elements is more important than physical proximity, and describes how other design principles such as rhythm & repetition, and proportion, contribute to this. WD Hall uses its lack of unity to create a highly impactful visual effect. It is arguably striving to achieve a chaotic, rather than unified aesthetic. There is precedent for this feature in Rubinowicz (2000) who argues that this intentional disorder can reflect the unpredictability of the lives of the public and therefore resonate with them emotionally. Visitors to a concert hall may be attracted to this arousal of more intense and liberated emotion. Since Liverpool Met is a religious building however it is probable that the designers were trying to achieve the opposite effect- to impose order on chaos- and the cathedral design would appear to have achieved this. The balanced exterior is complemented by a symmetrical interior floorplan designed to be predictable and orderly (see figure 3).

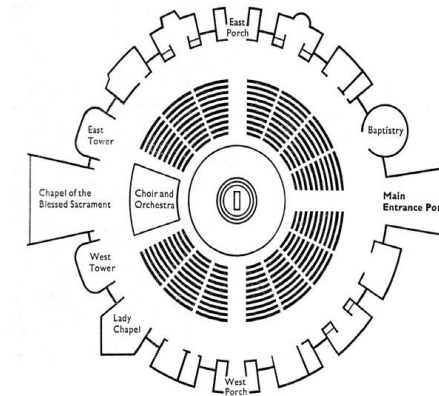


Figure 3: Liverpool Met Floorplan

Both buildings demonstrate emphasis and contrast, though in different ways. WD Hall shows striking contrast (defined by Designingbuildings.co.uk (ND) as being through the use of form and shape, as it applies to these buildings) in the size and orientation of its vertical faces- the multiple façades- yet there is also unity in the parabolic surfaces which can be seen in figure 2. The emphasis appears to be in the way in which the structure overhangs the bystander in an imposing manner. Liverpool Met achieves this however in a very different manner. Its vaulted ceiling, visible in figure 4, draw the eye upwards. Meis (1991) posits that this can have health benefits in addition to the sense of wellbeing and spirituality associated with religious buildings. It is probable that the public are thus subconsciously attracted to such spaces. For this reason, contrast is less evident in Liverpool Met than WD Hall since, as described above, one of the aims of the architect was almost certainly to instil this sense of calm through strong unity of design.

Example Page 3



Figure 4: Liverpool Met vaulted ceiling

In summary, although these two buildings are similar in terms of how they inspire awe, they have used the three principles to very different effect to achieve this.

(550 words)

Example Page 4 (References)

Reference List

- Designingbuildings.co.uk (n.d.). Designing Buildings Wiki. Available at: https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Design_principles (Accessed: 7/5/2021)
- Meis, J.A., 1991. A haven for the spirit. A well-designed chapel can improve nursing home residents' spiritual and psychological health. *Health Progress (Saint Louis, Mo.)*, 72(5), pp.56-59.
- Murrani S. (2009) Instability and incompleteness in architecture. In: Ascott R., Bast G., Fiel W., Jahrman M., Schnell R. (eds) *New Realities: Being Syncretic*. Edition Angewandte. Springer, Vienna. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-78891-2_47
- Rubinowicz, P., 2000. Chaos and geometric order in architecture and design. *Journal for Geometry and Graphics*, 4(2), pp.197-207.

Image Credits

- Figure 1: <https://www.liverpoolmetrocathedral.org.uk/the-fourth-cathedral/> (Accessed: 7/5/2021)
- Figure 2: <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/CA-01-037-0100> (Accessed: 7/5/2021)
- Figure 3: <https://www.thedramaofthemass.com/original-brochure/> (Accessed: 7/5/2021)
- Figure 4: <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/golden-jubilee-celebrations-liverpools-metropolitan-12481700> (Accessed: 7/5/2021)

Recap

There is a LOT more to writing academic essays and assignments than what is contained in these slides, but they should give you the basic idea. Please take the time to look through the resources linked here—particularly Gillet (Uefap) as this will be useful to you not only in your current assignments, but also in your future academic careers.

Good luck!