



Study Skills Induction for New Learners:

4. Academic Conventions and Referencing

Please note: these workshops are interactive!

Message the lecturer if you are unable to unmute your microphone during the session.

Session will start at: 00:00

Academic Conventions and Referencing: Workshop Content

Explain the importance of properly utilising academic conventions and referencing

Apply these conventions to improve style and make best use of limited word-counts

Name the two components of a reference, describing where they are provided in assignments

Produce an accurate in-text citations using the QA Harvard Referencing Guide

By the end of the lesson you will be able to:

Confidently utilise academic conventions in university assignments, avoiding plagiarism by citing sources.

Your Understanding of Academic Conventions?

1

What are the conventions of a successful university assignment?

2

How do university assignments differ in style from other written works? For example, newspaper articles or company process documents.

These six conventions should be followed when preparing university assignments for submission:

1 Formality

2 Objectivity

3 Caution

4 Concision

5 Precision

6 Referencing

Match the conventions to the definitions!

1

Formality

A

To use **impartial** language which is not personal, judgemental, or emotive. To **avoid exaggeration** or bias, **respecting the views of others**.

2

Objectivity

B

To express **varying degrees** of certainty or **uncertainty**. This is also known as hedging language.

3

Caution

C

To communicate in **standard English**, **avoiding colloquialisms** and the first person (unless otherwise instructed).

Match the conventions to the definitions!

1

Formality

C

To communicate in **standard English**, **avoiding colloquialisms** and the first person (unless otherwise instructed).

2

Objectivity

A

To use **impartial** language which is not personal, judgemental, or emotive. To **avoid exaggeration** or bias, **respecting the views of others**.

3

Caution

B

To express **varying degrees** of certainty or **uncertainty**. This is also known as hedging language.

Match the conventions to the definitions!

4

Concision

D

To acknowledge the original sources of information used in your work, providing **evidence** and **avoiding plagiarism**.

5

Precision

E

To convey information effectively in as **few words as possible**.

6

Referencing

F

To impart information with **accuracy**, incorporating **relevant detail** such as facts, statistics, and **discipline-specific vocabulary**.

Match the conventions to the definitions!

4

Concision

E

To convey information effectively in as **few words as possible**.

5

Precision

F

To impart information with **accuracy**, incorporating **relevant detail** such as facts, statistics, and **discipline-specific vocabulary**.

6

Referencing

D

To acknowledge the original sources of information used in your work, providing **evidence** and **avoiding plagiarism**.

The Importance of Academic Conventions and Referencing



May comprise **up to 10% of your overall grade.**



Enable the marker to easily navigate, understand, and assess the validity of your work – including how you arrived at your conclusions and recommendations for practice.

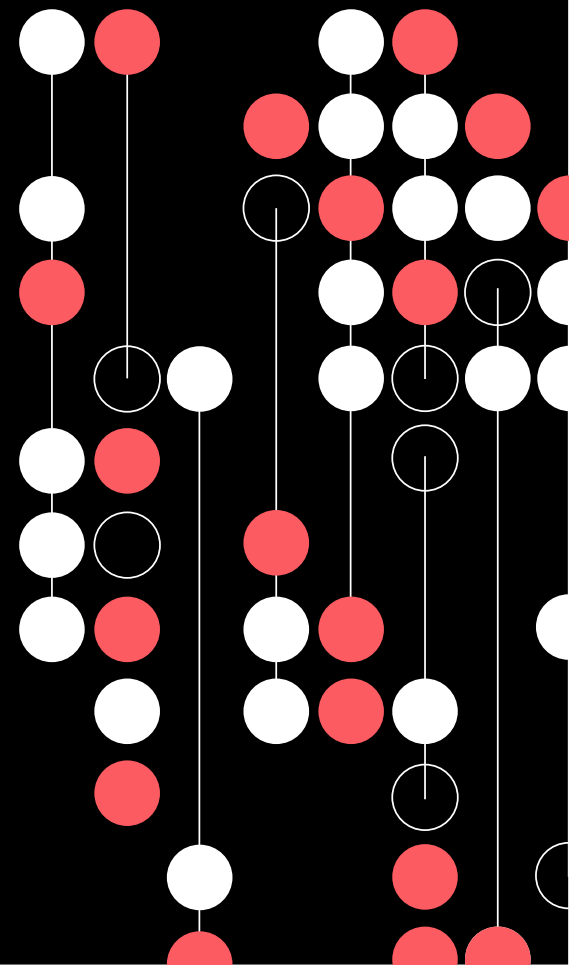


Encourage you **make best use of limited word-counts**, prioritising the most valuable or compelling arguments.



Prevent accusations of plagiarism!

1. Formality



True or False?

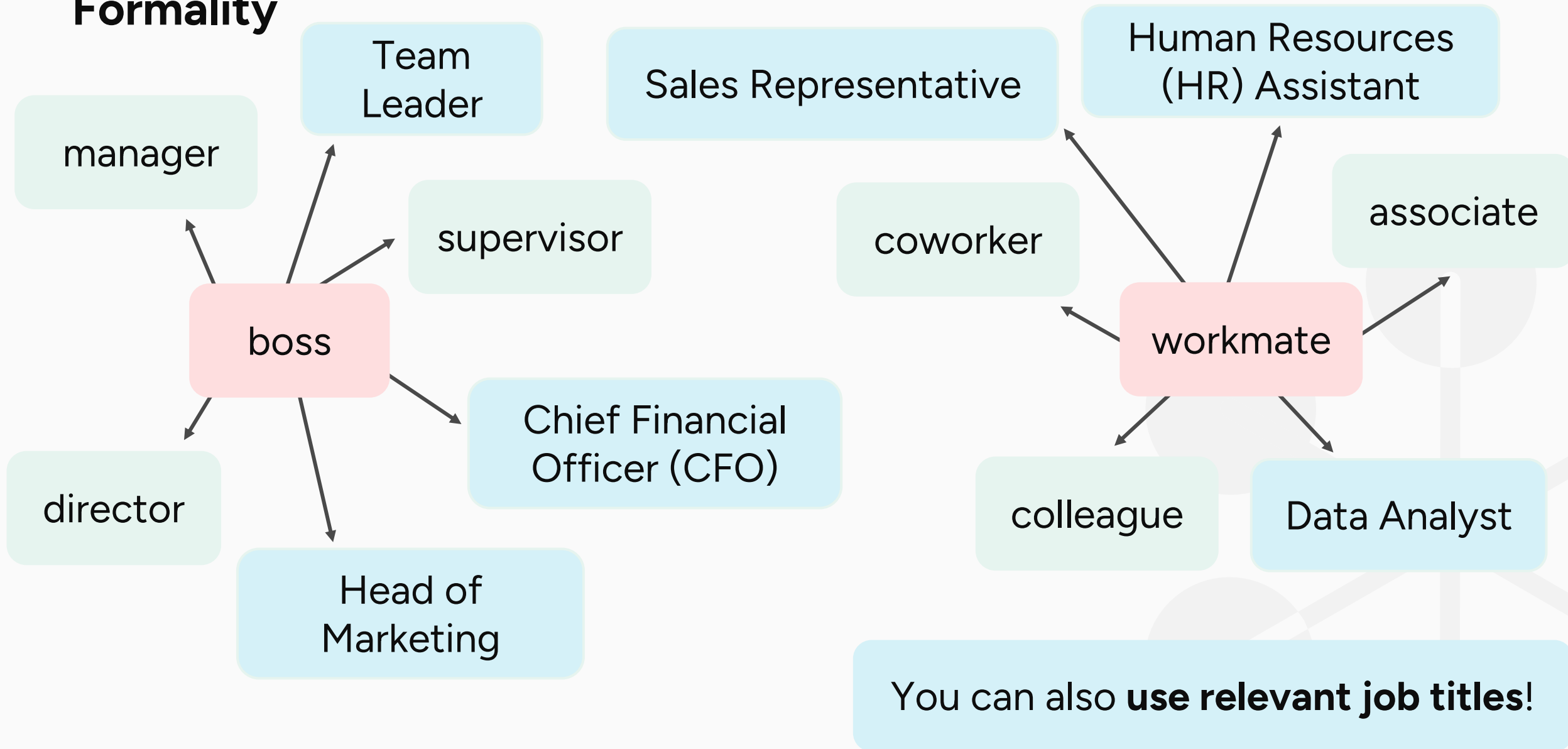
Formal academic language...



Uses colloquialisms such as 'boss' or 'workmate'.

Can you think of any **formal alternatives** to 'boss' and 'workmate'?

Formality



True or False?

Formal academic language...



Uses idioms like 'cut corners' and 'easier said than done'.

cut corners

As standard operating procedures
were bypassed...

In Project X, these quality
standards were compromised...

easier said
than done

In application, Framework Y posed
several operational challenges...

However, Ahmed (2025) neglects
to consider incremental costs
associated with...

True or False?

Formal academic language...



Avoids contractions, including 'isn't' and 'didn't'.

Formality

Contraction	Expansion
isn't	is not
didn't	did not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
aren't	are not
couldn't	could not
haven't	have not
it's	it is
there's	there is
should've	should have
could've	could have



True or False?

Formal academic language...



Avoids multi-word verbs like 'take place' or 'bring together'.

Formality

Task

In assignments, you should **avoid the use of multi-word verbs**. Can you think of **formal alternatives** for examples 1 – 6?

Carry on	Continue
Get bigger	Increase
Bring together	Integrate
Bring into	Introduce
Take place	Occur
Stay the same	Maintain

Leave out	1) Omit
Sort out	2) Organise
Take part	3) Participate
Come before	4) Precede
Get worse	5) Deteriorate
Put forward	6) Propose

True or False?

Formal academic language...



Uses question forms. For example:
'According to Murphy (2026), what factors may contribute to a decrease in job satisfaction?'

How could this be **rewritten as a statement**? Post your answer into the chatbox!

What factors contribute to a decrease in job satisfaction?



Factors including a lack of recognition and career development opportunities may contribute to a decrease in job satisfaction (Murphy, 2026).

Formality

Task

Identify and correct the informalities.



While Smith's (2023) investigation backs up these findings, Taylor (2024) says they should be taken with a pinch of salt.

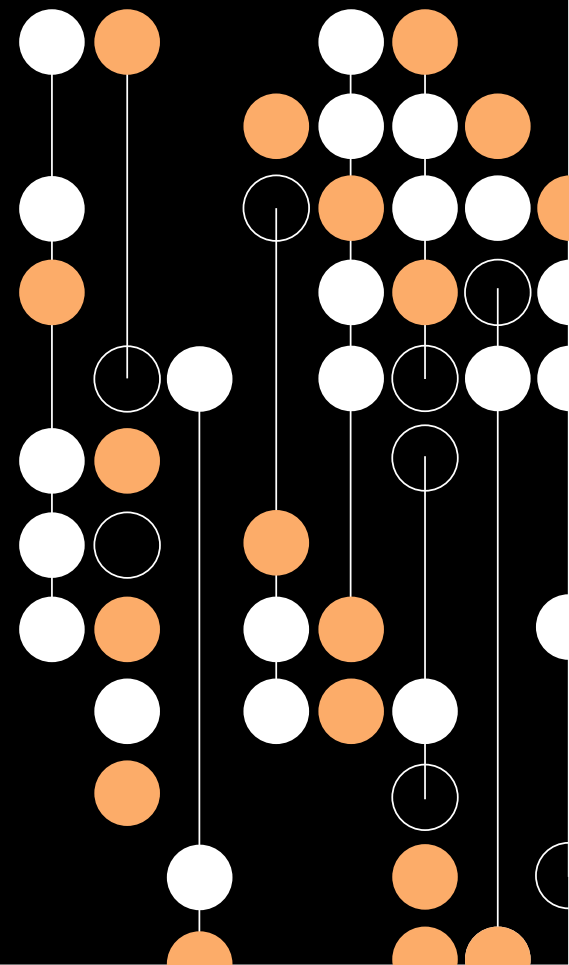


While Smith's (2023) investigation **backs up** these findings, Taylor (2024) says they **should be taken with a pinch of salt**.



While Smith's (2023) investigation **supports** these findings, Taylor (2024) **identifies potential limitations**.

2. Objectivity



Objectivity

Academic writing should be **impartial** and **impersonal**.

Whether you are discussing theories or practices in the workplace, it is important to use language that is not personal, judgemental, or emotive.

Task

Consider the following example. Is it objective?
Be prepared to justify your reasoning!



A recent employee survey found that workloads were often unbearable, contributing to devastating effects on mental health and wellbeing (Appendix A).

Objectivity

The table below includes further examples of emotive language as well as some **objective alternatives**:

Emotive	Objective
Shocking	Unexpected
Disastrous outcomes	Negative outcomes
Deeply concerning	Raises concerns
Blatant failure	Significant limitation

Objectivity

Task

How could this example be revised to make it objective?

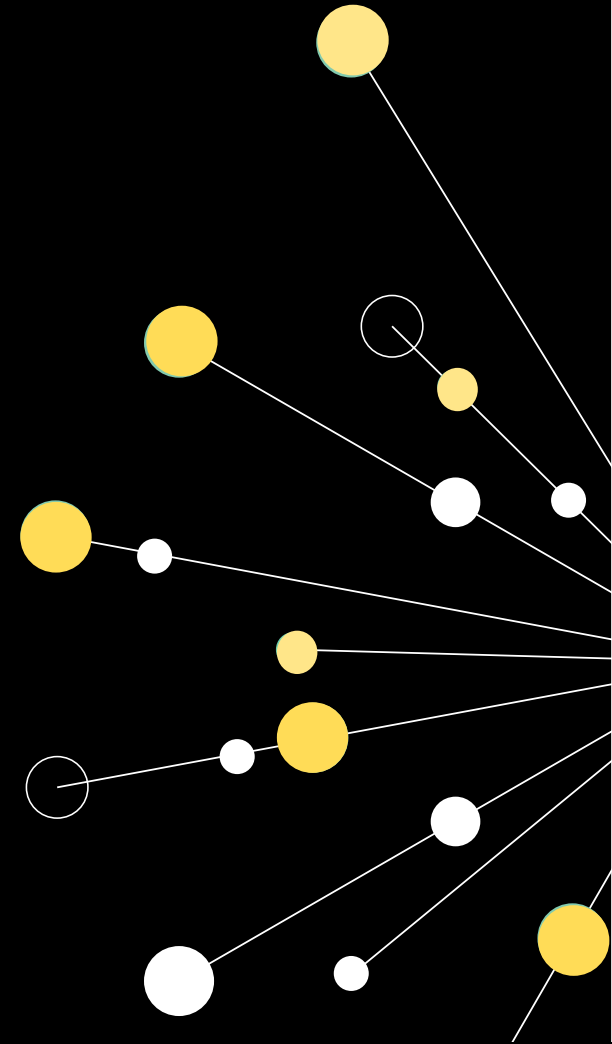


A recent employee survey found that workloads were often **unbearable**, contributing to **devastating effects** on mental health and wellbeing (Appendix A).



A recent employee survey found that workloads were often **unmanageable, detrimentally impacting** mental health and wellbeing (Appendix A).

3. Caution



Caution

Cautious language is used to **distinguish between facts and claims** and to **express varying degrees of uncertainty**.

Task

Consider the two following examples.
Which do you think is cautious?

1

This intervention will increase employee engagement.

2

This intervention may increase employee engagement.

Caution

Cautious language is used to **distinguish between facts and claims** and to **express varying degrees of uncertainty**.

Consider the two following examples.
Which do you think is cautious?



This intervention **will** increase employee engagement.



This intervention **may** increase employee engagement.

Is it Cautious?



The data shows that an authoritarian leadership style negatively impacts decision-making (Appendix B).

The data **suggests** that an authoritarian leadership style **can** negatively impact decision-making (Appendix B).

Is it Cautious?



Yen (2025) indicates that a four-day working week could increase productivity.

Exceptions to the Rule

Task

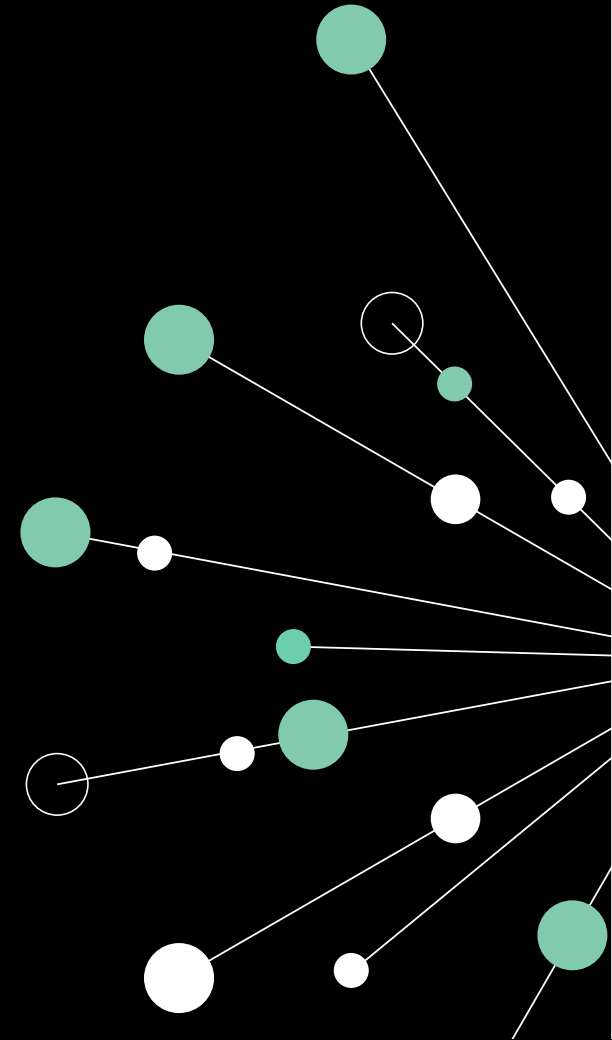
Can you think of any **exceptions** to this rule?
Where might it be appropriate to use more **assertive language**?

You do not need to use cautious language if you are **stating established facts** or **describing methods** and processes adopted. For example:

Employees are legally protected from discrimination under the *Equality Act 2010*.

Participants completed a 20-question survey.

4. Concision



Concision

Your arguments should be expressed **clearly** and **succinctly** – using **no unnecessary words**.

Task

Identify the unnecessary words and post your answers into the chatbox. If you are feeling confident, try concisely rewriting the sentence!

Notably, Khan (2025) argues that it is so important to have a clear digital strategy which has long been necessary in today's modern business environment because it enables organisations to maintain their competitive advantage in the market and ensure sustainable growth.

Concision

Notably, Khan (2025) argues that **it is so important to have** a clear digital strategy **which has long been necessary in today's modern business environment because it enables organisations** to maintain **their competitive advantage in the market** and ensure sustainable growth.



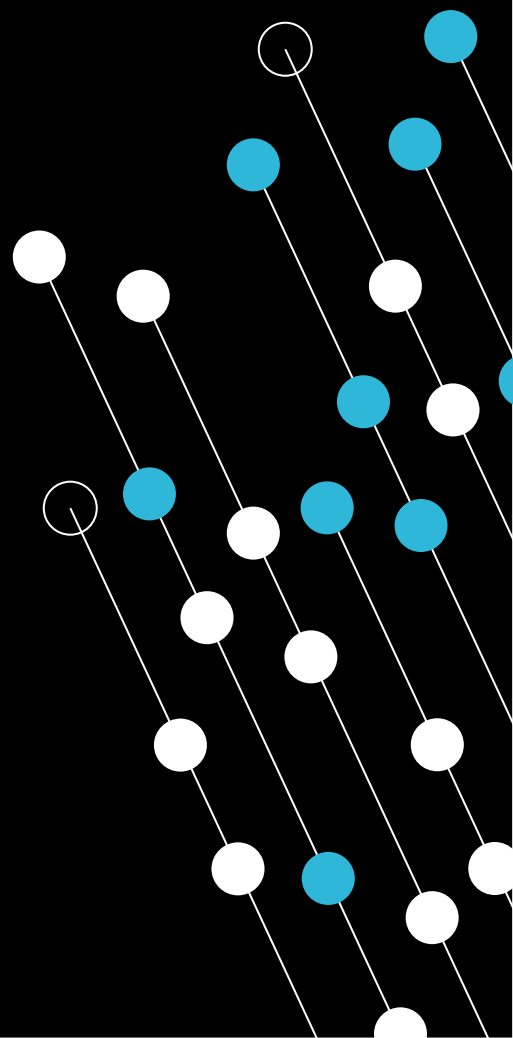
A clear digital strategy is necessary for maintaining competitive advantage and ensuring sustainable growth (Khan, 2025).



Concision

Common Unnecessary Adverbs	Common Unnecessary Phrases
totally, completely, surprisingly	In my opinion... As to whether...
absolutely, definitely, certainly	It is important to note... Due to the fact...
probably, actually, basically, virtually, truly	In order to... In spite of the fact...
rather, quite, somehow, perhaps	In the event that... It goes to show...
extremely, simply, clearly	It is possible that... For the purpose of...
notably, interestingly, remarkably	In terms of... Has the ability to...

5. Precision



Precision

Task

Which of the following examples is more **precise**? Be prepared to justify your response!

1

Employees at Organisation X dislike lengthy meetings.

2

85% of employees at Organisation X preferred meetings of under an hour (Appendix C), reporting improved engagement and retention of new information (Soady, 2024).

3

85% of employees at Organisation X testified to a penchant for meetings comprising a maximum hour in duration (Appendix C), for facilitation and optimisation of oft-lacking communal partaking and the efficacious assimilation of freshly acquired information (Soady, 2024).

Precision

Which of the following examples is more **precise**? Be prepared to justify your response!

1

Employees at Organisation X dislike lengthy meetings.

2

85% of employees at Organisation X preferred meetings of under an hour (Appendix C), reporting improved engagement and retention of new information (Soady, 2024).

3

85% of employees at Organisation X testified to a penchant for meetings comprising a maximum hour in duration (Appendix C), for facilitation and optimisation of oft-lacking communal partaking and the efficacious assimilation of freshly acquired information (Soady, 2024).

Precision

To write with precision involves:



A high level of **detail** and **specificity** – integrating relevant facts, statistics, and discipline-specific vocabulary.



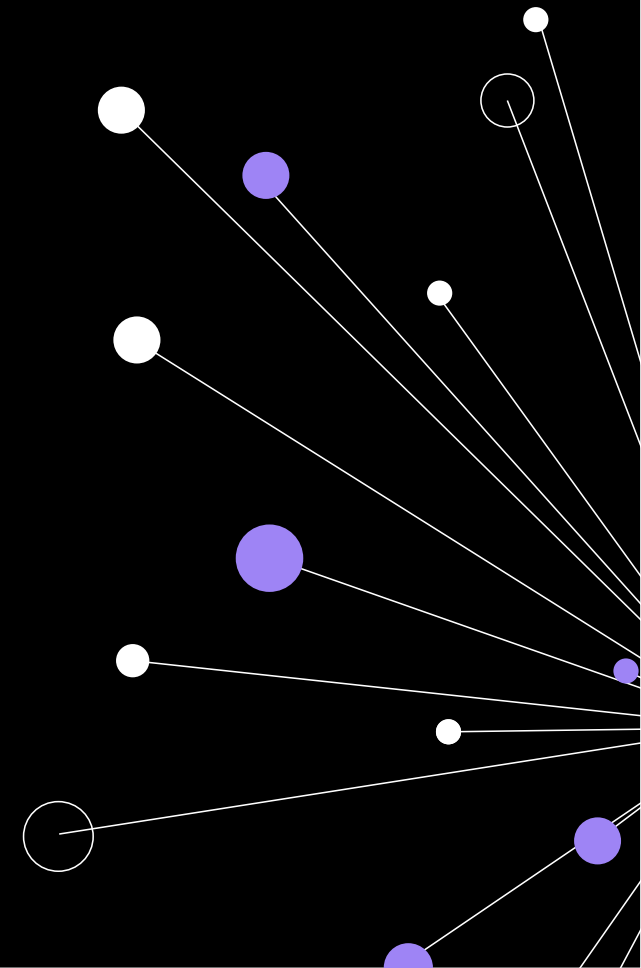
Making **deliberate linguistic choices**, which do not allow for misinterpretation.



Incorporating **citations** and **appendices**, using scholarly resources and internal company documentation to evidence your arguments.

However, do not confuse precision with writing in an artificial 'overly-academic' style. Your writing should still be **clear** and **easy to understand!**

6. Referencing



Your Referencing Guide

Using the link provided, please open the [QA Harvard Referencing Guide](#)

[How we help](#)[What we do](#)[Who we are](#)[Resources](#)[For individuals](#)[Search](#)[User profile](#)[Feedback](#)

The Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team

The Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) team provide guidance for **degree apprentices** alongside regular classes on topics such as academic style, critical analysis, relating theory to practice, research skills, reflective writing, referencing, and much more.

We assist learners in three main ways:

1. Academic skills resources for self-study, available here on the Learner Portal.
2. Workshops to practise and develop academic skills - [book your place here](#)
3. One-to-one tutorials to discuss your assignments - [book one here](#)

[ACE workshops schedule July – September 2024](#)



Introduction to Referencing

Task

1

When do you need to provide references in your assignments?

2

Where do you need to provide references in your assignments?

Introduction to Referencing

1

When do you need to provide references in your assignments?

Answer

You should provide a reference **whenever you include an idea or piece of information from another source.**

This could be a **paraphrase**, **direct quote** or a **summary**.

- Books
- Journal Articles
- Conference Papers
- Videos
- Government Reports
- Websites

Introduction to Referencing

Answer

2

Where do you need to provide references in your assignments?

1

In the **main body** of the assignment

In-text citations appear next to the idea or piece of information you have included from another source (within the same sentence).

2

At the **end of the assignment**

Your **reference list** provides the full publication details of the sources cited in the assignment.

In-Text Citations

An in-text citation is a **short acknowledgement included whenever you quote or take information from a source** in academic writing. It gives enough information to uniquely identify the source in your reference list.

Regardless of the source type, the format of your in-text citation will generally be:

(Surname, Year) or (Organisation, Year)

In-Text Citation Examples

Paraphrase/Summary

Machine learning can deliver improved cybersecurity solutions, deftly analysing datasets to provide timely recommendations (**Sarker, 2023**).

Author

Date

Note: In today's workshop, example in-text citations are highlighted in bold. Please **do not bold in-text citations** in your assignments!

Direct Quotation

Machine learning can "intelligently analyse cybersecurity data and provide a dynamically upgraded and up-to-date security solution" (**Sarker, 2023, p. 1474**).

Author

Date

Page number (if applicable)

In-Text Citations: Task

Task

Complete the in-text citation for this journal article:

Author	Ewan McGaughey
Title of Article	Will robots automate your job away? Full employment, basic income and economic democracy
Journal	Industrial Law Journal
Publication Date	14 th July 2021

Answer

In-Text Citation

(McGaughey, 2021)

In-Text Citations: Tips



If there is no named author, use the **name of the organisation**.



If you cannot find a date of publication, try to **find the same information elsewhere**.



If there are **four or more authors** you must include the first named author, followed by '*et al.*'



Review pages 5-10 of the QA Apprenticeships Harvard Referencing Guide for guidance on formatting **multiple citations, sources with the same author and year** and **secondary citations**.

Reference Lists

Your reference list appears at the end of your assignment. **Each reference list entry corresponds with an in-text citation in your main body**, providing further details of publication so your reader can identify and verify the source.

Different sources, e.g. books, journal articles and conference papers, are formatted differently.

For more information, attend an **ACE Referencing Workshop** and consult your **QA Apprenticeships Harvard Referencing Guide** to complete your reference list.

Example QA Harvard Reference List

References

DuBrin, A. (2012) *Management essentials*. 9th edn. London: Cengage Learning.

Lofgren, J. (2020) *The Approachable Leader: Adapting Your Style To Work For Your Employees*. Available at:
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2020/10/15/the-approachable-leader-adapting-your-style-to-work-for-your-employees>
(Accessed: 9 September 2026).

Porter, M. (2008) 'The five competitive forces that shape strategy'. *Harvard Business Review*, 86(1), pp. 25-40.

Vergidis, K., Tiwari, A. and Majeed, B. (2008) 'Business process analysis and optimization: beyond reengineering', *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics, Part C (Applications and Reviews)*, 38(1), pp. 69–82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/TSMCC.2007.905812> (Accessed: 9 September 2026).



Begins directly beneath your assignment with the title 'References' or 'Reference list'



It must be in **alphabetical order**, with **clear spaces** between each entry.



Different sources (e.g. books, journal articles) **are referenced differently**.



For online sources, provide the **full URL** and **the date you last accessed the source**.

Referencing: Tips



Only include the **first initial** of the author's name.



Always use the official **referencing guide** to format your entries correctly for different source types.



Store your sources so you can refer back to them if necessary, e.g. OneNote, Excel Spreadsheet, Word Document, Favourites, Collections.

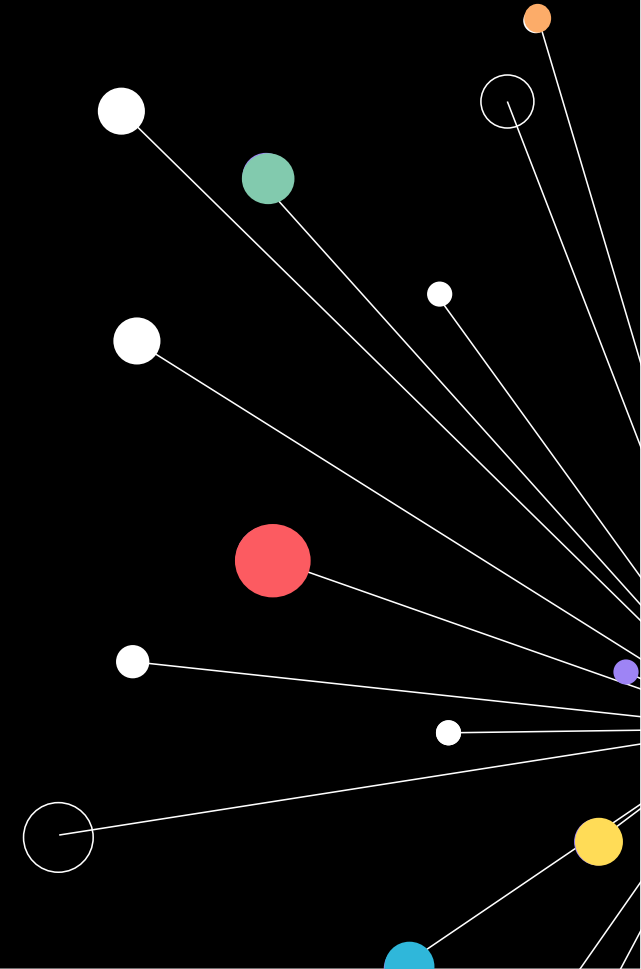


Reference as you go! Avoid leaving your referencing until the last minute.



Do not use automatic reference generators!

Academic Conventions in Practice



Task

Identify **problem areas** within this 'academic' paragraph. If you are feeling confident, choose one sentence to rewrite!

What is change management if not people-focused? In her groundbreaking publication on this very topic, Henderson argues that the success of change management initiatives is entirely dependent on the people involved - requiring a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of pervasive organisational cultures as well as potential root causes of change resistance, regrettably including a lack of trust or perceived loss of authority. As such, I recommend that a full assessment of people's readiness and capability to process change be undertaken.

Well done if you identified the following **problem areas**:

What is change management if not people-focused? In her groundbreaking publication on this very topic, Henderson argues that the success of change management initiatives is entirely dependent on the people involved - requiring a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of pervasive organisational cultures as well as potential root causes of change resistance, regrettably including a lack of trust or perceived loss of authority. As such, I recommend that a full assessment of people's readiness and capability to process change be undertaken.

Improved Example Sentence

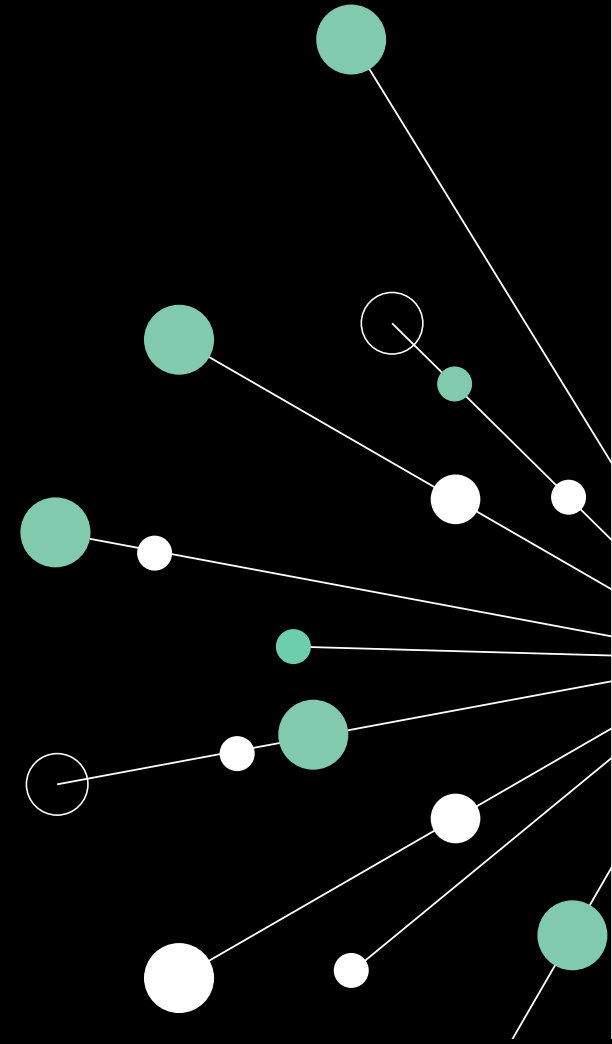


In her groundbreaking publication on this very topic, Henderson argues that the success of change management initiatives is entirely dependent on the people involved - requiring a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of pervasive organisational cultures as well as potential root causes of change resistance, regrettably including a lack of trust or perceived loss of authority.



The success of change management initiatives is frequently dependent on the employees involved, requiring an understanding of organisational cultures and factors contributing to change resistance (Henderson, 2026).
At Organisation X...

Review



Academic Conventions and Referencing - Review



You should use contractions such to reduce word-count

Academic Conventions and Referencing - Review



It is important to use language that is not personal, judgemental, or emotive

Academic Conventions and Referencing - Review



Writing with precision involves integrating relevant facts, statistics, and discipline-specific vocabulary

Academic Conventions and Referencing - Review



You only need to include an in-text citation if you are directly quoting a source

Further Resources

[ACE Academic Writing Essentials Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Formal Academic Style Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Academic Style Video Guide](#)

[ACE Coherence Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Writing Concisely Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Hedging Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Introducing Paraphrases Quick Guide](#)

[QA Apprenticeships Harvard Referencing Full Guide](#)

[ACE Introduction to QA Harvard Referencing Video Guide](#)

[ACE In-Text Citations \(QA Harvard\) Quick Guide](#)

[ACE Writing a Reference List \(QA Harvard\) Quick Guide](#)

ACE Feedback

Thank you for attending this ACE workshop.
We would be grateful if you could take 2 minutes to
complete our **feedback form**.

Do you require further academic support?

Look on the
ACE Page for
resources

Check out our
upcoming
workshops

Book a 1-2-1
tutorial



Any questions?