PPLS Skills Centre – SharePoint Archive v1.0
James Donaldson
(2025-03-08)

Table of Contents

Introduction

The PPLS Skills Centre provides appointments, resources, and activities designed to help you improve your academic skills. It is run by the School of Philosophy, Psychology, and Language Sciences.

This document serves as an archive of our resources as they stand in the 2025/26 academic year, our tenth year of service. Specifically, this information was snapshotted on 2025-03-08.

You'll note that this document isn't for a specific audience. I'm hoping that students will find it useful for tips, of course, but I'm also hoping that it serves as an operational blueprint for other writing centres in combination with the source code for the database and pipelines. Finally, and this may be a little on the morbid side, it also serves as an archival snapshot of what academic support used to look like in the age leading up to the rise of LLMs a few years back. Hello future historians?

Writing

1-on-1 writing appointments

Welcome to the PPLS Skills Centre's booking portal. We've been helping students improve as writers since 2016. Our tutors will let you know what your essay is like for a first-time reader and help you decide what to focus on next.

The link for booking an appointment is at the bottom of this page in a red button. But before scrolling immediately to the end to request an appointment, please read this page carefully to make sure that our services are the right fit and that you are eligible to use them.

Booking checklist

1. (**Courses**) We offer help for all upper-level courses owned by PPLS. We are happy to help people from other Schools as long as you are registered on a PPLS course (i.e., the course code must start with PHIL, PSYL, LASC, or PPLS). First- and second-year undergraduate coursework is regrettably no longer suitable for writing appointments.
2. (**Type of help**) Come to us for help with clarity and argumentation. We cannot provide help with statistics or content.
3. (**E-mail**) You must use an address beginning with your student number to book. Each student at the University of Edinburgh has such an address. We will automatically extract your student number from your address to check your eligibility.
4. (**Maximum appointments**) You are eligible for three appointments per semester. Each student can have at most one appointment on any given day.
5. (**Cancellations**) Any cancellation requests must be in line with our policy, which is outlined in the "Getting ready" section below.

So that our system functions smoothly for all students, these guidelines are strictly applied. Appointments that fall outside these guidelines will be removed. Please be sure to read carefully to avoid disappointment.

For more about our services, please see the sections below.

Overview ("What will the appointment be like?")

What does a typical meeting look like?

Our goal is to help you communicate more effectively. A successful essay creates fresh, vivid images in the mind of the reader and directs their attention to exactly where the author wants it to go. Less successful essays either over-explain basic concepts or fail to develop difficult ones. Our tutors will help you to spot these problems and correct them.

It's best if you bring us relatively complete section drafts, but we can help you at all stages of the writing process. That is, you can work on whatever you like. If you have a complete draft, that's best, but you can also bring in a particular section that is worrying you. If you are completely stuck, try writing a paragraph or two as a preliminary response to the essay question – it's important to have something to start with.

Meetings last for 50 minutes and follow a structured format:

I: Reading out loud

Your tutor will not read your submission before the appointment. Instead, you will read the section in question out loud together (normally the student will read, but the tutor may do this as well). This is an important step: it forces you to pay careful attention to your own writing, as things just sound different when you've got an attentive person in front of you who knows the field. You're almost guaranteed to notice new problems with what you've done before you finish.

II: Feedback

At this point, the tutor will start to let you know about their experience as a listener. Where did your argument become confusing? Did you leave any terms undefined? Was it unclear how a section was linked back to your main claim? You may be asked to rewrite a few sentences right there in the session.

III: Planning ahead

Before you go, you will have to come up with a concrete plan consisting of at least three steps to improve what you've done so far.

If you require any modifications, please let us know by leaving comments with your appointment booking. Please note that we won't tell you what grade we think a paper should receive (we're here to improve your writing skills, not judge your work).

Eligibility ("Am I allowed to be here?", "Why was my appointment removed?")

Who is eligible?

Appointments are targeted at anyone taking a course offered by PPLS. The course set is limited to Honours (UG3/4) and postgraduate (PGT) levels. Particular eligibility cases are spelled out below:

Eligible: Visiting students, students working on PPLS dissertations (which count as courses), non-PPLS students taking a PPLS course, and students looking to transform work they did for a PPLS course into a research proposal (see "Other help" for details on this).

Ineligible: Undergraduate students in their first two years (UG1/UG2), research students (e.g., PhDs), and students seeking help for work that is unrelated to PPLS coursework.

Why was my appointment removed?

You can find out why your appointment was removed by checking "Additional information" in your cancellation notice. A thorough account is provided in the appendix "Why was my appointment removed?"

To ensure fair access to appointments, no exceptions are ever made to these rules. You might not have time to rebook a removed appointment. We understand that real life means that appointments will be missed for very good reasons (e.g., illnesses, personal emergencies, etc.). This is precisely why we've made the decision to give everyone more than enough appointments: one uncontrollable situation won't prevent you from getting help.

Getting ready ("How do I book/prepare/cancel?", "How do I get there or connect?")

How do I book?

1. Once you've read the rules and determined that you're eligible, **click on the red "Book an appointment" button** at the bottom of this page and provide the **essential details**.

   a. Choose a **subject area** (Philosophy, Psychology, or Linguistics) & **delivery** (online or in-person).

   b. (optional) Choose a **tutor**. If you want more information about a tutor's research interests, see "Quick Links" (top menu) -> "Research Student Lists".

   c. Choose a suitable **date/time**. Availability will be limited according to the PPLS Skills Centre's opening hours and your tutor's upcoming appointments and meetings.

2. Next, you'll need to provide **personal details** and **answer some questions**

   a. Again, make sure that your **e-mail address** is associated with the University of Edinburgh and begins with your student number (e.g., s0000000@ed.ac.uk).

   b. Please make sure to use the **"Notes"** field to tell your tutor more about what you'd like to work on. If you require any adjustments to be made, please describe those as well.

   c. We've prepared guidance on the things to focus on in our "Skills and guidance" section.

   d. If you are not sure how to answer any of the questions in the **"Provide additional information"** section, please contact [link].

3. Please **do not ask your tutors directly**. We have a strict policy that all requests must be made through the portal so that all tutors receive sufficient notice.

What happens after I book?

1. You will receive an **automatic confirmation** within a few minutes if your e-mail address is right; this confirms **receipt** of the appointment, but we still might need to **remove** it if it violates any of the rules.

2. The **tutor** will contact you before the appointment to **confirm** the details, including location.

3. The PPLS Skills Centre reserves the right to **change tutors** or **cancel appointments** at any time. We will give you as much warning as we can.

4. At the beginning of the year we often **tutor in pairs**. Doing so allows us to get good ideas from each other about how to hold appointments. You will normally be told about this in advance of your appointment.

5. Please make sure to use **UK Time** when discussing appointments.

What if I need to reschedule or cancel?

All requests must be made officially through the link or the form.

1. **Over 48 hours** until the appointment? Self-manage with the "Reschedule" link in your confirmation e-mail.

   a. You will be taken to a page with three options: "**Reschedule**", "**Cancel booking**", and "**New booking**". The first lets you change the date, time, and tutor, the second removes your request, and the third creates a new booking **in addition** to your existing appointment.

   b. **If rescheduling is no longer available**, you will have just one option: "**New booking**". This, again, creates a new appointment and does not remove or change your existing booking.

2. **Under 48 hours** until the appointment? You can also **issue an emergency cancellation request**.

   a. Use the form linked in your notification to issue the request.

   b. If this request arrives at or after 20:00 on the day before your appointment, it will count toward your total.

3. **After 20:00** on the night before the appointment?

   a. At this point, the appointment will still count towards your total. We still appreciate being told about your absence, however.

   b. If you continue to miss appointments without providing adequate notice, your access to the Skills Centre may be temporarily restricted.

4. There are **no other ways to cancel appointments**.

   a. Contacting your tutor by e-mail is not enough; **all requests have to be made officially** (i.e., through the link or the form) in order to be processed.

   b. Anyone who repeatedly **misses** appointments without communication may be temporarily blocked from making appointments.

   c. We understand that appointments will sometimes be missed for **very good reasons** (e.g., illnesses, personal emergencies, etc.). But we cannot give out additional appointments, as this would introduce the difficult problem of determining which reasons are acceptable. Accordingly, we've made the decision to give everyone more than enough appointments. This buffer means that one uncontrollable situation won't prevent you from getting help.

Where is the PPLS Skills Centre located?

In-person appointments are held in one of three locations in 7 George Square. All room bookings are handled by the tutor, who will tell you if alternative arrangements need to be made.

We have created videos, photos, and directions to help you find us (link provided).

Using Microsoft Teams

All online appointments will be held through Microsoft Teams (https://teams.microsoft.com). You should already have access to Teams with your student account. It's very important to have a good connection in a quiet room with a screen that's big enough to display your writing.

Joining: There will be a link to the meeting included in the invitation. Click on it and you should be taken to the meeting. If your tutor has changed, make sure to use the link in the most recent message or the calendar appointment, not the initial e-mail. If you encounter difficulty, log in with Teams and send an e-mail to your tutor asking for a direct meeting. Wait for your tutor to initiate the call.

Sharing work: When you are ready to start work on the essay in Teams, you can share your desktop/window by clicking on the icon of the square with the arrow pointing up. This is in a floating menu that appears when you move your mouse over the video window.

Troubleshooting: If the connection is poor, it's possible to stop sending video by clicking on the camera icon in the floating menu. If the audio is poor, click on the three dots in the floating menu and choose "Show device settings". You may have more than once choice for "Microphone", in which case you can try another option.

No tutor? If your tutor does not respond to e-mail, write to [link] so we can look for a replacement.

Other help ("What about proofreading, statistics, programming, content, etc.?")

Are you looking for help with **statistics** or **programming**? There's a separate site (PPLS Data Collection and Analysis) dedicated to these topics with ways to request help.

Do you want advice about the **actual content** of your essay? Talk to your instructor during office hours.

Do you want help with **proofreading**? EUSA's peer proofreading service has been closed. If you ask a friend or family member for help or seek out professional assistance, the type of help you can receive is subject to strict regulations. Please read the guidelines for third-party editing and make sure that the person who is helping you is also aware of those rules. Briefly, a proofreader can correct minor issues with spelling and grammar, but more extensive changes can be tantamount to academic misconduct. Note that these guidelines do not apply to the work we do at the PPLS Skills Centre. The IAD also provides some tips on how to go over your own work.

Are you **applying for a PhD**? You can talk to us about marked coursework that you want to expand on in your future studies (make sure to select "post-mortem" when booking). We cannot discuss your actual proposal, however, so for the personal statements, CVs, or interview questions, you'll want to head over to Careers instead. They've put together a page on preparing for your PhD and you can book appointments with them as well.

The University of Edinburgh has a **wide variety of services** available. You could start by looking at the resources and workshops on offer from the Institute of Academic Development. There is also support for specific groups of students as well, including the Student Disability Service and English Language Education. If you would like to talk to someone about pastoral support, please contact the Student Support Office.

Data policy ("What do you do with the information I provide?")

The information you provide will be used by the University of Edinburgh to check your eligibility for our service, arrange appointments, contact you to follow up, brief tutors and run analyses on how the PPLS Skills Centre is used. These analyses will help us to answer questions about how to improve our service (e.g., when is there particularly high demand for Philosophy appointments?) and complete regular reports on how we've performed. This processing is necessary for the performance of our contract with students. Information is collected and stored using tools from Microsoft Office 365, including Microsoft Bookings. Some information is automatically processed to generate warnings if, for instance, a first-year student requests too many appointments per semester.

Reminder: E-mail format required for booking

We require your UoE student-number e-mail address.
Correct: s1234567@ed.ac.uk
Incorrect: first.last@ed.ac.uk (Please guard against auto-fill)
Appointments booked with a name-based e-mail address cannot be validated and will be automatically cancelled.

Can't get the interface to work? Try the following (in order): clear your browser cache; use a different brower; reset your device.

Questions or problems? Contact [link].

Writing examples

Help us build our collection

We're in the process of gathering coursework so that we can use anonymised examples of real student writing in our documents, workshops, and guidance articles. In some cases, we'll present the essays in their entirety.

Many students have agreed to let us do this so far, but we need more -- we'd like to have examples of essays that worked and didn't work from every corner of PPLS. A collection like that would take a lot of the guesswork out of writing. Instead of spending time wondering about expectations, you could concentrate on thinking about your ideas and how to communicate them.

This would be of enormous benefit to everyone. But we need your help to accomplish it. **If you're willing to let us use your assignments for this purpose, please click this button and fill out the consent form:**

[Provide Consent button] (see Appendix C for details)

Participation is completely voluntary and will have no effect on your academic career at all. We will never reveal your name or student number in the material we create.

Student work

These essays, dissertations, and proposals have been approved for distribution through the PPLS Skills Centre.   Names and acknowledgements have been removed *unless we have permission to include them*. Most images have been removed as well.

All of these examples were judged to be excellent (unless otherwise marked), but please note that you should not assume that any given essay is a flawless example for uncritical imitation. They are presented as they were submitted.

You can also look over **past theses and publications** from our School's areas within the Edinburgh Research Archive. This is a good way to get ready to write your own dissertation. People looking for PhD dissertations can find collections from Philosophy, Psychology, and LEL. (Note that items with a lock icon are restricted; please look for examples without that icon.)

Note: If you're using macOS Monterey or higher, some of these PDFs may appear distorted in the built-in applications (Preview and Safari). To fix this, try opening them up in another program, such as Adobe Acrobat Reader DC.

NEW: Please see the next section for some comments on how to use these essays.

What to take away from the examples

There is no formula for writing a good essay. I don't want you to look at the example essays we've provided as models for copying, but rather as demonstrations of a few features that most good essays share. The features that I'd particularly like to draw your attention to can be unified in a single piece of advice: **don't leave the reader to wonder what's going on**. This advice applies at a global level and also within each paragraph.

We'll take a look at an essay from LEL1A [link] here. The topic is an invented report on human languages that was supposedly made by an alien anthropologist. The student is to explain the inaccuracies that it contains.

(page 1)

Note that the introduction for this essay **sets out the argument right away** without merely repeating the prompt. The prompt mentions that the alien's report is inaccurate, but the writer doesn't stop there and makes the additional claim that these inaccuracies stem from overgeneralisations that underestimate the complexities found in human language.

Sometimes you'll see a "roadmap" for the upcoming argument that indicates the structure and approach. There's one here. It might be overkill in this instance, but complicated and/or long essays will usually require some signposting, and few markers will object to a sentence or two spent on clearing up your approach.

What really needs to be underlined, though, is that the overall claim (that the alien's report overgeneralises) is stated up front. Too often, students simply use the roadmap without the claim (e.g., "This essay will examine the alien's report for inaccuracies."). Your reader should never be left to wonder what your opinion is until the end. You should always be there as a guide.

(page 3)

Most essays in linguistics involve examples. **The relevance of these examples must always be made explicit up front**. The reader should never be left to wonder why they are reading any particular example.

This student prepares the reader well for examples by providing a sentence or two of explanation in advance in most cases. For instance, the example on page 3 follows both an introduction to homophones and a mention of the role of context in disambiguation. The example doesn't take the place of that argument but rather illuminates it.

Before we turn the page, we should also note how this writer is careful to **tie individual arguments back to the central claim**. For example, look at the last sentence, which connects the content of the paragraph (the dependence of meaning on context) with the aspect of the alien's report that's being problematised (the proposal that words have unique fixed concepts). Students are sometimes afraid to make these connections too explicit, but they really are useful for the reader (and will help you attain better marks).

(page 4)

You must **clearly differentiate the work of other linguists from your own argument** -- your reader should never wonder who came up with a specific claim. The best way to do this is through ample in-text citations. Don't use footnote citations or numeric citations unless you are specifically instructed to do so.

Usually, you will **paraphrase** what the author has put forward and then include the citation in parentheses. This student paraphrases like this most of the time, but resorts to quotation on page 4, which is probably unnecessary, as there is nothing particular to the way in which the idea is phrased.

One last hint: use *ibid.* to refer to the same source several times in a row. This allows you to avoid repeating yourself.

Writing within PPLS

For a decade, the PPLS Skills Centre has provided advice to students learning how to write papers in Philosophy, Psychology, and Linguistics. This section draws on the 15,000 appointments we've delivered in that time. Click through on the links for more specific guidance.

Common ground

Academic writing has one guiding principle: Look after your reader

- **Introductions** provide **context**, describe the **academic discussion**, and make space for a clear central **claim**. You can learn how to do this by looking at the "CARS" model.
- **Body paragraphs** should focus on **one central idea**. You can make sure that this happens by learning how to use **topic sentences**, "little claims" that get the reader to ask questions that you answer over the course of the paragraph with **evidence** and **reasoning**. Each paragraph should be obviously **relevant** to the question. If it's not obvious, make it so.
- Go **narrow and deep** rather than broad and shallow. Don't present a mere patchwork quilt of name-dropped researchers and ideas; engage in **critical analysis**.
- Your reader should know where you have been and where you are going throughout your essay. If this starts to become unclear, **signposting** can help with orientation, but use a light touch.
- Your **conclusion** should gather the **main points** you've already established and consider the **implications** of your claim. Don't bring in new arguments at the end.
- Always strive for **clarity**. Make your sentences **vivid**, **vary** their length, and be as **straightforward** as you can.
- **Distinguish** your ideas from those of your sources.
- The **word count** is a requirement, not a suggestion. Learn how to be more concise.

Area-specific tendencies

Philosophy: How to argue

Philosophy at Edinburgh is largely analytic, and so sessions tend to focus on the structure of your argument and the various moves you make. Philosophers nearly always provide a detailed roadmap of where they are going, even in smaller essays. Get familiar with argument / objection / response. It is vital to use first-person "I" to distinguish your own ideas from those coming from others. Avoid strawman arguments (i.e., be charitable), and work to break down arguments in to their components and tease out hidden assumptions. Finally, limit the scope of your essay instead of trying to summarise the entire debate.

Psychology: Empirical rigour

Psychology sessions are usually about empirical questions. It's important to be able to talk about the take-home messages from the articles you use; make sure you don't create a patchwork quilt of research. Critical analysis frequently involves issues like converging lines of evidence or specific methodological faults (demographics, confounding variables, etc.). There are strict expectations about formatting (APA 7) and in many cases you will use report structure (IMRaD).

Linguistics: The big tent

Linguistics essays are highly variable: sometimes they are closer to Philosophy with an emphasis on reasoning, while at other times they are very much about empirical results, like much of Psychology. Papers in phonetics, syntax, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis look very different, and you'll have to learn the conventions through extensive reading. What linguistics essays do have in common is that they almost always require concrete examples to illustrate points. The connection of these examples must be made explicit; don't assume that they speak for themselves.

But what about...?

Each of the above categories is necessarily a simplification, and there are assignments that will stand outside of these descriptions. One of the great things about taking courses in our department is the chance to be exposed to different approaches, so please make the most of this! In all cases, your Course Organiser will alert you to the new requirements. For example,

- **Philosophy**: A few courses take a continental approach in which explicit signposting has less of a role than in the analytic tradition.
- **Psychology**: Some courses will ask you to write qualitative reports, which focus on data less amenable to a quantitative approach.
- **Linguistics**: Some courses have very specific requirements that will differ radically from those of typical linguistics essays (e.g., IEEE reports).

Your path to academic success

There is, generally speaking, a progression as students pass through the four years of an undergraduate degree in PPLS. But first, there are three critical things that students always seem to need help with at all levels:

- Students should focus on writing **coherent paragraphs** that focus on a central issue that contributes to the argument of the paper, although the focus will shift slightly from each paragraph in itself to the larger thread of the argument as papers become longer and more complex.

- Students should guard against extensive description at the expense of **critical analysis**. Their voice must not be lost in the presentation of the literature.

- Students should seek out **clarity of expression** at all times. You are discussing complex concepts, so you don't need to dress them up in fancy language.

Here are some skills that frequently come up in our appointments as students gain experience:

Year 1: Getting used to academic writing

- Know what an academic essay looks like

- Read and respond to the prompt

Year 2: Improving analysis & depth

- Keep your focus narrow to avoid excess description

- Don't just summarise readings; describe how they interact with each other

- Make sure you have a clear, independent position

Year 3: Handling longer and more difficult sources

- Use literature reviews to deal with conflicting sources

- Develop your own voice as an academic

- Learn more about specific requirements in your area (results vs discussion, etc.)

Year 4: Expanding the scale with the dissertation while narrowing the focus

- Tell a coherent story across a large document (the "golden thread")

- Maintain a consistent voice across multiple chapters

- Earn your academic membership card

PGT students have to fit all of this into a single year. Like UG4 students, they deal with literature at a high level and need to produce a dissertation. But many of them are transitioning from different academic backgrounds, so they will need to step back and learn about the specific expectations of their area.

Writing skills and guidance

Introduction and "Assessment for Skills" rubric overview

If you read one book on how to write academic essays, make it "The Craft of Research". We use it at the PPLS Skills Centre as our bible, as it contains excellent guidance on developing the skills mentioned in the rubric.

The Craft of Research by Booth, Colomb & Williams (e-book)

Subject-specific books

Psychology: Scientific Writing for Psychology by Kail
Linguistics: Writing Essays in English Language and Linguistics by Murray (e-book)

Frequently-mentioned online resources (Philosophy)

Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper (external) by Pryor
Writing Philosophy (external) by Lipton

These resources will help you see how Philosophy papers differ from work in other subjects. There are a few aspects that, while not unique to Philosophy, are particularly emphasised beyond what you see in Linguistics or Psychology:

1. They tend to have more detailed **roadmaps** of how the argument will be presented.

2. They are more explicit about the **premises** of the argument.

3. They frequently **anticipate counter-arguments**.

University-specific guidance

You should check your programme handbook for current guidance, but there are also several other places with specific guidance for the University of Edinburgh and PPLS:

PPLS Student Hub: Assignments and Advice

PPLS Postgraduate Submission Requirements (MSc)

UoE How to Write a Good Postgraduate Research Proposal (MSc/PhD)

UoE Thesis Format and Binding Guidance (PhD)

UoE Including Publications in Postgraduate Research Theses (PhD)

Dissertation Resources (Karen Fleet)

Course-specific guidance

speech.zone: Videos with tips on writing: style & presentation, being concise, and using figures (Prof Simon King) [note: these are used in Speech Synthesis and Speech Processing; the referencing is IEEE and not APA/USS]

Assessment for Skills Rubirc

The PPLS Assessment for Skills Rubric identifies five major writing skills:

1. **Demonstrating understanding of the material**
2. **Establishing and supporting claims through reasoning**
   (e.g, introductions & abstracts, body paragraphs & topic sentences, conclusions, etc.)
3. **Critically evaluating other research**
   (e.g., literature reviews & annotated bibliographies, engaging with your sources, etc.)
4. **Writing clearly and effectively** (grammar and style)
5. **Referencing appropriately** (mechanics)

You've probably had more experience with some of these skills than others. You might write beautifully, yet have no experience with academic citations. Or maybe you cite the work of others very thoroughly without ever analysing it critically enough. It will be much easier to improve if you work on one thing at a time – that's why we tell students booking appointments to identify a category to focus on.

You may notice that these categories overlap and intertwine with one another. For instance,

- 2 and 3 both involve argument, but 2 is about the ideas you're putting forward while 3 is about engaging with the ideas of other researchers.
- Similarly, 2 and 4 are both about how you put things in prose, but 2 is about the overall structure while 4 is about the execution at the sentence level.
- And 3 and 5 both involve other people's work, but 3 is about how you engage with the arguments of others and 5 is about how clearly and consistently you mark ideas as belonging to others.

This implementation of this rubric is described in "Assessment for Skills: A programme-level idea for giving feedback" (external), a blog post for Teaching Matters. The rubric allows markers to categorise Turnitin in-line comments under five categories, each of which represents a distinct academic skill.

In the upcoming sections, we'll look at how to improve these skills

Knowledge: Demonstrating understanding of the material

Although "understanding" isn't really a skill, showing that you understand something is. There are a few major ways to accomplish this. You have to talk about ideas in an accurate way, of course, but you also have to work those descriptions into a coherent global picture of concepts and trends.

When specific terms arise, you must use those terms accurately and explain them to your reader when necessary. Be careful – many words are used in very particular ways in various academic fields, so you want to make sure you're getting them right. How are you going to decide whether to call an issue "moral" or "ethical"? What does it mean to say that the results of a study are "significant" or that something is a matter of "semantics"?

Your work as a student will necessarily be a little broader than the work of researchers. That's because part of what your essays have to do is convince the readers that you understand the material presented in your courses. Even something like a PhD dissertation will devote space to describing theories that would only need to be touched on in a published monograph on the topic. Researchers can concentrate more narrowly on giving their audiences what they to know without worrying about demonstrating their own competence.

Some of these issues will become easier to deal with as you become more and more familiar with your subject area, but as long as you stay in academia you will be encountering new ideas that you have to come to grips with.

Argument: Establishing and supporting claims through reasoning

You will also be evaluated on how well you put forward and organise your ideas. Most essays require you to support a claim. Your proposal should be clearly stated and, ideally, original to some extent. It should be supported convincingly throughout the body of your essay by evidence and argumentation. It's important to strike a balance between covering the topic and focusing on a particular issue; most students err in favour of breadth over depth. Make sure not to spend too much time writing around your particular issue, as that reduces the time you can spend on the issue itself. It's usually more important to discover and engage with limitations to your proposal.

You should also arrange your argument in a way that flows with a clear logical line from start to finish. Your reader should be aware of where the argument is heading at all times. This is such a big set of skills that some people will separate the argument itself from the way it's organised, but here we've placed both together because they can be hard to disentangle.

There are certain expectations about how to organise the structure of an academic argument. We've put together advice on how to use your introduction and abstract, body paragraphs, and conclusion to put across and support your central claim.

Introductions

There are a few well-worn pieces of advice on introductions that get passed around. "Tell 'em what you're going to say" is probably the most popular of these. Another one is "grab their attention". I haven't found either to be very helpful in my own writing. After all, most authors tell people what's going to be said in the abstract, which covers the whole paper and its conclusions. The introduction is really for leading people into the essay, not reproducing it in compact form. And while you can grab people's attention through short, shocking statements, surely that isn't the only way to open things up. Look at the essays you admire. Some may aim to surprise, but probably not all.

Then there are the traps that students fall into over and over. Many undergraduates open by repeating the essay prompt or quoting from the dictionary. These are hackneyed approaches, and they call to mind an unsure student sitting in front of a blank computer screen, hoping to inflate the word count. Other students try to puff things up with grand statements of the cosmic importance of what's to come in the essay ("Ever since the dawn of humanity, we have wrestled with..."). None of these approaches is great.

A better strategy is to use your introduction to set the right environment for your argument. You can do this by (1) establishing the context, (2) identifying a problem, and then (3) providing a response. The context is where you introduce the topic that will be under discussion, usually in a fairly neutral way. The problem can be either a gap in existing knowledge or a point of academic contention. And the response is your contribution or judgment, the argument that you will be supporting over the rest of your paper. You might have found a different approach to the problem, or something new to consider. Or maybe new evidence has come along from a different field that should be taken into account.

If you'd like to read more about this way of writing introductions, you can try chapter 16 of Booth et al.'s The Craft of Research, or various material written by John Swales, such as chapter 7 of Research Genres: Explorations and Applications.

For now, though, read through the following introductions, all taken from work produced at least in part by PPLS teaching staff (Hannah Rohde, Andy Clark, and Robert Logie). Watch how they follow the pattern I've just described. I'll highlight the first one for you.

Rohde, H. (2008). Coherence-driven effects in sentence and discourse processing. (Doctoral dissertation). University of California, San Diego.

[CONTEXT] Most of the linguistic input that we encounter as comprehenders woefully underdetermines the crucial structural, semantic, and pragmatic relationships that make language meaningful. These invisible relationships must be inferred by the listener or reader, who manages to do this gracefully and automatically. From a stream of words, we extract a plausible grammatical structure, positing syntactic and semantic relations between words and phrases. At the same time, we also identify higher order relationships that hold between sentences and that allow us to link together a series of sentences to form a coherent discourse.

Almost all sentences that we encounter are embedded in larger multi-sentence discourse contexts, [PROBLEM] yet our current models of language comprehension tend to focus on the sentence-internal process of combining words to form local syntactic and semantic relationships. [RESPONSE] The aim of this dissertation is to show that comprehenders generate expectations about the direction the discourse is likely to take — that is, how upcoming sentences will relate to the current one — and that those expectations influence the interpretation of linguistic phenomena internal to the sentence.

Try the next two on your own:

Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. (1998). "The extended mind." Analysis, 7-19.
Logie, R. H. (2011). "The functional organization and capacity limits of working memory." Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20(4), 240-245.

These examples are particularly concise, but that's not the only way to do it. Some writers will spend paragraphs getting from green to red to the highlighted text. But nearly all essays do follow the pattern, and that's because all academic writing is (1) about something requiring contextualisation, (2) situated within a research community that has already thought about the topic, and (3) aimed at generating new ideas or approaches. Don't see the pattern as a straightjacket, but as a reminder of your academic responsibilities to your reader. The execution is up to you.

What about the roadmap?

As your academic work becomes longer and/or involves more complicated argumentation, your readers will find it more and more useful to have an idea of how you are going to support your claim with reasoning and evidence. This is especially true in Philosophy, where it is particularly important to be explicit about how you will answer the question with argumentative strategies, even in short papers (e.g., "The next section presents a few potential objections to this view along with some responses..."). In Linguistics and particularly Psychology, on the other hand, such roadmaps are often saved for more substantial pieces of writing, like dissertations.

Abstracts

It's important to be able to write a good abstract. How else are you going to convince people to accept your journal articles or conference presentations?

Abstracts share a lot with introductions. In both you'll have to provide context, establish a problem or niche, and then fill in the knowledge gap with your own position. And they both function to get the reader interested in finding out what you have to say.

But you'll have to go a step further with abstracts. Despite their brevity, abstracts must also contain a brief but concrete presentation of your arguments along with a sample of your data. If you've done experiments, they should be described along with the results. While introductions are promises of what's to come, abstracts have to get the building blocks out in full view.

It's essential to strike the right tone. Abstracts should be confident without being dismissive of others. Don't apologise for your work, but don't overinflate it either. Of course, that applies to any writing, but the

whole purpose of an abstract is to help people to decide whether or not to spend time with you and your ideas. Haughty arrogance and abject humility both come off badly.

The Linguistic Society of America has provided a collection of eight annotated model abstracts [link] to get you going in the right direction. At the bottom, they've also taken one of the model abstracts (Pullum and Zwicky) and desecrated it to make what they call "Unacceptable Abstract Sample". They've really done a hatchet job on it – the result is a parody of all the worst submissions. But the pitfalls exemplified are ones that people really do fall into. You always need to be on the guard for even a hint of empty overpromising rhetoric. After reading the degraded version, go back to the original (#2) to see how much better it is.

Body paragraphs and topic sentences

The body paragraphs of your essay serve to organise your argument into digestible sections. During your studies, you will be probably be told at least once that a good way to organise your paragraphs is to use **topic sentences**. These sentences come at the beginnings of paragraphs and introduce the central ideas that are about to be developed. "Use topic sentences," the advice-givers say, "and your writing will become clear".

This is less relevant outside of academic prose. Countless examples of fine writing do not use topic sentences. I've read many paragraphs where the first sentence does not point towards the incoming payload at all, and yet the authors of these paragraphs are praised for their style and clarity. Then why should we use them? Is the topic sentence an invented device designed to turn writing into a paint-by-numbers exercise?

The first thing we should note is that academic writing is not just a stuffier version of regular writing. Instead, the main thing that sets it apart is that it has a narrower purpose. It does not seek to entertain through mystification (we hope), but to **communicate ideas**. Most of these ideas are difficult to grasp, and so it is the academic writer's duty to present them in as clear a way as possible.

A good way to ensure that the reader stays focused on the argument is to constantly **set up questions** in the reader's mind and then **answer them**. And this is what topic sentences let you do, because they are not mere statements of fact but miniature claims that the reader should want to have explained. They are found throughout academic prose.

Let's take a look at some examples from dissertations written by academic staff at PPLS (Chris Cummins and Adam Moore). You don't need to understand the sentences fully to see what sort of questions are being set up in the minds of the readers, mostly along the lines of "How do you know?" or "What do you mean by that?".

Cummins, C. (2011). The interpretation and use of numerically-quantified expressions. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Cambridge.

For the "single-bounded" category, things are potentially more interesting, because there are several productive ways to express this type of quantification.

- What ways are there to express this type of quantification?
- Are there any important differences between these ways?

One development which coheres with this notion is stochastic OT.

- What does stochastic OT involve?

- How does it cohere with whatever's being discussed?

Moore, A. (2011). Moral Judgment as Simulated Action Planning. (Doctoral dissertation). Princeton University.

The DEMV model has several key advantages over many other accounts of moral judgment so far offered.

- What are these advantages?

On our reading of this exchange, the key question up for debate now is whether or not there is evidence that utilitarian responses to personal moral dilemmas engender cognitive conflict.

- Has evidence been found?

- What does it look like?

- Are there any problems with this evidence?

Each of these sentences serves a vital role precisely because none stands on its own. As readers, we want to find out more, so we keep reading. And we have an idea of roughly what we're going to find out, so there are no surprises.

This is a powerful way of improving the unity of the essay. The reader is promised a reward for continuing to read the paragraph. That reward gets handed out over the course of the paragraph, and then another topic sentence comes along to promise more.

So when you are working on topic sentences, don't think of them as just one-sentence summaries, but as ways to provoke questions that will have to be answered. Use them as lures. How are you going to convince the reader to keep on going through paragraph after paragraph, section after section? Topic sentences aren't the only way of accomplishing this, but they are an important tool in the writer's kit. Academic prose can be enjoyable if the reader never has to wonder what the point of it all is.

Conclusions

We often hear that the conclusion is where you "tell 'em what you told 'em". That's easy advice to follow, but does it really reflect how most essays and articles end? It would be a little odd if that were all there was to it; you can already find a brief summary of what the article says in the abstract, so why would there be another place for doing the exact same thing again? Just for convenience's sake, so that the reader doesn't have to flip back to the abstract? I think there's more that can be done with a conclusion than simply repeating what was in the paper. To be sure, we do need to sum up the paper's content, but that can be over in a sentence or two. What comes next?

I like to think of the conclusion as working in reverse order from the introduction. That doesn't mean that it's an exact mirror image, but rather that the mental scene of communication from the introduction (first establishing context and then narrowing focus through existing research to the thesis statement) gets inverted. A conclusion will instead lead from (1) your **central claim** back through (2) **other research** to (3) its **broader implications** outside of the narrow focus of our argument. Here you can finally relax from rigorously concentrating on a single goal (proving your point) and start to consider what it all means. This will involve a small leap of faith: you have to assume that your readers, faced with your evidence and logic, are now on side with you. That means they are now prepared to find out how your argument affects broader academic circles and even the "real world" in some cases.

This will all be easier to see if we have a concrete example. I'll use Gollwitzer et al. 2009, an interesting article about how making public announcements about your intentions to do things that are relevant to your identity (as, say, someone who wants to become an academic researcher) can have the counterintuitive result of making it less likely that you will actually carry those plans out. So don't tell people that you plan on improving your essay-writing skills in various ways; just do it.

1. Their conclusion starts by indeed telling what has been told. That is, they repeat their **claim**: when you know that other people have heard that you intend to behave in an identity-relevant way, you are less likely to actually carry out that behaviour. So far, so good.

2. Next, they situate themselves within the **research** again. How does what they've done fit into what others have done? The names that come up here don't need to be the same names that come in the introduction because the task is different. Before, they were establishing a niche for themselves. Now, they are considering what their research means for other people. Work that has been done before might need to be reinterpreted or modified or expanded in the light of what's just been shown.

3. Gollwitzer et al. also consider how their findings might be applied to the **real world**. After all, committed individuals who want to achieve goals will be interested in knowing how to avoid the discouraging effect they describe. Are there other ways around it than just not talking to people? They consider other research connected with increased/decreased motivation and speculate on strategies that might be adopted to improve work ethic.

Most research papers will have a similar pattern of strategies in their conclusions. Being consciously aware of these strategies and observing them as you read will help you when it comes time to write your own conclusions.

Now, if you're writing a dissertation or producing some other sort of original research, there are ways to take your conclusions to the next level:

- If your findings have any **incompatibilities with previous research**, these should be noted clearly. But think carefully before claiming that your work overturns an established field.

- If you are aware of any **limitations of your approach**, it's in your best interest to make them clear now. You won't be scoring an own goal by doing this. It's far better to scour your own paper for weaknesses and make them explicit than to have them discovered by someone else. You have a duty as an academic to seek out the truth, to be sure, but if you need a more selfish reason, consider that honest self-criticism helps to further establish your ethos as a writer. We're more likely to trust people who are hard on themselves.

- You should indicate any **new areas for research** that you might not have had time to treat in your work. Are there interesting unexplored paths to take? Indicating them will also help connect your work to what others will do later on.

In brief, your conclusion should be your answer to the question "so what?" from your readers. You've spent the paper arguing in favour of something. If your audience is convinced by what you've said, they're going to need to change some things about the way they view the topic. Pointing these things out to them is a great way to bring your paper to a close.

Analysis: Critically evaluating other research

When you present the research of others, you should evaluate it with your own analysis; merely recapitulating what others have said or done is insufficient and will result in a mere patchwork of sources. You'll want to identify strengths and weaknesses, of course, but also show where different strands of

research come into contact. You should pay careful attention to ways in which alternative arguments might undermine your own claim, and deal with these possible objections in a fair and thorough manner.

Engaging with your sources

It can be a bit scary to be told to "engage" with your sources. After all, who are you to decide what's right and what's wrong? The research you've been looking at was carried out by people who have spent years in the field, and you're just beginning your academic career.

First, it's liberating to realise that you don't have to take a side or attack in order to engage. All that you have to do is situate different research positions against one another. Where do the positions **overlap**? Can the insights of one approach be **captured** in the other? What **objections** have been raised? Are they **insuperable**? Asking even a few of these questions will have you on the way to a deeper engagement with your sources.

Of course, you may very well want to criticise, and that's a good thing. But it's usually best to underplay your hand here. It's certainly possible that your insights completely demolish an established research program, but it's much more likely that you've actually misread whatever it is that you're attacking. Don't claim victory prematurely.

Instead, make your criticism all about finding issues and presenting them to the reader for judgement. Look for **contradictions** in what people say. Check the **accuracy** of the data that's presented. Could certain effects be explained by a **different cause**? Is there a piece of **counterevidence** that was overlooked? If you've come up with enough reasons to be suspicious of someone's claim, you won't need to huff and puff to blow it over.

On the contrary, it's important to be generous in how you read your opponents. The game you're playing is not about piling up as many advantages for your side as possible and setting them beside a heap of disadvantages for the other side. Having an obviously biased approach like that makes it look as though you either don't fully understand the problem or are being dishonest about it. Neither is a good look for a researcher. In *Scientific Writing for Psychology*, Robert Kail points out that incomplete or biased descriptions of research annoy the reader. I think that's true whether the reader is on your side of the argument or not. Try to present different views as fairly as you can. I always try to imagine the researchers whose work I'm writing about happening to come across my paper. I wouldn't need them to agree with my views, but I wouldn't want them to feel as though they'd been mistreated. On occasion, I've even pulled up pictures of the people I'm criticising so that I can read my essay out and pretend that they're in the audience. I often find myself becoming a little less strident.

Of course, you may fully agree with what a paper has to say. This can almost be worse, in a way: you might think there's not much more to write than "me, too". But claims can nearly always be bolstered by **additional evidence**. And sometimes old claims can be applied to **new areas** in new ways. The claims you agree with might be vulnerable to counterarguments in their current forms, so you can provide them with the additional **support** they need to fend off attacks.

What's important is that engagement with research is a very different activity from, for instance, clicking "like" or "dislike" on online videos. Too many papers have brief summaries of articles followed by the equivalent of "loved it" or "nonsense". You're asked to read sources not so that you can rate them, but rather so that you can assemble them into an detailed picture of what the research community has to say about whatever topic you've chosen to discuss. It's a far more interesting task.

Annotated bibliographies and literature reviews

You can't do research in a vacuum. Even if you've identified a brand new problem to tackle, it will be adjacent to work that's already been done, and your reader will need to understand that work. That's why the first step in many projects is to **explore existing research**. You'll draw connections between other people's papers and chapters and then situate your own work within the field.

This is a chance for you to show your marker that you've mastered several important skills:

1. You will **demonstrate your knowledge and understanding** by correctly describing what you find.

2. You will **engage with those sources in a critical way**. That doesn't necessarily mean that you'll spend all your time finding weaknesses. Rather, you'll be using your own insights to point out how different approaches are related and how they interact with each other.

3. You will write about what you find as **clearly** as possible.

4. You will demonstrate that you can use your chosen **referencing** style in a consistent way.

In this guide, we'll assume that you want to put together an **annotated bibliography** as a first step. In some cases, you'll be asked to perform this step as a self-contained assignment. We'll then look at how to turn that annotated bibliography into a **literature review**. These frequently appear as self-contained chapters in longer dissertations, but you'll need to summarise and analyse research in all sorts of writing. No matter whether you decide to create a dedicated chapter or not, your look at the literature will probably be positioned just after the introduction of your work so that you can make reference to it when describing your own contributions later on.

Please note that this guide is aimed at creating narrative literature reviews that could at least potentially sit within dissertations or monographs. Some self-standing literature reviews, such as Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs), involve a more rigorous approach that goes beyond the discussion below. See this post [link] by the Academic Support Librarians for more information (particularly the links to this guidance [link] and the relevant part of LibSmart).

Step 1: Annotated Bibliographies and Literature Searches

What's involved?

Annotated bibliographies are like expanded reference sections. They're similar in that they're both collections of papers, chapters, books, dissertations, and so on. Your sources should be formatted consistently according to the expectations of your discipline (see Referencing in Resources).

There are three key differences between annotated bibliographies and reference sections. First, they differ from reference sections in that they can contain items that are **not necessarily cited** in your work. So you can include items that you might use instead of limiting yourself to things that you have already decided to use. Next, many annotated bibliographies will also include **a brief introduction** that sets up the approach to reference compilation. If you've divided your annotated bibliography into parts, why have you done so? Finally, annotated bibliographies contain **notes** with each entry. These notes will guide your research and help you keep track of your reactions. They will also let your marker know whether you are on the right track with your reading.

The notes will be your key contribution. They will, of course, **summarise** the work in your own words. That is, you will describe its purpose, methodology (particularly if it's novel), and findings while pulling out any particular information that is relevant to your topic. But there's more to notes than that. You might also want to **evaluate** the credibility of the work by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. You can also start to **draw connections** between different papers and your own topic. How is this work relevant to the ongoing academic conversation and what place might it have in your own paper?

There are several ways to organise annotated bibliographies. The more research you look at, the more it will make sense to organise it in sections. But if your bibliography is only a few items long, then it's probably best to organise it as a simple alphabetical list.

The most essential quality of the annotated bibliography is its suitability as a guide for people looking to read about your topic. Are the findings clear? Do your summaries make sense together as a group? Have you decided which studies to include and exclude in a principled way? Are there obvious gaps?

How to proceed

You'll want to become familiar with various techniques for conducting **literature searches** so that you can select appropriate sources. The library has provided a detailed guide. And here's a video on finding resources that looks at various research tools (e.g., Google Scholar).

Examples

You'll also want to know what you're aiming at. Have a look at these **anonymised examples** from Guided Research courses in Linguistics and English Language:

- [Creoles example] Note how the introduction doesn't waste time providing a thorough overview to the topic, but rather gets right to work identifying ongoing questions in the field so that the organisation of the bibliography into sections makes sense.

- [Gender example] Here, the marker specifically praises how clearly the writer explains complex topics (see comment 2). This makes the bibliography more useful for newcomers to the field (and demonstrates your understanding of the topic).

If you would like to take a look at a professional annotated bibliography, visit Oxford Bibliographies. They're excellent, but please be aware that they involve a great number of sources and relatively brief descriptions. If you're creating an annotated bibliography for a course, you'll probably be expected to have fewer sources but longer notes. Check with your instructor.

Step 2: Literature Reviews

What's the difference?

Let's consider how a literature review differs from an annotated bibliography. Instead of considering each work separately, you'll weave your analyses together into a coherent **story** about your topic, the theoretical issues it raises, the findings that led to your research problem, and any relevant methodological issues. You will be answering questions like "How much is known about this topic?", "What are the key academic disputes?", "Which areas need further exploration?", and so on.

There are various ways to organise that story. You might tell your story in **chronological** order (how did a particular field develop over time?) or organise it by **topic** (theme? paradigm? theoretical positions?). You'll probably need to bring together approaches that you intend to compare in a single paragraph.

Trace around the gap that you intend to fill with your own contribution. What research approaches yours the nearest? What are the fundamental shortcomings that you hope to resolve? Are there any analogies between your approach and those in more distantly related fields?

Because you're telling a story now, you'll need to **foreground your own voice** to an even greater degree. While annotated bibliographies are fundamentally about analysing each study in turn, literature reviews are usually about presenting the central concepts you are addressing in the light of those studies.

One way to avoid creating a patchwork of sources is to cite those sources in a different way. That is, you might want to consider changing some instances of **integral citations** (1), in which the researchers' names are directly included in your sentences, to **non-integral citations** (2), in which the researchers' names are parenthetical asides:

1. ***Benedict (1979)*** *tested the comprehension skills of 36 children and concluded that infants begin to comprehend words some time between the 8th and 10th month.* ***Huttenlocher (1974)*** *also concluded that at around 9 months of age, children begin to show signs of word recognition. However*, ***Oviatt (1980)***, *who conducted a similar study, obtained different results [...]*

2. *There are reports in the language acquisition literature that infants show some limited comprehension of words beginning at approximately 9 months of age* ***(Benedict, 1979; Huttenlocher, 1974)***. *But other studies suggest that comprehension skills are quite limited even at 11 months, and that it is not until around 15 months that infants show signs of comprehending and recognizing novel words* ***(Oviatt, 1980, Thomas et al., 1981)***.

Note that (1) summarises what people did into a patchwork, but (2) presents a narrative that is supported by what people did. The latter approach puts the fact that the findings are contradictory in the spotlight. This could lead to exploration of what sort of work might advance the discussion.

I don't mean to suggest that non-integral citations are universally preferable to integral citations. Indeed, when you're providing extended commentary on key papers, it will be more natural to use integral citations. But I've found that I tend to overuse that style because it's easier: I can simply regurgitate my notes. When I make an effort to rewrite some sentences so that they are about the ideas rather than the researchers, I find I am more likely to include my own ideas (and less likely to parrot the results of other people). Note that it's also easier to include multiple citations when they are non-integral.

One last tip: most of the time you'll be **paraphrasing** your sources, but if you're presenting something controversial or being particularly critical of an idea, it can help to **quote directly**. This way, the author's words come across accurately and there's less chance that you'll create a straw man.

How to proceed

If you already have an annotated bibliography in hand, consider using it as a starting point:

1. **Rearrange** your notes to outline your "story". You might need to split up your description of a source into two parts if it participates in two different parts of the story. Don't repeat yourself; use cross-references.

2. As you create your story, you will probably come up with a more appropriate title than "Literature review". You can usually use your **topics** as section headers.

3. **Delete** all items that don't take part in your story. Don't view these deleted references as wastes of time: you've learned something from them, but leaving them in your literature review would confuse your reader.

4. Put this rearranged document on one side of your screen, and **rewrite** the whole thing to foreground the ideas over the individual researchers. Make sure to emphasise your own understanding of how the many pieces fit together.

Examples

The best place to look for literature reviews is probably within dissertations. As I've mentioned, they'll often have a chapter dedicated to the task, but many work the review right into the introduction.

[A Sociophonetic Study of FACE and GOAT in Leith]

In her dissertation, Nina Markl uses her second chapter ("Research background") to provide a distinct literature review (pp. 12-21). Because she must deal with several topics, she divides it into four sections:

1. Leith and Edinburgh

2. Scottish English

3. Dipthongs and Diphthongisation

4. Accommodation, Indexical Variation and Local Identity

Broadly speaking, she arranges these to move from general history through to language and then focus on phonology and sociolinguistics in turn. The narrative order makes sense, as each section can build on ideas that were previously introduced.

Note how the text of each of these sections focuses on bringing the reader up to speed with the various topics. Nina uses non-integral citations to keep the focus on what she is describing rather than the individual pieces of research.

Her style changes somewhat in section 2.2.3, where she looks at various approaches to diphthongal realisations of what are usually monophthongs. This makes sense, because the narrative flow here slows down so that she can evaluate each study in turn. As the studies themselves become the topics, this integral approach works well. But the pace picks up again in section 2.3 as the narrative shifts back to a description of ideas.

Additional reading

- Booth, Wayne C., et al. (2016). *The Craft of Research* (4th ed.). University of Chicago Press. [eBook] (*Chapters 6 (Engaging Sources) and 14 (Incorporating Sources) are particularly relevant to literature reviews.)*

- Machi, Lawrence. A. & McEvoy, B. T. (2016). *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success* (3rd ed.). Corwin. [eBook]

- Ridley, Diana. 2012. *The Literature Review: A Step-by-Step Guide for Students* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. [eBook]

Acknowledgements

Fluency: Writing clearly and effectively

In order to communicate effectively, you need to write sentences that are easy to read and flow together with transitions. After all, you're discussing difficult ideas -- your prose should make those ideas as accessible as possible to your audience. Your tone should be succinct and engaging, avoiding both casual informality and needless turgidity.

This is a lifelong struggle for all writers.

There are many great books on how to write well. I have linked to the e-book when one is available.

- The Sense of Style by Pinker
- Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace by Williams & Bizup (e-book)
- Clear and Simple as the Truth by Thomas & Turner (e-book)

Below, I go through three specific tips: (1) write to communicate, (2) don't be afraid to be straightforward, and (3) reduce ambiguity.

Write to communicate after you've written to learn

Write twice: once to discover what you think and once to present your findings. Committing yourself to writing twice may look like a burden, but you'll probably find it to be liberating instead.

The first time through is when you find out what you think. You can't skip this; you won't know what you have to say until you get it out. No matter how many times you read through your sources, you'll find that your ideas and concepts will always have something ethereal about them until they are sitting on your computer screen.

You won't want to submit any part of this early version. It will be uncertain here and overconfident there. Your narrative will leave out what's essential and spend too long going over what's not. But you must allow yourself the freedom to write in this less-than-perfect way without fear of being judged. Seek out new ideas, discard old ones, and don't stop to polish phrasing unless you really can't help yourself.

But this freedom to explore carries with it a new obligation. You have to be ready to throw out all of the mess you've just made. Your task will involve more than just shifting sentences about and trimming superfluous words. It's not good enough to scan through your work for mistakes and call it a day.

Instead, use your second composition to present your discoveries as perfectly as you can. You have to make it as easy as possible for your reader to approach the topic, and this can never be done by summarising the haphazard process by which you came to understand it. Your finished prose should be cool, precise and polished. This will not be easy to accomplish, but it should look as though it were.

The secret is in carefully visualising the scene. Reimagine your topic, with all of its abstract complexity, as a mechanical object that can be described in an exact way. Now conjure up a reader, an interested and intelligent person who wants to learn about how your topic works. What are its parts? How do these parts interact? How has your topic been used or interpreted by others? Guide your reader's attention to what you've noticed.

This is where student writing fails so often, and that's a pity. If you don't take the time to rewrite, you're acting like a pianist who releases a recording of an early practice session instead of the final performance. Your essay is not a record of how you came to know something. It is an act of communicating what you have already come to know.

To learn more about how to do this, see chapter 2 of Pinker's The Sense of Style and Thomas and Turner's Clear and Simple as the Truth.

Don't be afraid to be straightforward

Students often try to give their writing an academic air by making it more difficult to read. They'll turn a straightforward sentence like "the puppet popped out and scared the children" into "the puppet's sudden emergence caused fear in the children". Or write sentences like "an experiment to test this theory was

carried out", in which all instances of "I" or "we" are scrubbed out in an effort to make things less personal.

But few professional researchers feel this shyness about being direct and personal in their writing. To illustrate this, I've taken extracts written by PPLS researchers and degraded them into the sort of writing that's more typical of undergraduates. Take a look at the transformed sentences below and consider how they could be made less obscure.

> *Animals setting off to their usual foraging grounds can be seen to be in possession of knowledge of their destination based on the fact that different starting places and different routes exist.*

> *An experiment in which eight- to ten-year-old children played a tangram description and matching task with a partner, as in Wilkes-Gibbs and Clark (1992), was carried out to distinguish these alternatives.*

Sentences like these can require multiple passes to absorb. They might not jump out immediately as awful, but they're harder to understand than they might be.

Now let's see the unaltered versions. The original authors didn't feel the need to disguise ideas or identities, and so they are able to communicate their ideas to the reader more effectively:

> *When an animal sets off to its usual foraging ground, it knows where it is going, because it can get there from many different places, and even take new routes. (James R. Hurford's chapter in Christiansen and Kirby 2003)*

> *To distinguish these alternatives, we carried out an experiment in which eight- to ten-year old children played a tangram description and masking task with a partner, as in Wilkes-Gibbs and Clark (1992). (Branigan et al. 2016)*

Hurford keeps the animal in focus throughout his sentence by making it the subject of several short clauses. Branigan, Bell and McLean aren't afraid to use "we", which means the reader doesn't have to plough through dozens of words before getting to the main verb.

Yes, it's true that research articles often involve specialised vocabulary and complex ideas. But a skilled academic writer will try to communicate as clearly as possible despite all that. A novice, on the other hand, will see the complexity as a badge of honour and may even try to increase it artificially. This is always a mistake.

Reduce ambiguity

If you've taken an introduction to linguistics, you'll have heard of ambiguity. When I say "a cow attacked a farmer with an axe", there's some potential for miscommunication about who's wielding the axe. When I say "I bought a pen", you probably imagine that I've bought something to write with, but I might be talking about an enclosure for pigs.

In your academic writing, you probably won't be communicating facts about pigs in pens or cows with axes, but that doesn't mean that you don't need to worry about ambiguity. Here are a few examples of ambiguity causing trouble in essays:

> *I will present her test of the main prediction of this account, which demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y.*

What exactly is it that demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y? Is it the test? The prediction? The account?

> *Bill notes that Sally criticises Pat. This is unsurprising.*

Is it the criticism that's unsurprising? Or is it the idea that Bill took note of the criticism?

This sort of ambiguity can creep into anyone's writing. It's particularly hard to detect when it's in your own prose, because your brain will choose your intended reading automatically. So how can you detect problems and fix them?

It might seem a bit mechanical, but running a quick search on your essay can be illuminating. Doing this won't find all the problems, and it will list many sentences that are perfectly fine, but I still find the process to be helpful.

Supplementary relative clauses like the one in the first example can be found by searching for [, which], and you can also search for sentences beginning with [This] or [That] if you make sure to turn on sensitivity to capitalisation.   You'll have to read each instance yourself to judge ambiguity, but it's a step in the right direction.

Now what can you do to resolve ambiguity once you find it? Let's take a look at our sentences again.

> *I will present her test of the main prediction of this account, which demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y.*

A supplementary relative clause coming at the end of a sentence is often a source of trouble. See Huddleston and Pullum 2002 ch 12 sec 4 if you want details about what these clauses look like, but for now I'll just point out that you could change this relative into a supplementary noun phrase containing a relative (Huddleston and Pullum 2002 ch 15 sec 5 for details). These terms are tricky if you're not a linguist, but the essential message is that you could make the thing the relative clause attaches to more explicit. Depending on what we want to convey, we could change the material after the comma to:

"a test that demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y"

"a prediction that demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y" or

"an account that demonstrates that X has failed to account for Y"

> *Bill notes that Sally criticises Pat. This is unsurprising*.

The "this" in "this is unsurprising" is what's called a fused-head noun phrase. Again, see Huddleston and Pullum 2002 ch 5 sec 9 for a full explanation if you're interested, but it will be enough for now to note that you could put a word after 'this' to disambiguate what it is that you're talking about. These replacements of the final sentence both make the intended meaning more obvious:

"This observation is unsurprising."

"This attack is unsurprising."

Joseph Williams has written at length about improving ambiguous sentences like these in some of his various books on Style.

Do you want to see how UoE students have overused "this" in their submissions? Prof Simon King has assembled a collection of 45 extracts with commentary explaining what is confusing about them. It's available here: https://speech.zone/media/images/Speech_Processing_feedback_notes_2018.pdf

Mechanics: Referencing appropriately

Finally, the way in which you reference the literature is important, too. You should correctly and thoroughly cite your sources so that it's clear which ideas are yours and which stem from your reading. There are many referencing styles that you might be asked to follow, but the most important point is to be consistent.

Common styles

If you're looking for good default assumptions, pick one of the following:

- Philosophy: Harvard or sometimes Chicago (author-date)
- Psychology: APA
- LEL: Unified Style Sheet or APA

We have physical copies of the concise and complete APA guidelines.

Of course, the guidelines set out by your instructor override these defaults. For instance, some courses in LEL specifically require IEEE style.

Tips

We highly recommend that you use reference management software to make referencing easier. See software skills for help with this.

For help on the difference between integral and non-integral citations, see the information embedded in our guidance on literature reviews.

Are you worried about knowing when to include a citation? Chapter 14 of The Craft of Research has advice that will help you avoid stumbling into inadvertent plagiarism, and the IAD and Academic Services have both prepared UoE-specific guides to good academic practice.

Common questions

When should I include page numbers?

Direct quotations: Use page numbers every time.

Paraphrases: Use page numbers if they help the reader find the right part of a longer work (e.g., a book) or an article with sections that aren't relevant to the point you're making. Otherwise they can be left out.

Learning

Studying & organisation

You'll perform better if you have effective strategies for learning course material and approaching evaluations. This page is intended to help you develop these strategies and improve your organisation and time management.

Keep in mind that you don't need to do everything here! Life is not only about optimising every waking moment for academic success, and you should not feel guilty about spending time in other ways. In fact, you may find that your very best ideas come to you when you let yourself wander. Go for a run along the Water of Leith without headphones and see where your mind takes you.

That said, the rest of this guide is based on the assumption that you want to tighten things up a little. There are three sections. The first gathers tips for reviewing material at home. The second involves tips specifically related to examinations. The last one links to videos and other resources that you might find useful.

Studying effectively

When you work, turn off all distractions. Turn off notifications, of course, but also turn off your Internet access if you can. I know that I'm constantly tempted to browse if it's available, so I like to remove the option altogether.

Of course, you'll probably convince yourself at several points that there's something that you absolutely need to look up right then and there. You'll turn the Internet back on, search for whatever it is, and somehow end up looking at your news feed (or pictures of cats). A good way to prevent that from happening is to take notes on what you want to look up so that you can search during a break or at the end of the study session. Don't allow yourself to search until then.

Some people find it effective to schedule work in bursts. This is known as the Pomodoro technique after the tomato-shaped timer that its inventor used to manage his time. The idea is that you work for 25 solid minutes and then take a 5-minute break. After four of these sessions, you take a longer break (15-30 minutes). Many find this more sustainable. If you're running Windows, you can find a built-in timer in "Clock" -> "Focus sessions". But other people prefer to focus for longer periods – if that's you, then don't force yourself to cut off your flow!

Here's another idea: take the hardest thing you currently have to learn, write it out on one sheet of A4 paper, and post it in a place where you spend time every day (e.g., over the kitchen sink, by the kettle, or on the wall by the toilet). That way you can make use of time that would otherwise be lost to master something you find difficult. This is particularly effective for things that you just have to commit to memory. For instance, I took care of proofs in calculus that way.

Many people use flash cards to study sets of facts that have to be memorised. One option is to create a small set of study cards for when you are on the go. Cut a set of index cards in halves or quarters, punch a hole in them, and then thread them onto a key ring. Keep them with you all the time. When you find yourself in a situation in which you'd normally pull out your phone (waiting for the bus, queueing at the supermarket, etc.), you can pull these out instead.

Loose flash cards are useful in a different way: you can sort them according to how difficult they are for you. Most people simply go through all their flash cards one after another, but this wastes valuable time on cards that are too easy. Instead, evaluate yourself on how comfortable you are with each flash card you answer. Put the tricky ones back in the middle of the deck so you'll see them again soon. The easy ones can go to the back of the deck, as you don't need to review them as often. Many computer-based learning systems implement something similar: the questions that you answer incorrectly come up again more frequently. One example of this sort of software is Anki.

When you take notes on your reading, don't make a simple list of interesting points. Instead, summarise each paragraph, noting how it contributes to the argument. If you have questions, ideas, or things you'd like to do, develop a consistent way of tagging them (e.g., stars, checkboxes, "TODO", "IDEA", etc. in the margin). That way you'll be able to tell different types of notes apart at a glance.

Preparing for examinations

Gathering information in advance

Check the exams diet: https://www.ed.ac.uk/timetabling-examinations/exams. Type the relevant information into the details field of the appointment on your calendar so that it's all in one place and you don't have to search around.

Familiarise yourself with the location of the building: http://www.ed.ac.uk/maps. How long will it take you to get there? Do you need to catch a different bus?

You should also check the rules: https://www.ed.ac.uk/timetabling-examinations/exams/regulations. What should you take (e.g., pen, student ID)? What are you (not) allowed to have (e.g., water bottle)

What to study

You will need to figure out how much time you have. Put deadlines directly into your Outlook calendar and set a reminder (or two). Check how many days you have and then how many hours you can afford to spend on preparation. Be honest with yourself. This will be much easier if you have your entire schedule in Outlook. Add all of your obligations: fixed classes, work, social time, family time, exercise time, etc. Don't forget to allow yourself enough time to shop, prepare food, do laundry, clean, rest, and sleep. With all that in place, how much time is left for studying? Make sure that you spend an appropriate amount of that time on each subject. You'll want to cover all of your subjects, but perhaps give some extra time to a subject you find more difficult.

You'll need to think about what material you need to study. The answer is not "everything", as there will be some areas that you feel more comfortable with than others, so don't reread all of your notes. Look at a list of the topics covered in the course and evaluate yourself honestly on how familiar you are with each of them. Try typing out a paragraph explaining each topic without referring to your notes. No peeking! Rate each of your explanations out of 5, where 5 indicates that you don't need to spend much more time on it and 1 indicates that you feel lost. Spend your study time on turning lower numbers into higher ones.

Give yourself manageable tasks for each day. Try to break up large, nebulous tasks like "learn X" into smaller ones that can be accomplished (e.g., "create a summary for chapter 2", "invent and answer 3 short-answer questions on subject Y", etc.). At the end of each day, evaluate yourself on how well you are doing. If you are slipping, don't get angry with yourself but do try to get back on track.

Practising on old exams

Put yourself in the instructor's position and imagine what sort of questions you would put on the exam. Write them all out and consider how well you could answer them. Now gather exams from previous years by using https://exampapers.ed.ac.uk/. Pick one out and put the rest away for later. Do your invented questions match up with an actual exam?

Try taking the exam you've selected without allowing yourself any notes. Make sure to take this exercise seriously and give yourself an appropriate amount of time. After you finish, give yourself extra time to go back and answer any questions that you did not elect to answer (look for prompts like "choose 3 of the following 6 questions"). Afterwards, evaluate your exam performance as best you can by making reference to your class notes. This should give you a better idea of your weaknesses.

Don't look at the next exam right away; you want to get as much value out of each exam as you can before moving on. First, make sure to revise the topics you found difficult. Study until you can answer the questions completely. Then try to make up your own questions like the ones on the exam and answer them. Once you've done this, put the exam away and go back to your regular studying. Spread out your

sample exams; you want to save at least one for a week or so before the exam itself so that you can be encouraged by your improvement.

As you go through the exams, try making a spreadsheet that details the contents of each exam. Look for patterns. Is there a certain style of question that is repeated? Is there a topic that always comes up? Is there a central point that hasn't been discussed for the last few years and so might be due for an appearance on the real exam you are about to take?

Finally, put away all your notes and try to take all the exams again in full. See if you can provide even better answers this time around.

Improving your handwriting

It's easy to forget that few of us get very much practice writing by hand these days. You don't want to get cramped muscles scratching out illegible responses.

Make sure you have good quality pens that let you write fluidly without much pressure. Practise writing with a relaxed hand every day, using your arm muscles to move the pen instead of relying solely on your fingers. Build up your stamina over time.

One more thing: consider picking up some plasters in advance. Fingers can get sore quite quickly when you use them a lot, and you don't want to be in pain. When I knew that I would be writing a lot in an exam, I would preemptively wrap the knuckle nearest the tip of my middle finger with the cushion facing towards my second finger.

Before the exam

It's easy to recommend getting a good night's sleep, but things don't always work out that way. Practise relaxation methods so that you can get to bed more quickly. Basically, this means pretending that your body parts are heavy and immovable and then imagining peaceful surroundings. Don't wait until the evaluation period to start practising; you should be doing this far in advance. The more times you try, the better you'll get at falling asleep quickly.

It's also a good idea to purchase earplugs in advance in case your neighbours decide to be noisy on an important night. I used to live across from a pub that seemed to time their open-mic nights to coincide with deadlines and exams.

Eat a good breakfast and drink plenty of water. You should also make sure you have a water bottle with you for when you are actually writing.

Plan to be ready early. Your final few minutes of studying will be more peaceful if you aren't worried about connecting or arriving, and you'll be less flustered when you start.

Answering the questions

Never allow yourself to run out of time. Immediately budget your minutes to match the marks you can earn. Spend twice as long on a 20-mark question as you do on one worth 10 marks.   Sketch out a schedule for finishing each set of questions and stick to it. It's much better to have a complete set of pretty good answers than to have a few great ones and a few blank spaces. Move on as soon as you use up your time and come back if and only if you have extra time at the end.

Start with the questions you can do best on. Read all parts of each question and make sure you are interpreting things correctly. Many people pay attention to the topic but ignore the way in which the question should be answered. For instance, are you supporting the idea in the prompt or providing an argument against a common misperception? It's an important distinction. Also, consider how 'full' your answer should be to earn the allocated marks.

Some question types lend themselves to specific strategies. If you have a multiple-choice question, read the prompt and guess at the answer before looking at your options. This will let you avoid being led into attractive traps. Eliminate the options you know are wrong and choose the best fit of those that remain.

In an essay question, you should make your opinion clear up front. What is it that you are going to show is true? Don't save the revelation until the end; you are not writing a mystery novel. Similarly, each paragraph should start with a sentence that prepares the reader for what you are about to say ("Support for this idea can be found in evidence X", "There are three steps in process Y", or "Process Z has been questioned on several points"). Make sure the marker knows right away what it is that you are trying to show in the paragraph.

Videos and other resources

Are you having a tough time with deadlines? Do you feel overwhelmed with how much there is to be done? And when you fall behind, do you respond with additional procrastination? Try these LinkedIn Learning courses out.

Managing Your Time (0h11m)

Don't have time for the longer courses? Try this one out: in just over ten minutes you'll learn how to fit the tasks that matter most into the time that works best for you.

Getting Things Done (0h30m)

This is an introduction to an approach to time management with the central idea of getting everything you have to do into an external system so that larger items can be broken down into specific tasks that you can accomplish.

Time Management Fundamentals (1h47m)

Ever wonder what you could do with an extra 10 hours per week? This course will help you gain that time with a 3-pronged approach: organise your workplace, clear your mind, and get your schedule in order.

Improving Your Focus (0h50m)

How can you make sure that you spend your time on the things that count? This course is designed to help you stop your mind from wandering by presenting a series of concrete changes.

Time Management: Working from Home (1h17m)

University courses don't last all year round; you'll have to spend some time working on your own at home. This course explains how to do that effectively. Of course, not all of us are alone at home, so there are also tips on how to maintain boundaries.

Note-Taking for Business Professionals (0h47m)

Pay particular attention to section 2 ("Taking Note of What You Read (0h13m)). Don't simply highlight what you read or write out lengthy stretches of text. Instead, do a preparatory scan, ask yourself questions before reading, take notes between paragraphs, and summarise regularly.

Want a really methodical approach? Have a look at our guide to managing your time with spreadsheets and Gantt charts

(Micro)managing your time

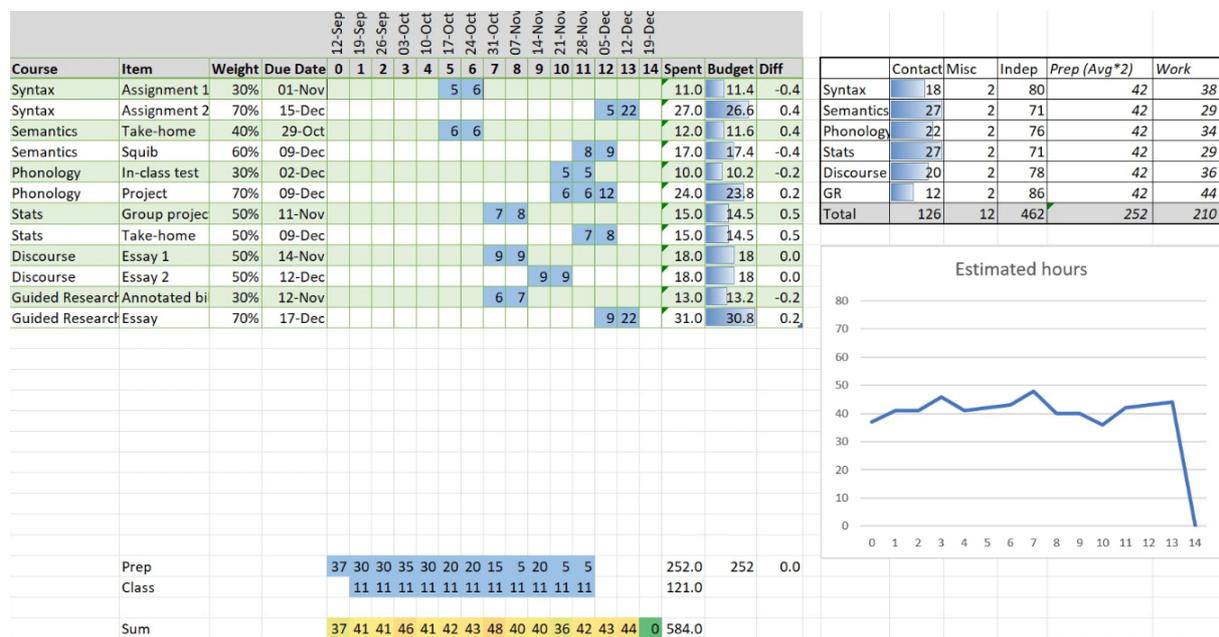**Tracking your time investment in a spreadsheet**

It's important to make sure that you're not neglecting any commitments. Why not track the number of hours you invest in each course in a table like the one below? As you invest hours on each day, you'll be able to see in the rightmost column how diligent you're being in general, and the colours across the top will show you which courses you've invested the most in (green) and which you should attend to most (red).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		3	3	3	4	3	2	
2	Date	Course1	Course2	Course3	Course4	Course5	Course6	Total
3	16-Sep-24		2	1		1		4
4	17-Sep-24	2			1		2	5
5	18-Sep-24			1	1	2		4
6	19-Sep-24		1	1				2
7	20-Sep-24	1			2			3
8	21-Sep-24							0
9	22-Sep-24							0
10	23-Sep-24							0

Modified Gantt charts

Studying for a degree is a full-time job, so you should expect to spend 35 hours a week at it. But many students don't use their time efficiently early in the semester, which means that they see huge spikes of demand on their time around assessment due dates.

You can use information from DRPS and Learn to plan your workload. It involves creating modified Gantt charts to decide how many hours to spend on which tasks at which point in the semester. If you follow the plan, you will do better work and feel better at the same time.

Course	Item	Weight	Due Date	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Spent	Budget	Diff
Syntax	Assignment 1	30%	01-Nov						5	6									11.0	11.4	-0.4
Syntax	Assignment 2	70%	15-Dec													5	22		27.0	26.6	0.4
Semantics	Take-home	40%	29-Oct						6	6									12.0	11.6	0.4
Semantics	Squib	60%	09-Dec											8	9				17.0	17.4	-0.4
Phonology	In-class test	30%	02-Dec										5	5					10.0	10.2	-0.2
Phonology	Project	70%	09-Dec											6	6	12			24.0	23.8	0.2
Stats	Group projec	50%	11-Nov								7	8							15.0	14.5	0.5
Stats	Take-home	50%	09-Dec											7	8				15.0	14.5	0.5
Discourse	Essay 1	50%	14-Nov								9	9							18.0	18	0.0
Discourse	Essay 2	50%	12-Dec										9	9					18.0	18	0.0
Guided Research	Annotated bi	30%	12-Nov								6	7							13.0	13.2	-0.2
Guided Research	Essay	70%	17-Dec													9	22		31.0	30.8	0.2
	Prep			37	30	30	35	30	20	20	15	5	20	5	5				252.0	252	0.0
	Class				11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11				121.0		
	Sum			37	41	41	46	41	42	43	48	40	40	36	42	43	44	0	584.0		

	Contact	Misc	Indep	Prep (Avg*2)	Work
Syntax	18	2	80	42	38
Semantics	27	2	71	42	29
Phonology	22	2	76	42	34
Stats	27	2	71	42	29
Discourse	20	2	78	42	36
GR	12	2	86	42	44
Total	126	12	462	252	210

Estimated hours

Please note that this uses the notional hours provided by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. It is perfectly possible to do distinction-level work with fewer hours. At the same time, putting in these hours does not guarantee a pass.

For more information, please see the online advice.

Our libraries

Library guides

If you want a general introduction to using the library effectively, start with the LibSmart courses.

The PPLS Library maintains a PPLS library help page with resource guides for each of the subject areas.

The Main Library offers Scan & Deliver, through which you can request scan of printed material they hold (check the link to see which UoE libraries are participating).

Online resources

You can also look over past theses and publications from our School's areas within the Edinburgh Research Archive. This is a good way to get ready to write your own dissertation. By the way, only some of these dissertations have been made available. You can tell by the lock icon to the left of the file. Click around until you find some that you have access to. Some people are having difficulty getting to the text of dissertations. If you're having trouble, submit a help request to Karen Fleet.

Oxford Bibliographies is an extraordinarily useful collection of annotated bibliographies for many areas in Philosophy, Psychology and Linguistics. They have created videos to introduce the collection and show you how to use it. If you're new to an area within your field and want a peer-reviewed guide to the literature, this is a great place to turn first.

Tip: Quickly searching DiscoverEd

Here's a technique for quickly searching through DiscoverEd directly from the address bar.

Chrome: Click on the three vertical dots at the right and go to Settings -> Search engine -> Manage search engines and site search. Find the "Site Search" section.

Edge: Click on the three horizontal dots at the right and go to Settings -> Privacy, search, and services -> Address bar and search (at the very bottom) -> Manage search engines.

In both cases, click on the "Add" box and enter the following information:

Search engine: DiscoverEd

Shortcut (Chrome) / Keyword (Edge): lib

URL with %s in place of query: https://discovered.ed.ac.uk/discovery/search?query=any,contains,%s&tab=Everything&search_scope=UoE&vid=44UOE_INST:44UOE_VU2&offset=0

The URL should be entered as a single line. Click "Add".

Now you can quickly search by typing "lib" in the address bar and pressing space or tab. The bar should display "Search DiscoverEd", at which point you can enter your query.

For specific databases and links, please see the online page.

Software & workflows

Devote part of your time to developing your software skills -- the payoff is considerable. Here we've gathered resources to help you learn how to use your computer more efficiently. There are three types of software that all researchers should be familiar with:

Writing software (e.g., Word or LaTeX)

Many researchers use LaTeX, but it requires time to learn. If you use Word, make sure to learn its features for long documents.

Note-taking software (e.g., OneNote)

You should not be taking notes in a word processor; note-taking software is far more effective.

Reference managers (e.g., Zotero)

It is vital to have a way to track and use academic texts.

Many of the resources below are provided by LinkedIn Learning, a site with video courses that teach a wide variety of skills. You're already going to be doing a lot of reading, so it's nice to have videos to break things up. I've found them to be particularly useful for getting comfortable with new software as quickly as possible, as it's generally easier to watch someone click a button than it is to read a description of where that button is located. We have a site-wide subscription to this service. You can set up your account by following these directions [link].

Microsoft Office

We all have access to Microsoft Office desktop and mobile applications through the University of Edinburgh. You can install Office on up to 5 devices. It's well worth taking a few hours to learn how to use your tools properly. There are many features built into these programs that can save a lot of time.

OneNote

I often see students typing their notes into word processors. But there are ways of organising notes so they can be used in a more productive way later on, such as OneNote. There are two versions of OneNote covered: OneNote 2016 and OneNote for Windows 10. OneNote 2016 is the original version. It comes with Office 365 and has many powerful features. OneNote for Windows 10 comes for free on all Windows 10 machines. It is more streamlined and is the version that OneNote for Mac is closest to. The videos for the Mac version of OneNote are several years old, so it's better to use the Windows 10 training even if you're on a Mac. The programs are very similar.

Teams

Teams is the platform we use at the University of Edinburgh to collaborate with one another at a distance. The course at the link in the title will give you lots of details, but if you just want to know enough to carry out video calls, try this document [link]

Word

If you're not sure how to use Word, it's worth taking the Essential Training course for your platform. The course on long documents is particularly useful for those of you who will be using Word to write a dissertation: it will show you how to manage cross-references, citations, document structure, indices, and more.

Excel

Anyone working with quantitative data will need to deal with spreadsheets. These courses will provide basic training and also more in-depth looks at how to manage and analyse large amounts of data. The courses on PivotTables will show you how to change your data structure.

Outlook

Outlook combines mail, calendars and tasks in a way that lets them work together. These courses will help you make the most of whichever version of Outlook you use (Windows, Mac, web app). The topics include (i) essential training, (ii) tips and tricks, (iii) e-mail management, and (iv) time management. With the amount of e-mail that comes in, it's essential to be able to filter it automatically and come up with a system for managing what's left.

Forms

Do you need to collect information from students and staff? Instead of using e-mail, try Forms. You can create branching questionnaires and require individuals to authenticate before responding. The results will be visually summarised and tabulated in a spreadsheet for easy reference. Plus everything is kept within Office 365, so you won't have to worry about the GPDR issues involved with external services.

Reference managers (e.g., Zotero and Mendeley)

Every year the number of publications you have to track will grow. This will become unmanageable around the same time that you will no longer have time to learn new software: when writing your dissertation. That's why it's a good idea to start using a reference manager as soon as possible. You'll find that writing becomes much easier when your brain isn't occupied with worries about tracking citations and updating your bibliography. When I last surveyed staff members, Mendeley was the most popular choice (it comes in two versions, Reference Manager and Desktop, but the latter is being phased out this year). EndNote, Zotero and BibDesk were also used by many. The University of Edinburgh maintains a reference guide here.

LaTeX and Overleaf

Many researchers use LaTeX for writing long documents. It has many specialised packages for academic texts that will save you time in the long run and let you concentrate more on your writing.

And there is a very full set of tools available as packages. Linguists, for example, can generate trees, create glossed examples, and use IPA.

There are many ways to create documents with LaTeX, but I'd suggest starting by using Overleaf, an online LaTeX editor. Why?

- There's no installation and most of the packages are already there.
- You'll have access to your work on all your devices.
- You can easily co-author with comments, changes and more.
- All students and staff members at the University of Edinburgh can get Pro accounts through a campus-wide licence.

Overleaf has very thorough documentation that also introduces you to LaTeX itself. There are also several subject-specific guides to packages relevant to your discipline (the authors of these can be opinionated!):

Philosophy:

> https://tanksley.me/latex-for-philosophers/latex-guide.pdf

Linguistics:

> https://adamliter.org/content/LaTeX/latex-workshop-for-linguists.pdf

> Alan Munn's guides

Examples:

> Interested in looking at some examples of LaTeX documents written by PPLS staff? Dr Pavel Iosad has released the source of many of his documents on GitHub, including his CV and PhD dissertation.

A checklist

1. Have you set up your computer and phone to automatically check all your e-mail accounts with a dedicated program/app?
2. Are you using your 1 TB of backup space with OneDrive?
3. Have you set up your computer to use the VPN for accessing on-campus resources through DiscoverEd?

Academic skills & employment

Articulating what you've acquired with Skills for Success

Getting a degree in the School of PPLS is hard work. The Skills for Success framework helps you translate that work into specific language for your CV. See "What is the Skills for Success framework?" for more details on how this is implemented across the University of Edinburgh. Skills for Success was created by the Curriculum Transformation Programme's Future Skills Working Group, which I sat on.

If you would like to see how these skills are surfaced in PPLS courses, head over to the PPLS Course & Skills Map Hub. Put together by Mary Woolley, this huge collection gathers together all the information you'll need to share your accomplishments with prospective employers.

On this page, I've provided a broad overview of how PPLS coursework in general maps onto this framework with links to help.

Skill 1 → Critical thinking

We build critical thinking in our courses by asking you to read the literature carefully, discuss the significance of what you encounter with your peers, and write academic prose to communicate your ideas.

In philosophy, critical thinking is based in the text and its structure. You need to understand the structure of the arguments you encounter and engage with opposing viewpoints. You are taught how to deconstruct arguments into their core components so that you can interpret and judge them more effectively. In psychology, critical thinking is tied to the scientific method. You take studies apart to look at empirical data, methodologies, and statistical reasoning. And in linguistics, critical thinking comes from fitting theory and data. You analyse how well various claims are grounded in that data.

Want help? Learn to engage with your sources

SKILL 2 → Curiosity

We develop student curiosity by encouraging students to seek out new information in an active way. The lecture material is just a starting point! You are asked to find research topics that interest you and explore those topics independently, especially as you move towards your dissertation. You are taught how to engage with your readings in a way that generates additional questions, and to experiment with new approaches that can inspire fresh ideas.

You are invited to interrogate assumptions in philosophy, explore different methodologies in psychology, and investigate less-familiar languages in linguistics.

Want help? Explore your topic with a literature review

SKILL 3 → Problem Solving

Problem solving is often about synthesizing knowledge and applying what you've learned to specific challenges.

In psychology, you have to think creatively to overcome the issues you face in experimental design, from debugging code to addressing methodological flaws. There are also "purer" problem-solving aspects to both philosophy and linguistics: in the former, you deal with the structure of problem solving itself in the various logic courses, while in the latter, you're asked to solve linguistic puzzles in which you recognise patterns and find answers.

Want help? Head over to Data Collection and Analysis for experimental design

SKILL 4 → Collaboration

Studying at university means engaging with other people, including your classmates. We work to provide spaces in which people can get practice sharing their ideas and handling disagreements. In more advanced courses, collaboration involves transferable project management skills such as delegation, motivation, and conflict resolution.

More specifically, philosophers get practice debating concepts with each other, psychologists carry out research in teams, and linguists work together to solve linguistic puzzles.

Want help? Ways to get better at participating in tutorials

SKILL 5 → Reflection

Reflection involves learning from experience and improving. A large part of everyone's university experience is feedback, which you can use to adjust your approach and raise the quality of your work. You assess your own strengths and weaknesses throughout the course of your degree and particularly in preparation for your dissertation.

Philosophers challenge their personal biases, psychologists examine their research toolkits, and linguists consider their linguistic backgrounds and biases.

Want help? Book a postmortem for already-marked work

SKILL 6 → Communication

To communicate effectively in writing, you need to make your thoughts clear in a structured format. You're given chances to adapt your tone and style to a variety of genres, from academic papers to lay articles. You also have to sustain that prose through longer and longer assignments as you progress. In psychology and linguistics, you are also taught to organise the visual presentation of data.

Tutorials are based in discussion, which give you a chance to develop your oral communication skills by actively debating complex ideas.

Want help? Have a look at our writing skills page

SKILL 7 → Inclusivity

We ask our students to examine their assumptions and consider alternative perspectives without prejudging them. Because we deal with topics that are in many ways highly personal (thought and language), we must work to ensure that tutorials are welcoming spaces that account for a variety of approaches. Depending on your subject area, you might be asked to look at ideas, languages, and approaches that expand your intellectual scope.

Want help? How to be generous to other perspectives (soon)

SKILL 8 → Adaptivity

We want our students to be intellectually flexible. You have to adjust to new assessment styles, deal with uncertainty in research, and learn to adjust your communication to reach a wide variety of audiences.

You also have to manage your time effectively, especially when you take on the project of writing a dissertation, the culmination of your journey with us.

Want help? How to study and manage your time effectively

SKILL 9 → Data and Digital Literacy

Data and digital literacy is central to both psychology and linguistics. Psychologists learn how to code, conduct statistical analyses, and handle a wide variety of data. Linguistic training has a particular focus on specialised software and services that help students obtain linguistic data and analyse it. Philosophers consider the ethical implications of these technologies. In all subjects, students have to learn to manage their digital workflows to engage in modern research.

Want help? Learn how to use academic software

SKILL 10 → Individuality

We value the unique perspectives you bring to your topic: the variety of your personal backgrounds, experiences, and languages is an asset to our department. As you progress, you are expected to take the initiative to plan for your own growth.

Want some help? You're already in the right place! Looking through skills frameworks like this one is a great way to improve.

Seeking employment

Before you know it, you'll be facing a new challenge: applying for employment that puts the things you've learned into action.

There is ample support for you within the School of PPLS, more broadly at Careers Service, and in a set of vetted resources.

The PPLS UG Hub has a new careers section that is specific to PPLS students planning their post-degree lives. You'll find videos and links to places that will help you get ready for your next steps.

The UoE Careers Service has a Careers Essential Guide that gathers resources and workshops for the upcoming year. They also have a set of quick links that will let you access several services. For instance, you can book one-on-one sessions for help with CVs, interview preparation, and more.

You can also prepare by watching video courses on career development from LinkedIn Learning (how to set up):

- Job Hunting for College Grads (1h10m)
- Writing a Resume (2h27m)
- Finding a Job (0h39m)
- Mastering Common Interview Questions (0h50m)
- Insights from a College Career Coach (0h27m)

Classroom

Taking part

Tutorials are not just extra lectures. You will be put in smaller groups so that there is room for discussion. The students who will benefit most from this are the ones who participate. It's not about demonstrating that you know the answers; it's about exploring the topics that have been introduced in the lectures and reading.

Speaking up in this way is an important skill to acquire — people in all sorts of professions need to be able to communicate with their colleagues and managers. LinkedIn Learning provides workplace training in the following video, but you can adjust it to the university setting by replacing "colleagues" with "fellow students" and "boss" or "manager" with "instructor" or "tutor".

See the LinkedIn Learning course "Speaking up at work" (0h22m).

The key takeaways (adjusted to be relevant to university students):

1. Many students don't speak up because they have **mental barriers to communicating**. If you can identify your own personal barriers, it's easier to overcome them. You might have **internalised rules** about conversation from your childhood or your culture. For example, were you told not to question your elders? You also might have had an **embarrassing experience** speaking up in class that continues to haunt you. Once you recognise and label your barriers, work on getting past them.
2. Speaking gets easier when you **prepare**. If you take a moment to simplify your message, you can express your thoughts more clearly.   What is the **key takeaway** of what you want to say? What are the **points of interest** that you want to draw others' attention to? If you feel uncomfortable stating your opinion, you might try **rephrasing it as a question** for the instructor or the entire class. When you're reading at home, **put together questions** for your next tutorial.
3. Don't worry if your contribution is **met by silence**. We tend to interpret silence as disapproval, but in an academic setting it often means that others are trying to absorb your contribution or think of a considered response to it.
4. Remember that your instructors aren't providing feedback to take you down a notch; they're trying to help you **find a path to improvement**. Think of a coach trying to fix an athlete's posture.
5. If you want your instructor or tutor to assist you with something, it's best if you've tried to **solve the problem at least partially on your own**. Show that you've done your homework and taken things as far as you can. Then try to articulate where you're running into trouble and why. This will be much more productive than simply requesting help.

Tutoring

Improving your tutoring

Tutorials provide a unique opportunity to focus on individual students as learners. The School of PPLS provides extensive training every year to tutors in each of its disciplines, but tutors may want to seek additional opportunities to improve.

If you want to make improvements in a way that can be documented, it would make sense to do this through the Continuing Professional Development Framework for Learning and Teaching, which will help you work towards your Advance HE Associate Fellowship, a great addition to your CV. There are two primary pathways: Introduction to Academic Practice (IntroAP) and the Edinburgh Teaching Award (EdTA). IntroAP is held by the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) and involves both coursework and teaching observations, while the EdTA is a mentorship that is more closely tied with local Schools. The EdTA contact for PPLS is Dr Hannah Cornish.

Of course, you may just want to pick up some tips without necessarily engaging in a more formal programme. For instance, if you want ideas for how to turn discussions into learning activities, you may want to watch Learning how to increase learner engagement by Karl Kapp (0:41, LinkedIn Learning). It would also be a good idea to look through some of the resources that the IAD has collected to help tutors across the University of Edinburgh. These are listed in the next section.

IAD resources for tutoring and demonstrating

The IAD has created a resource bank on Learn that allows you to self-enrol: "IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating". Below are some of the resources it mentions (note that many of these are also relevant to lecturing). Because this is the Skills Centre, I've picked out those items that are specifically about techniques, not policy. They are all accessible through either DiscoverEd or the web.

Books

Ashwin, P. et al. (2020). Reflective teaching in higher education. (includes strategies for improving)

Brown, G. and Atkins, M. (1991). Effective teaching in higher education. (practical guidelines for teaching, tutoring, and supervising)

Dorster, F. et al. (1995). Tutoring and demonstrating: A handbook (covers various aspects of tutoring and demonstrating; published by the University of Edinburgh)

Lea, J. (2015). Enhancing learning and teaching in higher education: Engaging with the dimensions of practice. (is more about the academic debates on university teaching, but still includes tips)

Marton, F. et al. (1984). The experience of learning: Implications for teaching and studying in higher education. (compiles research into how students learn; published by the University of Edinburgh; see chapter 12 on tutorials)

Morss, K. (2005). Teaching at university: A guide for postgraduates and researchers. (serves as a practical guide to tutoring in higher education)

Articles

Bogaard, A. et al. (2005). Small group teaching: Perceptions and problems. (examines the differences between the ways instructors & students view tutorials)

Nicol, D. and MacFarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning. (outlines principles of good feedback)

Websites and videos

Key strategies for effective tutorials. (University of Waterloo)

Facilitating effective discussions. (University of Waterloo)

Small group teaching: A toolkit for learning. (The Higher Education Academy)

Advanced discussion leading. (Yale University)

Answering students' difficult questions. (University of London City)

Classroom authority and engagement. (University of London City)

Small group teaching: Methods & techniques. (Cardiff University)

Technology for teaching

The PPLS Learning Technology Support site has guides to all of the software that is essential to teaching and tutoring (e.g., Learn, Turnitin, Media Hopper, etc.). And IS maintains an extensive set of training material related to many different aspects of learning and teaching at Learning Technology. Below are some additional ways technology can help you in the classroom.

Establish an online presence

When people want to know more about you, they look you up on the web. It's a good idea to shape what they find. Check out our guide for editing your staff profile and creating an academic website.

Keeping track of students and tutorials

It's essential to keep notes on your tutorials so you can remember what went well, what needs to be changed, and what points should be addressed in the future.

Consider using software for spreadsheets (Excel) or note-taking (OneNote) to make your life easier. These are much better than simple documents for tracking who said what and making notes for the next week.

Do you want to provide a way for students to contact you anonymously? Try setting up a box for suggestions in Microsoft Forms (in Settings, deselect Record names).

Take a look at Software skills for training videos.

Electronic voting systems (EVSs)

It's easier to teach students who are actively involved, and one of the best ways to get students involved is to use an EVS. The instructor can set a better pace and spend time more efficiently, while the students can find out whether they're alone in finding something confusing. And the feedback can lead to larger discussions in a natural way.

There are two official options at the University of Edinburgh:

Wooclap is the standard in-class voting system and is supported through UoE documentation. It allows lecturers and tutors to create sets of questions.

Microsoft Forms is available through the UoE subscription to Microsoft 365 and can be used for impromptu or single-event questions. Training is available through LinkedIn Learning. You can use Forms to create polls for Teams chats by clicking on the three dots above where you type messages and then selecting Forms as an app.

Working with two accounts

Every student who works for the University of Edinburgh has two accounts. It's important to use both and to know which account you are using at any given time.

First, pick a "primary" account that you use by default. This will be the one you use on Teams and the one that you keep your calendar on. I'd suggest using your tutor account as your main account, as you'll probably have to coordinate with people more frequently using it (meetings with students, coordinating with staff, etc.). But you'll want to be able to access either at any time.

Create browser profiles

I'll assume that you're using Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge. Both allow for multiple profiles and easy syncing.

Click on the icon of a person in the upper right corner and then click on "Add" or "Add profile" near the bottom. You'll be prompted to sign in (Chrome uses Google accounts and Edge can use your UoE accounts), which will allow you to sync this profile across devices, but you can continue without a browser-associated account if you wish. Create a "Staff" profile and give it a colour (colour is part of profile creation in Chrome; in Edge, you should go to Settings -> Appearance -> Theme). Then do the same thing again to create a "Student" profile with a different colour. Distinct themes will let you instantly recognise which profile you have open, so make sure that the colours contrast each other.

Make it a habit to use only one account with each profile; sign in and stay signed in. If you want to switch accounts, switch profiles. You can do this by clicking on the user icon or by right-clicking on the icon that you use to launch the application.

Sync your apps with both accounts

Now take the time to download the desktop versions of Outlook, Teams and To Do. All students and staff have access to the latest Office desktop suite.   These apps should be configured to use your primary account, but for Outlook you should put in your secondary account as well so that you always have access to all of your e-mail. This will be more convenient than swapping between browser windows. Other mail applications (e.g., Thunderbird) will also work.

Do the same on your phone with the apps.

In both cases, make sure that you accept all appointments, etc. with your primary account so that you don't get unintentional clashes.

Make sure people don't try the wrong account on Teams

Here are two ways to help other people identify which account you use on Teams:

i) Make sure that your primary account has a picture of some sort. Even if you don't feel like putting your own face in, you should still use a photo of some sort (a pet? a pencil?) so that it's clear that this is the account you use. Make sure that your secondary account does not have a picture.

ii) Set an away message on your unused account. Sign into the *web* version of Teams (https://teams.microsoft.com) on your secondary account (i.e., keep your primary account logged in on

the app so you don't inadvertently change it). Then click on your icon and select "Edit status message". I use "Automatic message: This isn't the account I use. Please try my staff account ()." Between the parentheses, I tag the account that I want people to use using @. I set this to show to everyone who messages me, and make sure never to clear the status message.

Moving and syncing accounts

You might already have a calendar. You'll want some way to integrate it with your primary account so that you can plan more easily. You can either move the appointments over or sync the calendars so that you can see the appointments from within Outlook.

Moving

Merging Outlook calendars (support.microsoft.com)

Moving from iCloud to Outlook (support.apple.com)

Moving from Gmail to Outlook (support.microsoft.com)

Syncing

(syncing Outlook isn't necessary if you sign in with both accounts)

Syncing iCloud (support.microsoft.com)

Syncing Gmail (support.microsoft.com)

Maintaining an online presence

When people want to know more about you, they look you up on the web. It's worth putting some effort into shaping what they find.

You should present, at a minimum, the following information:

1. contact information with a current photograph
2. a short paragraph describing who you are and what you do
3. a list of your academic work with links
4. things that belong on your CV (education, teaching experience, etc.)

We'll look at two main ways for you to get this information out there: staff profiles and external sites.

Staff profiles are hosted by the University of Edinburgh. They're generally suitable for information that is mostly static or relevant to your colleagues or students (office hours and so on).

External sites are, strictly speaking, not necessary, but there are good reasons to have one in addition to your staff profile:

- you can take control over your site's contents and appearance
- your site can host PDFs and other files (profiles are limited to 1 PDF for your CV)
- if you change institutions, you won't have to recreate your site and advertise a new URL

So all staff members should maintain a staff profile, but most people should offload at least some information to an external site. And if you don't have a profile, everything should go on your external site.

Editing your staff profile

All staff members and research students at the University of Edinburgh have a profile. For instance, mine is at https://edwebprofiles.ed.ac.uk/profile/jim-donaldson. Again, these are important to maintain even if you have a separate external site.

To learn how to edit yours, consult the guide here: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/edweb/Editing+your+profile. Basically, click "CMS login >" at the bottom-right of the profile page (NOT the red "MyEd login" button just above it) and then select "New draft". Add information and then select "Publish".

Minimal version

There are good reasons to make your profile fairly minimal if you intend to establish an external personal site. For one, you probably won't want to have a lot of duplicate information that you have to remember to update. The following items are either relatively unchanging or particularly relevant to other people at the University of Edinburgh:

- Individual and organisation info
    - Profile picture
- Contact details
    - Availability
    - Extra details -> Type: Web (provide "URL" and "Link text")
- Research
    - Summary of research interests
- Teaching & PhD supervision
    - Undergraduate teaching responsibility
    - Postgraduate teaching responsibility
- (for PhD students) PhD details
    - Thesis title

Extended version

All that said, it is possible to use this profile as your personal site if you don't want to bother with an external site right now. You'll have enough space to include all of the essential items. If you do decide to take this route, make sure to use these sections (in addition to the items in the minimal version):

- Biography
    - Biography
    - Qualifications
- (for those without a Pure ID) Extra categories
    - Publications (you'll have to type this in as a custom category heading)

Creating an external site

There are many options for external sites, but here we'll walk you through setting up a site on GitHub Pages. It's a fairly common choice in our department and has several benefits:

- there no ads on the free tier
- you'll get comfortable with GitHub, which is often used in research

The only restriction on the free tier is that you have to make the source for your site (the markdown files) accessible to the public. This is not usually a problem for an academic site; there aren't many reasons to hide these away.

Why you should use Jekyll with GitHub Pages

I'd suggest jumping right in and learning Jekyll from the start. Jekyll is a site generator that is built into GitHub Pages and is widely used for academic purposes. It will generate HTML pages from Markdown, which is one of the easiest and most widely used ways of creating formatted documents.

This might sound like a lot of extra work (learn a new way of writing documents AND a new package for transforming it into HTML?), but it will actually make it much easier to maintain and expand your page. You certainly don't need to be fancy. My site (https://jamesdonaldson.github.io/) uses the default options (no external plugins or themes). You could create something similar in about an hour starting from scratch.

What's involved?

You'll create a repository, where you store the all the files needed to generate your site. This is synced between your computer and GitHub, which will take care of hosting it. You'll develop the site by editing markdown files locally on your computer. You'll run Jekyll to test things out in private on your computer until you're happy and then push the changes to GitHub. You can also edit the files directly on GitHub.

You can use an external service to purchase a custom URL, but there's really no need. The "github.io" part of the default URL actually gives you a subtle way to promote yourself as technically skilled.

How to learn the basics

Here's what to do:

1. Create a GitHub account for yourself here. Keep in mind that your username will be public.
2. Look at the tutorial "Setting up a GitHub Pages site with Jekyll".
   a. You can skim through the first page ("About GitHub Pages and Jekyll") without worrying about understanding everything.
   b. Concentrate on parts 2-4 ("Creating…", "Testing…", and "Adding content…") and create your own site as you go along. Make sure to select which OS you are using to get instructions specific to your platform. You can ignore the bits about "Posts" for now, as those are only relevant if you'll also be running a blog.
3. To teach yourself more about GitHub and Markdown, consider these LinkedIn Learning courses: Learning GitHub and Learning Markdown. If you haven't created a LinkedIn Learning account, do so by following the directions here.

These are the things I did to customise my page:

1. I created an "images" directory, put my headshot in there, and then used the following markdown: ![Headshot](/images/JD.jpg).
2. I created "research.md" and "cv.md" with some very minimal formatting (e.g., I highlighted my name in the research list with double asterisks).

You can look at what I did by browsing to https://github.com/JamesDonaldson/jamesdonaldson.github.io/ and comparing the files with your own. There are really only 3 files to look at: index.md, research.md, and cv.md.

Here are some other staff sites that are hosted on GitHub [links to pages using Jekyll, Hugo, etc.]

Appendices

A: Other resources

What other resources are available through the University of Edinburgh?

1. The Institute for Academic Development can help you develop skills related to studying, research, and teaching.
    a. They maintain a study hub with guides to working more effectively.
    b. They hold workshops for undergraduate and postgraduate students.
    c. They support people who teach for the university with a variety of development opportunities.
2. Digital Skills can help you develop computer-related skills.
    a. They can help you figure out what you know and decide what to work on for your role (student, researcher, etc.)
    b. They have a one-stop portal containing hundreds of resources and training courses and a set of structured paths through that material.
3. Careers Service can help you make plans for employment.
    a. They maintain an online programme of live sessions, recorded content, and other resources.
    b. They handle job adverts, events, and appointments through MyCareerHub.
    c. They have a quick links page that will show you how to, for instance, make a CV and get feedback on it, prepare for a job interview, or have a chat about your future.
4. Digital Research Services is a guide to data and computing services for UoE researchers.
    a. They provide a list of services and a tool to help you sort through by research objective.
    b. They hold a variety of events designed to help you develop your digital-research skills.
5. The Centre for Data, Culture & Society supports digital research projects across CAHSS
    a. They hold training workshops (some of which are run by people from PPLS). Topics include text analysis, databases, GitHub, and more.

B: Why was my appointment removed?

To ensure that our centre remains a fair and secure resource for all students, we strictly enforce five rules for booking appointments:

1. (Courses) We offer help for all upper-level courses owned by PPLS. We are happy to help people from other Schools as long as you are registered on a PPLS course (that is, the course code must start with PHIL, PSYL, LASC, or PPLS). First- and second-year undergraduate coursework is regrettably no longer suitable for writing appointments.
2. (Type of help) Come to us for help with clarity and argumentation. We cannot provide help with statistics or content.
3. (E-mail) You must use an address beginning with your student number to book. Each student at the University of Edinburgh has such an address. We will automatically extract your student number from your address to check your eligibility.
4. (Maximum appointments) You are eligible for three appointments per semester. Each student can have at most one appointment on any given day
5. (Cancellations) Any cancellation requests must be in line with our policy, which is outlined in the "Getting ready" section below.

No exceptions are ever made to any of these five rules. Providing an exception would be unfair to the students who consistently follow these guidelines and also to the students who have had appointments removed in the past.

The most common reason for cancellation, by far, is violation of rule #3: you must use your official student address, and it must begin with your student number.

Q: Why can't I use an external e-mail address?

A: External addresses are not verified by the University of Edinburgh, so there would be nothing stopping people from creating false addresses and claiming appointments under the names of other people. We would also have no way of verifying that the messages we send out are really going to you, which could result in your personal data leaking. Finally, external addresses make it harder to make sure that you are taking a course with PPLS.

Q: Why can't I use an ed.ac.uk alias, like John.Smith.XP123@ed.ac.uk?

A: There might be more than one John Smith. The easiest way to match up your request with your identity is to extract your student number from the beginning of your e-mail address. It is also easier to count how many times you've requested our services if you use the same e-mail every time. Otherwise we'd have to add up all the requests you've made under all the different e-mails you might use. It's much easier for you to use one address and one address only: your student e-mail address beginning with your student number.

Q: I have used my allowance. Can I have another appointment?

A: We understand that appointments will sometimes be missed for very good reasons (e.g., illnesses, personal emergencies, etc.). But we cannot give out additional appointments, as this would introduce the difficult problem of determining which reasons are acceptable. Accordingly, we've made the decision to give everyone more than enough appointments. This buffer means that one uncontrollable situation won't prevent you from getting help.

Q: Can you give me back the cancelled appointment ? It's too late for me to book for the same slot using the system.

A: Once an appointment is cancelled, it cannot be restored. There are several reasons why it could be too late to secure the same spot: another student might have taken the same tutor at the same time, the tutor's schedule might have changed, or there might be less than 48 hours left until the desired time. The best thing to do is attempt to book a new appointment using the portal.

We highly recommend that students who have run out of appointments consider looking carefully through the writing guidance we have made available. There is a lot of information on how to improve independently.

C: Forms

Permission to collect student work

The PPLS Skills Centre is collecting coursework submitted by students in order to conduct research and improve our student and tutor training material. We think that using real student writing will have a transformative effect on what we provide.

(a) You will never be identified in the material released. Identifying information (e.g., name, student number, exam number, etc.) will be scrubbed. We will also look for any potential clues (e.g., acknowledgements in dissertations).

(b) Your decision to provide or withhold consent will have no bearing, positive or negative, on any other aspect of your academic career at the University of Edinburgh. It will not affect your eligibility for any of the PPLS Skills Centre's services. Of course, only those students who consent can get additional

feedback by seeing what we develop with their writing. Not all essays will be used and some may be edited.

FAQ:

Q: Will I know when my work is used?
A: We'll write a message to your student e-mail account, but this may be closed by the time we make contact. If you wish to be contacted beyond that point, please leave an e-mail address in the "Comments or questions" box. We will include a copy of the manner in which it is used.

Q: What sort of material do you choose?
A: The most frequent reason for picking something out is to show students what good work looks like, but we may also pick out sections of essays that need work. For that purpose, we usually select work that is good in many ways but has an aspect that could use improvement. For instance, we may show how an otherwise good essay doesn't link back to the prompt explicitly enough or doesn't provide adequate citations.

Q: What sort of activity do you do with essays?
A: One common activity is to distribute two essays and ask students to guess which one received a higher score. For instance, we might tell students that one essay got a 63 and another got a 70, and their job is to figure out which is which. We generally try to pick essays that are less than ten points apart to make the activity useful -- usually the essay that scores a 63 could have scored a 70 with a few adjustments.

Text: "I give permission for the PPLS Skills Centre to collect my submissions for PPLS coursework and use anonymised versions of them to conduct research and develop student and tutor training material (slides, handouts, online guidance, and so on). This permission applies retroactively to all past submissions, and we will assume it applies to all future submissions as well unless you write us to revoke it [link]."