

**An Introduction  
to  
Academic Writing**

**Presented by  
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# Outline of this Session

A brief introduction to key issues in academic writing

- audience
- purpose
- organisation
- formal grammar
- formal vocabulary
- flow of ideas
- presentation
- referencing

# Considering Writing in English

- What kinds of writing do you do in English?
- How confident are you of your ability to write well in English?
- What problems do you have with writing in English?
- Why is writing in English important at UniSIM?

# What is Academic Writing? (1)

D

Discipline-specific

E

Evidence-based

B

Balanced

T

Truthful

\*DEBT An original idea by Abdel Halim Sykes

# What is Academic Writing? (2)

## Discipline-specific

- writing that
  - conforms to methods and conventions expected within an academic field of study
  - demonstrates your knowledge of the demands of your academic community
  - shows you are a member of a particular academic community

# What is Academic Writing? (3)

## Evidence-based

- assertions should be supported by verifiable facts, figures and other knowledge
- statements should be supported by relevant, real-world examples
- sources of information should be clearly documented

# What is Academic Writing? (4)

## Balanced

- writing should show a range of background reading on an issue
- statements and assertions should be based on logical reasoning
- discussions should present opposing views fairly
- conclusions should be drawn from careful reflection of the evidence

# What is Academic Writing? (5)

## Truthful

- statements should be based on accurate, current data and state of knowledge
- information should be from reliable sources
- citations should be given for the sources of information and ideas
- conclusions should be drawn from analysis of the data presented
- assignments must conform to standards of academic honesty and integrity



# What is Academic Writing? (6)

D

Discipline-specific

E

Evidence-based

B

Balanced

T

Truthful

# Planning a Written Assignment (1)

Who?

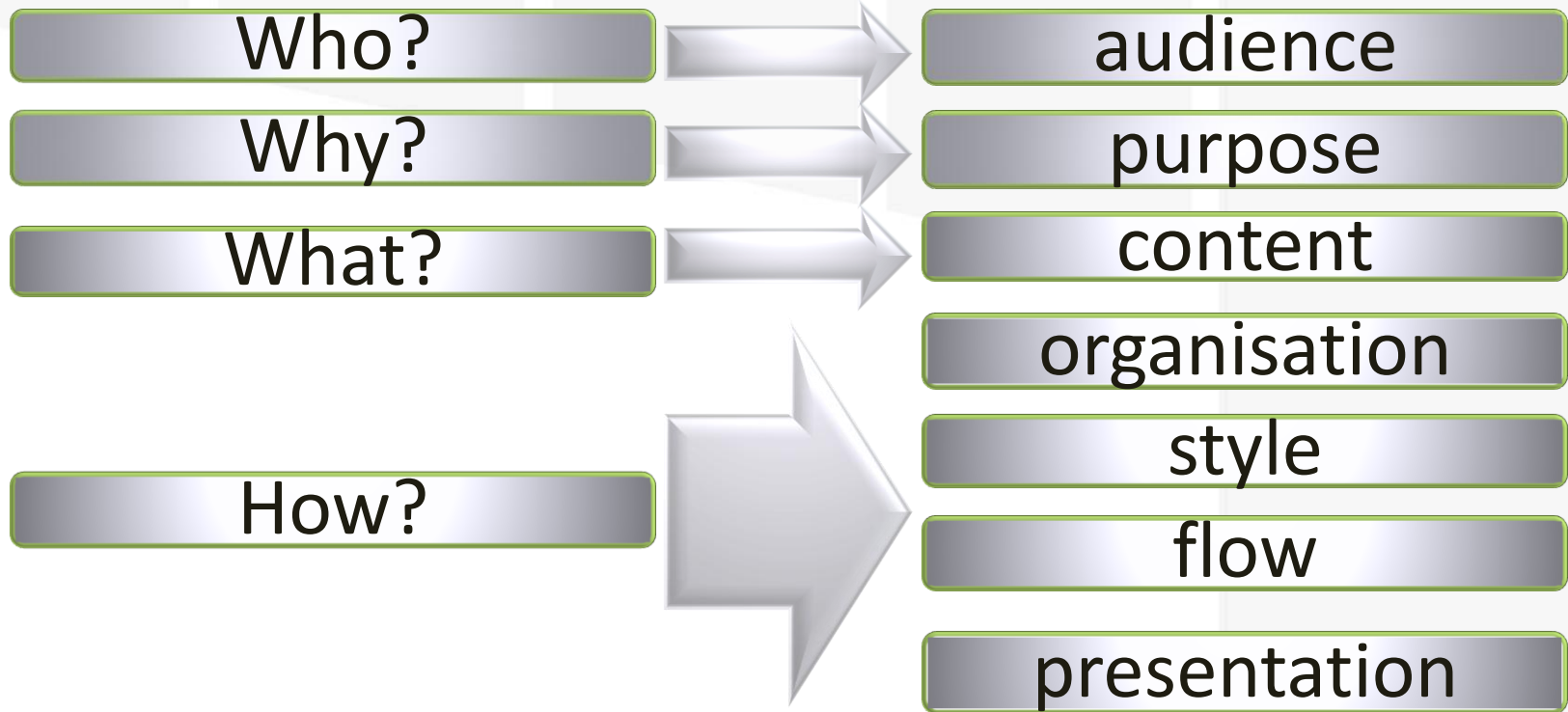
Why?

What?

How?

Written  
Assignment

# Planning a Written Assignment (2)



# Audience (1)

- The audience is your reader.
- Identifying the audience enables you to determine:
  - the focus of your topic
  - the organisation of your assignment
  - the kinds of explanation you give
  - the types of example you provide
  - the vocabulary you use

# Audience (2)

Who is the audience for your academic writing?

- lecturers, examiners, colleagues
- need to understand the audience's knowledge and expectations – affect the content
- Your audience expects you to:
  - demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the issue
  - display your intelligence

# Purpose (1)

Why are you writing?

- To address a given task you should
  - analyse the task
  - identify what you are required to do
  - determine the focus
  - show your familiarity with the topic by addressing it appropriately

# Purpose (2)

Analyse the task to find

- instructional verbs
  - tell you how to address the issue
- content words
  - tell you what issue is to be addressed

These determine the purpose and focus of the written assignment.

# Purpose (3)

Some common instructional verbs

analyse	argue	compare	contrast	criticise
debate	describe	discuss	evaluate	examine
illustrate	justify	outline	review	summarise

Do you know what each of these instructions requires the writer to do?



# Purpose (4)

Always ensure you

- address the topic in the most appropriate way
- limit your response to the purpose of the task
- establish and maintain the focus of your writing
- remind the reader of the purpose
- draw conclusions that address the purpose

# Content (1)

What are you writing about?

- a specific issue on a given topic with a particular focus
- your own studies and ideas in relation to others' work and ideas on the same issue

# Content (2)

The content should focus on one issue and show

- what the issue is
- why it is important
- why people need to be informed
- what you know about the issue

# Content (3)

Your content should

- illustrate your reading and understanding
- concentrate on a specific aspect of the field
- be selective and appropriate for the task
- present evidence based on credible research and reliable sources
- show your engagement with the issue
- be organised logically and progressively

# Organisation (1)

How should you organise your writing?

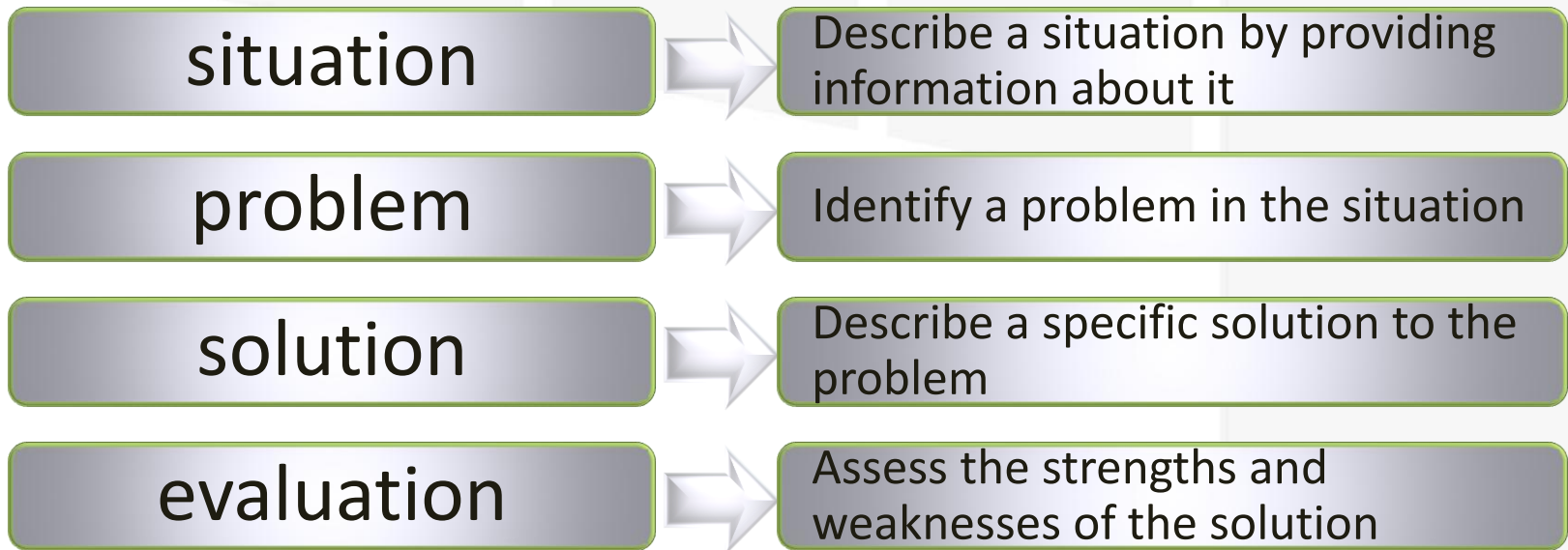
The audience and purpose of the writing should determine how it is organised.

The two most common ways are

- Problem-Solution
- General-Specific

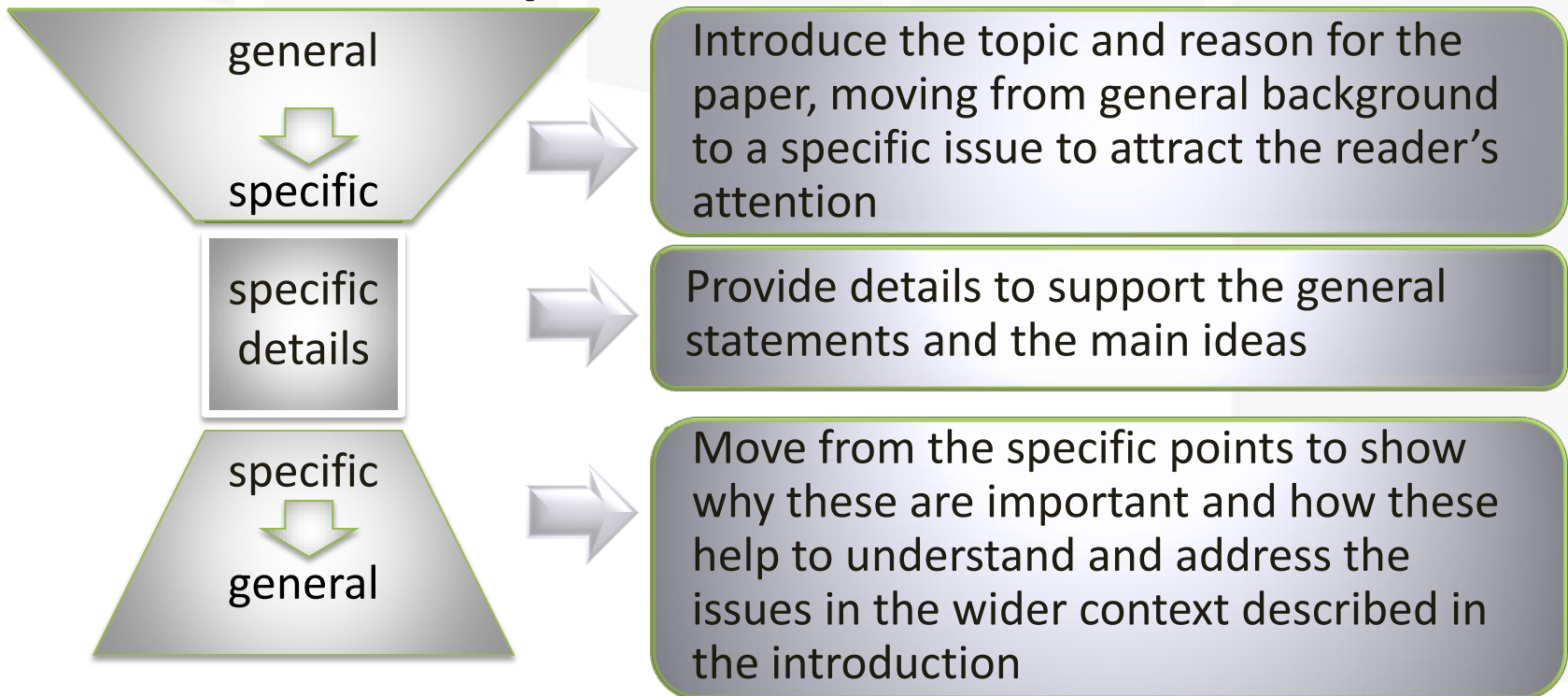
# Organisation (2)

## Problem-Solution



# Organisation (3)

## General-Specific



# Organisation (4)

Whichever organisational structure is used, three key components are essential.

- introduction

- to attract the reader's attention, establish the topic and identify the focus

- body

- to present main ideas and supporting points in a series of related paragraphs

- conclusion

- to restate the main ideas and key findings



# Organisation (5)

## Introduction

- attract the reader's attention by
  - defining key terms
  - presenting significant facts or figures
  - referring to or quoting from major work
  - providing questions related to the topic
  - identifying the focus of the paper
  - stating the thesis of the paper

# Organisation (6)

## What is a thesis statement?

The particular position you take

- based on your knowledge of the issue
- provides direction for your writing

Your writing should be related to the thesis

- to support it or to show opposing views
- to provide a theme for your writing

# Organisation (7)

## Body

- hold the reader's attention by writing paragraphs that
  - are clearly related to the thesis or topic
  - maintain focus on the key issues
  - present one major point in each
  - have supporting ideas related to major points
  - are presented in a logical flow
  - have smooth transitions between them

# Organisation (8)

## What is a good paragraph?

- main idea is presented in the first sentence
- explanation and details are presented in the next sentences
- examples to support points in the preceding sentences are offered in the subsequent sentences
- a summary sentence ends the paragraph

# Organisation (9)

## Conclusion

- convince the reader by
  - reiterating the thesis of your paper
  - restating the focus of your writing
  - summarising all the key points you have made
  - drawing a final conclusion from your writing

# Academic Writing Style

Write in a style appropriate to your discipline.

Always use

- formal grammar
- formal vocabulary

Be clear, concise and precise

# Formal Grammar (1)

## Contractions

- A solution to this problem hasn't been found. ❌
- A solution to this problem has not been found. ✅
- The outcome isn't clear. ❌
- The outcome is not clear. ✅

# Formal Grammar (2)

## Negatives

- The test has not produced any valid data. ❌
- The test produced no valid data. ✅
- It did not take much time. ❌
- It took little time. ✅
- There were not many problems. ❌
- There were few problems. ✅



# Formal Grammar (3)

## Weak endings

- This device can be used to track lions, tigers and so on. ❌
- This device can be used to track lions, tigers and other wild cats. ✅
- These rules apply to all ASEAN countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, etc. ❌
- These rules apply to all ASEAN countries, such as Brunei, Cambodia and Vietnam. ✅

# Formal Grammar (4)

## Personal pronouns

- You can see these trends in Figure 2. ❌
- These trends can be seen in Figure 2. ✅
- We can identify three types. ❌
- Three types can be identified. ✅
- I will examine this issue. ❌
- This issue will be examined. ✅

# Formal Grammar (5)

## Direct questions

- What do these findings mean? ❌
- The meaning of these findings needs to be considered. ✅
- Which one is best? ❌
- The best option needs to be identified. ✅
- What can be done to solve the problem? ❌
- It is necessary to find solutions to the problem. ✅

# Formal Grammar (6)

## Word order

- The graph shows the number of people aged between 40 and 50 years attempting to gain employment by sex in Singapore in 2011. ❌
- The graph shows, by sex, the number of people in Singapore aged between 40 and 50 years attempting to gain employment in 2011. ✅

# Formal Grammar (7)

Avoid using

- contractions
- negatives
- weak endings
- personal pronouns
- direct questions

Pay special attention to

- word order

# Formal Vocabulary (1)

## Multi-word verbs

- Researchers tried to figure out the causes of the problem. ❌
- Researchers tried to determine the causes of the problem. ✅
- Efforts to get rid of dengue fever have failed. ❌
- Efforts to eliminate dengue fever have failed. ✅

# Formal Vocabulary (2)

## Repetition

- Several problems were encountered when attempting to address this problem. ❌
- Several obstacles were encountered when attempting to address this problem. ✅
- This problem is compounded by a number of other problems. ❌
- This problem is compounded by a number of issues. ✅

# Formal Vocabulary (3)

## Redundancy

- Let's say if for example alternative methods were used... ❌
- If alternative methods were used... ✅
- The participants were each given a small, little red colour token. ❌
- The participants were each given a small, red token. ✅



# Formal Vocabulary (4)

## Tone

- Jones (2011) did a really great study on... ❌
- Jones (2011) conducted a convincing study on... ✅
- The survey gave a lot of really useful data. ❌
- The survey yielded a considerable amount of useful data. ✅

# Formal Vocabulary (5)

## Precision

- Interest in this issue has been growing more and more. ❌
- Interest in this issue has been increasing. ✅
- The crisis has got worse and worse. ❌
- The crisis has worsened. ✅

# Formal Vocabulary (6)

## Clarity

- The concerned parties opted to schedule a subsequent situational interface. ❌
- They decided to have another meeting. ✅
- The participants in the self-report intercept survey were front-line, retail-based, customer service facilitators. ❌
- Shop sales staff were surveyed using a self-report questionnaire. ✅

# Formal Vocabulary (7)

Avoid

- multi-word verbs
- repetition
- redundancy

Pay special attention to

- tone
- precision
- clarity

# Flow of Ideas (1)

## Coherence

- presenting an idea consistently

## Cohesion

- showing the relationship between consecutive ideas

# Flow of Ideas (2)

## Coherence techniques

- clear, consistent ideas
  - presenting ideas that follow a common theme
- logical order
  - presenting ideas in sequence
- paragraphs
  - presenting ideas in organised sections

# Flow of Ideas (10)

## Paragraphs

An effective paragraph focuses on one key idea.

Start a new paragraph when

- a new point is introduced
- the direction of the argument changes
- the description changes from one thing to another
- the time reference changes
- explaining a graph, chart or diagram

# Flow of Ideas (16)

## Cohesion methods

- repetition
  - repeating key words and phrases
- substitution
  - replacing words and phrases
- transition
  - using linking words and phrases



# Flow of Ideas (17)

## Repetition

- using the same word or phrase for emphasis and continuity
- using different forms of a word to highlight relationships

# Flow of Ideas (18)

Examples of repetition

Parents know that children need to understand right from wrong. However, this understanding is acquired over time.

This particular type of steel is extremely strong. Due to this strength, it can be used in a wide range of engineering and construction projects.

# Flow of Ideas (19)

## Substitution

- expressing the same idea in different ways
- using synonyms (words with the same or very similar meaning)
- using phrases that have the same or similar meaning

# Flow of Ideas (20)

Examples of substitution

As with all research methods, interviewing has advantages and disadvantages. These benefits and drawbacks will be discussed below.

These *issues* are particularly relevant to young learners with primary school pupils facing a number of these *challenges*.

# Flow of Ideas (21)

## Transition

Words and phrases used to

- help the reader move easily from one sentence to the next
- show the logical relationships between the sentences

Make sure that the transitions you choose convey the precise meaning intended.

# Flow of Ideas (22)

## Some common transitions

<b>Addition:</b>	moreover	besides	furthermore	also
<b>Comparison:</b>	similarly	likewise	in the same way	Like X, Y
<b>Contrast:</b>	however	nevertheless	on the other hand	yet
<b>Example:</b>	for instance	for example	specifically	such as
<b>Result:</b>	therefore	thus	consequently	hence
<b>Sequence:</b>	first	second	next	finally
<b>Time:</b>	meanwhile	since then	after that	later

# Flow of Ideas (23)

## Examples of transition

Over 85% of male students thought the course should be longer. In contrast, only 45% of female students thought so.

The experiment presented a number of problems. Nevertheless, some useful data were gathered.

# Flow of Ideas (24)

## Example of flow of ideas

In the past, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. Nowadays, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.



# Flow of Ideas (25)

## Example of flow of ideas

repetition

In the past, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. Nowadays, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

substitution

time

addition

contrast

# Flow of Ideas (26)

## Example of flow of ideas

**repetition**

In the past, **storm** impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe **storms**. Nowadays, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

# Flow of Ideas (27)

## Example of flow of ideas

In the past, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic *losses* resulting from *severe storms*. Nowadays, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social *cost* of these *extreme weather conditions*.

substitution

# Flow of Ideas (28)

## Example of flow of ideas

In the past, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. Nowadays, however, emphasis is **also** being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

**addition**

# Flow of Ideas (29)

## Example of flow of ideas

*In the past*, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. *Nowadays*, **however**, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

contrast

# Flow of Ideas (30)

## Example of flow of ideas

**In the past**, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. **Nowadays**, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

time

# Flow of Ideas (31)

## Example of flow of ideas

repetition

In the past, storm impact assessments mainly focused on the economic losses resulting from severe storms. Nowadays, however, emphasis is also being placed on the social cost of these extreme weather conditions.

substitution

time

addition

contrast

# Flow of Ideas (32)

Pay special attention to

- consistency of ideas
- logical order
- paragraphing

Try to use

- repetition
- substitution
- transition



# Presentation

The three key components of good presentation in academic writing are

- spelling
- punctuation
- grammar

# Presentation: Spelling

## Guidelines for spelling

- Always use formal spelling.
- Do not use text language or SMS abbreviations.
- Use British or American spelling.
- Do not mix varieties of English.
- Set the default on your computer to specify the variety of English.
- Non-English words (except names) should be italicised.

# Presentation: Punctuation (1)

Punctuation is a way of using special marks to divide ideas into phrases, clauses and sentences to make them clearer to the reader.

The most common punctuation marks in academic writing are

- full stop
- comma
- semi-colon
- colon
- quotation mark

# Presentation: Punctuation

## Example

Woman without her man is nothing.

Woman. Without her, man is nothing.

Adapted from Waddell, N. (2010) *UQ Writing Guide*, University of Queensland.

# Presentation: Punctuation (2)

Full stop

[.]

- written at the end of a sentence to show the completion of a statement
- used with abbreviations, such as e.g. and i.e.

# Presentation: Punctuation (3)

## Comma

[,]

- divides phrases from clauses
  - Since studies on this subject are few, this one is of particular interest.
- isolates names and linking words
  - The researchers, Jones and Wong, have drawn interesting conclusions.
  - The results, however, are inconclusive.

# Presentation: Punctuation (3)

## Comma (continued)

- divides words in a series or list
  - He worked in the laboratory on mice, rats, voles and other small rodents.
- separates adjectives referring to a noun
  - It was an interesting, entertaining and informative lecture.
- introduces direct quotations
  - The informant said, 'I agree with this statement.'

# Presentation: Punctuation (4)

## Semi-colon

[;]

- divides independent clauses that are closely related
  - Traffic jams have worsened in the last two years; these jams have become a concern for the majority of drivers.
- divides phrases in a series or list
  - Some potential solutions to ease traffic jams include reducing the number of cars on the road; improving public transport; increasing road-pricing fees; and widening major roads.



# Presentation: Punctuation (5)

Colon

[:]

- introduces a list of examples
  - There are three main causes of road congestion: heavy traffic, careless driving and inadequate roads.
- introduces explanations
  - He was a popular boy: bright, caring, friendly and diligent.

# Presentation: Punctuation (6)

## Quotation marks

[‘.....’] [“.....”]

- indicate the directly quoted words of others
  - He said, ‘This is the most astonishing set of data I’ve ever seen.’
- indicate the titles of written or artistic work
  - ‘The Long Dark Road’ was first published in 1978.
  - An example of this technique can be found in the novel ‘The Sixpence’ by Jeff Baines.

# Presentation

Pay special attention to

- consistency of spelling
- correct punctuation

Try to use

- British or American spelling
- spelling check software
- punctuation to make your writing clear

# Referencing (1)

Referencing or citation is an important part of academic writing

It means acknowledging the work of others.

Providing references

- gives respect and credit to others
- shows academic rigour
- indicates good research
- shows knowledge of relevant literature
- helps to avoid plagiarism

# Referencing (2)

There are several referencing systems including

- APA – American Psychological Association
- MLA – Modern Language Association
- IEEE – Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- Harvard

You need to know which system is

- used in your field of study
- required by your school or department

You need to learn

- in-text referencing
- end-of-text referencing

# Referencing: In Text (1)

**Type 1: The writers' names are stated in the main sentence.**

Swan et al. (2008) and Lim et al. (2009) suggest that drinking alcohol can cause liver disease.

# Referencing: In Text (2)

**Type 2: The writers' names are not stated in the main sentence but some reference is made to the sources.**

Researchers (e.g. Swan et al., 2008; Lim et al., 2009; Harun et al., 2010) have suggested there is a link between alcohol and liver disease.

# Referencing: In Text (3)

**Type 3: Sources not referred to in the main sentence.**

Drinking alcohol is widely believed to be one of the leading causes of liver disease (Swan et al., 2008; Lim et al., 2009; Harun et al., 2010).



# Referencing: End of text

At the end of a piece of academic writing, you should

- prepare a list of references
- list all sources cited in your writing
- list sources in alphabetical order
- include all details: authors, title, date and place of publication, publisher, (date accessed - for online sources)
- adhere to the conventions of the referencing system you are required to use

# Recap of Key Points (1)

## Audience

- consider the particular expectations
- determine the focus of your writing

## Purpose

- identify what you are required to do
- focus on the specific task

## Organisation

- audience, purpose and content determine how your writing is organised

# Recap of Key Points (2)

## Formal grammar

- use clear, well-structured sentences
- help the reader to understand

## Formal vocabulary

- use appropriate, accurate words and phrases

## Flow of ideas

- coherence – present ideas clearly and consistently
- cohesion – show relationships between ideas

# Recap of Key Points (3)

## Presentation

- focus on correct spelling
- use accurate and appropriate punctuation

## Referencing

- acknowledge the work of others
- follow a referencing system accurately and consistently

# Recap of Key Points (4)

Remember: academic writing should always be

D

Discipline-specific

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\*DEBT An original idea by Abdel Halim Sykes

# Support and Practice

## Teaching and Learning Centre

- Slides for this lecture

<http://tlc.unisim.edu.sg/english-proficiency.html>

- Links to useful sites

## Available in UniSIM Blackboard and Canvas

- SDE100 English Proficiency Assessment
- SDE101 Essential English Skills
- SDE102 Developing Academic Writing Skills

# Questions, comments and discussion