

Findlay

Kaufmann

8

HOW TO WRITE

Psychology

RESEARCH REPORTS AND ESSAYS



8

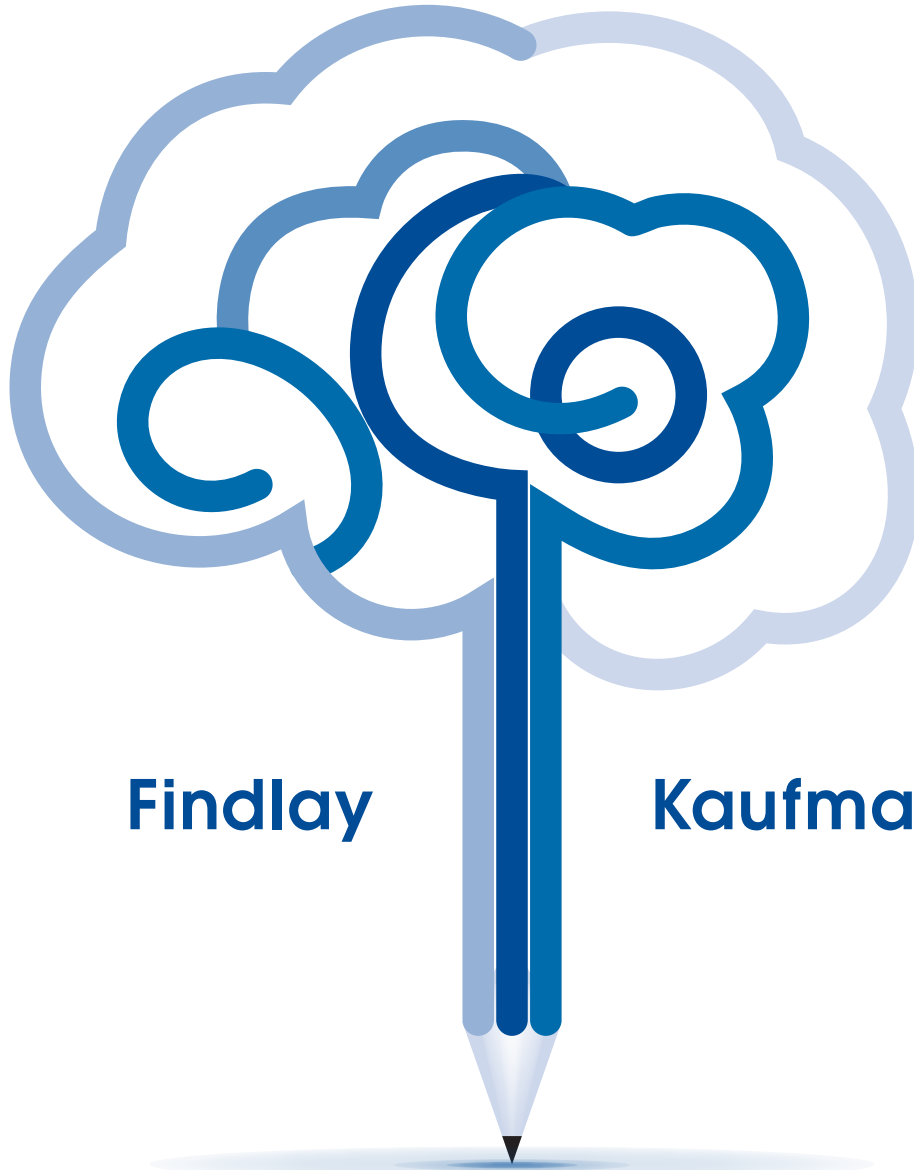
HOW TO WRITE

Psychology

RESEARCH REPORTS AND ESSAYS

In memory of Associate Professor Jennifer Boldero (1955–2017)

In recognition of your great contribution to research and teaching in psychology in Australia. Your passion and dedication inspired, supported, and educated hundreds of psychologists, psychology graduates, and one daughter.



Findlay

Kaufmann

8

HOW TO WRITE

Psychology

RESEARCH REPORTS AND ESSAYS

Copyright © Pearson Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) 2019

Pearson Australia
707 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3008

www.pearson.com.au

The *Copyright Act 1968* of Australia allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that that educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act. For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact: Copyright Agency Limited, telephone: (02) 9394 7600, email: info@copyright.com.au

All rights reserved. Except under the conditions described in the *Copyright Act 1968* of Australia and subsequent amendments, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Senior Portfolio Manager: Stephen Heasley
Sponsoring Editor: Simone Bella
Development Editor: Chakira Lane
Project Manager: Bronwyn Smith
Production Managers: Bernadette Chang and Amandeep Kaur
Content Developer: Stephen Razos
Rights and Permissions Team Leader: Lisa Woodland
Production Controller: Yijing Wu
Lead Editor/Copy Editor: Marie-Louise Taylor
Proofreaders: iEnergizer Aptara[®], Ltd and Maryanne Phillips
Indexer: iEnergizer Aptara[®], Ltd
Cover and internal design by Lamond Art & Design
Cover illustration © Kraphix/Shutterstock
Typeset by iEnergizer Aptara[®], Ltd

Printed in Malaysia

1 2 3 4 5 23 22 21 20 19



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

ISBN: 9781488618437

ISBN: 9781488618444 (eBook)

Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd ABN 40 004 245 943



Contents

Preface	viii
Introduction . . . . .	.ix
How to Use this Book.	xii
Acknowledgments	xiv

1 Reasons for Writing Research Reports and Essays 1

1.1 Why Write Reports and Essays?	2
1.2 What Is a Research Report?.	3
1.3 Writing Essays at University	5
1.4 Chapter Summaries	5

2 Writing Research Reports and Essays – Getting Started 7

2.1 Collaborating Not Copying – The Distinction	8
2.2 Information Gathering	9
2.3 Evaluating Internet Resources	15
2.4 Critical Thinking	16
2.5 Critically Evaluating Psychology Journal Articles	18
2.6 Writing Style	21
2.7 Using the Correct Tense	27
2.8 Inclusive Language	28
2.9 Proofreading and Redrafting	28
2.10 The Physical Presentation of Your Assignment	30

3 Referencing 33

3.1 Plagiarism	34
3.2 In-text Referencing	36
3.3 The Reference List	42
3.3.1 Books	44
3.3.2 Journal Articles	45
3.3.3 Internet Sources	47
3.3.4 Other Sources.	48

4	Research Reports – How Do You Start?	51
4.1	How to Approach a Research Report	53
4.2	How to Begin	54
4.2.1	Studies Designed by the Psychology Department	54
4.2.2	Studies You Design	57
4.2.3	All Studies – A Brief Introduction to Key Concepts	58
4.3	Research Ethics	60
4.4	Where to Go From Here	62
5	Sections of a Research Report	67
5.1	Title Page and Abstract	68
5.2	Introduction	72
5.3	Method	77
5.3.1	Participants	80
5.3.2	Materials	81
5.3.3	Design	85
5.3.4	Procedure	86
5.4	Results	87
5.4.1	Your Very First Report	87
5.4.2	All Reports	89
5.4.3	Numbers and Words	92
5.4.4	Decimals	93
5.4.5	Tables	93
5.4.6	Figures	97
5.5	Discussion	100
5.6	References	105
5.7	Appendices	105
5.8	Further Reading	106
5.9	Feedback	107
5.10	Summary	108
5.11	Checklist	108
6	Essays in Psychology	111
6.1	How Are Essays Different From Research Reports?	113
6.2	Choosing an Essay Topic	113
6.3	Deciding What the Essay Topic Asks	114
6.4	Preparation – Reading, Note-taking, and Planning	117

6.5	Structure of an Essay . . . . .	.118
6.5.1	The Title Page and Abstract . . . . .	.119
6.5.2	The Introduction . . . . .	.119
6.5.3	The Body (Discussion) . . . . .	.121
6.5.4	The Conclusion. . . . .	.122
6.5.5	The References . . . . .	.124
6.6	Redrafting and Presentation . . . . .	.124
6.7	Further Reading . . . . .	.125
6.8	Checklist . . . . .	.126
Appendix A	Sample of a Good Research Report . . . . .	.129
Appendix B	Sample of a Poor Research Report . . . . .	.139
Appendix C	Sample of a Good Research Report . . . . .	.151
Appendix D	Sample of a Poor Research Report . . . . .	.165
	Glossary. . . . .	.175
	References. . . . .	.181
	Index . . . . .	.187

Preface

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is pleased to continue its association with the publication of Bruce Findlay and Leah Kaufmann's *How to Write Psychology Research Reports and Essays*, now in its 8th edition.

Undergraduate psychology education aims to develop psychological literacy. Knowledge of research methods, critical thinking skills, and communication skills are valued competencies of psychology graduates. Undergraduate research projects and assignments are designed to help students master these skills; yet first- and second-year students may find writing research reports and essays daunting.

Findlay and Kaufmann's book is designed to make these learning tasks less challenging for students. It uses easy-to-read and student-friendly language. The book is intended to complement undergraduate textbooks and the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). The book will help students to plan and organise their research report, to express their ideas clearly, and to follow APA style. The book also alerts students to key issues, such as referencing sources correctly and avoiding plagiarism. It now includes information on electronic referencing, online sources, and submissions. Flowcharts, checklists, and sample reports provide further guidance on psychological writing. There are now additional examples for postgraduate students.

I am pleased to recommend the new edition of this book as a valuable resource to students throughout their undergraduate studies. Students interested in a career in psychology are invited to explore the APS website and our resources for students, including Psych Student Headquarters (www.psychology.org.au). The APS website also shows the diversity of careers in psychology, opportunities to network, and resources provided for students and student subscribers by the APS. You can subscribe to the APS by visiting <https://join.psychology.org.au>.

Sabine Wingenfeld Hammond, PhD, FAPS
Executive Manager, Science, Education, and Membership
Australian Psychological Society



Introduction

Introduction to Students

If you've picked this up to see what it's like – buy it! It'll save you a lot of hassles in your undergraduate psychology career.

While most psychology students do not go on to become the sort of psychologists who publish journal articles, most psychology departments treat you as if you will! For example, you will be expected to write research reports that differ from typical assignments and essays, and although they are not as long or complex as those an academic would write, they are designed to lead you towards that level. This book will give you all the information you need about how to prepare and write psychology research reports and essays in psychology at the undergraduate level, without overburdening you with all those extra touches that are needed for publication.

There is a glossary of those words that are on the tip of your tongue but whose meaning escapes you at the moment. There is an index that will lead you to the help you need for any particular feature of a research report or essay that is bothering you. There are flowcharts of the processes involved in writing a research report and an essay. There are a couple of good examples of research reports that you can use as a sort of graphical index, and a couple of examples of badly written reports to show you what to avoid.

If you want some global advice for undergraduate writing in psychology, it is – learn to plan ahead! It will save you a lot of anxiety of the sort that occurs when your computer fails at midnight and the assignment is due at 9 o'clock the next morning. This book will show you how to learn this valuable skill.

Good writing! It's not nearly as difficult as you might think.

Introduction to Staff Members

Purpose of the book. This book is intended to address the need for a set of guidelines for writing undergraduate-level psychology research reports and essays. It is aimed at *first-* and *second-year* students, although it may be useful to address weaknesses in preparation, writing, or even submitting assignments among more senior students. It is *not*, however, a guide to writing for publication. It does observe the conventions required by the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA), and it includes the rationale for those conventions, as well as the steps to be taken in producing and presenting psychological research reports and essays. A student who grasps these concepts and learns the conventions will have a sound basis for presenting research in a professional manner, and writing well-argued essays, so that the later step of writing for publication should be an easier one to take.

Why such a book is desirable. Increasing student numbers and dwindling resources (especially, face-to-face teaching opportunities) in Australian universities often result in students spending less time in classes on the more basic skills and approaches to writing research reports and essays. It can also mean students get less guidance on this (assessed) aspect of their learning and are less able to understand or make use of feedback on what they have written. This is particularly true at first-year level.

Many psychology departments produce handouts on writing research reports and essays which, however brief, are time consuming to develop, and are a further burden (beyond core content development) on the demands of increasingly burdened academics. They may also be produced by staff members who have been writing for publication for some time and who may take for granted a good deal of information that first-year students, in particular, do not know. For this reason, many students find the conventions of psychological report writing especially difficult, since the requirements differ both from those of their other tertiary subjects and from their own previous experience. Moreover, when students are left to seek answers to very basic or seemingly obvious questions (which they can be too embarrassed to ask of staff members), they often find ad hoc or inaccurate answers (e.g., from the internet, other students, or even less experienced staff), and this can lead to complaints from students about what is expected in research reports.

Students will find this book useful because it is considerably more detailed than the typical departmental handout, but not as overwhelming as books advising on writing for publication, such as the *Publication Manual* of the APA. Some of the more advanced books are mentioned towards the end of Chapters 5 and 6.

Difference from the previous edition. Since the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual* of the APA was published in 2010, publishing in general has continued to change, especially in the accessibility and presentation of electronic resources. While the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual* updated some conventions to meet the changes in publishing, especially the use of the doi, the APA has also published, electronically, a more detailed style guide to electronic references. The latest edition of the current book includes some

of this material. In addition, we have updated guidance on issues like online submission and the use of online sources (e.g., online journals) and tools (e.g., Turnitin).

The examples of opening sentences, summaries of prior research, and referencing examples are fairly recent material from Australian and New Zealand academics. We hope your students are tickled to see the names of academics they may know used as glowing examples still active at the time of writing, and relevant. The occasional URL used as examples have been updated to ensure they are still active and relevant.

In response to requests from third- and fourth-year students, who say they are finding the book useful in their higher years, we have also included some examples of more sophisticated tables and figures and how they should be reported in text.





Academics are encouraged to consider embedding and using this book in courses. It may save teaching time by recommending that students buy and frequently refer to this book. If you are using this book as an aid to your teaching and have any constructive criticisms to offer, especially about the newer sections, we would appreciate hearing from you.

Bruce Findlay
Senior Lecturer in Psychology
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218, Hawthorn, Vic 3122
email: bfindlay@swin.edu.au

Leah Kaufmann
Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115, Fitzroy MDC, Vic 3065
email: leah.kaufmann@acu.edu.au

How to Use this Book

This book has a number of design features which we hope will make it easier to understand the information you need to know. There are often good and poor examples cited. The examples will be in figures, because one of the conventions you need to learn is that illustrative material belongs in figures. The format of the figures and tables throughout this book is the format that you are expected to learn, but in addition there will be icons to remind you which are good and which are poor examples. They will look like this:

-  Good examples for you to follow will have this “tick” beside them.
-  Poor examples or formats that you should avoid using in your work will have this “cross” beside them.
-  Notes, which will often accompany tables, will have this little “notepad” icon beside them. Please read them carefully!
-  Finally, this icon will accompany comments or instructions that require even closer attention than usual. It will refer to things that are absolutely essential for you to be aware of.

Please be aware that the examples throughout the book illustrating the conventions you need to know about are not exhaustive. You should not get the idea that these examples are the only way to express those particular conventions, but they are certainly acceptable ways. As you become more comfortable with writing in this style, you will be able to be more creative within the existing conventions.

At the start of Chapters 4 and 6 there are flowcharts that indicate the sequence of activities for the successful writing of research reports and essays, respectively. These may serve as a useful summary and reminder of the process once you have familiarised yourself with the details. There are also checklists for research reports and essays, at the ends of Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, that will help you to plan and mark off your achievements in your first few assignments. Feel free to photocopy them and use them to measure your progress.

There are good and bad examples of two research reports, starting on page 129. The first is a fairly straightforward one, such as you might expect in your first one or two assignments. The second is rather more complex, but you might encounter one like it late in first year or early in second year. They are not meant to be the only way you can write a research report, but they are acceptable ways; they can also be used as a sort of index, if you are looking for something but can't think of the word that would allow you to use the normal index. You can look at the part of the report where you expect to find advice, then

be referred to the sections or pages where that advice can be found. The bad examples include many of the errors that students commonly make. Have a look at them, see if you can spot the errors, and check the answers on pages 147–149 and 172–174.

At the beginnings of Chapters 2 to 6 there are lists of keywords. Before reading each chapter, look up these words in the Glossary at the back of the book. This will ensure that when you first encounter them in the context of the chapter they will already be a little familiar. Their meaning should become even clearer as you read through the chapter.

Educator Resource – Test Bank

The Test Bank provides a wealth of testing material. Updated for the new edition, each chapter offers a wide variety of question types, arranged by section. Questions can be integrated into Blackboard, Canvas or Moodle Learning Management Systems.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the many academics who adopted earlier versions of this book for their introductory psychology classes. Thanks also to the reviewers who made comments on the 7th edition. We have incorporated most of the changes they suggested. We are also very grateful to the many students who have expressed their appreciation for the earlier editions of this book, and whose comments and experiences have led us to clarify or expand some points. They more than offset the feeling we sometimes get that, although students are persuaded to buy the book, many seem not to pay attention to it. It's many years ago now, but one first-year convenor set as a research report the topic used in previous editions as an example in the back of the book. The distribution of students' marks, and the errors they made, suggested that a large number of students didn't realise this!

It may not be apparent to the casual reader, but the publications referred to as examples in reference lists, and from which we draw good examples of opening sentences, hypotheses, and summaries of prior research, are most frequently the work of Australasian psychology researchers. We are impressed by the number of publications produced by our academic colleagues, and the ease with which we can find good examples without looking beyond Australia and New Zealand. We like to think that we are reinforcing the inspiration they are to their students.

At many universities, a high proportion of tutorial teaching, and therefore responsibility for instructions about, and marking of, research reports, is done by sessional staff, primarily higher degree students. We are continually impressed by, and grateful for, their dedication and professionalism. Similarly, we are blessed with congenial associates who offer advice in constructive ways. As ever, the responsibility for any remaining errors must be our own. In particular we are grateful to Ben Williams for his statistical and graphical advice, and to Aimee, Adam, Martin, Rose, Kelly, Ian, and Elisa, whose excellent reports allowed us to amalgamate them into the good report.

1

Reasons for Writing Research Reports and Essays



IN THIS CHAPTER

1.1	Why Write Reports and Essays?	2
1.2	What <i>Is</i> a Research Report?	3
1.3	Writing Essays at University	5
1.4	Chapter Summaries	5

1.1 Why Write Reports and Essays?

IN ANY SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE, the structure of established knowledge is, on rare occasions, shaken up by people of the stature of Einstein or Freud. More usually, knowledge is added to, brick by brick, by well-reported studies in some relatively specific area. When taken together, these all make up what we know – in the case of psychology – about how people think, feel, and behave. Hopefully, some of you will go on to contribute to this knowledge. This will involve considerable training in psychology, in research methods, and in publication.

You may have begun psychology because you were interested in learning how to help other people, or perhaps in understanding yourself better, and so may not anticipate that you will publish research articles in your professional life. However, even if you don't publish studies, you will have to read many published reports while completing your studies in psychology. Knowing the conventions and being able to critically evaluate these works will aid in this. Specifically, you will need to develop skills that allow you to decide whether the material you read is useful to your own area of work, as well as strengths and weaknesses within the work itself. You will need to understand how authors reached their conclusions, and to decide how sound or applicable those conclusions are, all of which require a familiarity with the conventions of psychological reporting.

The majority of students who study an introductory psychology subject, or even complete a three-year degree with a major in psychology, do not go on to become psychologists. To become a psychologist, you will need to complete six years of training; that is, an accredited undergraduate major, a fourth year called an Honours year or a Postgraduate Diploma, and two more years which may be a Master's degree, or professional supervision and training. In contrast, most students with an undergraduate degree in psychology find themselves working in management, human resources, human services departments, market research, journalism, the travel industry, or similar areas. This is because a degree with a major in psychology is well regarded in the commercial and industrial world, partly because of the experience of quantitative analysis that goes with writing research reports, but mainly because psychology graduates have had excellent training in the critical, disciplined, and concise reporting of the work they do.

There are therefore three good reasons why you need to learn to write good research reports:

- The first and most pragmatic reason is that you are expected to do so as part of an undergraduate degree in psychology and will be assessed on your ability to do so. It is something you need to know in order to complete your course successfully.
- A better reason is that as a potential psychologist you need to appraise what other people have written and to report your own research in order to communicate to the community of scientists/practitioners and

academics what you have learned from your study of human, or perhaps animal, behaviour.

- Finally, even if you do not intend to become a psychologist, any occupation will have its own conventions for preparing and writing reports of the work you do. Learning the conventions of psychology research reports demonstrates your ability to master the conventions of a discipline to potential employers. In addition, the generic skills of synthesising material requiring high levels of theoretical and conceptual understanding, as well as reporting your conclusions concisely and on time, are skills that will stand you in good stead in any professional career.

Many undergraduate psychology students are also asked to write essays. In contrast to a research report, which expects you to describe a piece of empirical research, essays usually expect you to argue a point of view in some area of psychological interest. Essay writing is also a valued skill, since it also gives you an opportunity to demonstrate the generic skills of assembling and summarising relevant information, critically evaluating it, and coming to a considered conclusion about it in a succinct way.

1.2 What Is a Research Report?

A research report (sometimes called a laboratory report, or lab report for short) is a summary of a research project, presented in a specific form including: (a) why you undertook this particular research; (b) what you expected to find; (c) how you actually did it; (d) what you *did* find; (e) what you think the results mean; and (f) the theoretical and practical implications of the conclusions you drew from those results.

Like most disciplines, psychology has conventions for the reporting of research findings. This means that readers who are familiar with these conventions can quickly and easily find the information they need and evaluate the quality of this information. From there they can decide whether they want to read the report in more detail. As a result, the format of psychological reporting is very useful to readers and can help authors communicate with their audience.

The reason that the conventions used in psychology conform to a “more or less” standard format is that the research presented differs in a number of important ways (e.g., number of studies, number and type of samples, use of apparatus, analyses), which results in slightly different information being presented. We encourage you to look through some of the major psychology periodicals in your library or browse through them on the web (and we encourage you to do so in the very near future), such as: *Australian Journal of Psychology*; *Brain and Cognition*; *Child Development*; *Journal of Experimental Psychology*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; or *Psychological Science*. You will find many articles in formats that are somewhat different to what is usually

taught in first- or second-year psychology, mostly as a result of more complex designs or methods than you encounter in your first couple of undergraduate years. Another reason is that a journal article expects a greater familiarity with existing research in the area than that expected of an undergraduate report, which means that some information may not be fully described, although you will do so in your early reports. However, by your third year you should be approaching a professional understanding of prior research, and your understanding of the conventions of presentation will conform more to the journal article standard.

The qualitative difference between journal articles and undergraduate research reports is that the research report is primarily an exercise in communication and only secondarily, if at all, a contribution to research. It is important that the information you communicate to your marker reflects your knowledge and understanding of the topic. It is important that as an undergraduate you become expert at producing the standard format, and once you are completely in control of it then you can decide whether it is appropriate to “bend the rules” in particular cases.

The basic rules are that a research report consists of the following sections in the sequence indicated:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction (section does not include this title)
- Method
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Appendices (often not used in undergraduate reports)

The Title Page clarifies what the report is about and contains information about you. The Abstract is an overview of the report. The rest of the report is the presentation of the full details of the research, using an hourglass structure (Kidder & Judd, 1986). Your Introduction should begin broadly, introducing the topic under study and why it is being studied. This will then begin to narrow down as you describe the work of previous researchers whose results have led to your own study. The end of the Introduction is like the approach to the waist of the hourglass, where you state the aims of your study and the specific hypotheses, which are predictions of what results you expected from your study. The Method and Results sections are the most specific sections of the report, since they state precisely what was done and what results were obtained. The Discussion is where the hourglass begins to spread out again. It starts with a description of results in relation to the hypotheses (i.e., were they supported?); your interpretation of the results; then broadens this to discuss how those results relate to previous work. Finally, you describe the implications of your research, including strengths and limitations, and finish at the broadest point with a general conclusion about the meaning and contribution of this research to the literature. The References allow others to check the accuracy of your assertions, and the Appendices contain additional material that doesn't need to be included in the body of the report but is specifically referred to (e.g., in your Method).

1.3 Writing Essays at University

An essay in psychology is no different in basic structure from the essays you will encounter in other tertiary humanities subjects, such as literature or social sciences like sociology. Unlike research reports, they are not usually divided into sections. They follow the standard essay pattern of having an introduction, a body or discussion, which is the bulk of the essay, and a conclusion. However, psychology essays may also need a Title Page, Abstract, and References. Essays at tertiary level are somewhat different from those many of you will have experienced at school. The basic difference is that at university you will be expected to be more critical of the material you use in your essays and systematic in your approach to creating an argument or viewpoint. Psychology essays typically ask you to discuss some research, to compare and contrast particular theoretical perspectives on some area of behaviour, or to critically evaluate some area of research.

Chapter 6 describes what is required of each of these sorts of instructions, but in essence they expect you to read people's work with a critical eye, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of a body of work. What is needed of you as a student with a major in psychology is that you demand particular standards of evidence for the assertions that researchers make before you give any weight to those assertions. This requires critical thinking on your part, and we describe some ways in which you can apply critical thinking to psychological articles in Chapter 2.

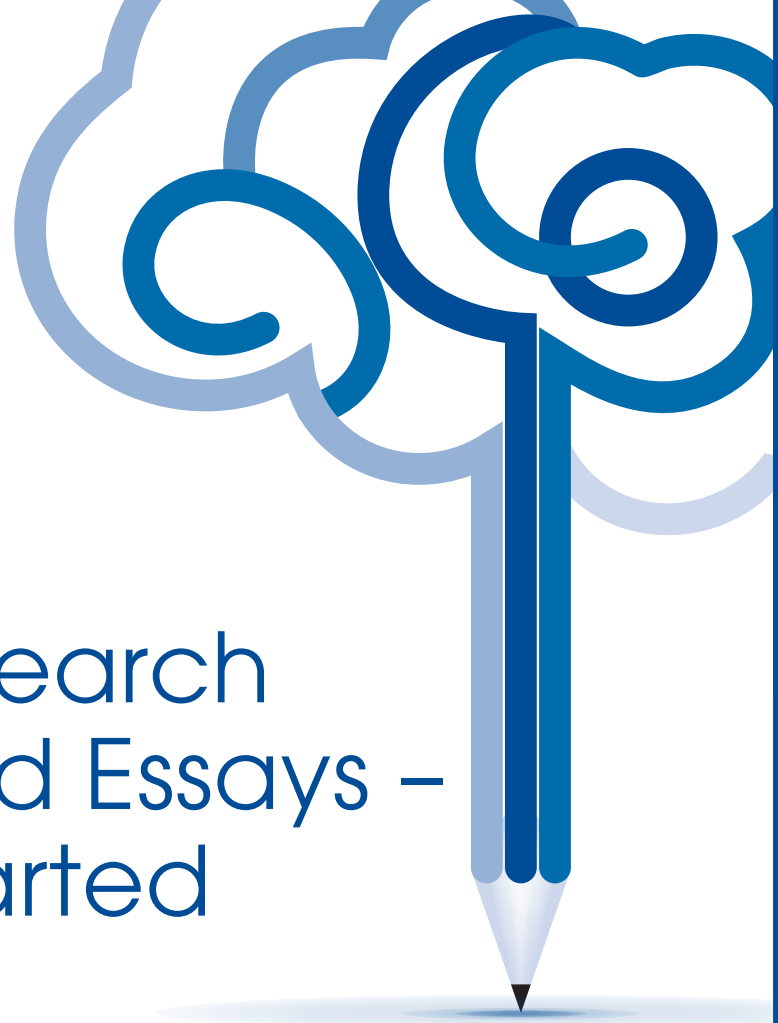
1.4 Chapter Summaries

The following chapters will deal with: (a) where to look for appropriate references; information on critical evaluation of earlier research; and the process of producing an assignment, all of which are common to both research reports and essays (Chapter 2); (b) the expected conventions of referencing in text and in the Reference list (Chapter 3); (c) what you do to get started when assigned to write a research report (Chapter 4); (d) detailed instructions on what sort of material goes in which sections of a research report, and the conventions for presenting it (Chapter 5); and (e) advice about essay writing for psychology (Chapter 6). At the end of the book are examples of good and poor research reports, which you may find useful if looking at specific aspects, but can't think of the word that will allow you to look it up in the normal index.

This page intentionally left blank.

2

Writing Research Reports and Essays – Getting Started



KEYWORDS

active voice, argument, assumptions, collaboration, copying, empirical, evidence, extraneous (nuisance) variable, factor, generic, hypothesis, methodology, operationalisation, organised scepticism, participant, plagiarism, problem (research problem), qualitative, questionnaire, reference, replication, representative, scientific study, study, theory

IN THIS CHAPTER

2.1 Collaborating Not Copying – The Distinction	8
2.2 Information Gathering.	9
2.3 Evaluating Internet Resources.	15
2.4 Critical Thinking	16
2.5 Critically Evaluating Psychology Journal Articles	18
2.6 Writing Style	21
2.7 Using the Correct Tense	27
2.8 Inclusive Language	28
2.9 Proofreading and Redrafting	28
2.10 The Physical Presentation of Your Assignment	30

THERE ARE SEVERAL ELEMENTS and processes that are common to research reports and essays. Most notably, assignments that receive the best marks are those that not only follow the conventional format but are also written clearly and concisely. Importantly, get the best marks also meet the requirements of the instructions given, including word limits, and are submitted on time.

This chapter addresses key issues in getting started: (a) the thorny problem of collaborating versus copying; (b) the question of the sort of material you should gather to support your research report or essay; (c) how to evaluate internet resources; (d) critical thinking and how to apply it to the material you read; (e) writing style, including the appropriateness of personal pronouns, fluency of expression, and punctuation; (f) the use of the correct tense; (g) inclusive language; (h) the need for proofreading and redrafting; and finally (i) the physical presentation of your assignment.

2.1 Collaborating Not Copying – The Distinction

Collaborative study has many benefits. It is good practice for your professional life, and it will make your university life more enjoyable and fruitful. However, collaboration in the production of assessable assignments can be confusing and even risky. You should always check what the expectations of your lecturer or tutor are regarding collaboration in the preparation of assessable work, but even when you work with another student or students, you should *never* produce one work which is submitted by multiple students. Instead, you might talk about the resources, your understanding of them, and the expectations of the task, and then you will write your own assignment.

It is desirable for first- and second-year undergraduate students faced with writing research reports and essays to collaborate in study groups. For example, when working on research reports, it may help you to discuss hypotheses, if these were not already given in the instructions, and to discuss which references logically lead to them, and do or do not support the hypotheses. You may also like to discuss the results, and the strengths and weaknesses of the research, because sharing ideas can help your understanding of the material. Collaborating on the preparations for a research report also allows you to debate your ideas and opinions, and hopefully, that will give you a taste of the intellectual excitement to be experienced in academic research that makes much of the grind worthwhile. However, it is always important to check with your tutor or lecturer about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable at your institution.

If your assignment is an essay, the possibilities for collaboration may be much more limited. Most lecturers would probably be happy for you to share resources, such as references. However, the essay probably needs to be a structured argument for *your* point of view, and your marker will expect that what you have written is *your* argument. If you want advice about whether you are on the right track with your essay plan, it is wisest to consult with the lecturer who set the essay topic, or your tutor.

So, as we have discussed, there are benefits to collaborating with your fellow students, especially on the preparatory aspects of the research report or essay. In contrast, when it comes to the final written work, your marker needs to be confident that what is written is your own work, reflecting your own research and understanding, except where explicitly acknowledged. Using other people's ideas, argument, or expression without acknowledgment is considered plagiarism. If you and a fellow student work too closely together, which leads to you both developing (or co-authoring) material, this is considered collusion. Both plagiarism and collusion are very serious matters and will typically mean a loss of marks, perhaps zero, for that report or essay, and a meeting with your lecturer or tutor to discuss issues of academic honesty. At worst, plagiarism and collusion can, and have led to expulsion from Australian universities. For more information about your university's approach to academic honesty (or dishonesty), consult the university handbook or web page (e.g., code of conduct or student responsibilities) of your institution and any course guides produced by individual departments for subjects you are studying. Ignorance of these policies and procedures is not an acceptable excuse if you are caught submitting unoriginal material developed with or by a fellow student, or from books, journal articles, or the internet. It is also more detectable due to the use of originality-checking software such as Turnitin. There is more information about plagiarism from books, journals, and the internet in Chapter 3.

If you have checked that collaboration is acceptable, there are several things you can do to make sure you stay on the right side of the collaboration versus collusion divide. First, collaboration is probably best in the planning and early (e.g., reading) stages of a research report or essay. For example, this will allow you to share practical information like planning your approach and sharing references. You may also like to discuss your understanding of such shared references once you have read them to clarify your comprehension. However, when it comes to writing the report or essay it is essential that it is your own work. For this reason, you should never share your drafts, or work on writing your reports or essays with another student(s). Also, while we will repeatedly stress the value of getting assignments proofread, your proofreader should *not* be a student completing the same assignment. You should be writing for an intelligent layperson, which means a non-psychology student is ideal as a proofreader.

2.2 Information Gathering

All undergraduate essays and research reports in psychology will require you to read some material on the chosen topic. You need to decide what to read, and how much. There is an enormous amount of information available within the discipline of psychology and related areas. There are two important considerations that should help guide your thinking on this issue. First, the information you are given about your research report or essay is the best guide to the topic and scope of the project. Second, undergraduate psychology majors and graduate psychology training in Australasian universities is based on a *scientist/practitioner* model of psychology. The aim of these programs is the

