

**SMARTER STUDY SKILLS**

**HOW TO  
CITE,  
REFERENCE  
& AVOID  
PLAGIARISM  
AT UNIVERSITY**

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## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR SOURCING MATERIAL AND EVALUATING CONTENT

**Plan in advance.** Sometimes there will be heavy demand for texts that have been recommended by lecturers. If that is the case, ensure that you have arranged to reserve the publication or have booked a time to consult the reference in your library.

**Be critical in your reading.** Just because something has been printed does not make it valid; just because someone with a reputation in an area asserts an opinion, this does not mean that it is 'right'. Hence, in your reading, you should be prepared to look for flaws in the logic of argument, weak evidence or incorrect facts and be prepared to challenge with counter-argument, conflicting evidence or verified facts.

**Be systematic in your reading and recording publication data.**

When selecting source material, record publication details of everything you read on the topic. This is important because you may find that points dismissed in the early stages of your reading may emerge as more significant and you will save yourself time if you can quickly refer back to the list of publications you read earlier. Note also that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain authorship for online publications. It is important not to ignore these, but you may need to be more inventive in establishing the details. One tactic would be to look for clues in the header, body and footer information on-screen.

**Be aware of fact, opinion and conjecture.** When you are reading academic texts, you must be alert to what has been said that is undisputed fact, what is the opinion of the writer based on evidence they have presented or what is their conjecture arising out of a set of circumstances that remain hypothetical, or put more colloquially, guesswork. You can evaluate the worth of these writings by 'triangulation' of one author's views with those of others by consulting and comparing different sources that address the same or similar issues.

**Be systematic in your note-making.** Some people prefer to make notes as they read, although it is arguably more efficient to read first and then compile notes. It is also a good idea to note the date on which you did the reading/made the notes and, of course, the publication details should be recorded on your notes so that you have all the essential details for the reference list. Thorough guidelines on making notes effectively can be found in McMillan and Weyers (2012).



**4.1 Identify and browse specialist encyclopaedias.** For some disciplines there are specialist encyclopaedias (and dictionaries) that you should investigate. These could provide you with quick and reliable baseline information about diverse aspects of your discipline. These usually go beyond the level of information given in generic encyclopaedias and dictionaries.

**4.2 Identify available periodicals in your subject area.** Since web access has made periodicals (journals) easily available to all, there needs to be a word of caution regarding their use. Periodicals are generally more appropriate to the work of researchers, postgraduates and senior undergraduates. These publications are written by specialists for specialists; less experienced writers can become bogged down in the detail and jargon. The more fundamental appraisal provided in textbook reading can provide more basic understanding which may be all that is necessary, depending on the level of study. That said, knowing the key periodicals in your area can be useful because the articles in them can provide the framework for understanding of the wider field. Listen for references to periodicals or journals that might be made in lectures, but be aware that they may only be accessible through subscription. If your library does not include a particular journal in its portfolio of subscriptions, then this will not be available to you.

**4.3 Organise your list of references as you read.** In your reading, you may not realise whether a particular point will be used in your work or not. It is often useful to set up a temporary reference list of all the sources that you have read. In this way, should you discover that something that you read but from which you did not necessarily take notes is going to be required, then you can source the document more quickly.

# 5

## UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURE OF TEXT

### How to elicit meaning in material for potential citation

Your first thoughts outlined in your initial brainstorm will be supplemented by ideas you've read about and your reflections on these. As your understanding deepens, you will begin to select particular points in your source material that could possibly be incorporated into your discussion. In this way you will begin to be clearer about how you will construct your own text and your thinking will develop further as you write.

#### KEY TOPICS

- Models of approach in structuring academic text
- Selecting sources for citation

#### KEY TERMS

Function   Reflection   Refuting   Seminal literature   Value judgement   *verbatim*

When selecting an idea that you wish to integrate into your own work, there are four key questions that you need to ask yourself with regard to the original source text:

- 1 What part** of the text will you use? – Which part or parts of the text best reflect the idea you wish to cite?
- 2 By whom** was it written? – Who was the author (+ name of publication)
- 3 When** was it written?
  - Date of publication – is this a recent piece of work or is it still valid and contemporary?
  - Is the date important to your appraisal of the literature and your current purpose?

- 4 Why** do you wish to include this? – What *function* (or purpose) will this particular citation perform in your own writing? For example, will this point be in support of the case you are making or does it represent a counter-argument?

Points 1 to 4 were covered in **Chapter 4**; this current chapter examines the fourth question about the types of judgements you may need to make when selecting the ideas you wish to include as particular text references within your work. This involves understanding the range of models that you might adopt in constructing your text.

### Noting page numbers for future reference



In the initial stages, when you are noting *verbatim* text, you may not know whether you are going to quote or paraphrase the content. Therefore, in addition to noting all the publication details, it is worth noting the page number of the selected text so that you have that information to hand if you decide to present this as a *quotation* within your own writing as you will need to provide page numbers so that readers, if they wish, could consult the original source.

## MODELS OF APPROACH IN STRUCTURING ACADEMIC TEXT

The nature of academic writing often follows particular patterns depending on the purpose of the writing and the level of study. However, although this can be a matter of scale, the principles are the same. Seven of the most common models of constructing academic text are shown in Table 5.1.

Within their writing, even within the same text, writers may adopt different approaches. For example, in order to conduct an objective analysis, the writer may adopt the situation-problem-solution-evaluation-recommendation model (or SPSER) (Table 5.1). Table 5.2 shows in greater detail how the writer can construct a case step-by-step, all the while considering different aspects of the issue or situation being analysed. In this particular example, this involves the writer in describing a process, presenting positive and negative aspects, stating an opinion and giving reasons in support of that opinion. These aspects of the text are known in language terms as ‘functions’; in

**Table 5.1 Seven of the most common structural models used in academic writing.** These models are explained in greater detail in McMillan and Weyers (2012).

Type of model	Definition
<b>1 Chronological</b>	Describing a process or sequence
<b>2 Classifying</b>	Ordering objects or ideas
<b>3 Common denominator</b>	Identifying a common characteristic or theme
<b>4 Phased</b>	Identifying short/medium/long-term aspects
<b>5 Analytical</b>	Examining an issue in depth by considering a situation, the problem within it, solution(s), evaluation of the solution(s) and possibly a recommendation (See Table 5.2)
<b>6 Thematic</b>	Commenting on a theme in each aspect of the work
<b>7 Comparative/contrastive</b>	Comparing and contrasting (often within a theme or themes)

**Table 5.2 How writing within the analytical (SPSER) model relates to functions.** This framework provides a good basis for organising writing, particularly where the issues are complex. It encourages a methodical approach that can help the underlying thinking that goes on even in the process of writing itself.

<b>1 Situation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describing</b> the context perhaps in a chronological way or by themes or, in the research case, by outlining the seminal literature. This simply reports what the situation involves <i>without expressing any opinion</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>2 Problem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describing</b> the problem as the writer perceives it, based on evidence available. Sometimes this will involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>presenting supporting evidence</b> and/or</li> <li>– <b>presenting contradictory evidence</b>.</li> </ul> At this stage, normally no opinion is expressed. </li> </ul>
<b>3 Solution(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describing a possible solution or solutions.</b></li> </ul>
<b>4 Evaluation of solution(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Giving reasons for favouring</b> each solution possibly by providing evidence from the literature or from data.</li> <li>• <b>Giving reasons for refuting (rejecting)</b> each solution possibly by providing evidence from the literature or from data.</li> </ul>
<b>5 Recommendation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stating an opinion.</b></li> <li>• <b>Giving reasons for that opinion</b> possibly by providing evidence from the literature or from data.</li> </ul>

well-written text, it should be possible to identify the ‘function’ in each paragraph. They are the underpinning constructs of extended writing formats such as those required at higher academic levels. This is a useful concept in both analysing reading and in framing your own writing. Table 5.3 shows some examples of functions that may be used to incorporate citations as part of the discussion within academic texts.

**Table 5.3 Examples of roles citations perform in academic writing.** Citation of the work of others is fundamental to academic writing; this can be included in the introduction where existing literature is reviewed or later in the work, for example, to explain theoretical approaches or interpretation within the conclusion of a report style text. They would appear throughout a literature review.

Role in discussion	Function	Action
Examining existing literature	Reporting/describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outlining work done to date chronologically</li> </ul>
	Reporting/describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outlining work done to date thematically</li> </ul>
	Exemplifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving examples</li> </ul>
	Classifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grouping aspects into categories or themes</li> </ul>
	Justifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining reasons for development of work thus far</li> </ul>
Presenting a viewpoint	Asserting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stating a viewpoint</li> </ul>
	Observing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging a piece of information</li> </ul>
	Making a claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposing an idea/position</li> </ul>
	Justifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting evidence in support</li> </ul>
	Surmising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggesting a possible theory or consequence</li> </ul>
Structuring an analysis or argument	Evaluating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting positive views in favour of a position</li> </ul>
	Contradicting/ Refuting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting counter-arguments or views</li> </ul>
	Endorsing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing agreement with a viewpoint</li> </ul>
Comparing and contrasting approaches	Critiquing work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering strengths</li> <li>• Considering weaknesses</li> </ul>
Cause and effect relationships	Identifying relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining the reasons that result in particular situations or conditions</li> </ul>