

Paragraph and Sentence Structure

Paragraphing

Paragraphing is another important feature of essay structure. Paragraphs are units of thought which help to break a large body of text into smaller sections so that it is easier to read and to understand. In a well-constructed essay each new point in the argument is presented and developed in a new paragraph. Each paragraph of an essay should contain:

- a topic sentence, and
- one or more supporting sentences.

The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. While it is often the opening sentence, it can also occur in other positions within the paragraph, and may even be the final sentence. The remaining sentences elaborate upon, and provide evidence for, the idea expressed in the topic sentence. There are many ways in which they can do this. Some possible techniques are: *definition, classification, analysis, examples and statistics, comparison and contrast, examination of cause and effect.*

Example of paragraph structure

<u>Whether exercise can</u> also prolong life, and offer protection against coronary disease is less certain. A major study of the exercise habits of a group of American college graduates (Paffenbarger et al., 1993) concluded that those who participated in sport during the fifteen year time frame of the study had a lower risk of coronary disease, including a 23-29% lower chance of dying from any disease, than those who were non-participants. Extreme caution is needed when interpreting such findings, however, since it is not known if those in the non-participant group were free of disease at the beginning of the study, or if those who participated in sport were simultaneously following a cholesterol lowering diet. The fact that the difference in survival rate between the two groups was only nine months raises further questions about the significance of the findings.	Topic sentence
	First supporting sentence
	Second supporting sentence
	Third supporting sentence

Sentences

In academic writing you are expected to write **grammatically complete** sentences. This means that each sentence in your essay should consist of a complete thought, and should make sense by itself. Using this explanation as a guide you should now be able to see that “*Everyone enjoys a holiday.*” is a complete thought, and therefore a sentence, whereas “*enjoying a holiday*” is not, because it is an incomplete statement which requires more information before it can stand alone.

To be grammatically complete a sentence requires a **verb** and a **subject**. The subject tells you who or what the sentence is about, while the verb tells you about the subject ie. what it does, did, will do etc, or about its existence. e.g.,

<u>subject</u>	<u>verb</u>	OR	<u>subject</u>	<u>verb</u>
Duty	calls		The tree	fell

Subjects and verbs can be single words or groups of words, e.g.,

<u>subject group</u>	<u>verb group</u>
Extreme caution	may be needed.

Sometimes, the verb may also have a complement (i.e., a group of words which provide more information about the verb). e.g.,

<u>subject</u>	<u>verb</u>	<u>complement</u>
The small difference in survival rate	raises	further questions about the significance of the findings.

All of the sentences that have been described so far are **simple** sentences that consist of only one **clause** (ie. a group of words that contains a verb). Many sentences, however, consist of more than one clause. Such sentences may contain two or more **independent** clauses (ie. clauses which contain the basic or essential information and which make sense standing alone). e.g.,

<u>independent clause</u>		<u>independent clause</u>
The storm flooded roads	and	tore off roofs.

Sentences may also be made up of a combination of **independent** and **dependent** clauses (ie. clauses which do not contain essential information, and which depend on the main clause).

Example one:

<u>part of independent clause</u>	<u>dependent clause</u>	<u>remainder of independent clause</u>
Damage from the storms	which have hit England recently	is enormous

<u>dependent clause</u>	<u>independent clause</u>
If the rain continues	Even more areas will be flooded.

Example two:

<u>dependent clause</u>	<u>independent clause</u>
Even though she spent a lot of time looking for resources	the student was not able to find the information

dependent clause
her lecturer said was essential for the assignment.

Special joining words or **conjunctions** are used to combine clauses in sentences. Independent clauses are joined by the conjunctions *and*, *but*, and *or*, while dependent clauses can be combined by using such words as: *although*, *since*, *because*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *yet*, *while*, *whereas*, *if*, *when*, etc.

Active and passive sentences

The normal order of sentences is subject, verb, object. In active sentences the subject is the *performer* of the action, whereas in passive sentences the subject is the *receiver* of the action. In passive sentences the main verb is also preceded by a form of the verb '*to be*' (i.e., am, is, are, was, were, be,

being).

Active and passive pairs of sentences have essentially the same meaning, but differ in the way the **relationships** between the participants are presented. Active sentences have the advantage of being clear and direct, but there are situations in which you might want to be more tactful. In this case you would use the passive. Using the passive instead of the active voice enables you to:

- place certain material towards the end of the clause where it may receive the **emphasis** of final position;
- omit any mention of an **agent** where this is unimportant or unknown, and concentrate attention upon the issue or process. This is particularly useful when you want the reader to focus on the information or argument being presented, and not on the writer or speaker.

Example

Active	subject	verb	object
	You	have not paid	your bill.
Passive	subject	main verb + verb 'to be'	
	Your bill	has not been paid.	

Examples of active and passive constructions

Active	Passive
I will pick him up	He will be picked up
The board did not show interest	No interest was shown by the board
We cannot find any record of your account	No record can be found of your account
We will have to make wage cuts	Wage cuts will have to be made
We made a mistake	A mistake has been made
You have overdrawn your account	Your account has been overdrawn

Some common faults in sentence structure

Student essays are often difficult to read because of poorly constructed sentences. Common problems are:

Sentence fragments

Sentence fragments are groups of words that do not express a complete thought, and that do not make sense on their own. e.g. “*Research that is poorly conducted.*” This statement contains a dependent clause (“*that is poorly conducted*”) describing “*research*”, but no main clause. Consequently, it does not make sense by itself. To complete the sense, a statement such as “*does not provide reliable results*” needs to be added.

Often, when a group of words begins with a *conjunction*, it is a dependent clause, a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence. Look for the conjunction that signals a dependent clause in a sentence. These are words such as *that, when, even though, as, if, so, after, once, unless, until, because, before, since, whenever, wherever, however, although, because, while, which, what, who*.

A sentence may also be a fragment because it does not contain a subject and/or a verb, e.g.,
“The student reviews his module notes. Two hours before the audio conference. He is keen to be prepared for the lecture.”

In this example, “Two hours before the audio conference.” does not contain a verb, so it is not a sentence. This fragment could be eliminated in one of two ways.

1. Add the fragment to the sentence before or after it, making sure the new sentence makes sense.
e.g. “The student reviews his module notes two hours before the audio conference.” Or
2. Add a new subject/verb to the fragment to form a complete sentence.
e.g. “**He reads** them two hours before the audio conference.”

To spot a fragment put each phrase through a simple test:

Does it have a verb and/or a subject?

Can the phrase make sense standing alone (is it a dependent clause or phrase)?

Misplaced modifiers

Misplaced modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that do not point clearly to the word or words they modify in a sentence.

1. **Limiting modifiers** (*only, hardly, even, almost, nearly, just*) should be placed in front of the words they modify. The entire meaning of a sentence can be changed if you place these single word modifiers next to the wrong word. e.g

Unclear:

“The guests **almost ate** all of the food.” (the guests can’t “**almost eat**” all of the food).

Revised:

“The guests ate **almost all** of the food.” (**most** of the food was eaten).

2. Place modifying phrases and clauses as close as possible to their **headword**, the word or phrase they modify. e.g.

Unclear

“The mayor was described as a round, squat man with a droopy beard weighing 60kg.”

Revised

“The mayor was described as a round, squat man weighing 60kg with a droopy beard.” (60kg describes the **man**, not the beard).

3. Sentences should flow from subject to verb to object without lengthy interruptions along the way. When this happens, the sentence becomes unclear e.g.

Unclear

“Susan, after trying to phone for a taxi, decided to walk to the station.”

Revised

“After trying to phone for a taxi, Susan decided to walk to the station.”

4. A **squinting modifier** is an ambiguously placed modifier that can modify either the word **before** it or the word **after** it. It is said to be “squinting” in both directions at the same time. To correct a squinting modifier, place the modifier so that it clearly modifies its headword. e.g.

Unclear:

“The lottery win that everyone thought would satisfy them **totally** disillusioned them.”

Revised:

“The lottery win that everyone thought would **totally satisfy** them disillusioned them.” (They were expected to be totally satisfied.)

or

*"The lottery win that everyone thought would satisfy them **totally disillusioned** them." (They were totally disillusioned with the lottery win.)*

5. **Infinitives** ("to" + verb such as "to be", "to go", "to eat", "to run") usually should not be split unless necessary in writing. e.g.

Unclear:

*"She hoped **to**, by doing lots of revision and studying, pass the exams."*

Revised:

*"She hoped **to** pass the exams by doing lots of revision and studying."*

6. **A Dangling Modifier** is a word or phrase that does not refer logically to any word or word group in a sentence. When a sentence begins with a modifying word, phrase or clause, we must make sure the next thing that comes along can, in fact, be modified by that modifier. e.g.

Unclear:

*"Born in New Zealand, **it** is natural to enjoy eating roast lamb." This is unclear because "it" was not born in New Zealand.*

Revised:

"For a person born in New Zealand, it is natural to enjoy eating roast lamb." Or,

*"Born in New Zealand, **I** enjoy eating roast lamb."*

In the second sentence, a subject "I" is introduced.

To correct a dangling modifier we can

- **create a new subject;**

Unclear:

"Using a microscope, the wings of the butterfly were examined." (The modifier cannot logically modify the word wings.)

Revised:

*"Using a microscope, **the scientist** examined the wings of the butterfly." (The scientist is the subject and refers back to who is using the microscope.)*

- **create a dependent clause.**

Unclear:

*"Planted in the field only a month ago, its **size** surprised the farmers." (The first phrase cannot logically modify the word size.)*

Revised:

*"Because **the turnip** had been planted in the field only a month ago, its **size** surprised the farmers."*

Parallel structure

Parallel structure means using grammatically consistent words, phrases, clauses or sentence structures to express ideas that have the same level of importance. When constructing a sentence, use the same pattern of words, such as all *-ing* words, all verbs in the past tense, all starting with nouns, or not changing from the active voice to the passive voice.

Types of parallel structure

1. Words and Phrases

- (a) **Coordinated ideas** of equal importance, connected by "*and*", "*but*", "*or*", or "*nor*".

With the *-ing* form of word: e.g.

Unbalanced:

*"I am looking forward **to meeting** you and **to hear** about your trip."*

Parallel:

"I am looking forward to meeting you and to hearing about your trip."

The *-ing* is matched with the *-ing* form in this sentence.

With infinitive phrases: e.g.

Unbalanced:

"Jane likes to ski, run, skate and swimming."

Parallel:

"Jane likes to ski, run, skate and swim." (or *"Jane likes to ski, to run, to skate and to swim."*)

(Note: You can use "to" before all the verbs in a sentence or only before the first one.)

(b) Compared ideas

With the *-ing* form of word e.g.

Unbalanced:

"He prefers writing assignments rather than to sit exams."

Parallel:

"He prefers writing assignments rather than sitting exams."

The *-ing* form is paired with another *-ing* form.

With infinitive phrases:

Parallel:

"He prefers to write assignments rather than to sit exams."

The infinitive is paired with another infinitive.

With articles and prepositions:

Parallelism requires that an article (*a, an* or *the*) or a preposition (*by, for, to, in, at, on, since, etc*) applying to all items in a series must either appear before the first item only, or be repeated before each item. e.g.

Unbalanced:

A dollar, a pound, lire or yen.

In January, February, or in March

Parallel:

A dollar, a pound, a lire or a yen

In January, February or March or *(in January, in February or in March)*

(c) Correlative expressions/ideas (such as *not only/but also, both/and, either/or, neither/nor* and *whether/or*) should also be parallel. Here, the kind of word or part of a sentence that **follows** the first expression must be the same as the kind following the second. e.g.

Unbalanced:

"The earthquake not only wrecked railway lines but also the trains."

In this case, the verb "wrecked" cannot balance the noun "trains." The sentence should be rewritten so that "wrecked" appears **before** "not only", and so that *nouns* follow both connectors.

Parallel:

"The earthquake wrecked not only railway lines but also the trains."

2. Clauses

When elements that have the same function in a sentence are not presented in parallel structures, such as changing from active to passive, not matching nouns with nouns, and not matching verbs with verbs, the sentence will have faulty parallelism. e.g.

Unbalanced:

"The lecturer told the students that they should do a lot of study, that they should get a lot of sleep and to do some relaxation exercises before the exam."

Parallel:

"The lecturer told the students that they should do a lot of study, that they should get a lot of sleep

and that they should do some relaxation exercises before the exam.”

or

*“The lecturer told the students that they should **do** a lot of study, **get** a lot of sleep and **do** some relaxation exercises before the exam.”*

Unbalanced:

“I will go to the library tomorrow, returning the book that is five days overdue, and apologised for holding it up.”

Parallel:

“I will go to the library tomorrow, return the book that is five days overdue, and apologise for holding it up.”

Lack of subject-verb agreement

The correct form should be used i.e. a singular subject needs a singular verb and a plural subject needs a plural verb. E.g. *“The rose **is** red.” “Violets **are** blue.”*

Apply the following “rules” to avoid confusion.

1. Ignore words and phrases that come between the subject and verb:
e.g. *“**The rose**, as well as the tomatoes, **is** red.”*
*“**Violets**, as well as the sky, **are** blue.”*
2. When the subject of a sentence is made up of two or more nouns or pronouns joined by “and” a plural verb is used:
e.g. *“**The rose and the tomatoes are** red.”*
*“**He and his friends are** ...”*

Note: phrases such as “as well as”, “in addition to”, and “along with” are not the same as “and” when inserted between the subject and the verb. They do not change the number of the subject. See Example 1.

3. Singular subjects joined by “or”, “nor”, “either ... or”, or “neither ... nor” take a singular verb.
e.g. *“Either the **student** or the **teacher** was lying.”*
4. If **one** subject is singular and **one** plural, the verb agrees with the closest subject when two or more subjects are joined by “or”, “nor”, “either ... or”, or “neither ... nor”.
e.g. *“Neither the **waiter** nor the **chefs** are aware of the fire in the restaurant.”*
*“Neither the **waiters** nor the **chef** is aware of the fire in the restaurant.”*
5. “It” is always followed by a **singular** verb.
e.g. *“**It is** their holiday that will be ruined.”*
6. When the subject follows the verb (particularly in sentences starting with “there is”, “there are” or “here is”, “here are”, check carefully to see that the verb agrees with the subject. Since “there” is never the subject, the verb agrees with what follows.
e.g. *“There **are two questions** I would like to ask you.”*
*“There **is a long queue** to buy bread.”*
7. When used as **subjects**, words such as “each”, “each one”, “either”, “neither”, “everyone”, “everybody”, “anybody”, “anyone”, “nobody”, “somebody”, “someone”, “no one” are **singular** and require a **singular** verb.
e.g. *“**No one is** allowed out of their dormitories after nine pm.”*
“Each of the students has to attend a residential school. (Even though “of the students” (a

- prepositional phrase) is plural, remember it is “*Each*” which is the singular subject.
8. Other words such as “*none*”, “*any*”, “*all*”, “*more*”, “*most*” and “*some*” may, however, take either singular or plural verbs depending on what they are referring to. (Is the thing referred to countable or not?) The phrases “*of the carrots*” and “*of the puzzle*” do affect the subject here because they tell you whether you are talking about a part of one thing (singular) or about a number of things (plural).
e.g. “*Some of the carrots are mouldy.*”
“*Some of the puzzle is missing.*”
 9. Look at the subject, not its complement, when deciding agreement with linking verbs.
e.g. “*The future is flat screen televisions.*”
“*Flat screen televisions are the future..*”
 10. When collective nouns refer to the group acting as a **whole** such as *team, group, family, class* and *committee*, they require **singular** verbs, and when the group is acting as **individuals**, they require **plural** verbs.
e.g. “*The committee is meeting this week.*”
“*The members of the committee are going to discuss fundraising methods.*”
 11. First person singular subjects require singular verbs, and first person plural subjects require plural verbs.
e.g. “*I was busy.*”
“*We were busy.*”
Second person subjects require plural verbs.
e.g. “*You seem busy.*”
Third person singular subjects require singular verbs, but third person plural subjects require plural verbs.
e.g. “*He seems busy.*”
“*They seem busy.*”
 12. Nouns such as “*civics*”, “*dollars*”, “*mathematics*”, “*measles*”, and “*news*” require singular verbs.
 13. Nouns such as “*scissors*”, “*glasses*”, “*tweezers*”, “*trousers*”, and “*shears*” require plural verbs.

Run-on sentences, Comma splices, Fused Sentences

A “run-on” sentence or comma splice occurs when two independent clauses (sentences) are blended into one without using enough punctuation, such as a semi-colon, or a comma with a conjunction (“*and*”, “*but*”, “*for*”, “*or*”, “*nor*”, “*so*”, “*yet*”, “*which*”). The length of a sentence does not have anything to do with whether a sentence is a run-on or not. It is a structural flaw. A fused sentence occurs when two independent clauses are joined with **no** punctuation.e.g.

Incorrect:

“*Howard Hughes was a billionaire, he was also a recluse.*” – *comma splice*
A comma is not strong enough to hold these two complete thoughts together.
“*Howard Hughes was a billionaire he was also a recluse.*” – *fused sentence*

Revised:

“*Howard Hughes was a billionaire. He was also a recluse.*” or
“*Howard Hughes was a billionaire; he was also a recluse.*” or
“*Howard Hughes was a billionaire, and he was also a recluse.*”

To repair run-on sentences:

- place a full stop between the two complete thoughts;
- place a semi-colon between the two complete thoughts;
- place a comma and a linking word (such as “which” or “and”) between the two complete thoughts;
- place the less important idea in a dependent clause, creating a complex sentence.

Run-on sentences can occur

1. when an independent clause gives an order or directive based on what was said in the first independent clause: e.g.

Incorrect:

“The last module contains essential facts and figures, you should revise this in depth for the final examination.”

Revised:

“The last module contains essential facts and figures. You should revise this in depth for the final examination.”

Or

“The last module contains essential facts and figures; you should revise this in depth for the final examination.”

Or

“The last module contains essential facts and figures, and you should revise this in depth for the final examination.”

2. when two independent clauses are connected by a transitional expression such as “however”, “moreover”, “nevertheless”, the transitional word must be preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma. e.g.

Incorrect:

“Bill often went to the cinema to see a new film, however, Jane preferred to wait until the film came out on video.”

Revised:

“Bill often went to the cinema to see a new film; however, Jane preferred to wait until the film came out on video.”

or

“Bill often went to the cinema to see a new film. Jane, however, preferred to wait until the film came out on video.”

3. when the second of two independent clauses contains a pronoun that connects it to the first independent clause. e.g.

Incorrect:

“The refugees were not spies, they were asylum seekers.”

Revised:

“The refugees were not spies. They were asylum seekers.”

or

“The refugees were not spies; they were asylum seekers.”

4. when the ideas in two independent clauses which are not of equal importance are joined by a comma. e.g.

Incorrect:

“George Orwell’s novel “1984” worried people when it was published, its message was too grim.”

Revised:

“George Orwell’s novel “1984” worried people when it was published because its message was

too grim.”

Punctuation

Sentences which lack punctuation can also be difficult to read. Consequently, knowing when and how to use punctuation marks is extremely important. You should think of punctuation marks as **signals** which are designed to help the reader to understand your intentions. Here are some guidelines which will help you to use punctuation marks more effectively.

A Full stop... marks the end of a sentence. Or it marks an abbreviation: *abbrev.* ; *diff.*

A Comma,....

1. Separates items in a list:
The colours of the flowers were red, white, pink and yellow.
2. Separates the main statement from other parts of a sentence. Additional information can come before, or after, the main statement:
The temperature is usually around 20 degrees Celsius, although today it is 28 degrees.
3. Sets off extra information in the main statement:
His sister, a marathon runner, is often overseas.
4. Separates two main statements joined by a conjunction:
You may leave at 2pm, but only today.
5. Follows an adverbial used at the beginning of a sentence:
Many people enjoyed the music. However, some felt it was a disappointment.
6. Separates a non-defining relative clause from the rest of the sentence. If there is no comma, the clause will be a defining relative clause. A **defining relative clause** (without a comma) identifies a person or thing in the main clause (sometimes called an ‘identifying clause’), and provides essential information about the subject or object **without which the sentence would make no sense**. The clause is introduced by a relative pronoun: *who* or *that* for people, and *which* or *that* for things.

A **non defining relative clause** (with a comma) provides extra information not essential to the sentence. The comma separates the **non essential information** from the main clause.e.g.

My mother, who lives in London, is 79 years old.

The weather, which had been hot for weeks, suddenly turned bitterly cold.

Peter, whose flight had been delayed, arrived at the conference two days late.

So in a sentence such as,

A child who screams for attention is best ignored a defining relative clause, if we put commas in, as in:

A child, who screams for attention, is best ignored,

then this sentence would mean that we should ignore **all** children which is probably not good advice to give to parents!

A Colon :::

Is used to indicate that an explanation, example, or a list follows. Can replace expressions like *namely*, *for example*, *such as*.

1. Introduces a list or a series of examples:

You'll need three things for your exam: a pen, a ruler, and a calculator.

2. Introduces a quotation or lines of a dialogue:

Jim: Will you be gone long?

Helen: Not very long.

Semicolon;;

1. Acts as a weak form of the full stop:

I found it hard to sleep last night; it must have been all the coffee and wine I drank.

2. Acts as a strong form of a comma to separate items in a series:

The members of the sub-committee are Jennifer Newman, Personnel; Peter James, Marketing; and a representative from Media Relations.

Parenthesis ()

Parentheses are used for extra, non-essential material included in a sentence. They enclose material which is not part of the flow of thought in a sentence or paragraph. Dates, sources, or ideas that are subordinate to the rest of the sentence are set apart in parentheses. e.g.

To moderate the amount of fat you eat, you should use salad and vegetable dressings, and sauces sparingly (many of these are high in fat) or choose low-fat varieties.

Ellipsis ...

An ellipsis may be used in an assignment when you are quoting references or other material and you want to omit some words. The ellipsis consists of three evenly spaced dots (full stops) with spaces between the ellipsis and surrounding letters or other marks. e.g.

Full text

During the growing years, physical activity is an important factor if normal development of the child is to be maintained. This fact is now well accepted. However, in recent years a debate has arisen regarding the potential benefits or risks of excessive physical training on the physical growth and development of children.

Text with ellipsis

During the growing years, physical activity is an important factor if normal development of the child is to be maintained. ... However, in recent years a debate has arisen regarding the potential benefits or risks of excessive physical training on the physical growth and development of children.

Note:

1. If the omission comes at the **end** of a sentence as in the sentence above, the ellipsis will be placed after the full stop, making a total of four dots. ...
Notice that there is no space between the full stop and the last character of the sentence.
2. In **mid**-sentence, a space should appear between the first and last ellipsis marks and the surrounding letters ... such as in this sentence.

3. The ellipsis can also be used to indicate a pause in the flow of a sentence and is especially useful in quoted speech. e.g.
Alice thought and thought ... and then thought some more.
4. If words are left off at the end of a sentence, use ellipsis marks (preceded and followed by a space) and then indicate the end of the sentence with a full stop... .
5. If one or more sentences are omitted, end the sentence before the ellipsis with a full stop, and then insert your ellipsis marks with a space on both sides. ...

Quotation marks “ ”

1. Set off spoken words from the rest of the material:
We all shouted, “Come on!”
2. Indicate a title, or a word or idea being discussed:
Have you read Jane Austen’s “Mansfield Park?”
What is your understanding of the term “irony”?
3. Used when quoting material from a text:
As Bouchard states “...failure to exercise is dangerous.”(1975:26)
4. Single quotation marks are used to indicate quotes within quotes:
“Do you know what ‘love’ really means?” he asked.

The dreaded apostrophe!

The apostrophe is probably the most misunderstood punctuation mark. If you are unsure about how to use it, check your understanding against the following examples.

To show ownership

Put the apostrophe either before the ‘s’ or after the ‘s’ depending on whether there is one owner or more than one:

The student’s books are on the desk. (One student)
The students’ books are on their desks. (More than one student)
The students’ flat is always a mess. (More than one student.)

In the case of plurals with no ‘s’ on the end (eg. women, children, geese) the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’. (Ask yourself, who is the owner? If the answer does not have an ‘s’, put the apostrophe before the ‘s’) e.g.

The women own the house > the women’s house.
The children own the toys > the children’s toys.
The honking of the geese > the geese’s honking.

To indicate possession when the plural already ends in ‘s’, just put an apostrophe on the end:

The lions’ water source has dried up. The wolves’ howling kept me awake.
The Jones’ house is on the corner.

When a word is contracted:

it is > it’s; do not > don’t; they are > they’re; you are > you’re
The cheque is in the mail > The cheque’s in the mail.
She has got a lot of study to catch up on > She’s got a lot of study to catch up on.

Do not use an apostrophe for possessive pronouns: ours yours hers its whose theirs

Ours is the tidiest flat in the block. Hers is always untidy. Theirs is ok. Whose book is it anyway?

The case of “its”:

The words **its** and **it’s** are usually the most confused. Only put an apostrophe in **its** when it is an abbreviation for **‘it is’**, and remember, possessive pronouns do not take an apostrophe:

It is terribly hot > It’s terribly hot.

It is a good house but its roof leaks > It’s a good house but its roof leaks.

Do not put an apostrophe in plurals just because they end in an ‘s’.

Please buy some potatoes and tomatoes, and order some pizzas.

NOT: *potato’s, tomato’s, pizza’s.*

Possessive forms of compounds:

Single compounds: before **‘s’**: *her daughter-in-law’s gift, a friend of mine’s car.* (only one daughter-in-law)

Plural compounds: after **‘s’**: *the daughters-in-law’s gift.* (more than one daughter-in-law)

Friends of mine’s car (bit silly and clumsy - use “*the car of my friends instead*”).

Moana’s and Rob’s new cars are in the parking lot.

(Each of them has a new car and ownership is a separate matter.)

Moana and Rob’s new car is in the parking lot.

(They share ownership; the possessive belongs to the entire phrase.)

Dawson and Clark’s study found that. (There was one study.)

Dawson’s and Clark’s studies found that . (Each did a study.)

NB. Watch out for computer spell checks - they are the worst enemy of correct apostrophe use as they tend to put an apostrophe in any word ending in ‘s’!

Cohesion

The various elements which combine to form the text of your essay (ie. ideas, paragraphs, sentences) need to be closely related. This is achieved in several ways:

- by referring back to earlier words and ideas,
- by repeating words and ideas,
- and by the use of connectives.

When referring back to earlier words and ideas we often use *this*, *these*, and *those*.

Example

Reported benefits include weight control, lower levels of stress, improved blood pressure, and a reduced risk of coronary and cardiovascular disease. The evidence on which *these* claims are based, however, is questionable, and needs to be examined more closely.

In the case of people and things we use *pronouns*.

Example

Tara Art press was established in 1968. Initially, *it* was involved in very small jobs like creating visiting cards and letterheads.

Ideas can also be linked by *repetition*. This does not necessarily mean that the same word is repeated several times. A word may be repeated in a different form (eg. a noun instead of a verb), or may be replaced by a word with similar meaning.

Example

1st Reference	2nd Reference
It moves	This movement
The temperature is falling	This drop in temperature
Products are advertised	These ways of advertising
Regular exercise	Regular physical activity

Connectives

Another way of linking and organizing ideas in the text is to use connectives. These can have a variety of functions as you can see in the following table.

Use	Example	Use	Example
add idea	<i>and, also, as well as, furthermore, in addition</i>	add opposite idea	<i>but, however, on the other hand, in contrast, although</i>
add similar idea	<i>similarly, also, as, once again</i>	give example	<i>for example, for instance, as follows</i>
exception, reservation	<i>even though, still, yet, nevertheless</i>	give alternative, or repeat	<i>in other words, or rather, alternatively</i>
give cause/reason	<i>for, because, since, as</i>	give effect/reason	<i>therefore, thus, hence, consequently, as a result, so</i>
show time relationship	<i>presently, soon, while, later, shortly, before, afterwards</i>	show spatial relationship	<i>between, next, front, beyond, across</i>
give summary, conclusion	<i>therefore, in summary, to conclude, in short</i>	generalising/ give qualification	<i>in general, on the whole, in most cases, usually, frequently, mainly</i>
highlighting	<i>in particular, particularly</i>	transition	<i>now, as far as X is concerned, with regard to, as for...</i>
list ideas in time order or order of importance	<i>first, second, etc. then, next, finally</i>	referring	<i>who, which, when, where, whose, that</i>

Some tips on style

Do not make the mistake of thinking that because you are at university you have to use big words and very complicated sentence patterns. Your ideas may be complex, but your writing should be

- **clear** ie. Someone who knows nothing about the subject you are discussing should be able to make sense of what you are saying, even if they don't fully understand the details.
- **concise** ie. Be economical, and don't use more words than are necessary.
- **accurate** ie. State your intended meaning as unambiguously as possible, and make sure that you quote opinions and other sources correctly.
- **relevant** ie. Don't include unnecessary material which may divert the reader's attention away from your main point. Also, make sure that you are answering the question asked.