**CTEC3451 - Writing and Formatting your Main report**

**Structure**

Your deliverable should be divided into numbered sections and sub-sections. Each section deals with a major topic; if this comprises several components, use a sub-section for each.

Within a section/sub-section, text should be divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph consists of one or more sentences that together make a logical whole. To start a new train of thought, start a new paragraph.

**Language**

**‘Voice’**

It is preferable that all parts of the report (except possibly for the conclusions section), should be written in the ‘passive’. Do ***not*** use the first person (‘I’), nor phrases such as ‘the student’ and ‘the author’.

**Examples:**

Wrong: I found that many studies have been carried out into ...

Correct: Many studies have been carried out into ...

Wrong: The student decided to interview some of the lecturers ...

Correct: It was decided to interview some of the lecturers ...

In certain sections it is permissible to write using the first person, for example:

‘My project management skills greatly improved ...’.

However, it is possible to avoid using the first person ‘I’ or ‘My’ too many times by rephrasing the sentence.

**Example:**

Wrong: ‘The student produced an Entity-Relationship diagram ...’

OK in certain circumstances: ‘I produced an Entity-Relationship diagram ...’

Avoiding the first person (ideal): ‘An Entity-Relationship diagram was produced ...’

Before putting any part of your deliverable into the first person you should check with your supervisor.

Avoid contracted forms such as *isn’t*, *can’t*: in a formal deliverable these should be *is not*, *cannot* respectively.

**Tense**

It is important to use the correct tense in your report.

Present tense: what is the case ***now***.

Past tense: what happened in the ***past***.

Future tense: what will/is likely to happen in the ***future***.

You are critically reflecting on work that you ***have undertaken*** during the year, to produce a product that does something ***now***.

So:

When you are discussing what you did, use the ***past***tense.

When you are explaining what your product does, use the ***present*** tense.

**Examples:**

Wrong: Work will be undertaken to ... [future]

Correct: Work was undertaken to ... [past]

Wrong: The program will be able to ... [future]

Correct: The program is able to ... [present]

It is typically expected that the majority of the main body of your report will be written in ***past*** tense, as you will be reflecting on the processes you have undertaken during each stage of the project.

The critical evaluation / conclusion chapters that come towards the end of your report may typically contain more analysis in ***present*** tense, as you may be evaluating the extent to which you met the objectives of your project, or on occasion you may switch to ***future*** tense to discuss future enhancements for example.

It is of course possible to use any tense in any chapter, e.g. the introduction could use present tense to give a brief overview of what the final product does in order to provide the reader with further context for the rest of the report. But if you apply these rules you will generally be taking the correct approach.

**Page layout**

* Paper size: A4.
* Spacing: single or 1.5.
* Font: a matter of personal choice, but standard fonts for the main text such as Arial in 11pt is clear and readable; otherwise you can use Times New Roman 12pt. Use a bigger font for headings.
* Page numbers: number all pages, and show in the Contents List the pages where each section/sub-section starts.
* Figures: if used, place them centrally on the page and provide a number and title underneath (figure caption). It is advisable you use the “insert caption” feature of your word processor that ensures consecutive numbering and helps with cross-referencing figures within the main body of text and with creating automatically a list of figures.
* Tables: if used, place them centrally on the page and provide a number and title above (table caption). It is advisable you use the “insert caption” feature of your word processor that ensures consecutive numbering and helps with cross-referencing tables within the main body of text and with creating automatically a list of tables.
* Margins: 3cm on the left (to allow room for binding) and 2cm on the right, top and bottom are recommended.

**Proof-reading**

Use a spell-checker, but do not rely on this alone: it will not pick up ‘typos’ where a correctly-spelt but inaccurate word has been used, or substituted by the software.

Allow time to read carefully through your deliverable. You will be more likely to notice errors if you leave it aside and return to it a few days after writing. If you are not confident about your written English, ask someone else to read it too. So allow time in your planning for proof-reading and correction. Note that a proof reader may make comments but not make corrections.