

# Writing Style

*Editing your written work so it is free of errors and is in a consistent style is essential to producing a professional piece of work. Poorly edited work will certainly lose marks! This section describes common features of technical and academic writing.*

Once you have decided on your tone and style, use it consistently in your writing. This also applies to your tone and style for your oral presentations. If you are preparing a group report, your group should agree on a common format and style. This will ensure that the whole text has a consistent look and sound, and help prove that you have worked as a team.

## ***Aim to inform***

Scientific or technical writing differs from literary writing in a number of ways. Primarily, the aim of technical writing is to inform rather than to entertain. A simple and concise style is recommended.

An example of a literary sentence might read as:

*“The wind was blowing fiercely and the air outside was becoming chilled.”*

A scientific/technical sentence would probably read as:

*“The wind velocity was 45 kph which reduced the air temperature to 15°C.”*

Since the primary aim of the report writer is to inform, emotive language should be avoided. You should try to transmit information as objectively as possible.

## ***Be concise***

Avoid too many long sentences. Sentences with four or more clauses (or parts) can be confusing to read. Your text will often read better if you consider making two shorter sentences rather than one long sentence. If you need to include some qualification or an example, however, then a long sentence might be more appropriate.

An example of a long sentence may read as:

*“After consulting three manufacturers: Dibble and Co., Sooky Ltd., and Bungle Pty Ltd., we have found two types of temperature sensor devices for the air flow meter and both are simple in design but have inherent drawbacks.”*

More concise sentences might be:

*“Three manufacturers were consulted: Dibble and Co., Sooky Ltd., and Bungle Pty Ltd. Two temperature sensor devices were found for the air flow meter. Though the design is simple each has inherent drawbacks.”*

Use words and expressions economically. If you can use one word instead of two or three, then choose the one word. Often the single word is more precise and more suited to a written context. For example use the word “avoid” in preference to “get around.” Similarly, avoid long paragraphs. A simple but effective rule is that each paragraph should address one theme. The theme should be introduced in the opening sentence, developed in the body of the paragraph with a concluding remark made in the final sentence.

### ***Be correct***

You are responsible for checking your spelling, punctuation and grammar (particularly tenses!) not the computer! Do not depend on a spell checker.

*I have a spelling checker  
It came with my PC;  
It plainly marks four my revue  
Mistakes I cannot sea.  
I've run this poem threw it,  
I'm sure your pleased too no,  
Its letter perfect in it's weigh,  
My checker tolled me sew.*

(Source unknown)

Sometimes you can see errors more easily if you do not proof read your writing until a day or two after printing the draft. This is called 'the bottom-draw treatment'. Reading aloud can be helpful for 'hearing' errors that your eyes may miss.

### **What's wrong with this sentence?**

The Learning Centre at UNSW (located at G23 upper campus) has many resources on punctuation, grammar and spelling that you can be used to improve your written expression.

### ***Do not discriminate***

Nondiscriminatory language must be used when talking generally about people. Non- discriminatory language helps you avoid stereotyping, patronising and demeaning people on the basis of their gender, status or race. This issue will be even more important in the workplace when you graduate.

**Table 5. Non-discriminatory language**

<i>Instead of ...</i>	<i>Use in preference...</i>
workman	operator/employee
(to) man	staff/operate/use/work/direct
man hours	operating hours/working hours
man power	staff/workforce/personnel
tradesman	maintainer/tradesperson/carpenter...
workmanship	work skill/skill/quality of output
chairman	chairperson/chair
foreman	supervisor
businessman	business executive

## ***Be specific***

Specify what you are writing about. Be careful how you use words such as 'it', 'this', 'thing', 'way', 'someone'. This year's word is 'stuff'.

*"Day (1983) suggested a new way to make a clear TiO<sub>2</sub> solution."*

The word 'way' is vague and should be replaced with 'method', 'procedure', or 'technique'.

Do not use contractions of verbs and pronouns as these are 'spoken forms' (doesn't, can't, it's, they're). The formal writing you will do at university and in the workplace requires the full form (does not, can not, it is, they are).

## ***Lists of information***

Reports use lists for clarity and emphasis within the text. They are a means to succinctly summarise information. Do not overuse lists or the report will become fragmented and difficult to read. There are several ways to form a list in a report.

### **1. Individual sentences**

The opening sentence ends with a colon and each subsequent line ends with a semicolon:

Signals that humans can perceive include:

- speech signals;
- image or video signals; and
- audio signals.

### **2. An inventory**

Start each item on the list with lower case letters (unless abbreviations) and do not punctuate until the end:

#### **3.1 Equipment Required**

The following equipment will be required to program the MBTP RI:

- C MUX SubRack
- supplied with - 48V DC
- NEHC ATA Card (Flash card)
- PC with Flash writer
- NEHC
- NEHC Debug cable.

There should be a logical order to the sequence of items in the list. This could be moving from general to specific, most important to least important, largest to smallest component, and so on. A numbered list is useful if a sequence or series of steps applies to the order of points in the list.

## Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations and acronyms are commonly used in Electrical Engineering and Telecommunications. Abbreviations are pronounced as letters, e.g. UNSW, whereas acronyms are pronounced as words, e.g. BIBO, pronounced as 'beebow'.

The first time you use an abbreviation, you must spell out the full term followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses. Subsequent use of the term is then made by its abbreviation or acronym. Do not use punctuation with abbreviations.

*“The University of New South Wales (UNSW) is situated on Anzac Parade, Kensington. The best way to travel to UNSW is by public transport.”*

## Punctuation

Understanding when and how to use punctuation helps you express ideas clearly.

**Tabel 6. Punctuation Conventions**

Name	Symbol	Function	Examples
Full stop	.	To mark the end of a sentence.	Batteries can be used together with solar cells.
Colon	:	To introduce a list. Begin the list on a new line with a bullet point for each item in the list and a semicolon at the end of each line.	Worksite inductions are important for three reasons: • in an emergency ...; • a fire would...; and • newly 'inducted' workers...
Comma	,	Separates information into readable units. Such uses include: • after introductory phrases • around relative clauses giving extra information • between separate items listed in a sentence.	As early as the middle 19th century, track gauge, wheel-set diversions, vehicle loading gauge, and traction and buffing gear were so standardised that freight trains could cross smoothly from one rail network to another.
Apostrophe	'	Used to indicate ownership (whose) with nouns.	The engineer's hat can be found... XYZ Ltd's safety officer has...
Quotation marks	"..."	Indicates that the words enclosed in the quotations are from another source and are quoted exactly as in the original source.	Brake and Bates (1999) believe that the three-phase motor "may have no distinct optimal operating level" (p. 73).
Hyphen	-	Joins two words to create a single idea. Used when the spelling of two joined words would be awkward or obscure the meaning. Use only when necessary .	common-mode voltage high-speed network low-pass filter