

# Self Study Programs: Top Ten Writing Tips



[www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre](http://www.jcu.edu.au/students/learning-centre)

This module covers:

- Identifying the top ten tips for writing effectively at university
- Reviewing your knowledge of effective writing through a short activity





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# Top 10 Tips: Grammar and Punctuation

<b>1</b>	<b>Answer the question</b> <p>OK – you’re right. Technically “answer the question” has little to do with grammar and punctuation, but it is so important we have included it here anyway. It is THE NUMBER ONE tip. No matter how well you research, plan, edit, write – you will not get a good mark on your assignment if you fail to answer the question.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look at <u>all parts of your assignment task</u>.</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Check the assessment criteria</b> <p>Yes – you’re right again. “Check the assessment criteria” also has little to do with grammar and punctuation. But, again, it is so important it is THE NUMBER TWO tip. The more you can align your assignment with the assessment criteria, the more marks you get.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answer the question + meet marker expectations = happy days. ☺</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Check the content</b> <p>Well, this does actually have something to do with grammar and punctuation, albeit on the periphery. Basically, your content is meaningless unless someone else (your marker) can make sense of it. Part of this sense-making has to do with grammar and punctuation. The first place to start is to “check the content” of your assignment. Does it make sense to you? Ignore all the finer details at this stage; focus on <i>what</i> you are trying to communicate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you need to say more or less? Do you need to say some things more clearly?</li></ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Proofread</b> <p>Now we are definitely in the punctuation and grammar hotspot. Narrow your lens and look at the detail – every detail. Focus on <i>how</i> you are trying to communicate. Ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there lots of active sentences (subject-verb-object)? And is each sentence actually a sentence (no fragments or run-ons)?</li><li>• Have you sprinkled commas everywhere like confetti or not used them at all? Make sure your commas, full stops, colons, semi colons and any other punctuation device is in <i>exactly</i> the right spot.</li><li>• Is each and every word spelled correctly? Don’t rely on a spell-checker. <i>You</i> need to check. Try reading your essay backwards from the final word to the first to pick up spelling errors you may be overlooking.</li><li>• Is your paragraphing correct?</li><li>• Are all fonts, size, headings, sub-headings, spacing etc correct – and consistent?</li></ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>Edit</b> <p>After you have checked that: you have answered the assignment question/task, given the marker what they expect, have meaningful content, and have corrected all known errors – then you get to “edit” – yes, again.</p> <p>As much as 1/3 of your overall assignment time should be allocated to the editing process (ie. it is often suggested that you should allocate a 1/3 of your time to researching, 1/3 of your time to drafting and a 1/3 of your time to editing your work).</p> <p>Embrace the challenge – you are potentially moving your assignment up one whole grade!</p>

6	<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>Think about what you're writing and why – and for whom you are writing. You speak differently to different people (pets, children, spouse, co-workers, the Prime Minister) and writing is no exception.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check that your writing has the right tone and style.</li> </ul>
7	<p><b>Sentence Structure</b></p> <p>This is an important part of proofreading and editing. Check that each sentence is actually a sentence.</p> <p>Is a sentence  (this is actually a fragment) This is a sentence.  (this is a sentence – hooray!)</p> <p>Maybe it's a sentence it just sounds like a sentence <span style="float: right;">(this is actually a run-on)</span></p>
8	<p><b>Paragraph Structure</b></p> <p>Each and every paragraph should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A topic sentence (tells you what the paragraph is about)</li> <li>• Supporting sentences (usually about 5-7 sentences of info/evidence)</li> <li>• A concluding/linking sentence (helps your writing cohere/flow well)</li> </ul>
9	<p><b>Overall Structure</b></p> <p>Does your writing follow the expected conventions for a report or an essay or a wiki or a blog or a.....?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check your overall structure. Does your assignment have an introduction, main body and conclusion? Does it have headings/sub-headings or all the appropriate report sections?</li> </ul>
10	<p><b>Practical Considerations</b></p> <p>Yes – you're right again – 3 out of 3. We have slipped this one into the top ten because it merits attention.</p> <p>Make sure you have considered all the practical aspects of your assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you submitting the assignment in the right way/location? At the right time/due date? In the right style? With the right word limit? With the right cover sheet, margins and line spacing?</li> </ul> <p>Don't waste marks by forgetting these practical considerations, especially the word limit and the due date!</p>



**A well-placed comma could save your life!**

Let's eat Grandma.



Let's eat, Grandma.

You may like to check out the following related workshop notes and/or online modules from the JCU website *Writing and Maths Skills Online*: Excellent Essays, Write Reports, Punchy Punctuation and Stylish Sentences.

## Activity: Word Search

See if you can find the words (clues below) in the following word-maze.

A	R	S	E	M	I	C	O	L	O	N	A	L	L	P	T	Q
O	E	U	S	U	C	O	R	L	A	G	P	K	V	A	A	Z
Q	H	B	T	W	E	N	T	Y	S	C	O	N	C	I	S	E
U	C	J	U	T	T	C	I	K	S	H	S	D	R	R	K	E
O	F	E	H	O	M	L	V	N	E	K	T	Q	I	P	J	F
T	J	C	D	Y	N	U	D	L	S	J	R	W	E	O	Y	W
A	C	T	I	V	E	D	E	M	S	G	O	O	I	E	Q	Y
T	O	E	D	I	T	I	N	G	M	S	P	R	S	M	U	M
I	N	Z	W	J	V	N	C	N	E	U	H	D	D	R	E	A
O	C	W	B	E	F	G	I	I	N	Z	E	L	H	P	S	X
N	L	G	H	J	E	S	B	O	T	F	D	I	K	T	T	L
M	U	C	I	F	R	E	P	O	R	T	X	M	C	J	I	W
A	S	K	Q	L	K	N	O	P	Q	G	B	I	A	S	O	O
R	I	E	A	I	N	T	R	O	D	U	C	T	I	O	N	Y
K	O	U	I	F	Y	E	G	C	S	L	A	D	N	T	M	P
S	N	O	C	W	N	N	Y	R	Z	H	L	N	B	U	A	B
A	U	T	O	P	I	C	S	E	N	T	E	N	C	E	R	G
F	O	R	M	A	L	E	X	U	T	I	J	C	B	V	K	Q
B	A	E	M	I	M	L	A	Z	W	V	K	D	E	W	X	H
Z	Q	G	A	F	S	I	M	H	V	X	T	M	A	N	P	X

### ACROSS

1. This is used to separate two closely related sentences.
2. The average length of a sentence is about \_\_\_\_ words.
3. The first part of an essay.
4. An assessment type which contains many distinct sections.
5. Academic writing has a \_\_\_\_ tone.
6. This process follows the first draft.
7. The preferred type of sentence structure in effective writing.
8. Answer \_\_\_\_ parts of the assignment question.
9. To use only as many words as is necessary.
10. The first part of an essay paragraph.

### DOWN

1. The last part of an essay paragraph.
2. This is used to indicate possession.
3. This is used for short direct quotes.
4. The first part of an effective (active) sentence.
5. The first thing you double-check before starting an assignment.
6. The criteria you check before starting an assignment.
7. This is an important practical consideration.
8. The last part of an essay.
9. This is rarely used in academic writing.
10. Simple sentences do not usually have this.

## **Need More Assistance? Contact The Learning Centre**

*In person*

Visit a Learning Advice Desk located on the ground floor of the JCU Library (Townsville and Cairns)

*Submit a request online*

If you're not able to access our on-campus services, you can contact The Learning Centre for advice and remote assistance.

Send us a request now using our [contact form](#).

