ASSIGNMENT WRITING GUIDE

Prepared by SESE academic staff with contributions from the Division of Teaching and Learning (Academic Skills Development) and SCU Library

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Southern Cross University

School of Environment, Science & Engineering

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Unless otherwise directed by the Unit Assessor in the Unit Information Guide, all students must conform to the formatting described in the Assignment Writing Guide. The referencing style presented in the Writing Guide will be used for all first year units. Second and third year students may be required to use a different style to meet the requirements of a particular discipline.

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Section 1

Introduction

Learning to write assignments at university is essential to study success. It takes time to learn how to write assignments according to expectations in your course. Clear information about assignment requirements will be provided in unit materials, and your teachers will provide instruction and guidance.

During the course of your studies at Southern Cross University you will be required to prepare many written assignments. These will take several forms including:

- scientific reports
- essays
- literature reviews
- laboratory reports
- project proposals.

All of these types of assignments require specific skills in research, writing, and presentation, and the Unit Assessor will generally advise you of the different requirements. Despite this variety, there are some general principles which can be applied to nearly all forms of written work in Environmental Sciences and Engineering at SCU. This guide covers those basic principles and provides examples which should help you.

It is important to remember that every assessment task is unique. Always:

- **closely read assignment information** (assessment details and marking criteria) provided in unit materials
- **follow the instructions provided by the Unit Assessor**.

1.1 Online learning support

The **Academic Skills Development** team have produced some very useful online resources to assist you with developing study skills and tackling your assignments:

Assignment Navigator (http://www.scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/) is an online resource developed to help students to complete their assignments by the due date. It contains useful advice, short clips, activities and strategies to help you to successfully complete assignments.

Quick Guides (http://scu.edu.au/teachinglearning/index.php/5) provide help on getting started at university, preparing for and writing assignments, the different types of assignments, getting the best out of lectures and tutorials, effective reading skills, study skills, working in groups and preparing for exams.

Numeracy Resources (http://scu.edu.au/teachinglearning/index.php/4) provide a series of modules and short videos on topics such as whole numbers and integers, decimals, rates and ratios, measurement, linear relationships, logarithms, statistics and many more.

In addition there is a range of useful short videos available via the **ESE Student Centre** (you will see this website listed in MySCU under the heading "My Information and Workgroup Sites"). Click on **Study skills** in the left hand panel to access the following resources:

- Basic MySCU (how to use the MySCU website to complete a range of tasks)
- Basic library searching
- Word processing using Microsoft Word (basic to advanced skills)
- Basic calculations in Microsoft Excel
- Graphs in Microsoft Excel.

1.2 How to use this guide

This guide is designed to be used as the starting point for finding information on how to study successfully in the School of Environment, Science and Engineering, and contains specific advice on how to carry out most tasks associated with preparing and submitting assignments.

You will find a great deal of information in the guide itself, and it also contains links to a range of online resources that provide greater detail on specific topics – make sure that you familiarise yourself with the resources available from these websites (see Section 1.1 for details).

You should keep a copy of the guide handy and consult it regularly. It will provide you with valuable advice to assist you in achieving success throughout your degree.

Section 2

Understanding and organising your study

2.1 Blackboard MySCU site

Blackboard is your unit online learning site and is the hub of the unit. The Blackboard site functions as both a centralised location for unit learning materials, and as a learning space where you can interact with fellow students and your teachers.

Lecturers engage with students on the Blackboard online learning site through a range of resources and interactive activities, which may include:

- weekly information
- discussion forum questions
- frequently asked questions
- practice papers
- online quizzes
- lecture notes and/or recordings

Blackboard Collaborate sessions (real-time online teaching sessions that can also be recorded for viewing later – click on **Blackboard Collaborate** on the unit website to access user guides and support).

So through Blackboard you can:

- communicate with other students and staff by reading announcements, using discussion forums, emailing, engaging in virtual classroom sessions, etc.
- access your unit materials in Blackboard content areas
- collaborate and interact with other students
- complete online surveys, quizzes and tests
- access grades and feedback on assessment items
- use the links provided to relevant website resources.

Learning to how to access and navigate Blackboard is essential to studying in Environmental Sciences and Engineering. This is the case even if you are studying internally, on campus.

Make sure you put aside at least thirty minutes at the start of each session to explore the Blackboard site for each unit you are studying. Use this time to locate important areas of the site and to download essential unit materials such as the Unit Information Guide (UIG) and study guide. The headings down the **left side of the screen** are navigational buttons and will take you to different areas of the site.

Online learning support

Watch short videos on how to use Blackboard effectively via the "Study Skills" link on the **ESE Student Centre** on MySCU.

Remember:

- Blackboard sites change and develop during session as your teachers add more materials and notices.
- You cannot break the Blackboard site. Keep clicking buttons and exploring.
- Use the discussion board on your Blackboard site to post questions about assignments. Your questions will help other students.
- Check the notice board a few times a week (it will contain important announcements about assignments).

2.1 Unit Information Guide

The Unit Information Guide (UIG) is vitally important, and works like a compass for each unit of study by orienting you to the unit and providing essential information about what you will learn and how your learning will be assessed.

The UIG will be available on the Blackboard site under 'Unit Overview'. Make sure you always print out the UIG for each unit you study in the session.

Your UIG will contain the following information:

- **the Unit Statement**: this will give you an overview of the unit. You should read it carefully. It will cover aims and objectives of the unit, the graduate attributes and how they are assessed, the syllabus (what is taught), prescribed text and materials, and assessment requirements
- **assessment details**: a description of each assessment item, when it is due, how it should be structured, the word limit, marking criteria, submission instructions, and how late penalties will be applied
- suggested study timetable.

2.3 Assessment tasks

Get to know your assessment tasks by:

- reading through the **assessment** details in the UIG to make sure that you know what is required and how marks will be allocated
- making sure you use the **marking criteria** to plan, research, write and edit your assignments.

See section 3 for more detail.

2.4 Time management

Good time management is not only the key to reducing study stress, it is also critical to study success. Putting together an assignment that will attract a high mark cannot be done in a few hours, and it is essential to submit assignments by the due date to avoid late submission penalties. This means it is very important to **get started early**, and focus on managing the process of assignment completion carefully.

To submit assignments on time:

- **Identify the small tasks or steps involved in producing the assignment** (e.g. interpreting the assignment question, reading unit materials and making notes, using library databases to undertake research, brainstorming research findings, drafting, editing).
- **Estimate how long each small task will take** (e.g. interpreting the assignment question (20 mins), reading unit materials and making notes (2 hours) and so on).
- **Work backwards from the due date of the assignment to allocate small tasks to your weekly study schedule.**

2.4.1 Efficient management of assessment completion: tips and scenarios

Try to take a self-aware approach to assessment completion. Treat each assessment task like a project you are managing. This means taking on the role of 'project manager' and really thinking through how to manage the **process** of assignment production.

- Always note the **weighting** of assessment tasks. The higher the weighting, the more complex and time-consuming the assignment is likely to be.
- Take care to allocate the time to an assessment task that is associated with the weighting of the task. For example, an assessment task weighted at 10% will take less time to complete than an assignment weighted at 30%.

Scenario One: Get the little things out of the way to be able to focus on "THE BIG ONE".

Students often use this strategy but it only works for students who are very disciplined. What often happens is that a student will spend all their time getting the little things done and find that they don't have time for THE BIG ONE. When an assignment has a heavy weighting (30% or more) it is usually for a reason (i.e. it takes a lot of time and effort).

Scenario Two: Get THE BIG ONE DONE and then move onto the little ones.

This will work better but you may find yourself doing five little assignments over the course of a few days to get everything in on time. Some students also do THE BIG ONE in a rush and submit early, only to discover that the assignment is only half done. Don't rush into submitting an assignment too early. You are much better off putting it aside and then re-reading it a couple of days before it is due. You will be surprised what mistakes you will uncover. Check the marking criteria one last time.

Scenario Three: Using a session and weekly planner.

This third strategy is most effective because it can help you to plan ahead, break assignments into smaller tasks/steps, and complete assignments progressively during session. The key is to prioritise assignment completion, by including work on assignments in your weekly study routine. Doing this can help build a sense of progress and control, reduce study stress, and get assignments submitted by the due date.

Online learning support

For tips about Weekly Study Plans and Session Plans go to the **Assignment Navigator** (http://www.scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/)

Time management strategies are available in **Academic Skills Development Quick Guides** (http://www.scu.edu.au/academicskills/).

2.5 Working in groups

During the course of your study you will be doing quite a lot of work in pairs or groups. The capacity to work effectively as part of a group is highly valued by employers of ESE graduates.

In some cases you will submit a group assignment, where students work together on the work submitted for grading and all students receive the same group result for the assignment.

In other cases each student submits their own individual assignment based on a group activity. For example you may do a group exercise recording data on water quality in rock pools, but you are required to write up

the work as an individual report in your own words and preparing your own figures and tables. This means you must **NOT** submit an identical assignment to another student, even though you shared the same data.

Submitting identical assignments is known as ***collusion*** and is considered a serious type of academic misconduct at SCU. You should also be aware that aiding another student to commit an act of plagiarism (such as allowing them access to your work) is also regarded as having committed an act of plagiarism **(see Section 5 for more information).**

Online learning support

For tips about working in groups go to the **Assignment Navigator** http://www.scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/ and **Academic Skills Development Quick Guides** http://scu.edu.au/teachinglearning/index.php/5.

2.6 Academic enquiry and academic writing

Students engage in academic enquiry every time they investigate and write assignments at university. Assignments are the place where students demonstrate their understanding and learning, by using credible, relevant and current sources in their writing. Learning to write university assignments and blend your ideas and judgements with those found in sources takes time and effort.

Practising academic integrity means carefully acknowledging **every time** you use others' work in your assignments. **Referencing** is the technique used at university to do this. It is important to understand that deliberately failing to acknowledge use of sources in your writing is considered **plagiarism**, and can be seriously penalised.

See **Section 5** for more information on academic integrity and how to reference correctly in ESE.

2.7 Learning the language of the sciences

Scientific writing is quite different to other forms of written expression you may be familiar with. It is essential in science that meaning is expressed clearly and unambiguously, and journal articles in particular are written very concisely, expressing as much information as possible in as few words as possible. In addition technical terms may be frequently used, although unnecessary use of jargon should be avoided. This means that reading scientific articles may prove challenging at first, and learning to write in a scientific style may require considerable practice.

It is essential that you actively work towards becoming familiar with the language of maths and science generally and the language of each discipline that you study in particular. However, this will not happen immediately and will take time. So please:

- read and make notes actively, accurately and with a purpose in mind
- do not expect to understand everything you read the first time you read it as you may have to go over complex ideas many times before you understand
- remind yourself that because you are learning an unfamiliar language, you will need time to develop confidence and proficiency in it by practising
- employ a number of different strategies to help you learn the language of your discipline e.g.
  - read aloud to help familiarise yourself with unfamiliar terms
  - use scientific terminology to explain concepts and ideas to fellow students
  - use the look, cover, write method to learn new terms
  - rote learn
  - construct a glossary of scientific terms that you encounter in your studies
- take note of the way science is written such as the way that the ideas are expressed but particularly the way the language of science is used in journal articles and textbooks.

2.8 Understanding and organising your study checklist

1. Read through the Unit Information Guide
2. Read through all assessment tasks.
3. Understand what is required for all assessment tasks.
4. Know how to navigate MySCU for each unit.
5. Locate resources e.g. Bb Collaborate/Discussion Board/Unit Documents.
6. Follow suggested study timetable in the Unit Information Guide.
7. Fill in Session Planner for all units.
8. Fill in Weekly Planner.
9. Check workload for all units on your Session Planner to estimate a starting date.
10. Write a checklist of all smaller tasks.
11. Slot smaller tasks into your Weekly Planner or diary.

Section 3

Understanding the assessment task

Understanding the assessment task means finding out what you are required to do – this sounds obvious, but students frequently stumble at this crucial step. It is important that you read the description of the assessment carefully several times until you **know what it is you are required to produce**, and if there is something you don't understand ask for clarification from the Unit Assessor.

Read your Unit Information Guide and check your Blackboard site for information about the assignment. The lecturer will often discuss the assignment in the lecture or in a Collaborate session, so keep in the loop, and when you come across something you don't understand ask a question at the lecture/Collaborate session or on the discussion board.

Online learning support

Read the information provided on **Understanding the Task** in the **Assignment Navigator** (http://scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/index.php/3/) for more information.

3.1 Assessment task tips

Good communication is the key to the successful outcome from an assignment. As a student you need to communicate with the marker. For most assessments the marker will be reading your words, so your words will have to convey the message to the reader clearly and concisely. When you graduate and are working in the industry the audience will change but the aim will remain the same.

Remember – when the marker is reading your assignment you won't be there to explain what a poorly constructed sentence means.

3.1.1 Know the aims and objectives

Assessment tasks are usually provided with aims (broad goals) and objectives (specific tasks). Keep these in mind as you are carrying out the work, so that you do not waste time and resources with irrelevant work. The aims and objectives of a study should be stated in the introduction section of reports, and the discussion section should also refer back to aims and objectives.

3.1.2 Use the marking criteria

Marking criteria specify the things that must be addressed in your assignment and how marks will be allocated for each criterion. Use the marking criteria at each stage of the writing process to check that you are meeting all the requirements of the assessment task throughout the planning, researching, writing, editing and polishing stages. The marking criteria may also function as a checklist as you seek to maximise your marks for each section or address all the requirement of each task.

3.1.3 Look for key words

As part of the assessment task you will usually find key words that describe what you need to do. Table 3.1 explains common key words used in assessment tasks.

Table 3.1 Common key words used in School of Environment, Science and Engineering assignments

Key word	How the word may be used … what you need to do
Analyse	Examine closely … In a scientific report you would be expected to create tables and figures summarising the data and may be required to perform some statistical analysis.
Compare	Compare and contrast different methods of … Examine the characteristics of the methods you are investigating and describe their similarities and differences.
Contrast	See above.
Define	Define terms and concepts of … You would define the terms and concepts you are investigating. You would be expected to do more than just look up the dictionary/encyclopaedia and provide the meaning of a word.
Describe	Describe aspects and dynamics of … You would be expected to identify and define the component parts of what it is you are investigating. You would also be expected to describe the processes involved.
Evaluate	Evaluate the ecological impact of … For evaluation you need to provide a judgement. What are the strengths? What are the weaknesses? Will it have an impact?
Examine	Examine the processes … Start out by defining and then describing and finish with evaluate.
Illustrate	Illustrate how knowledge of past sea level events have shaped Australia's coastline … Give an example, define the terms and describe the process. Illustrate could also mean to draw a graph or a diagram.
Summarise	Summarise the main findings … To summarise you need to pull out the important aspects of the work.
Discuss	Discuss the current status of … When you are asked to discuss you would be expected to incorporate many of the key words above. So you would analyse, compare, contrast, evaluate, etc.
Critically	This word will find its way before many of the key words above. Critically examine, critically evaluate, critically discuss. … It means that you must introduce an element of judgement into what you write. So you must do more than describe or define for example.

3.2 Types of assessment task

The type of assessment tasks will vary from one unit to the next and will depend on the discipline area and the year level of the unit. For example, in a first year unit you may be asked to write a scientific report about a simple experiment in Biology and an essay in Global Environmental Issues. In second and third year units you may be required to write a literature review or a management plan. So **you need to be sure you know what is required**. If, for example, you write a perfect scientific report but you have been asked to write a management plan then your efforts will not be rewarded.

Common assessment tasks used in the School of Environmental Science and Management are listed in Table 3.2, and a brief explanation of each is provided.

Table 3.2 Common assessments – School of Environment, Science and Engineering

Type	Description
Scientific Report	A scientific report will present the findings of a research activity. It will place the research findings in context and the methodology will be described. Because this is a very common form of assessment a full description of the structure is provided in this guide in Section 3.2.1.
Literature Review	A literature review will require you to search for published literature from scholarly sources such as journal articles and books. You will then need to evaluate and synthesise the relevant information into a concisely written review which summarises the literature. Because literature reviews are a common form of assessment a description is provided in this guide in Section 3.2.2.
Proposal	A proposal is a short document that justifies why a project should be supported. It will require you to write a short literature review to provide background information about the focus of the project. You will need to describe the significance of the project – Why is the project important? What gap in knowledge is the study going to fill? You will also need to outline the procedure that is to be used, the statistical methodology, time lines etc. In some cases you may be required to complete a budget.
Seminar	A seminar will require you to present in front of the class or via Blackboard Collaborate. You should develop PowerPoint slides that summarise your project/study/management plan/etc. Depending on what you are presenting you should aim to cover background, significance, methods, and results and put your project into context. Be prepared to answer questions at the end of your seminar. Timing is critical.

Following are descriptions of the structure of a scientific report and a literature review, two frequently required assignments.

3.2.1 Scientific report structure

Title

The title should be descriptive and contain some key words to tell the reader what the report is about. A title such as "Ecology Report" is insufficiently informative. "Impact of fire frequency on the distribution of *Acacia* spp. in Broadwater National Park" is much better because it contains key words and describes the work.

Abstract/Summary

The abstract is a summary of the report, and should be written AFTER completing the rest of the report. The abstract should be a single paragraph that clearly and concisely describes the aims, methods and main findings of the research. The abstract should enable the reader to judge the content without having to read the entire report.

Introduction

The introduction should describe the scope of the study, the objectives and rationale for the work and any relevant background information. This section may include a location map or other relevant illustrations (but make sure that you check the specific requirements stipulated by your Unit Assessor because often maps are included in the methods section). A review of the literature on the subject matter is often included in this section. The review of literature will provide evidence using correctly cited references (see Section 5) that you have read the relevant literature (journal articles and books) about the topic and you can put the aim of the project into a wider perspective.

Methods/Materials and Methods/Procedure

The methods, or materials and methods or procedure, section should explain concisely the procedures followed and materials used, including a description of the method of data analysis. It should be written in paragraph format using past tense – do not use dot points. Make sure your methods section can answer these questions:

- Where did the study take place?
- How many samples/observations were made?
- How were the measurements made?
- How were the data analysed?

Results

In the results section you present a concise summary of your results. This section should be factual and avoid generalisations and discussion. It should be limited to answers to the questions posed in the objectives of the work. Generally, the results should be described in words and summarised in tables and/or figures (graphs, diagrams, maps, photos, etc.). Text must always introduce the results section BEFORE tables or figures are inserted. Each table or figure must have a descriptive caption (placed above tables or below figures), and must be appropriately referenced within the text (see Section 6.) The text should **not** explain or interpret the results, that is the purpose of the discussion section. **DON'T** present masses of raw or processed data. If it is really necessary, put them in the appendix.

Discussion

In the discussion you discuss and interpret the results in the light of the study objectives, and in the context of the literature that you have previously reviewed in the introduction. Make sure that you reference appropriately (see Section 5). Your results should usually be compared with previous work. What the reader is looking for is interpretation of the results, in other words – WHY? Why was *a* different to *b*? Why does the addition of chemical *x* cause a change in water quality? Why are the changes in urban area different between two air photos? In the discussion, it is important to make an assessment of the reliability and potential usefulness of your work (if any). You should also discuss how your results fit into the topic at a broader level**.**

In some publications the results and discussion may be included a single section, especially if the discussion is brief and straightforward.

Conclusion

The conclusion should provide a summary of the main findings of the report. It may be incorporated as the final paragraph of the discussion section.

References

All material referred to in the report **must** be listed here. **NOTE:** The references list should **only** contain works that are cited in the report.

Appendices

Only include an Appendix if requested to do so.

3.2.2 Literature review structure

Title

Keep the title to a few major words. This acts to remind you of the particular focus of your Literature Review.

Abstract

The abstract is a summary of the literature review. Start the abstract by writing a summary sentence from each section. Complete the abstract after the report is written.

Introduction

Include the purpose of the literature review, and a logical sequence of the development of your argument/ideas/sections in order. You may include background and short definitions, scope or limitations. Check the marking criteria for the assignment to check that you are covering everything required.

Findings

Divide the findings into specific areas under investigation or the major sections of your literature review. Use headings and subheadings to logically structure your response and synthesise an overview of your topic in a reasoned and integrated argument. You should be able to identify major points that you want to convey to the reader. Make sure your paragraphs are in a logical order. Use paragraph structure (topic sentence, referenced evidence from the literature to support your argument and concluding sentence) to critically analyse and evaluate or make judgments about the literature. The structure will vary depending on the topic. In some literature reviews you may present some aspects chronologically. For others, you may present some background information with definitions and then canvas two or three case studies in detail. Then you may draw conclusions using the case studies as evidence for the argument that you are presenting to the reader. Always keep the focus of the review in mind.

Conclusions

Summary of the major points made, to provide an overview of the literature. Recommendations can be included in a separate section.

References

All material referred to in the rest of the report **must** be listed here. **NOTE:** The references list should **only** contain works that are cited in the report.

3.3 Understanding the assessment task checklist

1. Know the due date, word limit and weighting of the task.
2. Know the expected format (scientific report, poster, literature review, etc.).
3. Read the marking criteria for the task in the Unit Information Guide.
4. Search the required and recommended readings.
5. Read related topics/modules in the Study Guide.
6. Identify any underlying concepts, theories or ideas.
7. Revisit the unit material and search for information related to the task.
8. Check MySCU for assignment updates, discussions and resources.
9. Manage the task using checklists and a semester and weekly planner.
10. Seek assistance early if needed.

Section 4

Information research skills

4.1 Where to start

4.1.1 Library Guide

A good starting point is the **Library Guide** compiled by the School's Liaison Librarian, which is available from the **Library homepage** http://www.scu.edu.au/library/. The guide will help you identify resources and information for your assignment.

It is often good to start with a textbook to put things into perspective and get a broad understanding of the topic. If you are not quite sure what your topic is all about, a ***dictionary***, ***handbook*** or ***encyclopaedia*** can provide overview or background information. For online encyclopaedias go to the **Library homepage** http://www.scu.edu.au/library/ , select Databases – select option – C – and scroll to ***Credo Reference*** – click to access Credo.

4.1.2 Identifying key concepts

Break down your assessment question into its component parts:

- identify key words and concepts in an assessment topic
- identify instruction words: describe, analyse, compare, discuss etc.
- identify qualifying words: number of references, gender, age group
- identify the range of information resources available to you
- select appropriate resources for a particular assignment or problem.

Limiting words or phrases limit the key concept to make it more specific. They may be numeric (e.g. Discuss **two** perspectives), indicate importance (e.g. What is the **crucial** variable), identify specific periods (e.g. the sixties, the 1980s) or geographic areas (e.g. northern New South Wales, Sydney).

The **key concept** is the focus of the question – what you need to write about. It helps you to identify the words or phrases that best describe your topic. If you do not identify this correctly, you may miss the point of the question.

If you remove the **instruction words** and the **limiting words** from your topic, you will be left with the **key concept**. Identifying the key concept is vital to completing your assessment properly.

4.2 Searching the Library website

The Library OneSearch catalogue shows all items held in the Library: books, ebooks, journal titles, CDs, DVDs/videos; and where you can find them. The OneSearch interface also provides links to full-text journal articles.

The OneSearch catalogue can be found on the **Library** website home page: http://scu.edu.au/library/ and on MySCU under the myServices tab. You may search the catalogue for a specific title or for a range of books on a subject.

4.2.1 Finding books

To find a range of books on a subject

Type one or more keywords on the topic into the search box and click the Search button. OneSearch assumes that you are searching for all the words you type. Books that match these keywords will be listed with their location and availability for loan.

To find a specific book

Type the book title in quotation marks into the search box, and click the Search button. Books with those words in the title will be listed with their location and availability, so that you can find them on the shelf (on-campus students), or request them for loan (off-campus students).

4.2.2 Finding journal articles

For most units Unit Assessors require you to use journal articles as references. Journal articles are peer reviewed, which means that before being accepted by publication they must be reviewed and approved by other experts in the field.

Databases are the appropriate tool for finding journal articles published about your specific topic. Looking through individual journals in the hope of finding relevant material is time-consuming. Databases allow you to search online across hundreds of journal titles and often give you access to the full text of the article.

Databases vary in what they offer. Some provide abstracts (a brief summary of an article's content), some the complete full-text article, some are multidisciplinary and others are subject specific. They may be international in coverage or largely Australian material.

1. Go to the Library website. http://www.scu.edu.au/library/
2. Click on **Databases.**
3. You should now be at a page which contains A–Z links to all the databases that SCU Library offers access to.
4. You can move through the list by clicking on any of the blue letters at the beginning or by clicking on the appropriate **subject guide** for suggested databases relevant to your topic.
5. You access the database by clicking on its name.

Databases let you search using **keywords** or **phrases** relevant to the topic you are researching. When accessing each database you type in these words or phrases as your search terms and the database will display any articles that contain them.

If an article you want is not available online in full-text, look for the 

icon or use the catalogue and look for the title of the journal (not the article) to see if it is held at SCU in print or online in another database.

4.2.3 Search tips

These tips can be used in the OneSearch catalogue and the databases:

* Search for a word stem or truncation e.g. **ecolog*** returns ecology, ecological, ecologist

? Search for words with spelling variation e.g. **vap?r** returns vapor, vapour

Connectors

And: find documents containing all of your search terms.

Example: *coral and bleaching* will find documents that contain both words.

Or: find documents containing at least one of your search terms. You would use **or** to connect synonyms, closely related terms and spelling variations.

Example: *restoration or regeneration* will find documents that contain either word.

Example: *vapour or vapor*

Not: exclude words from your results. Not should be used with caution as you could inadvertently exclude relevant results.

Example: ***forestry not eucalypt*** will only locate documents that include the word forestry, but only if the document does not contain the word eucalypt.

Search structure

Phrase searching: Some databases will treat two or more words entered into the search box as a phrase, while others require you to place a phrase in double quotation marks.

Example: ***"ecological modelling"*** will only find documents where the whole phrase is present.

Nesting: The order in which search engines execute your commands is not always obvious. You can use round brackets to control the search sequence.

Example: the search term, ***forestry and (pine or eucalypt)*** will find documents that contain one of the words in brackets – i.e. pine or eucalypt – but only if they also contain the word '***forestry***'.

4.3 Choosing the best references to use

When selecting information be aware of the following:

Purpose/Audience:

- Who is it written for, the general public or students or researchers etc.
- Is it fact or opinion?

Currency:

- Note the publication date, is it current or dated? Use recent sources where possible.

Authority:

- Choose scholarly papers that have biographies or a summary of the author's credentials, occupation or qualifications.

Accuracy:

- Have facts been verified?
- Is there a bibliography/reference list for verification of information?

Appropriate:

- Is the paper related to your topic?
- Does it answer the research?
- Does it add anything new?

4.4 Website reliability

Websites are a great source of information, however, at university you will be aiming towards a scholarly piece of work that does not rely on the web for sources. In science we use refereed journal articles as the mainstay, and most websites are not appropriate to use as references unless they are provided by reputable agencies such as government departments, universities or research institutions.

When choosing a website, evaluate the site carefully and ascertain whether the site is an authoritative source. Who is responsible for the content of the site? Does the author or institution make clear or provide links to its credentials, affiliations, and sponsors? When was the information on the site written and last updated?

Here are a few questions that you should consider:

- What are the author's qualifications for writing about a particular subject?
- Does the author acknowledge the sources of the information provided?
- If it is an organisation, are its values/goals made clear?
- Is it a commercial, educational, governmental site or a personal one?

- Is the information fact or opinion?
- Are there links to other documents?
- Is the information supported by other sources?

The **Assignment Navigator** http://scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/index.php/4/ has comprehensive discussion regarding the reliability of websites. They also have a link to an interview with Wikipedia's founder discussing why university students should not use Wikipedia as a source for assignments.

4.5 Summary of information sources

Table 4.1 provides a list of the types of information sources you may come across whilst researching a topic. They vary in reliability, as indicated in the comments column, and should be chosen accordingly.

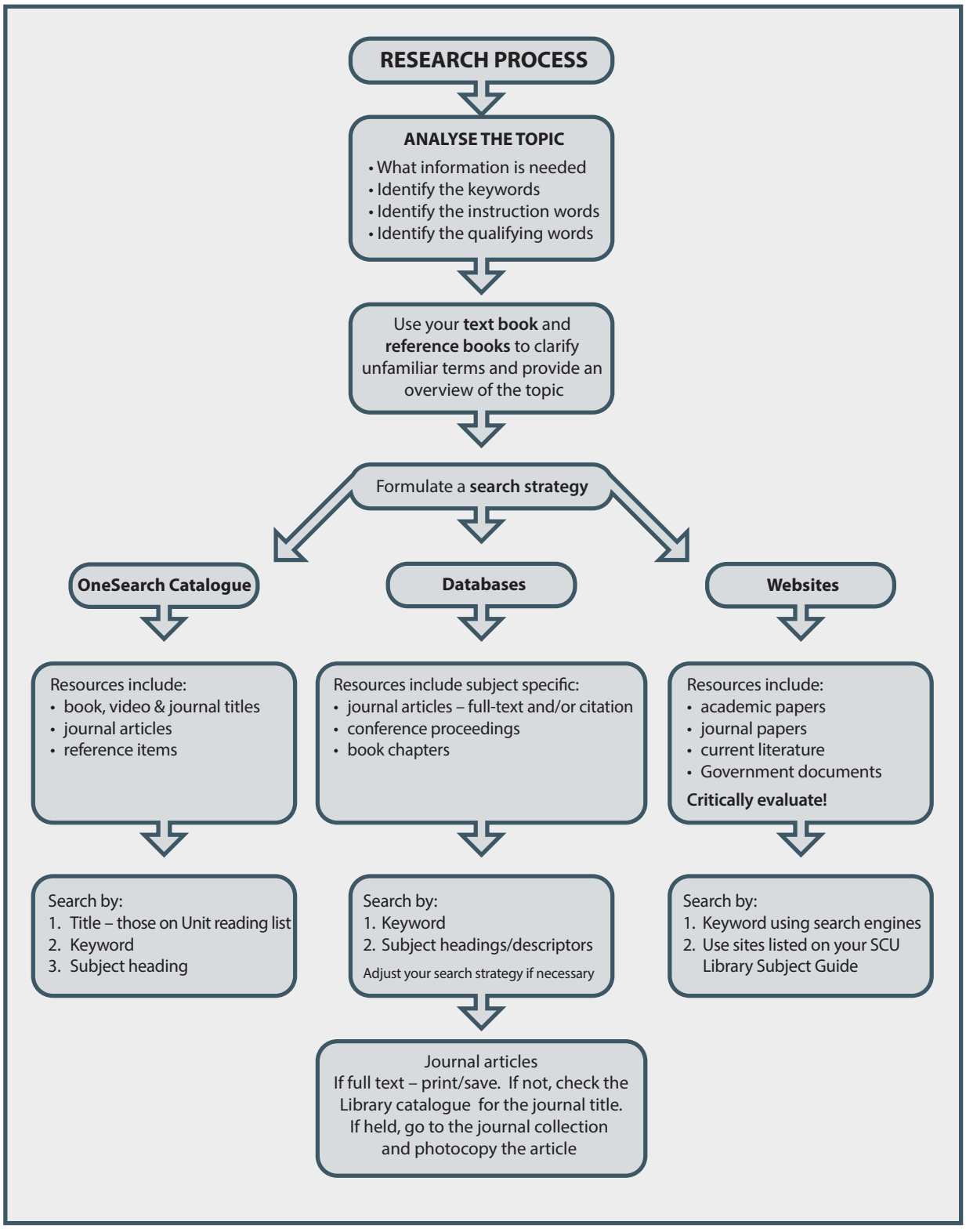
Table 4.1 Information sources commonly used in an environmental science/management report

Type	Source	Comment
Book (electronic or print)	SCU Library Catalogue, **Onesearch**	Books are a reliable source of information but keep an eye on the date. Old books may put forward theories that have been long discarded.
Book section/chapter	As above	As above.
Journal Article (electronic or print)	**Library database search engines** or SCU Library Catalogue, **Onesearch**	Peer reviewed journal articles are the mainstay of information used in science. Journal articles are submitted to the journal and then they are sent to peers for review. The article is either accepted, rejected or changes are requested.
Document on WWW	**Google** search engine etc.	Many documents can be found on the web. Most government departments produce reports etc. that they upload for wider distribution. Depending on the source they may or may not be a reliable source of information.
Web site	**Google** search engine etc.	The reliability of the site depends very much on the author. Avoid content that is biased – even a government department may not always give a balanced view.
Report/Government Document	**Google** search engine etc.	As above
Legal Regulation	**Library database search engines**	Acts are not usually included in reports but if you were writing a management plan or similar document they would be essential.
Conference paper or proceedings	**Google Scholar**	A conference paper often does not undergo the same level of scrutiny as a journal article but may still be a good source of current information.
Unpublished Work (Third Year Integrated Project)	SCU Library Catalogue, **Onesearch**	Third year projects are plentiful in the Library. They are not a reliable source of information.
Thesis	SCU Library Catalogue, **Onesearch**	Masters and PhD thesis are equivalent to a journal article because the same process is used. Honours theses are less reliable.

Some information sources should not be used in an assignment unless specifically requested by the Unit Assessor:

- Wikipedia
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Lecture notes
- Personal observation.

4.6 Flowchart of research process



4.7 Finding information checklist

1. Find the list of recommended reference materials in your Unit Information Guide.
2. Locate the eReadings site.
3. Recognise book, book chapter, journal article and website references.
4. Know how to access the catalogue.
5. Know how to search the databases to find a journal article.
6. Know how to print/download/save articles.
7. Recognise importance of evaluating websites.
8. Does your assessment require peer reviewed journal articles?
9. Reading the abstract or summary for relevance to your assignment.
10. When was the article published?

Section 5

Practising academic integrity in assignments: Referencing and Turnitin

5.1 Academic Integrity

Practising **academic integrity** means carefully acknowledging **every time** you use others' work in your assignments and in your professional life by using appropriate **referencing** (see Section 5.2 below for referencing instructions). It is important to understand that deliberately failing to acknowledge use of sources in your writing is considered **plagiarism**, and can be seriously penalised. Your teachers understand that new students need to be taught how to practise academic integrity, however, it is your responsibility to learn what academic integrity is, and how to practise it.

- See the **Academic Skills Development Academic Integrity** website (http://scu.edu.au/teachinglearning/index.php/6) for helpful guides on understanding and practising academic integrity in your assignments.
- Also see SCU's **Student Rights and Responsibilities Charter** (http://policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00101) and **Academic Integrity Policy** (http://policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00142) to understand what is expected of you while studying at SCU.

5.1.1 Student academic misconduct and penalties

Student academic misconduct is a general term used at SCU to describe deliberate breaches of academic integrity. Student academic misconduct happens when students understand how to practise academic integrity but fail to acknowledge when they use others' work in assignments and exams.

Download the ASD Quick Guide to student academic integrity for more information: **Student academic integrity: an introduction**.

Common forms of academic misconduct include **cheating, collusion** and **plagiarism**. It is really important to understand what counts as academic misconduct at SCU so you can avoid inadvertently contravening the rules and suffering penalties, which range from a requirement to resubmit the assignment to exclusion from the University, and may impact on your life after university as well.

Download the ASD Quick Guide to student academic misconduct for more information: **Student academic misconduct: an introduction**.

5.1.1.1 Cheating

Cheating is perhaps the most obvious type of academic misconduct. At school, and in life, cheating is understood as dishonest, and poor behaviour, which should be avoided. Cheating is also seen this way at University. Most new students understand cheating is not OK, and that it is very important to follow examination rules carefully.

5.1.1.2 Collusion

Collusion is a serious type of academic misconduct. New students are often shocked to find out that they have unintentionally colluded, when they were only trying to help out a friend. Even experienced students are sometimes surprised to find out it is collusion to give their old assignments to other students.

It is an act of collusion to:

- copy the work of a fellow student and submit it as if it is your own work
- allow a fellow student to copy your work (who then **submits it as their own effort)**.

The student who lets their work be copied, and the student who does the copying then submits the work as their own, **both** participate in collusion.

5.1.1.3 Plagiarism

Using the work of others without careful acknowledgement is plagiarism. Copying and pasting information from other sources (including the internet) without acknowledgement via referencing is not acceptable at University. Inconsistent referencing and poor paraphrasing are the most common ways students plagiarise in assignments – so make sure that you reference correctly!

Penalties for plagiarism are prescribed in the **University Handbook** in Rules Relating to Awards - Rule 3 - Coursework Awards - Student Assessment and Examinations , Section 18 – Academic Misconduct Including Plagiarism, which contains the information reproduced below:

Plagiarism is defined as the act of taking and using another's work, including unattributed material in whatever form and from whatever source, as one's own. For the purpose of this Rule, any of the following acts constitute plagiarism unless the work is acknowledged:

1. copying the work of another student;
2. directly copying any part of another's work;
3. summarising the work of another;
4. using or developing an idea or thesis derived from another person's work;
5. using experimental results obtained by another.

For an act of plagiarism, any one or more of the following penalties may be imposed:

1. an outcome with an impact less serious than a zero in the assessment in which the plagiarism occurred;
2. a mark of zero for the item of assessment in which the plagiarism occurred;
3. failure or cancellation or refusal of credit for the unit in which the plagiarism occurred;
4. suspension from the University for a specified period; or
5. expulsion from the University.

Any student who aids another student to commit an act of plagiarism as defined above shall also be regarded as having committed an act of plagiarism.

In all cases where a member of academic staff is satisfied that academic misconduct including plagiarism has occurred, the matter shall be reported to the relevant School, College or Special Research Centre 's Academic Integrity Officer for investigation. If satisfied that misconduct has occurred the Academic Integrity Officer shall either impose a penalty or in serious cases refer the matter to the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

The Academic Integrity Officer may impose a penalty of:

1. an outcome with an impact less serious than a zero in the assessment in which the plagiarism occurred; or
2. the award of a mark of zero for the item of assessment in which the plagiarism occurred.

A student may appeal against a penalty imposed by an Academic Integrity Officer by submitting a written request to the relevant Head of School/College or Director of the Special Research Centre within 10 working days after the student has been notified of the penalty. The decision of the Head of School/College or Special Research Centre shall be final in such a case.

In the case of a serious offence, the Academic Integrity Officer shall report the matter as soon as practicable to the Deputy Vice Chancellor who may investigate the alleged offence, nominate another person to investigate on his or her behalf, or refer the matter to the Student Misconduct Committee, or consult with the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) for research students.

An appeal against a penalty imposed by the Student Misconduct Committee shall be made in writing to the Appeals Committee of Council within 14 days after the decision appealed against has been notified to the student. The right of appeal shall lapse if not so exercised within that period.

5.1.2 Turnitin

SCU uses a web-based text-matching system called **Turnitin** (http://study.scu.edu.au/turnitin/) to check assessment tasks that you submit online for originality, by comparing your work with documents including other student assignments, books, web pages and articles from newspapers, magazines and academic journals. The main aim of the system is to help students to develop academic integrity and good scholarship skills by submitting draft copies for **self-checking** before final submission to make sure your work uses suitable paraphrasing and is appropriately referenced.

ESE students are expected to take a pro-active approach to Turnitin, and use it to improve their academic writing before submitting assignments for grading.

Turnitin originality reports summarise text-matches identified in your assignment. This means it is very important to use the originality report during editing phases and on your final draft to double check and improve your use of:

- paraphrases
- direct quotes
- referencing.

Make sure you leave enough time to use the originality report during your final editing phase. Ideally, this means you should submit your assignment for originality checking two days out from the due date.

For more guidance about Turnitin and how to use it as a learning tool to improve your academic writing go to the **Turnitin for students** website (http://study.scu.edu.au/turnitin/index.php/2/).

5.2 Referencing

5.2.1 What is referencing?

Referencing is a method used to acknowledge when ideas, information, data, examples, images and words from others' work are included in academic writing. This is why referencing is one of the most important ways students practise academic integrity when writing assignments at University. Whenever you use someone else's words or ideas then you should acknowledge the source of that information – this is known as **citing your sources**, or **referencing.**

A number of referencing styles are used in ESE, but first year students are usually asked to follow **APA 6th edition referencing style**. This is an in-text referencing style**.** This means you will need to:

- provide in-text referencing by inserting abbreviated referencing details within the text of your assignment every time others' work is referred to
- a list of references at the end providing complete referencing details for all sources used in the assignment. Note: if your assignment includes any appendices they should be placed AFTER the reference list.

You may be asked to provide a bibliography when submitting research assignments in advanced units. A **bibliography differs from a reference list** because it not only lists all sources cited in the assignment, it includes other sources considered relevant or useful to the reader, but not cited in-text. Assessment Details will state whether a bibliography is necessary.

5.2.2 Referencing systems

There are several systems for referencing work and they often go under such names as 'The Harvard System', the 'Vancouver System', 'Chicago', 'MLA', etc. Generally for most scientific work you will be expected to use an Author–Date system such as APA 6th. It is fairly easy to grasp, but there a quite a few tricks to learn until you become fairly familiar with it. Refer to the APA 6th edition Referencing Guide (see below) for details.

5.2.3 How to reference in ESE assignments

In all ESE first year units you are expected to use the **APA 6th edition referencing style unless directed otherwise by your unit assessor.**

Full instructions for using this style in your assignments are provided in the **APA 6th edition Referencing Guide** (http://libguides.scu.edu.au/content.php?pid=161580) available from the SCU Library website. Download a copy and keep handy so that you can refer to it every time you need to reference in an assignment.

5.2.4 Why ESE students MUST reference

Unless otherwise directed, ESE students are always expected to provide correct and consistent referencing in assignments. Referencing is one of the key ways students practise academic integrity, and avoid plagiarism. Students use referencing to show where they use sources in assignments, and to clearly indicate to the marker where their work ends, and others' work begins. It is important to only take credit for your own ideas and findings.

Key reasons why ESE students need to reference in assignments include:

- avoiding plagiarism
- providing verifiable information
- identifying sources of your information
- providing evidence from the literature for your argument
- demonstrating breadth and depth of information used.

5.2.5 When should you reference?

Reference **every time** you use others' work in your writing. This means you need to reference **every time** you use data, ideas, findings, claims, examples, words, tables, and images from sources.

Reference whenever you:

- **Directly quote** someone else's work. Direct quotations should be avoided in scientific writing – only use a quotation when the exact wording of the original source is essential to making your point, or if the quote is famous.
- **Paraphrase** someone else's ideas or information by summarising it in your own words. Your work will be stronger if you rephrase or paraphrase rather than quote, because by paraphrasing sources you demonstrate your understanding to the marker. When paraphrasing take care to:
  - keep the meaning of the original source
  - change the wording (don't just change a couple of words)
  - use language relevant to your discipline.
- **Include information from other sources** (e.g. data, tables, figures, maps, illustrations or photographs)
- Use a **personal communication**, which is something someone has told you. This must be from a reputable source, for example, an expert or a government or industry spokesperson working in a relevant field.

If it is not your idea, then reference it!

5.2.6 Reference management software: EndNote

EndNote is a type of reference management software that enables you to import, store and manage your references, to create bibliographies and to use the "Cite While You Write" feature to insert references in-text according to specified referencing styles. It is available for free on the Library's web page. It is not essential for you to use EndNote, but given that you will need to use references repeatedly throughout your degree, it is an option worth considering.

We have developed an EndNote Style that is available via the Library's **EndNote Guide** on the Library web site (http://libguides.scu.edu.au/endnote).

5.3 Practising academic integrity checklist

1. Make sure that you understand what is meant by academic integrity.
2. Know what is meant by plagiarism, collusion and cheating, and understand the penalties for academic misconduct.
3. Familiarise yourself with Turnitin and use it for self-checking before submitting assignments.
4. Know that correct referencing is the key to practising academic integrity.
5. Know how, when and why you should reference.
6. Download a copy of the APA 6th Referencing Guide from the Library website and follow it when preparing assignments.

Section 6

Presentation: Formatting and editing

6.1 Developing a logical structure for your assignment

Just as an investigation requires a logical approach, in order to logically communicate ideas you must organise the end-product in such a way that its meaning is clear. The way in which you arrange the parts of the end product is called the format.

The format suitable for assignments can vary greatly. At one extreme there is work which is based largely on work sheets and here the format is already determined. At the other end of the scale there are investigations which require you to do most of the planning and preparation of a report, especially in second and third year units. Then there are essays, which have different requirements as far as format goes.

Here are some suggestions for organising your assignment:

1. Organise the written work on the basis of the aims, objectives and/or scope of the assessment. This should be set out in the introduction. The title must be appropriate for the assessment also.
2. Before writing, list tentative headings for the various parts of the assignment. Arrange them in as **logical** an order as possible, and be consistent throughout. **Example 1** – if you are reviewing something on an international, then a national, then a local level, maintain that consistency throughout – international, national, local. **Example 2** – for a certain project you will analyse soil, water, then sediment; so list your methods in that order, the results in that order, and the discussion in that order.
3. **Organise tables and figures** logically to make interpretation easier. Tables and figures should be clearly understood without reference to the text, but you must make some mention of every table or figure in the text before it appears in the report. This can often be a statement such as "The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3" or "Figure 5 illustrates the private marginal costs and the private marginal benefits at landfill pricing of waste disposal options".
4. Begin sections or paragraphs with **general** topic sentences, then lead into more **specific** detail.
5. Make sure that everything in each section is **relevant** to the heading and that section. A common fault with student assignments is that a section will start under one heading, but the text will be about something else.

There are several publications on essay, report, and assignment writing available in the Library. You should take the time to look at different scientific journals in the Library, and take note of the structure, style and setting out of the reports. A good one to look at is:

Hay, I. (2006). *Communicating in Geography and Environmental Sciences.* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Some Unit Assessors may ask for assignments with different or specific requirements, or there may be definite limitations placed on the format. It is important to read carefully the details of the assessment task. Your Unit Assessors will advise you of the specific requirements for each assessment task.

Online learning support

For tips about working in groups go to the **Assignment Navigator** (http://scu.edu.au/assignment-navigator/index.php/2/)and **Academic Skills Development Quick Guides** (http://scu.edu.au/teachinglearning/index.php/5).

6.2 Details of setting out particular components of assignments

6.2.1 Headings

Good headings make the structure and content of the report clear to the reader. Headings should be appropriate to what follows and should stand out from the text. They may be CAPITALISED, *italicised,* or made **bold** to give emphasis. Have a look through a journal article to see how headings are formatted.

6.2.2 Margins

Always leave a margin of 20–30 mm all round each page, even for electronic documents to be submitted online. For hard copy assignments a margin of 30–40 mm is required along the stapling edge. When pages have material on both sides, keep this in mind when leaving the staple margin, otherwise material may disappear on left-hand pages.

6.2.3 Tables

Tables consist of columns (the vertical parts) and rows (the horizontal parts) and are usually arranged in such a way as to highlight important features. Tables are useful because they include summaries of relevant data which may be too complex to describe easily in words. They are usually used in the results section of a report.

There are certain basic rules which apply when constructing tables:

Rule 1 All tables must have a concise, descriptive caption which is written above the table. Ideally the caption should be understandable without reference to the text. Tables are numbered sequentially from Table 1 to Table ?? in the order that they appear in the report. When you refer to the table in text use Table 1 rather than table 1 because it is a proper noun.

Rule 2 Show all units of measurement.

Rule 3 All rows and columns must have headings.

Rule 4 The table must be relevant. This also means that if you are writing a report that includes tables, be sure to refer to the table in the text before the table appears. For example, in your text you might write "The efficiency of reed bed removal of total suspended solids is presented in Table 6.1." or "Removal of total suspended solids varied between 12% and 97% (Table 6.1)." The table should be placed at the end of that paragraph or as close as possible to the end of the paragraph.

Rule 5 If you don't obtain the data yourself, in other words you obtain it from some other source, then you must give that source. This is usually written as a note below the table.

6.2.4 Figures

These include all illustrations, charts, diagrams, etc. (not large maps) and should be as clear and as simple as possible. Charts (or graphs) are used for presenting numerical data or results in such a way as to highlight patterns and facilitate comparison. In Environmental Information Management you will be shown the different types of charts (e.g. column charts, histograms and pie charts). The teaching materials for EIM will be made available on the ESE Student Centre site. If you discover that a chart type for a particular unit is not included in the list then send an email to michael.whelan@scu.edu.au.

As for tables, you should always refer to figures in the text of the report before they appear in the report. For example, if you have a diagram of a rock pool, somewhere in the text you should say something like 'Figure 4 illustrates the general shape of the rockpool surveyed'.

Rule 1 Each figure should be captioned in sequence, i.e. Figure. 1, Figure. 2 …

Rule 2 Captions should be placed **under** the figure.

Rule 3 Maps should meet the "TOSSLAD" requirements – that is the map must display the following – Title, Orientation, Scale, Source, Legend, Author, and Date.

Rule 4 Photographs should, where practicable, have a scale included at the time the photo is taken. The best scale is a ruler with clearly distinguishable divisions. Otherwise use an object of easily identifiable size, e.g. matchbox, coin, geological hammer and person.

Rule 5 Photomicrographs and drawings from microscopes must have a line scale (in mm) and/or the magnification ratio (e.g. ×1/2, ×0.5, x40).

Rule 6 Measurements must have the units shown, e.g. mg, g, kg, cm, m, mL, L, ppm, m^2, ha, °C, etc. Where possible use the correct International System of units (SI units) (http://www.bipm.org/en/si/ and http://www.measurement.gov.au/measurementsystem/Pages/default.aspx)

6.2.4.1 Figures: Charts or graphs

Charts (or graphs) are commonly used to display data in a visual way that makes it easier to understand and easier to recall information. The preparation of appropriate charts is an essential skill that all ESE students will require.

There are basic rules for drawing charts. The properties of good chart include:

Rule 1 The chart is easy to plot and easy to read.

Rule 2 The axes are clearly labelled so the reader is able to see exactly what is plotted and its value, including the units of measurement.

Rule 3 There must be enough space to the left of the vertical (y) axis for labels and numbers without crowding.

Rule 4 If the label of a vertical axis is printed vertically, the words must be readable by turning the page a quarter turn.

Rule 5 Scales should be uniform. Scale numbers should be 'round' numbers, numbers like 20, 50, 100 not 17, 24, 228, etc.

Rule 6 The scale numbers on each axis must have a beginning value, which does not necessarily have to be zero.

Rule 7 Plotted points must be easily seen. Use symbols like x's, circled x's, large dots, squares etc. (e.g.: •, x, ◊□□□□□□□□□, s). If two or more data sets are plotted on one chart, use different symbols for each set of data.

Rule 8 Once a chart is completed and placed in a report it is referred to as a figure.

Rule 9 Whenever possible you should use a computer to create your charts.

Some of the different types of charts you can use are described below:

Histograms

Figure 7.1 is a histogram that summarises the size distribution of trees.

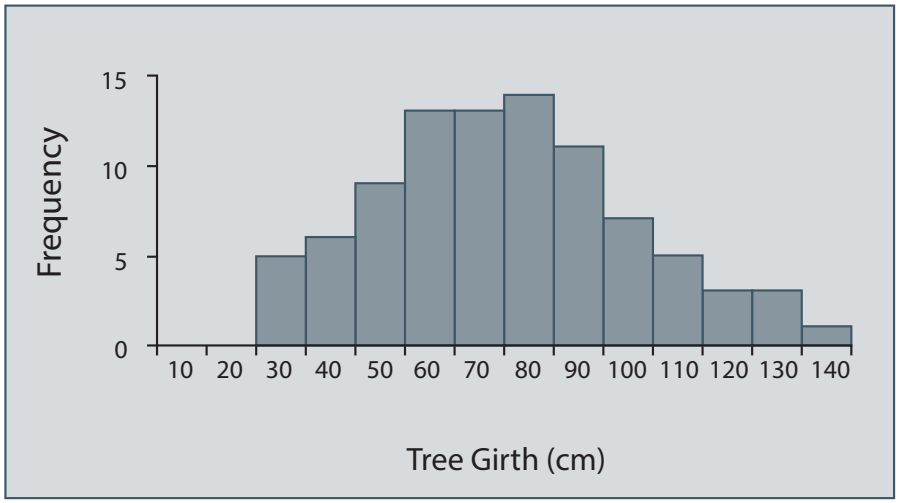
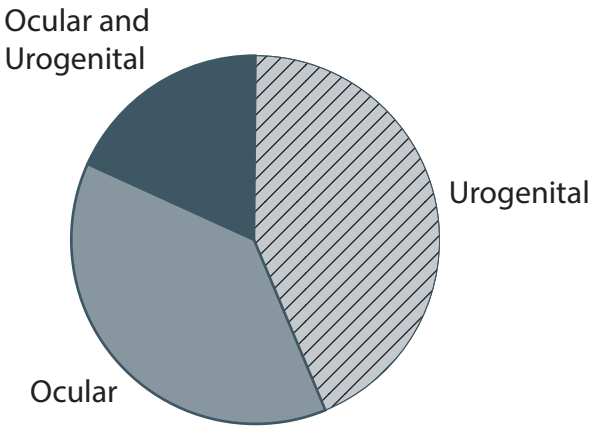


Figure 7.1 Size distribution of trees in koala habitat in the Tweed region of NSW.

There are some important points about chart drawing which can be made with this example. You will notice that the chart is actually called a "figure" and that the caption is placed underneath the figure. This is in contrast with tables which are captioned at the top. The x-axis is scaled with the girth of the trees in centimetres and the y-axis is scaled with frequency.

Pie charts

Figure 7.2 is a pie chart showing the relative frequency of different types of Chlamydia infections in koalas. Notice how different shading has been used to separate the three categories. The actual method of drawing a pie chart will be taught in Environmental Information Management.



Source: Jackson *et al.* (1999)

Figure 7.2 Frequency of different types of Chlamydia infections of koalas in Mutdapilly.

The following would appear in the reference section

Jackson, M., White, N., Giffard, P., Timms, P. (1999). Epizootiology of Chlamydia infections in two free range koala populations. *Veterinary Micro Biology 69*, 255–264.

Frequency polygon

By using points at the middle of each interval on the top of a histogram, and connecting them with a straight line you construct a frequency polygon as shown in Figure 7.3, using the same data used in Figure 7.1.

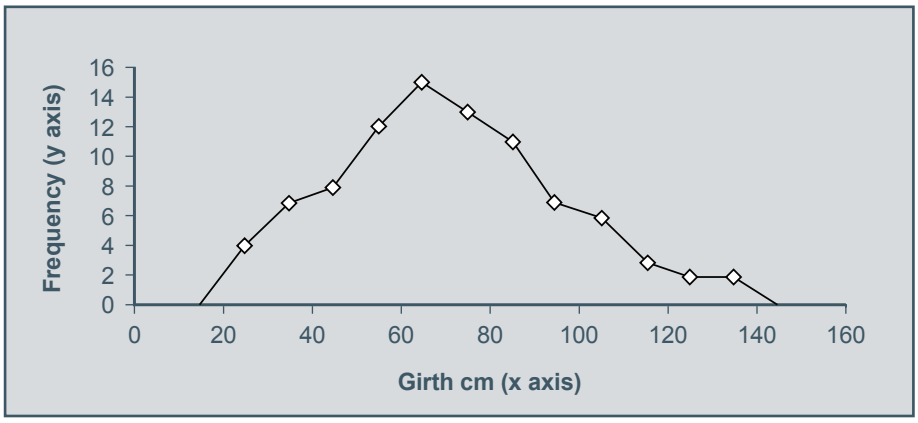


Figure 7.3 Frequency polygon of tree girth distribution.

Online learning support

Watch short videos on how to create graphs in Excel via the "Study Skills" link on the **ESE Student Centre** on MySCU.

6.3 Editing

Proofreading and editing is essential in preparing a quality assignment. Re-read and edit before submission to ensure that it makes sense and to remove any mistakes, bearing in mind that many assignments allocate a portion of marks to spelling and correct grammar.

We suggest a four-step editing process:

Step 1. Edit the structure – make sure it is logically sequenced and written concisely.

Step 2. Edit the meaning – make sure it makes sense.

Step 3. Edit the grammar and spelling – make sure it is correct.

Step 4. Edit the references – make sure you haven't plagiarised and that formatting is correct (see Section 5).

Proofreading for spelling mistakes is important – don't rely on spellcheckers. Spellcheckers are okay at finding some mistakes, but not when two words have different meanings and different spelling. For example:

> A pear of apples is to apples, butt it could all sew bee confusing depending on weather the whether was fine!

Every word in that sentence is spelled correctly, but the sentence makes no sense, or should that be cents!

6.3.1 Word processed assignments

All assignments should be word-processed. For many units you will be required to submit an assignment electronically via MySCU. Instructions are provided in the Environmental Information Management unit and on the ESE Student Centre site. Some assignments cannot be word processed because they are completed in the laboratory or in the field or require drawings etc. If in doubt ask the Unit Assessor.

Online learning support

Watch short videos on how to use Word via the "Study Skills" link on the **ESE Student Centre** on MySCU.

6.3.2 Page numbering and stapling

Pages must be numbered, either at centre top or in the exposed corner – this applies to both electronic and hard copy assignments. For hard copy, pages must be stapled in the top left-hand corner. Avoid using folders unless you are asked to by the Unit Assessor to do so.

6.3.3 Keeping copies

You must keep a copy of your assessment items. This could be a photocopy, a draft version, or a digital copy. This can be very useful if by any chance your assessment is lost.

6.3.4 Important notice

Some staff members may require you to submit work using different reference systems or styles. Always carefully look at assignment item details to make sure you are aware of any changes required.

6.4 Presentation: Formatting and editing checklist

1. Understand the need for logical structure and clearly expressed meaning in your assignments.
2. Read and follow the formatting guidelines presented above.
3. Make sure that figures and tables are consecutively numbered, have descriptive captions, and are introduced by text.
4. Know that proofreading and editing is essential in preparing a quality assignment.
5. Use a Word processor when preparing assignments.
6. Keep copies of all work submitted.

Section 7

Submitting your assignment

7.1 Cover sheet

Your unit assessor may require you to use a cover sheet when submitting assignments. For online submission an electronic cover sheet is provided on your unit's Blackboard site. If a cover sheet is specified for a particular assignment you should download the file, fill in the details, and insert the sheet as the first page in your assignment (do not submit the cover sheet as a separate file).

The cover sheet includes a declaration that you have read and understood the SCU rules relating to academic misconduct, and by typing your name into the signature box you are confirming that you understand the penalties and agree to be bound by the rules. Refer back to Section 5.1 for information about academic integrity and academic misconduct if you are unsure about your responsibilities.

7.2 Assignment marking and feedback

Assignments will normally be marked and returned to you within a two-week period where possible. Feedback will usually be provided to assist your learning, and may take the form of highlighted criteria on the assignment marking sheet, individual comments written on the marking sheet or on your work, group feedback sheets or by other means as determined by your Unit Assessor.

7.3 Late submission and penalties

You should contact your Unit Assessor to discuss your options as soon as possible if you think that you won't be able to submit your assignment by the due date. You may be eligible to apply for special consideration if you meet some clearly defined criteria (see Section 7.4 for details).

If you do not qualify for special consideration you may still be able to negotiate an alternative due date with your Unit Assessor, but be aware that they may refuse to accept assignments submitted late, or may accept and mark late assignments for a maximum grade of Pass (or 50% of the allocated marks for the item), or may impose an alternative penalty at their discretion.

7.4 Applying for special consideration

Special consideration is a request for:

- extensions of the due date for an assessment task, other than an examination
- special consideration in relation to a completed assessment task, including an end-of-unit examination
- a Special exam.

In line with SCU policy in the **University Handbook** (Rules Relating to Awards – Rule 3 – Coursework Awards – Student Assessment and Examinations), requests for special consideration in relation to assessment tasks shall only be considered on the grounds of health, compassionate circumstances, religious observances, serious unforeseen personal events, selection in state, national or international sporting or cultural events, rendering genuine and unforeseen emergency assistance, or rendering service in the Defence Reserves.

All special consideration requests must be submitted using the University's forms (these can be downloaded from **MySCU** http://scu.edu.au/students/index.php/30 or obtained from the ESE office), and must be accompanied by any documentation prescribed (e.g. a signed statement from a medical practitioner if applying on health grounds).

Requests for extensions on the due date of an assignment must be made to the Unit Assessor as soon as possible before the due date. The Unit Assessor will advise the student in writing within five working days whether the request is granted, and giving the new due date.

Requests for special consideration in the end-of-unit examination must be made to the Head of School using the official SCU application form.

Please read the relevant SCU Rules for more information and consult with your Unit Assessor and student liaison staff if you are still unsure how to proceed.

7.5 Submitting your assignment checklist

1. Find the electronic cover sheet on your unit website.
2. If a cover sheet is required for a particular assignment, download it, fill it in and type your name into the signature box.
3. Understand that the signed cover sheet indicates that you understand SCU's rules related to academic misconduct, and are aware of the penalties.
4. Insert the completed cover sheet to make it the first page of your assignment.
5. Make sure that you read any feedback provided after your assignment is marked because this is important to your learning.
6. Understand the penalties that may apply for late submission.
7. Know how to apply for special consideration, and what grounds make you eligible to apply.

Section 8

Where do you go for help?

If you are not sure what is required for the assignment then seek help from the Unit Assessor or Tutor. For help with report writing and academic issues contact the Division of Teaching and Learning (Academic Skills Development) (ASDU). They are in Level 3 of the Library at Lismore or contactable via **ASDU** http://www.scu.edu.au/academicskills/. They can help with writing, oral presentation, and research skills, as well as assistance with strategies for reading and mathematics. Assistance is available to internal and external students.

8.1.1 Useful reference texts

There are several books in the Library which you could consult. The following have been listed as essential sources of information. The full references are provided as well as the Library Call Number to help you locate them.

Hay, I. (2006). *Communicating in geography and the environmental sciences*. South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University. [Call No: 808.066333 HAYI]

Zeegers, P. (2008). *Essential skills for science and technology.* South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University. [Call No: 607.1 ESSE]

Section 9

Final thoughts

This guide is not meant to answer all your questions about writing assignments. You are expected to read widely from the Library and part of that reading should be looking at how articles in journals are written, as well as looking at some of the writing guides mentioned and others which you will find. Good luck and good writing!