

# Effective Writing



**BRADFORD**  
UNIVERSITY  
School *of* Management

# Effective Writing



## EFFECTIVE WRITING

Bad English can lead to poor results. This is true of both the business and academic worlds.

### The Business World

A Royal Mail survey in 2003 of 1,000 consumers estimated that UK businesses were losing more than £700 million a year as a result of spelling and grammar mistakes in their letters, emails, brochures and leaflets, or on webpages.

The survey suggested that nearly three quarters of customers do not trust businesses that use poor spelling and grammar and 30 percent say they would not do businesses with companies that made these mistakes (Royal Mail 2003)

### A Bad Spell at Norwich Cathedral

New tourist information maps in Norwich will have to be altered because one of the city's chief visitor attractions has been misspelt.

The blunder means that Norwich Cathedral has become the "Cathederal" after an extra "e" was added. *Lend Lease*, the company behind the signs, has admitted the gaffe.

Development manager Craig Graham said: "Obviously anything that is wrong on the maps, we will put right. It will have to be put down to human error."

He said although it had cost thousands of pounds to put up the signs themselves, the graphics work on each one was inexpensive and the mistake would not cost much to correct.

(BBC 2006)

### Awful Apostrophes

A spelling or grammatical error in an advertising or directional sign exposes the company or organisation concerned to public ridicule.

(See pages 18-20 for more examples of signs with apostrophe problems)



## In the Academic World

Tutors expect that you will take pride in the way you present your written assignment. It should be word-processed and **look** inviting.

It must also be well-written. Spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and confusing sentences can interrupt the process of communication between you and your tutor. If an essay or report is hard to follow or understand, it makes it difficult for a tutor to connect with your line of thought. This can cost you marks.

## Wretched Writing

When you are faced with writing an assignment or any other challenging document, how do you feel about the task ahead? And how do you start writing? Do you carefully construct a plan beforehand, or just start writing and think about the process as you go along?

If your reaction to any significant writing is apprehension - and to put off starting it until the last moment - then you are not alone. A study of students by Freeman (1983) reported that 45 per cent found writing 'painful', 61 per cent found it 'difficult' and 41 per cent lacked confidence in their ability to write. Another survey of academic writing (Kellogg 1994) found that motivating yourself to start was deemed to be the hardest part.

## Surrounded By Words

Students are surrounded by words: words in academic books, journals, Internet, crafted by seemingly competent and professional writers. The anguish and endless revision by these writers is hidden, unknown, and what is left is a polished and professional product - that emphasises the inadequacy of the student who feels they have to write to the same standard.

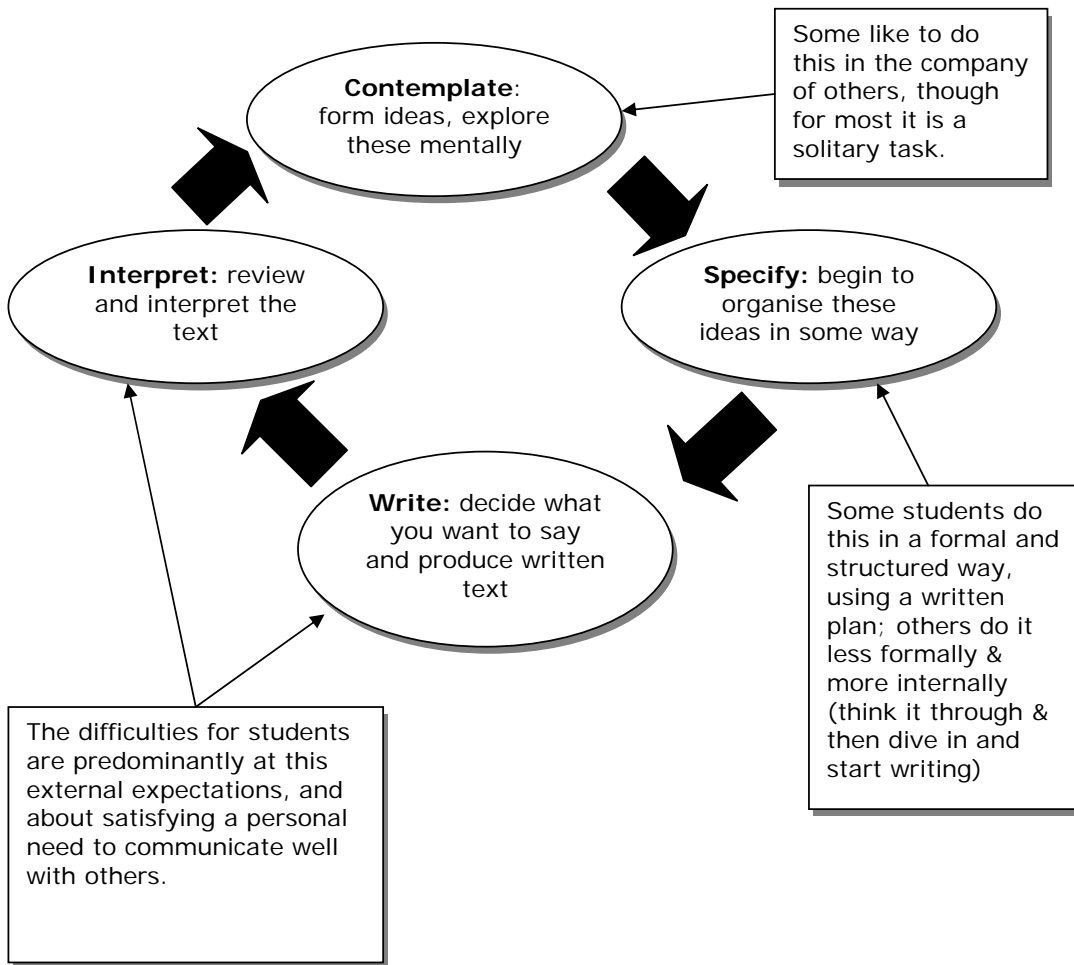
What to do in this situation?

*Being a writer is, above all, having **control** over how you write and trust in your ability to make progress. If you try to walk with your eyes closed you find that the first few steps are easy, but after about ten paces you begin to slow down, to tread carefully, sensing the terrain and feeling for obstacles. You lose faith in your ability to continue. Open your eyes again and the terrain guides you onward* (Sharples 1999, p.128).

Apprehension of writing can be overcome by gaining clearer awareness of the 'terrain': understanding more about both the craft and process of writing.

### The Process of Writing

The cycle of engagement and reflection in writing is shown below:



Is this how you begin the process of writing, or is the cycle of engagement different for you? Do you skip the 'contemplate' and 'specify' stages? If so, is that a problem for you?

## Writing Strategies

Wyllie (1993) surveyed student and academic writers to learn about the writing strategies they used. She categorised five main strategies and gave them names associated with creative or construction occupations.

- Water-colourist
- Architect
- Bricklayer
- Sketcher
- Oil painter

### 'Water-colourists'

They start writing with the end result clearly in their minds.

They think hard about what they going to say and make mental plans about the structure. They then work continuously and sequentially until the job is done, with few pauses or revisions. They rarely lose sight of the 'big picture' as they write. Only a small percentage of the respondents were in this category!



### 'Architects'

They made detailed plans first, usually with chapter or section headings to guide them. They write a first draft, usually in a sequential way, starting with chapter 1, but sometimes starting with the easiest section. They then continually review and revise their work until satisfied with it. They rarely correct as they go along, preferring instead to leave it until they have completed the first draft.



### 'Bricklayers'

They do not always have a big picture in their minds when they start writing, but more likely a series of ideas and points they want to make. They start with one idea and build up the text sentence by sentence, revising each until they are happy with it. Their revision is predominantly at a small scale, sentence or paragraph level, rather than with the text as a whole. The big picture emerges slowly in the process, with ideas emerging sequentially and gradually.



**'Sketchers'**

They usually produce rough plans that organise text under broad headings, though these might be abandoned once they begin to write. They are flexible in their writing, usually writing in a linear and sequential way, from introduction onward, but sometimes starting with an easy section. They revise frequently, both to the meaning, grammar, spelling and ordering of the text, both during the writing and after, until they are satisfied with it.

**'Oil-painter'**

They write by discovery and never have a complete picture in their minds when they start. They start off by jotting down a few ideas as they occur and organise these later. They begin writing sometimes with a rough plan, but often not. They jump into the text anywhere they feel comfortable or at the easiest part and go backwards and forwards from there. Their work is subject to much revision and they may correct as they go along, but generally do this later.



From this we can see that just one study-skills formula for writing will not fit; students need to be aware of their own individual writing style and aim to develop this further.

If you are happy with the way you write and it works for you, that's fine.

However, a useful experiment is to work on a writing project with others with different writing styles, as the result can often be creative for all involved.

Those, for example, with a tendency to over-plan in advance could benefit from working with others more spontaneous in their approach to writing – and vice versa.

'Bricklayers' might benefit from working with 'water-colourists', or 'oil-painters,' who in turn can learn from the layer-by-layer approach of the former.

Whatever your writing style, a reminder, or greater awareness of the basics of what constitutes 'good English', is always useful.

## Good English is Plain English

A Golden Rule in all forms of writing is 'good English is plain English'.

Writers on business communication share similar views: that plain English is at the heart of effective written communication.

Three examples, from Britain and the USA, are:

- Cutts, M. (1995) *The Plain English Guide: How to Write Clearly and Communicate Better*, London: QPD.
- Joseph, A (1998) *Put It In Writing: Learn How to Write Clearly, Quickly and Persuasively*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lauchman, R. (1998) *Write for Results*, New York: Amacom New Media.

### **What is Plain English?**

These commentators identify six features of good plain English and share similar views on each of these.

1. Short sentences
2. No unnecessary words
3. Familiar words
4. Prefer the active to the passive voice
5. Style
6. Good punctuation

The table that follows illustrates this agreement, but also suggests some differences in emphasis between the writers.

<b>Language Characteristic</b>	<b>Cutts (1995)</b>	<b>Joseph (1998)</b>	<b>Lauchman (1998)</b>
Short sentences	Average 15-20 words.	Average 15-20 words.	<i>'Let emphasis dictate length...but length dilutes; brevity emphasizes.'</i> (pp.59-60)
No unnecessary words	<i>'Use only as many words as you need.'</i>	<i>'...the need for clear, simple language.'</i> (p.14)	<i>'Avoid redundancy.'</i> (p.42)
Familiar words	<i>'Use words your readers are likely to understand.'</i>	<i>'Prefer clear, familiar words.'</i> (p.12)	<i>'Give yourself permission to use ordinary words.'</i> (p.84)
Prefer the active to the passive voice	<i>'Prefer the active voice unless there's a good reason for using the passive.'</i>	<i>'Prefer active voice verbs; avoid passives.'</i> (p.36)	<i>'Use it (the passive voice) when emphasis and context demands its use. It is senseless to make every sentence active; when you do that, you alter emphasis.'</i> (p.38)
Style	<i>'Put your points positively if you can'. 'Use the clearest, crispest, liveliest verb to express your thoughts.'</i>	<i>'Use conversational style as a guide.'</i> (p.39)	<i>'Write with verbs, not nouns.'</i> (p.31)
Good punctuation	<i>'Put accurate punctuation at the heart of your writing.'</i>	<i>'Punctuation marks are like traffic signals. They guide readers; they tell readers when to go and when to stop and when to turn, and in what direction.'</i> (p.209).	<i>'Punctuation has a single purpose: to clarify the writer's intended meaning.'</i> (p.105)

Source: Hartley & Bruckman (2002)

These six elements are now discussed in more detail.



## SHORT SENTENCES

*"A sentence is more likely to be clear if it is a short sentence communicating **one thought**, or a closely connected range of ideas"*  
(Evans, 2000, p.17)

There are four kinds of sentence:

Type	Construction	Example
The simple sentence	One sentence and one predicate or statement.	Two thieves robbed a bank yesterday.
The compound sentence	Two simple sentences joined by a conjunction.	Two thieves robbed a bank yesterday <b>and</b> stole £80,000.
The complex sentence	One principal statement and one or more subordinate statement or clauses which modify the main statement.	Two thieves, one armed with a handgun, the other with a knife, robbed a bank yesterday and stole £80,000.
The compound-complex sentence	All the statements have one or more modifying statements or clauses.	Two thieves, one male, armed with a handgun, the other female, armed with a knife, at 10am, on Peckham High Street, South London, audaciously robbed a bank yesterday and stole £80,000.

All the above sentences are clear, and any effective piece of writing will contain a mixture of sentence types and sentence lengths. This gives rhythm, pace and variety to writing.

However, compound-complex type sentences risk confusing the reader, as they present a mass of information that has to be navigated. To write effective 30+ word sentences requires a firm grasp of grammar, so that the main idea and modifying clauses in the sentence are clear, connected and coherent.

Long sentences can confuse readers; and the risk increases or declines in proportion to the writer's ability to punctuate sentences correctly.

**The Word Count**

There is another good reason to practise shortening sentences: to avoid exceeding the word-count in an assignment.

Shortening sentences is often possible without losing the meaning of a sentence. Look at the following introduction to an essay:

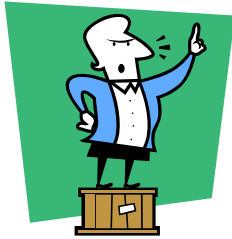
Before embarking on an approach to analyse the business model there is a need to explore the meaning of the business model. Paul Timmers (2000) has defined the business model as ‘an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles’. Although there are different kinds of business model they have got one thing in common and that is they are designed to make money for their owners in the long run.

There are 81 words in this introduction. But this can be reduced by a quarter without loss of meaning. Alternative words can be substituted for those cut.

Before	After
<p>Before embarking on an approach to analyse the business model there is a need to explore the meaning of the business model. Paul Timmers (2000) has defined the business model as ‘an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles’. Although there are different kinds of business model they have got one thing in common and that is they are designed to make money for their owners in the long run.</p> <p>(81 words)</p>	<p>Before analysing the business model, there is a need to explore its meaning. Timmers (2000) defined the business model as an architecture for product, service and information flows, including a description of the various business actors and their roles’.</p> <p>Although there are different business models, they have one thing in common: they are designed to make money for their owners.</p> <p>(60 words)</p>

The word-count in assignments can be managed by pruning your paragraphs; like shrubs, it does them good!

## KEEP IT SIMPLE



When students arrive in higher education, a change often comes over them.

They feel they need to change from writing in plain English, to a writing style they feel is more 'appropriate' for university; this grand place of learning they have entered!

Maeve O'Connor (1991) gives an example of a student who wrote once in a science report:

*Although solitary under normal prevailing circumstances, racoons may congregate simultaneously in certain situations of artificially enhanced nutrient resource availability.*

This means that racoons normally feed alone but will group together if food is left especially for them!

So why not simply say this? Students often feel they have to write in a long-winded and pretentious way because they are at university and this style of writing is expected of them. It is not.

The same message is true for academic writing as for any other: **keep it simple**. It may be necessary to use jargon occasionally and to write extended sentences to explain complex ideas. But the more complex the ideas, the more transparent, direct and plain your language should be.

This is particularly true for management studies students. The contemporary world of business and management has long been the target for the UK Plain English Campaign, who regularly poke fun at the ludicrous 'management-speak' that surfaces from too many companies.

The Campaign has a 'Golden Bull' slot on their website ([www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)) to highlight the worst cases. This is a typical example:

Jungle.com Email reply to a customer who asked 'Do you still sell blank CDs?'

*'We are currently in the process of consolidating our product range to ensure that the products that we stock are indicative of our brand aspirations. As part of our range consolidation we have also decided to revisit our supplier list and employ a more intelligent system for stock acquisition. As a result of the above certain product lines are now unavailable through Jungle.com, whilst potentially remaining available from more mainstream suppliers.'*

### The Wrong Word

Leader (1990) quotes examples of introductory paragraphs to exam question answers where a number of students used words inappropriately.

For example, in response to an exam question: 'Evaluate this statement: *Half the money spent on advertising is wasted*', one student wrote:

*Advertising is often used synonymously. Advertising includes all the activities which attempt to inform the public about the firm. This also includes public relations.*

There are factual inaccuracies in the second and third sentences, but the main problem is in the first sentence with the word 'synonymously'. Synonymously means 'exactly or nearly the same', so it would normally be used to compare one thing with another.

The student uses it in relation to advertising, but doesn't say what advertising is compared with or nearly the same as. The second and third sentences give us a clue to the meaning: the student is trying to say that the term 'advertising' describes a range of activities in a company.

However, the student uses a word he or she thinks will impress the reader, but gets into trouble because the result is an incomplete sentence. The student also gets off to a very bad start in an exam assignment, which will make a poor impression on the examiner!

### The Right Word

In most instances the word or phrase on the left could be replaced with the one on the right. It is not that the ones on the left are necessarily wrong, but the alternatives are crisper, more direct or shorter, which can help cut down on the word count for assignments.

**Try instead:**

Ahead of schedule	Early
A large proportion of	Many
Ascertain	Learn
Attempt	Try
Demonstrate	Show
Despite the fact that...	Although
Give consideration to	Consider
In many cases	Often
Made an approach to	Approached
One of the purposes	One purpose
Terminate	End

There are many more examples like these to be found in Harold Evan's book, 'Essential English' (see Bibliography).

**PREFER THE ACTIVE TO THE PASSIVE VOICE**

*“Prefer the active voice unless there’s a good reason for using the passive” (Cutts 1995).*

It may be some time since you studied the structure of language, so what is meant by the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ voice?

Clear sentences can be written in both forms; it depends on how verbs are used. Most verbs can be used in either an active or passive form.

<b>Active</b>	<b>Passive</b>
The dog <b>bit</b> the man	The man was <b>bitten</b> by the dog



□

An **active voice** is one where the subject (dog) performs the action of the verb (bit the man).

The **passive voice** is where the subject (the man) is on the receiving end (is bitten).



<b>Active</b>	<b>Passive</b>
The evidence suggests...	What <u>is suggested</u> from the evidence is that...
The SWOT analysis shows that...	What <u>is shown</u> by the SWOT analysis is that...
Restrictive tariff barriers damaged trade.	Trade <u>was damaged</u> by restrictive tariff barriers

The **active voice** is more direct, and is closer to the way we speak; it gets straight to the point. It can help student save on words when writing within tight word-count requirements for assignments

The **passive voice** can be recognised by the way the verb is formulated in two parts. Over use of the passive voice can add unnecessary words to an assignment.

### Emphasis Determines Voice

Although active sentences are preferred in most academic and business contexts, effective writing often combines both voices. The passive voice can be included to give variety or, as Lauchman (1998) reminds us, to alter the **emphasis** in a sentence. For example:

Example	Explanation
The <i>company</i> gave each employee a bonus. (Active) 	The emphasis here is on the <i>company</i> and what they did.
Each <i>employee</i> was given a bonus by the company. (Passive) 	The passive voice is used here deliberately: to emphasise the <i>employees</i> of the company.

In the passive voice example above, the employees were emphasised in the sentence, usually to prepare the reader for a relevant follow-on sentence, e.g.



*Each employee was given a bonus by the company. The result was that they decided to work the extra shift needed to complete the order on time.*

A combination of active and passive voice can give variety to an assignment, and is often necessary to give the required emphasis to a subject (see above).

But in business correspondence the active voice is more effective for most of the time:

#### Be active about passives

*"We often hold training courses in writing for staff in banks, building societies, insurance companies and public authorities. In these organisations, the most common cause of unclear writing is the overuse of passive verbs. When we analysed examples of writing in one building society, 90% of the verbs were passive and only 10% active. Clarity usually demands the reverse.*

*...passive verbs lengthen sentences; research also shows that passives are more difficult to understand.*

*Examples:*

*Passive: I refer to your letter of 23 March to the Town Clerk, **which was received by me** on 3 May.*

*Active: I refer to your letter of 23 March to the Town Clerk, **which I received** on 3 May.*

(Cutts & Maher 1986)

## STYLE

*"Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret to style".*

(Matthew Arnold, poet, 1822-1888).

Style is about the way a writer chooses to express him or herself. When we read something, we should hear the authentic voice of the writer.

But this is where many people go wrong.

The best style of writing is that which is close to formal, correct speech. Imagine, for example, you were explaining an idea to a tutor, or making a presentation to a group of people. It is likely that you would speak in a formal way. You would not use slang, but instead make an effort to put your ideas clearly in good English. You might use jargon if there was a shared understanding of this between you and the tutor or audience. But it is unlikely you would use words you did not understand, or words you regarded as pompous or pretentious.

The same rule applies to good writing.

The test of good writing is to read it aloud. If it sounds formal but still natural, you have probably got the style and tone right, although you would need to check the accuracy of the grammar and spelling. But, if it sounded convoluted and pretentious and was difficult to read aloud, it is likely to be all of those things; how it sounds is how it is likely to look and read.

### **The Invisible Reader**

When you write an essay or a report, bear in mind two readers.

The first reader is your tutor who will mark it. The tutor understands all the theories, practices, models and ideas relating to the subject.

However, there is another reader – an imaginary one.

This is a bright, intelligent, imaginary person; one who is quite capable of understanding unfamiliar, complex ideas if they are explained in a simple, straightforward way. Write your essay or report with this person in mind. Write as if you were explaining things aloud to this second reader.

This means you will explain the history and background of the subject to this person, briefly define terms and concepts, sum up arguments for and against issues – using simple language – and ensure this invisible reader understands all the main issues. This invisible reader should be in no doubt at the end of your essay or report what your main argument or point of view is.

If you do this, you will never go wrong as far as writing style is concerned. Your arguments may be wrong, but that's another story- and the subject of another booklet - but your writing style will be spot-on!

The following is an example of an introduction to an essay.

*We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be reorganised. We tend to meet any new situation by reorganising, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.*'(quoted in Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum 1999, p.455)

The above quotation might have been recorded yesterday in any staff canteen in any large organisation. In fact, the Roman author, Petronius, wrote it in 210 BC!

Petronius refers to the 'illusion of progress', meaning the images presented to the world outside the organisation, whilst hiding the reality within. This essay will discuss the reasons why organisations try to maintain their competitive advantage by innovating, changing and learning. But it will also emphasise the need for planned organisational change in eight stages to avoid the situation Petronius describes – and is still valid today.

The student uses an ironic quotation by Petronius to gain the interest of the reader and to make a valid point about the need to manage change effectively.

The 'voice' of the student emerges from the text. It is plain and direct; the English is correct and formal, although there is also a conversational quality about it. Terms like 'whilst hiding the reality within' are intriguing and add to the sense of interest generated in the topic.



## CORRECT PUNCTUATION

There are many books written on English punctuation. One of the best in recent years is *'Eats, Shoots & Leaves'* by Lynne Truss. The extent of the success of this book surprised the publishing world, but highlighted the concern many people have about punctuation. There are two particular areas of concern: about misuse of the comma, and of the apostrophe.

### 1. Comma Confusion

The use or misuse of the comma is a particular problem. Misuse of the comma, for example, is the cause of misunderstanding in student assignments.

It is such an insignificant mark on the page, but a lack of a comma in the right place can change the meaning of a sentence. Take this sentence, for example:

*'The England Manager said David Beckham was entirely to blame for the team's dismal performance.'*

This sentence suggests that the England manager was putting the blame on Beckham; the emphasis is put on what the Manager said: that Beckham was entirely to blame etc.

However, addition of two commas can completely change the meaning:

*'The England Manager, said David Beckham, was entirely to blame for the team's dismal performance.'*

The commas now change the emphasis to what Beckham said about the England Manager: that the Manager was to blame, not him!

Another example of changing the meaning of a sentence is:

*Woman without her man is nothing.*

The meaning changes dramatically with some additional punctuation:

*Woman! Without her, man is nothing.*

Which version do you prefer!

Peck and Coyle (2005) argue that the correct use of the comma is the 'key to precision' in writing and highlight the six main occasions when commas should be used (see next page).

Rule	Example
1. To separate the clauses in a sentence.	'Society depends on its traditions, and the authority of the written text is one of these'.
2. To separate the <b>introductory element</b> of a sentence from the main part (subject) of it.	'After the collapse of communism, Russia was thrown into economic turmoil'.
3. To separate an <b>additional and final part of a sentence</b> from the opening and main part (subject) of it.	" The sea is calm tonight, yet it has rained all day".
<p>4. To separate out (a) non-essential, or (b) essential/useful information, from the main part (subject) of the sentence.</p> <p>Commas used in these situations '<i>hunt in pairs</i>': are used at the beginning and end of the word or words to be separated from the main sentence.</p>	<p>(a) "There is, however, one mistake that many students make".</p> <p><i>(These words are non-essential, but they make the sentences 'flow' better)</i></p> <p>"There is, of course, a big advantage to using Metalib, in that you can gain easy access to a wide range of electronic journals".</p> <p>(b) "Eric Partridge, in his book '<i>You Have a Point There</i>', says that using colons in your writing is the equivalent of playing the piano with crossed hands."</p> <p><i>(Essential/useful information is about the book; the main subject of the sentence is about colons)</i></p>
5. To separate commands or interjections from the remainder of the sentence.	<p>"Stop, or I'll shoot."</p> <p>"No, you are wrong."</p> <p>"Yes, you are right".</p> <p>'Phew, what a hot day it is today".</p>
<p>6. (a) To separate out adjectives, or (b) a list of items in a sentence.</p> <p><i>(Note: you don't need a comma before the 'and' at the end of any list)</i></p>	<p>(a) " It was a fine, dry and sunny day in Bradford, which was a little unusual".</p> <p>(b) "April, June, September and November all have 30 days".</p>

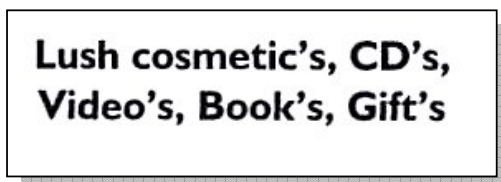
(adapted from Peck & Coyle 2005)

## 2. More Awful Apostrophes

The quaintly-named The Apostrophe Protection Society has many visual examples of misuse of the apostrophe on its website:

<http://www.apostrophe.fsnet.co.uk/>

Here are a few examples:



(Reproduced with permission of The Apostrophe Protection Society)

## Correct Use of the Apostrophe

The apostrophe is used in the following situations:

### 1. To show where a letter , letters or figures have been left out

- 'It is' can be merged to **it's**
- 'You will' can be merged to **you'll**
- 'He is' can be merged to **he's**
- 'Do not' can be merged to **don't**
- 2006 can be merged, if appropriate, to **'06**

However, using an apostrophe in these situations is acceptable for informal writing that imitates conversational speech, but should be avoided in formal writing for assignment purposes.

### 2. To indicate possession

This is when the apostrophe shows ownership or possession of something by someone or something.

- The University's Charter
- The Universities' Charters
- The course's aims
- The module's outcomes
- The School's Mission Statement
- The Dean's Mercedes Car
- The student's bar
- Women's rights
- The system's complexity
- The tutors' salaries

### Should the apostrophe come before or after the s ?

Paul Doherty (2006) suggests a useful way of helping you to resolve this question, and presents some examples:

"...a general tip for checking that your use of apostrophes is correct is to change the phrase around so that the part before the apostrophe becomes the last word. If it still has the same meaning, the apostrophe was correct..."

- The **boy's** books: the books of the **boy**
- The **boys'** books: the books of the **boys**
- The **children's** books: the books of the **children**
- **Men's** shirts: shirts of the **men**

but...

- **Peoples'** wishes: wishes of the **peoples** (wrong).
- **People's** wishes: wishes of the **people** (right)."

## COMMON ERRORS

### It's and Its:

**It's and its:** it is (or it's) easy to confuse the use of these two.

**It's:** only used when a letter has been left out, e.g. 'It's (it is) nearly time to go'; 'It's (it is) a hot day today'.

**Its:** no apostrophe is used when the word is used to denote possession, for example, the 'School opened its new library today'; or, 'the company closed its account with the bank this week'; or, 'the University launches its new Mission Statement this month'.

### Plural Problems

Apostrophes are never used to denote plurals. All the photographs on page 18 illustrate misuse of the apostrophe.

- So 'Taxi's only' is a **mistake**, as it is referring to taxis in the plural
- So 'CD's, Video's, Book's and Gift's' are all **common mistakes**, as they all refer to these items in the plural
- So 'Individual Tropical Pavlova's' is a **mistake** – as it is referring to Pavlovas , plural.

Another **common mistake** is to add an apostrophe to CV's. It should be CVs, if denoting plural.

Now try the short exercise on the next page.

**WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE SENTENCES?**

On this worksheet there are 11 punctuation errors. How many can you spot?

1. The University of Sussex is holding it's first 'Plagiarism Awareness Week' in February (13th - 17th).
2. Its estimated that more than a thousand people were affected by the radiation leak.
3. The CV's were'nt particularly impressive I'm afraid.
4. The report was logical short, and reading it was easy.
5. The decision to introduce computers has already been made by the Director's.
6. I decided not to take out the insurance policy on principle as its too expensive.
7. I have devised a plan to ensure our place in the top ten SME's in the region.
8. The BBCs response to the MPs criticism was to invite the MPs to take part in a televised broadcast on the topic.

Answers on page 25

## Developing Your Writing Skills

Ways of developing your writing skills:

- **Attend an English class:** English classes for international students are available throughout the year. Classes for postgraduate students are available every Wednesday afternoon at the School of Management; contact Heather Rea at the School, room 1.10 Airedale Building (h.m.rea@bradford.ac.uk). The Language Unit at the main campus also organise English classes for both undergraduate and postgraduate students; tel. 01274 235208, for details
- **Attend an Effective Learning Service (ELS) workshop:** many of these are on writing course assignments. Students are advised about workshops by Email at the start of each week and a reminder is sent at the start of the day concerned. Most workshops are at lunchtime, although some scheduled for late afternoon and especially targeted at part-time students. Most workshops are 40-50 minutes in length.
- **Read other ELS booklets:** see last section in this booklet for full list of titles currently available. Printed versions of these booklets can be found in the entrance halls to both the Emm Lane and Airedale Buildings, in the School library and outside the ELS office, room 0.10 Airedale Building. Electronic copies can also be read or printed off from the ELS web site on the School Home Pages (*go to the School Home Pages, click on to 'Resources', then 'Effective Learning Service-workbooks'*).
- **Read books on the skills of writing:** see the 'bibliography' on the next page for suggested titles.
- **Study on a writing or Personal Development Module:** the School offers undergraduate courses: *Writing for Professional and Academic Purposes* and *Personal & Professional Development* modules; contact the Undergraduate Office for details of these. The core *Personal Development Plan* module for MBA students also offers opportunities for postgraduate students to develop their writing skills in a range of independent ways.
- **Talk to the Effective Learning Officer (ELO):** the Effective Learning Officer for the School, Colin Neville, the author of this booklet, will discuss your written work with you individually. You can make an appointment or attend a weekly drop-in 'writing clinic'. Details of these drop-in sessions are sent out to all students at the start of each week. For an appointment, send an Email to C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk. Distance learning students can discuss issues of concern with the ELO by Email or telephone.

## Effective Learning Booklets

There are other booklets in the 'Effective Learning' series:

1. *Return to Part-time Study*
2. *Return to Full-time Study*
3. *Accelerated Learning*
4. *20 Tips for Effective Learning*
5. *The First Semester (surviving the First Semester)*
6. *Time Management*
7. *Six Steps to Effective Reading*
8. *Essay Writing (1): stages of essay writing*
9. *Essay Writing (2): planning & structuring your essays*
10. *Essay Writing (3): finding your own voice in essays*
11. *Report Writing*
12. *References & Bibliographies*
13. *Pass Your Exams*
14. *Your Assignment Results – and how to improve them*
15. *Presentations*
16. *Group Work*
17. *Introduction to Research & Research Methods*
18. *Foundations for Good Research*

You can download any of these from the School of Management Homepages: **Resources– Effective Learning** link, or contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 4414 (internal), Email: C.Neville@Bradford.ac.uk, or visit room 0.10 Airedale Building at the School of Management.

The booklets can also be found in the School of Management library, in the foyer of the Airedale Building and in the main entrance/foyer of the Emm Lane building.

In the School of Management and J.B. Priestley libraries, there is a study skills section at **D.371.30281**

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**Answers to Quiz on page 21.**

1. The University of Sussex is holding **it's** first 'Plagiarism Awareness Week' in February (13th - 17th).

**Comment [BU1]: Question 1.** 'Its' in this context regards possession, so an apostrophe is not required

2. **Its** estimated that more than a thousand people were affected by the radiation leak.

**Comment [BU2]: Question 2:** However, there should be an apostrophe here, as two words: 'it is', have merged to one .

3. The **CV's** **were'nt** particularly impressive. I'm afraid.

**Comment [BU3]: Question 3a:** CVs is used in the plural, so apostrophe is not needed

4. The report was logical short, **and** reading it was easy.

**Comment [BU4]: Question 3b:** This is a merge of two words, 'were' and 'not', so the comma should come after 'n', to replace the missing 'o': to make 'weren't'

5. The decision to introduce computers has already been made by the Director**'s**.

**Comment [BU5]: Question 3c:** There should be a comma after 'impressive' (see example 4, p.17)

6. I decided not to take out the insurance policy on principle as **its** too expensive.

**Comment [BU6]: Question 4:** No comma needed here – see example 6, p.17

7. I have devised a plan to ensure our place in the top ten **SME's** in the region.

**Comment [BU7]: Question 5:** The Apostrophe is not necessary, as 'Directors' is used in the plural in this context

8. The **BBC's** response to the **MPs** criticism was to invite the MPs to take part in a televised broadcast on the topic.

**Comment [BU8]: Question 6:** Apostrophe needed here, as it is amalgamation of two words 'it is'

**Comment [BU9]: Question 7:** No apostrophe needed here, as SMEs is plural in this context.

**Comment [BU10]: Question 8a:** Apostrophe needed here, as the response is 'owned' by the BBC

**Comment [BU11]: Question 8b:** Same principle as above; it is criticism 'owned' by the MPs