# Hints on writing Essays, Reports and Dissertations

Anton Setzer

December 3, 2014

Here follow a couple of remarks, which might improve the quality of essays and reports:

- Look very carefully at the marking scheme for your essay, report, or dissertation, and what each item it requires. Then make sure you address each item.
- In the motivation say what could motivate the audience, not what motivates you. (E.g. that you want to learn about an area since childhood doesn't motivate others, only you; think instead why this area is important, interesting, etc).
- Essays and reports should contain title, table of contents, introduction, conclusion, list of references (which must not consist of web addresses only), citations in the text, and numbered chapters.
- To copy sentences and small paragraphs from other texts is acceptable, if **cited correctly** (especially, **quotation marks** should be put around them). To do this for longer paragraphs doesn't give a good impression. It is a **violation of the university policy on plagiarism**, to copy material from other sources without making this explicit in the text. Such a violation might have **serious consequences**.
  - Note that if you copy some text verbally from somewhere else, it doesn't suffice to have a reference to the source in your list of references. It needs to made clear to the reader, which parts are written by you and which are coming from other sources.

  - It is still plagarism, if you change a few words in a text and copy it without making it explicit that this is copied from some other source. Only if you rewrite the text completely it counts as your own text - but you are still obliged to mention the source. Note that having many references to the bibliography is something positive, which is highly recommended (provided of course that these references are meaningful).

- The same rules apply to pictures taken from somewhere else: it should be cited where they have been taken from.

- Usually, using LaTeXor TeX, a much higher quality is achieved.

- Justify the text left and right (in LaTeX, this is done automatically, under Word, there is a button for doing this).

- References to literature should be added in a proper way:

  - There are several schemata for introducing abbreviations, two of them are:

    * Numbers in square brackets e.g. [5].
    * Alphanumeric references, e.g. [Sm98] for an article written 1998 by John Smith, [Sm98a], [Sm98b] if there are two articles by the same author, [AS01] for an article written by Adams and Smith 2001, [ASJ01] for an article written by Adams, Smith and Jones, 2001).

  - Below follows an example of a bibliography. The order in each entry (author, **book**-title, edition, publisher, year, page number; note that sometimes one takes an article in a collection of articles – then the author of the book is usually an editor and the title of the book is in italics whereas the title of the article itself is not; an example is [3] below) and the use of Roman and italic font is particularly important (however one might follow a different schema, as long as it is one typically used in scientific literature). Please refer to bibliographies in other academic books for entries which don't fit into the pattern below.

# References


[1] P. Aczel. Frege structures and the notions of proposition, truth, and set. In J. Barwise, H. J. Keisler, and K. Kunen, editors, *The Kleene Symposium*, pages 31–59. North-Holland, 1980.

[2] W. Buchholz. A note on the ordinal analysis of KPM. In J. Oikkonen and J. Väänänen, editors, *Logic Colloquium '90, ASL Summer Meeting Helsinki*, volume 2 of *Springer Lecture Notes in Logic*, pages 1 – 9, 1993.

[3] C. Coquand. *The Agda homepage*, February 2000. `http://www.cs.chalmers.se/~catarina/agda/`.

[4] T. Coquand and C. Paulin. Inductively defined types, preliminary version. In *LNCS 417, COLOG '88, International Conference on Computer Logic*. Springer-Verlag, 1990.


– Entries in the bibliography should be sorted, by the author's last name(s). For entries which have no author, one should take the first main word in the title instead (omitting words like "The"). Usually, all entries should be sorted in one big list.

– In the bibliography there shouldn't be references to individual pages in a document (unless the document consists only of on e page). Especially, books should be referenced only once. When referring in the text to an individual page one should write for instance [3], p. 37 or [5], p. 37-38. Page numbers occur only when referring to a complete article or to a chapter which is a seperate unit (typically written by a different author, e.g. an article in a proceedings volume or a chapter on a topic in a handbook or encyclopedia), and then indicate where the whole article is to be found.

– Especially, because of the above, there shouldn't be multiple entries for the same book, which refer to different pages in it (unless one refers to separte subunits).

– Web-addresses should not be underlined, as Word does it by default (there are options which allow to disable the automatic underlining of web-addresses).

- References should be included in the text, whenever they were used when writing the text (otherwise one might violate the university policy on plagiarism) or when they might provide additional information. Typical ways of citing are:
  - In [3] p. 145, Meyer writes ,...
  - As Meyer [3], p. 165 points out, ...
  - LaTeX([7],[9],[16]), developed by Lamport ([6]) has now become the standard in mathematical type setting".
- When citing books or long articles, often only a couple of pages are really used. Then one should be more specific by giving page or section numbers, e.g. "[3], p. 5 - 7" or "[5], Chapter 7", or "[8], Sect. 9".
- For cited web pages, the title and if possible the author should be identified. The web address should **not** be underlined.
- The bibliography should be sorted alphabetically by the first author. If there is no author, the first main word (e.g. not words like "The") in the title should be chosen.
- Many mistakes can be avoided by using the spell-checker (M-x ispell under XEmacs/Emacs or the spell-and-grammar-checker under Word).
- The style of an essay should be rather formal, like in scientific articles.
- Mathematical formulas should be properly typeset. This is with some effort under Word possible as well (at least subscripts and superscripts, some Greek symbols and some mathematical symbols are readily available, otherwise one might have to install Microsoft Equation, which is part of the Word distribution). Under LaTeXof course it is much easier to create them in good quality.
- The proper use of sections and subsections improves as well the quality of your article. It's recommended to have numbered sections.
- Create a well designed title page containing title, your name and your student number. Alternatively you can put the title etc. at the beginning, but use proper spacing like in the examples provided.

- Please add page numbers.
- Please put essays and short reports in a binder in such a way that they can easily be read without having to remove them first from a poly bag, or use a stapler.
- Word underlines web-references. This might be useful when reading such documents online, but looks strange in printed documents. One can switch this automatic underlining off: Go to Tools → Autocorrect → Autoformat as you type → Replace, and deselect there Internet and network paths with hyperlink. Do the same with the tab "Autoformat" in the same menu.
- When using Word, it is recommended to deselect some other items in the autoformat menu mentioned in the previous item, since they often result in errors in mathematical or program text (e.g. variables are by this autocorrection facility automatically capitalized). It is better to apply at the end the spell-checker to the document, which gives the user the possibility to decide whether (s)he wants to make a change or not.
- The following applies especially for theses and dissertations, but is as well applicable to other documents:
  - The introduction should clearly outline what the student is going to do. (Often only after having read half of the document it becomes clear what the student is going to do.) One should aim at making this crystal clear.
  - The conclusion should not only be a summary, but really give an answer to the questions set out in the introduction. It should evaluate what has been achieved. This could as well be a negative answer (for instance by saying that the approach which was tried out in this project wasn't appropriate – it is quite normal in science to try something out in order to see whether it is suitable; sometimes it turns out that it is not suitable, but then a lot of information is gained, namely that the approach was not good.) An evaluation should make clear what has been achieved, what went wrong, what one learned from it, what one should have done differently, etc.