

Guide to structuring written and oral presentations

William B. McGregor

Department of Linguistics, Cognitive Science and Semiotics,
Aarhus University

Revised version, August 2018

© William B. McGregor

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface | 3 |
| Part 1: Essays and other written pieces | 4 |
| 1. Introductory remarks | 5 |
| 1.1. Basic principles and considerations | 5 |
| 1.2. Be aware, beware | 6 |
| 2. Background: preliminary considerations | 7 |
| 3. Organising your time and thoughts | 8 |
| 3.1. Planning | 8 |
| 3.2. Time tabling | 8 |
| 4. Structure of essays and other written pieces | 10 |
| 4.1. Essays must be about something | 10 |
| 4.2. Basic structure | 10 |
| 4.3. Outlines | 12 |
| 4.4. Quotes | 13 |
| 4.5. Tables and figures | 14 |
| 4.6. Linguistic examples | 15 |
| 4.7. Phonetic fonts | 16 |
| 4.8. Other things to bear in mind | 16 |
| 5. Referencing | 18 |
| 6. Other considerations | 21 |
| Part 2: Oral presentations | 24 |
| 7. Introductory remarks | 25 |
| 8. Structure of oral presentations | 27 |
| 8.1. Content | 27 |
| 8.2. PowerPoint | 27 |
| 8.3. Handouts | 29 |
| 8.4. Questions and answers | 30 |
| Guide to further reading | 31 |
| Appendix: Advice on reading | 32 |
| Reference | 34 |

Preface

This document is intended to give you some practical advice on how to put together written and oral presentations. It is intended for students in LICCS at Aarhus University, especially those studying linguistics, but also those studying semiotics and cognitive science. It includes an appendix that gives some advice on how to read – and not to read – academic books and articles.

The text is short and selective, and does not pretend to be a complete guide to study techniques. It does not provide advice on how to get ideas (hardly explicable anyway!), how to use your word processor (you need to ensure you know how to use it effectively, what its capabilities are, and its bugbears), or how to take notes, for instance. There are a number of places on the internet where you can find information on note taking, including, for instance the following websites (note that websites have short half-lives, and addresses are often changed – you may need to search further for these sites):

<http://www.mantex.co.uk/how-to-take-notes/> (last accessed 31-08-2018)

<https://student.unsw.edu.au/note-taking-skills> (last accessed 31-01-2018)

<https://www.oxfordlearning.com/5-effective-note-taking-methods/> (last accessed 31-08-2018)

To facilitate its use as a guide, this text is written in point form.

Thanks to my colleagues Jan Rijkhoff, Ethan Weed, Jakob Steensig and Peter Bakker for useful comments on a previous version.

Part 1: Essays and other written pieces

1. Introductory remarks

1.1. Basic principles and considerations

- Before putting pen to paper or finger to keyboard, get your brain into gear.
- All writing requires preparation, forward planning, and constant evaluation and revision of your plans.
 - ▶ Time spent planning will pay dividends later, when the writing process will go more smoothly.
- A good principle to operate on is emulation, a fancy word for copying. Look at samples of writing on the subject published in good international journals. For instance, if you are writing in linguistics, there are a number of general journals such as *Journal of Linguistics*, *Studies in Language*, and *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics*; if you are writing in semiotics you might look at *Semiotica*, *Cognitive Semiotics*, and *Social Semiotics*. You may also want to look at more specialised journals: for instance, if you are writing on sociolinguistics, look at articles in e.g. *Language in Society* and *Journal of Sociolinguistics*; if you are writing on psycholinguistics or neurolinguistics, look at articles in e.g. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research and Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*; if you are writing on typology, look at articles in e.g. *Linguistic Typology*.
 - ▶ These samples show you what an end-product could look like, but don't give much of an idea of how to go about producing it. It is one of the foci of this document to explain some of the doing processes.
 - ▶ Below I list a few sample articles that reveal intelligent design and good argumentation (all are available online from electronic journals at the Royal Danish Library, Det Kgl. Bibliotek – <http://library.au.dk/>):



Alibali, Matha W., Kita, Sotaro & Young, Amanda J. 2000. Gesture and the process of speech production: we think therefore we gesture. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 15. 593-613. (Gesture studies, psycholinguistics, experimental reportage.)

Davidse, Kristin. 1999. The semantics of cardinal versus enumerative existential constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 10. 203-250. (Grammar, grammatical argumentation.)

Duranti, Alessandro. 1990. Politics and grammar: agency in Samoan political discourse. *American Ethnologist* 40. 646-666. (Sociolinguistics; conversation analysis; politics and grammar.)

Verstraete, Jean-Christophe. 2005. The semantics and pragmatics of composite mood marking: the non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia. *Linguistic Typology* 9 (2). 223-268. (Linguistic typology, grammar.)

- Stivers, Tanya. 2008. Stance, alignment, and affiliation during storytelling: when nodding is a token of affiliation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 41 (1). 31-57. (Conversation analysis; interactional linguistics; gesture.)
- Winawer, Jonathan, Witthoft, Nathan, Frank, Michael C., Wu, Lisa, Wade, Alex R. & Boroditsky, Lera. 2007. Russian blues reveal effects of language on color discrimination. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 104 (19). 7780-7785. (Psycholinguistics, experimental reportage.)

[Back to Contents](#)

1.2. *Be aware, beware*

- This document contains a considerable number of points of detail about planning, organising and presenting your data and ideas.
- Don't get too bogged down on details: the process of writing takes years to hone to a skill. **Don't expect to learn it all at once.**
- It may be helpful to read this document and look at a sample article at the same time.
- This document is not meant as a recipe book — there is no recipe for good writing.
- You learn most by **doing**. The following hints are meant to help you in the process of doing, and are not to be followed slavishly as a recipe for producing a good essay.
 - ▶ Ideally, as you progress through your years of study your essays should come closer and closer to the shape described here.
 - ▶ Your lecturer will have different expectations according to what year of study you are in.



☞ So read this document, attempt to follow the main principles, but don't let the details hinder you. Don't expect to be perfect from the beginning; try to improve over time, with practice.

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Background: preliminary considerations

- Decide on a topic to write on:
 - ▶ usually you should choose a topic that interests you;
 - ▶ make sure you choose something manageable in the time available;
 - ▶ it is advisable to consult with your lecturer to ensure that you are not attempting too ambitious (or too trivial) a project.
- Search the library and internet for literature and data. The best places to begin are:
 - ▶ textbooks for the course, and references they cite;
 - ▶ your course outline and references cited in it;
 - ▶ dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and handbooks of linguistics and its sub-disciplines;
 - ▶ online resources such as bibliographic indexes and abstracting services (e.g. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>); *Wikipedia* (<https://www.wikipedia.org/>) can provide useful information, but be careful and critical in using it (like all online resources);
 - ▶ annually or continually updated online bibliographies like *Language and Linguistic Behavior Abstracts*; *Bibliographie Linguistique*. You can also google the word *bibliography* with your topic of interest; more often than not, someone put a bibliography on the net.
- Take notes while reading — be careful to be **accurate**, and **understand** what the writer is saying. (See further [Appendix: Advice on reading](#).)
 - ▶ Always note page numbers for the important and relevant information that you might want to use. If you don't do this, you may have to double up on work again if you want to use the information in your essay.
 - ▶ Note down good quotations, remembering to follow the **exact wording** of the source, including spelling. This includes spelling mistakes — these should be indicated by *sic* to show that they are the author's error, not yours. E.g. "Take knotes (sic) while reading". Also make sure to distinguish in your notes your own remarks from quotes, so that you do not accidentally use quoted text as your own, since that would be plagiarism (see under §6).
 - ▶ Keep a careful record of works consulted, including all of the relevant bibliographical details (see §5 below).
- Organise your thoughts!
 - ▶ Identify the main ideas, themes, etc. from your readings.
 - ▶ Attempt to put them together coherently into a story.
 - ▶ Put together a tentative outline of the structure of the essay (see §4.3).

[Back to Contents](#)

3. Organising your time and thoughts

3.1. Planning

- Plan each stage of writing your essay — make sure that you choose something doable in the time available (bear in mind that for a 10 ECTS course, you are expected to work 280 hours, including classes, group work, preparation, reading and exams). It is a good idea to discuss your ideas with your lecturer.
- Plan your project taking into consideration work for your other classes and exams.
- Put together a **plan** of how you will spend your time so that you don't run out of it.
 - ▶ You may find the plan is unworkable; if so, don't stick to it rigidly. Make changes as necessary to make it realistic, and be able to complete it in the time available.
 - ▶ Always make sure you leave sufficient time for actual writing-up of the essay — this is always a very time-consuming process, so don't underestimate it. Even the most experienced writers often take longer to write than they expect.

3.2. Time tabling

- It is often a good idea to work **backwards** from the submission date to the beginning (which ought to be **right now**). The following is an example of steps – listed in reverse chronological order – that are likely to be involved in preparation of a course essay – some of the steps will not be relevant for other types of writing:
 - ▶ **dd/mm/yy**: deadline; hand in paper on time! Note that for online exams submission automatically at the point in time set for delivery; even if you are late by one second you will be unable to submit, and you will need to sit a reexamination.
 - ▶ **dd-1**: make pdf of file, and check it over carefully for errors, typos, etc. Make sure that the conversion process worked well, and everything is there in the final pdf file. If a hard copy should be submitted, print out the final version — never leave this until the last day, or you'll find that there's no paper, the printer is broken, you wake up late, it snowed during the night, etc. etc.
 - ▶ **dd-3**: print out the next to last version, and proof read it very carefully, checking you have page numbers on each page and other formatting details (see under §6). Have you got the references complete and correct (see further §5)? Note that it is advisable to print the file at this point to make sure everything is in order.
 - ▶ **dd-4**: revise your paper in accordance with the comments you have received. Take comments seriously, and use them as a basis for improving your paper.

- ▶ **dd-14:** if you want comments on your paper, you should have a draft ready at least two weeks or more before submission so that there is time for your lecturer or colleagues to read it and give you feedback. This is perhaps cutting things very finely, and your lecturer may set an even earlier deadline; if so, respect it: they may have many essay drafts to read and comment on, as well as other things to do. Make sure that you submit a complete final draft of the essay, including introduction and conclusion: it is impossible to properly comment on a paper lacking these components. (Things like references might be incomplete at this stage – check with your lecturer for confirmation.)
- ▶ **asap:** work out a feasible time table for completing the sections of the body of the text; leave the introduction and conclusion until last — these are the hardest bits to write unless you are very experienced.
- ▶ **asap:** work out a general plan for the essay (numbered sections and subsections, their main content, and a preliminary list of references – make sure you record all of the necessary information about the works, as per §5).
- ▶ **by about week 7 or 8 of the course** (if not before): hand an abstract or outline of what you propose to do — about a paragraph. The lecturer will comment on it.
- ▶ **week 6 of course or before:** begin your serious reading schedule. You should begin your reading before you plan too much writing. However, don't leave the planning and writing until after you've done all the reading — usually there will be too much material to read. (See further [Appendix: Advice on reading](#).)
- ▶ **by no later than week 6 of course** — decide on a topic to write on, and let your lecturer know what it is. Discuss your selection with your lecturer, and/or other students.
- ▶ **by yesterday:** look through the course description and textbook for topics you find interesting — skim the entire textbook. Read more carefully topics that seem most interesting. Don't get bogged down at this stage.

☞ The above steps can be modified in accordance with the circumstances, including the length of the essay, amount of time available (shorter essays may be expected by the middle of the semester), and so forth. For longer pieces such as theses it is a good idea to discuss your timetable with your supervisor: e.g. whether you hand in chapter by chapter or the final draft. Be sure to allow sufficient time for your supervisor to read and comment on your thesis, and for you to act on those comments.

[Back to Contents](#)

4. Structure of essays and other written pieces

4.1. *Essays must be about something*

- Identify a theme or thesis for the essay (which might be a BA project or MA thesis – note the different sense of the word *thesis*) — it has to be **about** something, not just a collection of random thoughts cobbled together.
 - ▶ The thesis will be a proposition or hypothesis that relates to what the essay is about — e.g. the thesis of an article I wrote some years ago is that a verb meaning ‘say, do’ in Nyulnyulan languages have a single invariant component of meaning.
 - ▶ Try to write down the thesis in a single sentence, as I have just done.
 - ▶ Have you ever read an article or book that is not (or appears not to be) about anything? Did you enjoy it? Unlikely!
- Organise your essay around the thesis — everything in the essay should relate to the thesis, and develop it. Don’t go off on too many tangents, with badly integrated information.
 - ▶ The essay should develop a case for the thesis, argue for it; think carefully of how you can make the argument most convincing.
 - ▶ Note that this applies also if your piece is primarily a critique — the critique needs a thesis too. E.g. I might write a paper critiquing the claim that there is nothing peculiar about the cognitive processing employed in language or speech. My thesis might be that there is something unique about it; it might alternatively be that the evidence is insufficient to make a coherent case pro or con.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.2. *Basic structure*

- Basic structure of essays — it is always a good idea to divide the essay into numbered sections with headings: this helps the reader find their way around it. You should generally have:
 - ▶ INTRODUCTION — where you present background to the paper, identifying your thesis, and situating it within the wider context of relevant thought; indicate your thesis as early as possible in the essay – readers do not like to be left in the dark for very long. A lead-in to your topic can also be useful; however, personal ones that explain why you became interested in the topic should be kept to a minimum – more than a sentence or two can become irritating to the reader. In general, it is preferable to lead the reader to your topic by relating it to general knowledge in the field. It is a good idea to include in any substantial essay an outline of the structure of the argument and/or paper; the most natural place for this is in a paragraph at the end of the introduction. The introduction is normally numbered 1, **not 0**. Be careful that your introduction is not too long.

- ▶ **BODY** of text — this presents the details that elaborate and justify your thesis; do not include anything that is not relevant to the thesis (or if something is not obviously relevant, explain how it is relevant). The body should be divided into numbered sections dealing with particular subthemes; you can also make hierarchies within the numbering, with sections 2.1, 2.2, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, etc., as in this document.
 - Avoid too many levels — consider three the maximum for a 10-20 page essay (as in e.g. §2.1.3). (For longer pieces more levels may be warranted.)
 - You might want to include a section giving a literature review (normally §2), though this is not essential — an alternative is to integrate literature where relevant in your text. This usually makes for a more readable piece, though it can be more difficult to write.
 - A literature review is more than just a summary of what others have said. Make sure to include considered discussion, critique and evaluation of the claims, methodology, and so forth.
 - If your argument is long and/or complex, it is advisable to include signposting of its direction in the body of the text (in addition to the overall structure given in the introduction). That is, refer to relevant parts of the text where you discuss a particular point in detail – e.g. “As I showed in section 2 ...”, or “As will be exemplified in chapter 4 ...”.
- ▶ **CONCLUSION** — this winds up the essay by briefly summarising it: mentions the main thesis and point of the paper, and outlines the main evidence adduced in the paper. Comment on any especially significant or recurrent difficulties or problems encountered on the way, and try to link your thesis to the wider world; e.g. say why your study is significant. (Note that a conclusion is not just a summary, and should say something new, that has not already been said in the body of the essay.) The conclusion should be numbered sequentially after the last numbered section of the body of the essay.
- ▶ **REFERENCES** — list of works referred to in the text; do not include works that you don't refer to. (See §5 below.) The reference section is not normally numbered.
- ▶ **APPENDIX** — if relevant, you might want to include some of the data collected (if you collected data) in one or more appendixes, which should be numbered (Appendix 1, Appendix 2, ...) if more than one. These should normally follow the references. Remember that an appendix is not necessarily read, and nothing crucial to your argument should be included. If you want to use examples to illustrate a point in your argument, they should normally be given at the relevant point of the text — don't say “see Appendix 1”. Likewise figures and tables that are integral parts of the text should be given where appropriate in the text, and not included in an appendix.

- Sometimes an ABSTRACT is required, which is normally the first piece of prose in an essay or thesis. An abstract is more than a summary. The idea is to give a concise presentation of the entire paper in a paragraph, in a way that will hopefully intrigue the reader sufficiently to make them want to read the whole thing. Thus it needs to give an idea of the motivation of the study, a statement of the problem to be addressed, the approach, the results, and the conclusions. Abstract writing is not easy, and takes a good deal of practice. Do not number your abstract. Check length and language requirements for the abstract.
- One way of modelling an academic essay is as a double funnel, as shown in Figure 1. Your introduction should draw the reader into the topic; the body of the text will process the details, making your case; the concluding section will take the reader back to the world in general, showing the general relevance of the essay, and how it contributes to our understanding of the domain of investigation.

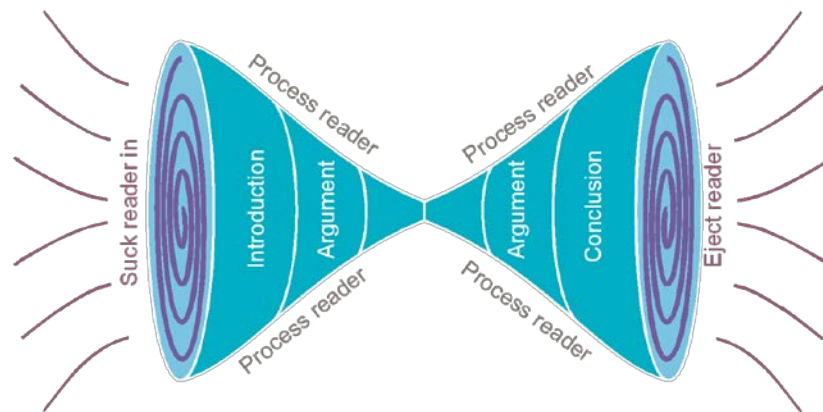


Figure 1: *Double funnel model of essay structure*

[Back to Contents](#)

4.3. *Outlines*

- Below is a sample outline for an essay entitled *The interaction between grammatical mood and pragmatics, implications to the organisation of a semiotically informed grammar*

1. Introduction:

what I'm going to do; main problem and idea to develop; background information (what is grammatical mood? what is pragmatics? what are the problems in relating them?); organisation of the paper

2. Mood in Semiotic Grammar:

critical outline of how SG incorporates mood into the grammar

3. Pragmatic account of illocutionary acts:

critical account of pragmatic approaches to illocutionary acts and force — where does grammar fit in these accounts?

4. SG meets Pragmatics:

how does SG suggest grammar and pragmatics interact? What specific proposals does the theory make, and how viable are they? Any difficulties?

5. Conclusions:

summary of argument; problems; implications for future development of SG and pragmatics

[Back to Contents](#)

4.4. *Quotes*

- Quotes — one often wants to quote another writer (**not** plagiarise them). Bear the following in mind:
 - ▶ If the quote is from one word to about 3 lines in length, enclose it in quotation marks within the flow of your text — e.g. *it follows that “morphemes are constructions” (Goldberg 1995:23)*, or *thus, according to Goldberg (1995:23), “morphemes are constructions”*.
 - ▶ If it is much longer than that, indent it from the left edge of the page, as follows (you can also indent from the right hand margin if you like, but this is not essential):

Both views — the one appealing to Logic for help and the other indicating an autonomous rule for Grammar — are equally in disagreement with the facts and to be rejected. It is nothing short of absurd to assume, with the rigid grammarian, that grammar has grown up as a sort of wild weed of human faculties for no purpose whatever except its own existence. The spontaneous generation of meaningless monstrosities in the brain of Man will not be easily admitted by psychology — unless of course the brain is that of a rigid scientific specialist. (Malinowski 1923:327)

- ▶ Notice that the source of the quote is always specified. Standard practice in linguistics is to provide the author's name, date of the work and the page number of the quote, as in the above examples.
- ▶ In some books and journals you will find quotes set in smaller font. This is not advised for essays. Keep to the standard 12 point font.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.5. Tables and figures

- It is often helpful to use tables and figures (including photographs) to provide a clear overview of a set of data and/or to help explain some point; but always provide sufficient explanation in your text so that the reader knows what is represented in the table or figure, and how to interpret it.
 - ▶ Think about the best way of presenting the data in a table or figure: would a graph give a good representation, and if so, what type of graph (e.g. pie graph, bar graph, or whatever).
- It is best to number tables and figures sequentially through the paper, and give them a caption e.g. Table 1: Cardinal adverbs; Figure 5: Family tree for the Worroran languages. Generally a caption goes before a table, but follows a figure. Tables and figures are then referred to in the text by number (e.g. see Table 1, etc.).
- Table 1 is an example illustrating one way of laying out a table. *Word* and other text processing programs provide a number of different table layouts; it is preferable to employ plain layouts rather than highly complex ones, though alternating row colours can sometimes be helpful. Note that the note immediately follows the table, and does not go at the foot of the page. Nor is it numbered in sequence with other footnotes or endnotes.

Table 1: *Frequency of ergative marking and non-marking of Actor NPs in Warrwa narratives*

| | Actor NP | -na | % | -ma | % | -nma | % | unmarked | %* |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----|----|-----|-----|------|-----|----------|-----|
| intransitive & quasitransitive | nominal | 6 | 3 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.4 | 221 | 97 |
| | pronominal | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 30 | 100 |
| | ellipsed | | | | | | | 477 | 68 |
| | total | 6 | 1 | 1 | 0.1 | 1 | 0.1 | 698 | 99 |
| middle1 & middle2 | nominal | 14 | 52 | 6 | 22 | 5 | 19 | 2 | 7 |
| | pronominal | 1 | 33 | 2 | 66 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | ellipsed | | | | | | | 71 | 70 |
| | total | 15 | 15 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 73 | 72 |
| transitive & ditransitive | nominal | 52 | 50 | 23 | 21 | 20 | 19 | 9 | 9 |
| | pronominal | 34 | 87 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 10 |
| | ellipsed | | | | | | | 739 | 84 |
| | total | 86 | 10 | 24 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 752 | 85 |

Notes

- * The percentages given in this column are the percentages of unmarked NPs to all NPs, and of ellipsed NPs to all instances of the Actor role.
- Figure 1 provides illustration of how to incorporate a figure into your text.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.6. Linguistic examples

- There are standard ways (with some slight variations) that you should follow of presenting examples in linguistics. The main principles are:
 - ▶ Give examples in foreign languages in three lines: a source line (the example in the language), an interlinear gloss line (glossing each segmented word or morpheme from the source line), and a free translation into the language of the article.
 - ▶ Align words in the source and interlinear lines, using tabs (not spaces), and make sure that each word and morpheme that is shown in the source line has an interlinear gloss. This is very easy to do in Word, where you can select the relevant text and set up the relevant tab stops.
 - ▶ Use abbreviations for the glosses of grammatical morphemes (see below).
 - ▶ Number examples sequentially throughout the paper, and refer to examples in the text by number (e.g. “see example (32)”).
- Examples of the appropriate way of presenting linguistic examples:
 - (1) *mee binya: yarn.gu: gumbia:, garnmarn.gu:, ngarrambu*
 veg.food this kapok potato long:yam root:food:type
an-birr-mira-ngi Wunambal
 HUM.O-3PL.S-grab-PA
 ‘They got these foods: kapok roots/shoots, potatoes, long yam, and *ngarrambu*.’
 - (2) *wamb-in barn i-na-w burruk jilaman-nyirr Nyulnyul*
 man-ERG shoot 3MIN.NOM-CM-give kangaroo rifle-COM
 ‘The man shot the kangaroo with a rifle.’
- For more detailed description see *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>).
 - ▶ This document also provides a list of standard abbreviations, which it is recommended you follow.
 - ▶ In case you use abbreviations not on their list, you should note them in a footnote, usually immediately before the first example cited in the article. In fact, it is a good idea to indicate all of your abbreviations in the appropriate footnote.

- ▶ Some style guides suggest using small capitals for abbreviations in example sentences (and elsewhere in the text). This is an elaboration that serves little purpose other than (perhaps) an aesthetic one.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.7. *Phonetic fonts*

- As a student of linguistics it is likely that at some stage you will need to use IPA symbols including diacritics, or the graphemes from some writing system other than Latin-based ones (e.g. Cyrillic, Greek, Cherokee, Hangul) in your essay. Modern word processors generally allow you to display and print such symbols relatively easily and cleanly. (Note that software such as *Powerpoint* does not handle diacritics so well.)
- You should always use a Unicode font: otherwise you (or your reader) are likely to have problems in either display or printing from a different computer or printer.
- Times New Roman now has extensive sets of symbols in IPA and other scripts, and this font will usually suffice for most uses. However, the symbols are not always easy to access, and you will find that e.g. engma <ŋ> is in the section ‘Latin Extended-A’, whereas <ɟ> is in the section ‘IPA Extensions’.
- If you need to use IPA (or another script) frequently, it will be useful to use a character picker, which displays the characters in an intuitively useful and accessible way. For instance, a number of IPA pickers are available, including e.g. at: <http://westonruter.github.io/ipa-chart/keyboard/>, <http://ipa.typeit.org/full/>, <http://languagelink.let.uu.nl/tds/ipa/index.html>, <http://schwa.dk/filer/ipacharpick/> (all accessed 31-08-2018)

[Back to Contents](#)

4.8. *Other things to bear in mind*

- What can you assume your reader knows? This is not an easy question to answer, and it is impossible to give precise rules. But you want to convey to the marker (grader or examiner) that you understand the subject matter, and can reason about it. Therefore you should not assume too much beyond basic linguistic notions (even many of these are not universally agreed to!)
- You want to show that you can think — and have thought — about the topic.
 - ▶ Therefore do **not** simply summarise what someone else has said; show that you are a critical reader, and that you can put the ideas together in a different way and can discuss them critically.
 - ▶ Read several articles from different authors about the same topic, so you get an impression of a diversity of approaches, opinions, and discussions on the topic.
 - ▶ Don’t just agree with everything you read, but try and find weaknesses in the arguments, experiments, claims, or whatever.

- ▶ Ask yourself whether the evidence that the writer produces actually argues for their thesis.
- ▶ How convincing do you find their story?

[Back to Contents](#)

5. Referencing

- In general, use scientific literature from established and recognised peer-reviewed journals, not popularizing sources like encyclopedias, general dictionaries or newspapers – unless these are the object of your study.
- Standard means of reference — use the Harvard system; do not use footnotes for references (as is normal in history and some other disciplines). The main features of the Harvard system of reference:
 - ▶ References in the text take the form Bloggs (1934:56); generally it is a good idea to give a page number, unless the point is a general one, relevant to the entire article.
 - ▶ Put the entire reference in brackets in contexts such as: *according to construction grammar, morphemes are also constructions (Goldberg 1995:23)* (Note that in the case of quoting just a couple of words one need not necessarily indicate that it is a quote, when integrated into your own text.)
 - ▶ Don't put brackets around the author's name when the reference is incorporated in your text. Instead, put just the year and page numbers in brackets, as in *according to Malinowski (1923:327), grammatical rules are not there just for the sake of being there.*
- In the list of references at the end of the article, which contains **all and only** works actually cited in your paper, give the sources of your information in the following forms (see further <http://library.au.dk/en/students/reference-management/harvard-referencing-system/>):
 - ▶ Books:
 - Peile, Anthony Rex. 1997. *Body and soul: an Aboriginal view*. Perth: Hesperian Press.
 - ▶ Edited books
 - Bakken Jepsen, Julie, De Clerck, Goedele, Lutalo-Kiingi, Sam & McGregor, William B. (eds.). 2015. *Sign languages of the world: a comparative handbook*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton and Preston: Ishara Press.
 - ▶ Articles in journals:
 - Fraser, Bruce. 1988. Motor oil is motor oil: an account of English nominal tautologies. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12. 215-220.
 - ▶ Articles in edited books:
 - Hale, Kenneth. 1994. Core structures and adjunctions in Warlpiri syntax. In Corver, Norbert & van Riemsdijk, Henk (eds.), *Studies on scrambling: movement and non-movement approaches to free word-order phenomena*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 185-219.

► Theses:

Louagie, Dana. 2017. *A typological study of noun phrase structures in Australian languages*. Leuven: KU Leuven PhD thesis.

- For anonymous works, replace the author/editor's name by Anon. If there is no year of publication indicated, indicate this by nd or n.d. (no date) instead of the year.
- If there are several works by the same author(s) or editor(s) published in the same year, they should be distinguished by letters following the year, as in 2017a, 2017b, 2017c.
- Note that reference styles differ somewhat from journal to journal and from book to book. The above is just one way of doing it. It is fine to use another style, provided you are consistent.
- If there are three or more authors or editors sometimes just the first is named, and the others are replaced by *et al* (meaning 'and others'). Also when there is more than one author or editor the second and subsequent ones may be referred to with given names first.
- If you use material from a newspaper for instance in a discourse study (not, of course, as a scientific source), you should indicate the author, date and page numbers.
- If your information comes from a website, then you should provide the web address, as well as the author and title of the document. Also indicate the last date on which you visited the site (this information is important, since the contents of websites can change drastically and rapidly, and may even disappear overnight. For example:

Nash, David. 1992. Warlmanpa language and country. Unpublished MS, ANU.
<http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/papers/lgshift.pdf>. (Accessed 19/12/2017)

- ☞ If you are not systematic in recording reference details in your essay from the very beginning, you are asking for problems later on in the final stages of your work. The best thing to do is to use a referencing program such as *Endnote* or *Refworks*, and enter the bibliographical information into that. Then you input the required reference in the relevant place in your text, together with the page number (it will then look like “{Crowley, 2001 #2662}:245” if you are using *Endnote*). When you have finished the paper, you simply generate it from within the program, which creates a bibliography at the end of your paper, and replaces the above in-text-reference by “Crowley 2001:245”. Note however that you usually have some tidying up to do: in my experience the built-in referencing styles work far from perfectly.
- ☞ Remember that all references in your text must be in the list of references, and vice versa that all listed references must be referred to in your text (see above). If you use a referencing program this will be done automatically. If you do not have one, you can look for years in the text by searching for 19 and 20 (perhaps 18 as well if you work with text from the 19th century), and mark all of the references found in the list. Solve the discrepancies by adding or deleting references in the list or in the text. I always search for 19 and 20 in the final draft of an article to ensure that the in-text reference has been properly handled by *Endnote* – it rarely is!

[Back to Contents](#)

6. Other considerations

- **Plagiarism.** This is an important and difficult problem. Don't quote word for word (or almost word for word, or by simply modifying words and sentence structure of a source) from someone else's writing without acknowledging it (give the page reference, as well as the standard details of the publication — see §5 above). Usually quotes are fairly easy to distinguish from your own writing because of different styles. (Don't quote from other students' essays, either!)

For further information on plagiarism – which is a type of fraud – and what is acceptable and unacceptable practice, see the following websites:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml> (last accessed 31-08-2018)

<http://studerende.au.dk/en/studies/subject-portals/arts/exams/regulations/guides/plagiarism> (last accessed 31-08-2018)

- **Notes.** Use footnotes only for elaborating or explanatory comments not important enough to go in the main text, that would break up the flow. (Don't use footnotes for references to literature as is done in some disciplines — see §5 above.)
 - ▶ You can also use endnotes, but these can be annoying for readers if they have to find the place of the note in a long text — it is much easier to just look at the foot of the page. (You have probably been annoyed by having to do this when reading some books.)
- **Writing to length.** It is very difficult to write to a specified length, even for experienced writers. Nevertheless, you will probably have length restrictions on your essay that will need to be followed. Be aware that essays submitted to digital examination systems may have automatic counting of pages, and your essay may be rejected if it does not satisfy the requirements.
 - ▶ At Aarhus University, a page is defined as 2400 keystrokes including spaces, which is roughly equivalent to one page in 12 point font and 1.5 line spacing. Use your word processor to count the characters. (In other parts of the world it is more likely that length restrictions will be stated in terms of word counts.)
 - ▶ My advice is not to take the length restrictions too seriously when composing your first draft. Write it to the length you feel comfortable with.
 - ▶ After you have written the first draft, check it against the required size, and adjust accordingly, either by reducing or expanding.
 - Some care is required in reducing or expanding — don't add irrelevancies in expanding just to make up the required number of pages (this will be obvious to the reader, who is unlikely to view it favourably!), and when reducing, be careful to remove all references to the deleted material.

- **Cross-referencing.** It is often useful to make a cross-reference to some other place in your text (like a hyperlink in a web document, except that the reader has to find the place). For instance, if you discuss the body-part counting system of the Oksapmin in page 10 or section 2.4 of your paper, and you mention it in your introduction (but don't want to discuss it in detail there), it may be useful to make a reference to the relevant page or section in the introductory text. Usually this is done in the form of "see p. 10" or "see §2.4".
 - ▶ If you mention somewhere a concept or idea that is discussed in detail elsewhere in the paper, then it may be worth making a cross-reference to that notion. Or if something you mention at a particular point is likely to raise questions in the reader's mind, cross-referencing to a place where you deal with those questions is called for. For instance, in an article I recently read reference was made to culture circles, but no explanation was provided until the following section; reference to the explanation in the following section would have facilitated reading.
 - ▶ It is also standard to include cross-references to figures, tables, and numbered linguistic examples. In most cases there should be a reference in your text to such items (i.e. you don't just give a figure, but refer to it). It is preferable to refer to the table, figure or example number rather than use expressions like "see the table below" — you might shift text around so that it ends up above the cross-reference.
 - ▶ It is recommended that you use the cross-referencing facility of your word processing program right from the beginning. Any decent word processing package allows you to make cross references to pages, table numbers, figure numbers, example numbers, or whatever.
 - If you don't use this facility (along with automatic numbering of tables, figures, examples, etc.), you are asking for extra work — probably you will have forgotten the point you wanted to make the reference to by the time you get back to it, or its number will have been changed.
 - If you don't know how to use either cross-referencing or automatic numbering in your word processing package, it is time to find out how. Read the manual – RTFM!
- **Layout.** Your essay will be read by someone, so give some consideration to their eyes – these choices apply not just to hardcopies, but also to electronic files such as Word and pdf files.
 - ▶ use A4 sized paper.
 - ▶ use 12 point font, preferably Times, with reasonable space between the lines (1.2 to 1.5 line space or 14-18 points is recommended).
 - ▶ margins should be wide. 3 cms on each side is recommended.
- **Academic style.** See also Chapter 23 of Wray & Bloomer 2012 for practical information on academic English.

- **Spelling and grammar checkers.** Most word processing packages, including *Word*, have built in spelling and grammar checkers. These can be useful, especially spelling checkers. Personally I find grammar checkers annoying and at best minimally helpful: they regularly fail to indicate genuine grammatical mistakes, parse weirdly, and consistently mark perfectly grammatical sentences such as passives as problematic.
- **Style guides.** Most international academic journals have their own style guides, giving information on their own preferred styles, usually some relatively minor variant of the above. As an example, see the *De Gruyter Mouton Journal Style Sheet* (https://www.degruyter.com/staticfiles/pdfs/mouton_journal_stylesheet.pdf).

[Back to Contents](#)

Part 2: Oral presentations

7. Introductory remarks

- In some courses you may be called on to give one or more oral presentations as a part of the requirements of the course; sometimes the exam for a course will be oral; sometimes the exam will be a combination of oral and written components. If you are in an MA program, it may be that you want to present something to an academic or student conference or workshop.
- Preparation and delivery of oral presentations is in many ways similar to that of written ones. Much of the advice given in Part 1 applies to oral presentations as well, including the need for planning and timetabling (bearing in mind of course the differences such as the need for rehearsal of oral presentations – [see below](#)), and basic structuring of the presentation (basically the same as for written presentations).
 - ▶ Plagiarism is also a consideration for oral presentations.
- There are of course differences in details. **An oral presentation is not simply a spoken version of a written essay.**
 - ▶ Speech and writing differ both in terms of lexicon and grammar; a consequence is that a written piece that is read aloud may sound very stilted, and can be quite difficult to follow.
 - ▶ By all means use a written script, but don't just read it out: use the script as a guide to give you the basis for what you say. Use the script to remind you of the things you want to say, not how to actually say them.
 - ▶ Nevertheless, in some disciplines (e.g. anthropology) it is commonplace to read written papers aloud. It makes sense to follow the traditions for your discipline.
- Like essays, oral presentations are sometimes made by a group of two or more students. In such cases coordination of effort is essential; the advice given below assumes you are working alone on the presentation.
 - ▶ The only specific advice I will give on group presentations is that it is usually preferable for one member of the group to be selected to do the oral presentation. Otherwise it is far more likely that things like time management will be problematic, and that one of the group will take up more than their allotted time. Also bear in mind if you have multiple presenters that you should make sure each group member has control of everything, so that the presentation can be completed if one of the members is ill.
- Time management is one of the most important considerations for oral presentations.
 - ▶ There will always be time restrictions on oral presentations, and these will need to be adhered to quite strictly.
 - In an exam context it is likely that you will have to stop at a certain point in time, regardless of whether you have finished or not.

- In a presentation within a lecture, time may be less strictly adhered to, but the lecturer is unlikely to let you talk for the entire duration of their three hour class if you are told you have 10 minutes for the presentation!
- I find the most effective means of tracking time in an oral presentation is to set the timer on my phone with a warning at the end of the time, or e.g. 5 minutes prior to the end. Checking time throughout your talk can be very distracting to both speaker and audience.
- ▶ Rehearsing your presentation is important.
 - Go over your presentation a number of times: present it orally to yourself or to friends or colleagues, until you are satisfied that you can fit everything you want to say into the available time.
 - Keep track of the time you take in the presentation, including the various parts of it such as introduction and conclusions, and modify what you say accordingly.
- Make sure that your visual material is readable and accessible to everyone in the audience. Use a sufficiently large font size, and do not stand in the way of the blackboard or screen.
- Make sure to look at your audience, and not just at your notes or computer screen.
- For further advice on how not to give a scientific talk, see the article 'How not to give a scientific talk' by Michael De Robertis at <http://www.casca.ca/ecass/issues/2002-js/features/dirobertis/talk.html>.

[Back to Contents](#)

8. Structure of oral presentations

8.1. Content

- Like written essays, oral presentations must be about something. No one will be interested in listening to an oral presentation that lacks a topic or thesis.
 - ▶ Introduce your thesis or topic early, stating it in as clear terms as possible.
 - ▶ Indicate the main ideas that will be dealt with in the presentation.
 - ▶ Give an overview of the structure of the talk, and the organisation of the argument.
 - ▶ Explain any technical terminology, acronyms and abbreviations that you use. Remember that most specialists use terminology in slightly different ways, so it is important to make clear how you are using terminology.
 - ▶ Be selective in the introductory material you present, and do not spend too much time on it. Literature reviews should be kept to a minimum – these can easily get out of hand and take up most of your time.
- Among the things that you might be called on to present orally are:
 - ▶ a summary of a lecture or chapter of a textbook;
 - ▶ a summary and/or review of an article;
 - ▶ an analysis of a certain set of data, such as a conversation or text;
 - ▶ your ideas on a particular theme – that is, an oral presentation that argues for a certain thesis, e.g. that a certain set of languages are genetically related to one another.
- For summaries and reviews you are not presenting and arguing a claim yourself, but rather reporting on what someone else has said. Provide early on in the presentation a succinct statement of their position and main claims.
 - ▶ In a review you should also say something about the evidence and methodology of the study you are reporting on. These may also be relevant to summaries, depending on what is expected of you, and how much time you have available.
 - ▶ Generally you will also be expected to be critical in a review, to evaluate the evidence and/or argument, and whether or not they support the writer's claims.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.2. PowerPoint

- A PowerPoint presentation can be a useful accompaniment to an oral presentation. There are other similar presentation packages, e.g. *Prezi*; some people prefer to present using pdf files. It is advisable to have multiple possibilities: your own computer; a memory stick and a net version in case of unexpected technical challenges; and a pdf beside a PowerPoint.

- ▶ Preparation of the slides can also be a good way of working out what to say, and how to organise your presentation.
- Templates may be available, including specific templates of the University. As a general rule, plain layouts and colours are most effective, and least distracting.
- Visual appearance of slides is important. Here are some considerations to bear in mind:
 - ▶ Avoid too much clutter on slides. There are differences of opinion concerning the amount of detailed text to include on slides.
 - Some prefer little text, with just main points indicated, and to provide the relevant text and details orally.
 - Others prefer more explicit text on their slides, which is closer to full sentences; they do not necessarily read these words, but rephrase them as they progress through the slides.
 - In general I prefer the second option. Such slides are more useful to the audience and other interested persons later, who will be able to reconstruct the presentation from the PowerPoint. They can also be helpful to the speaker, who need not be worried that they will forget important matters.
 - ▶ Use headings to help the audience follow the structure of your talk, include locating where they are.
 - ▶ Use a font size that is large enough to be visible to the audience – taking account of the size of the room. For most material, 24 point font or larger is recommended.
 - ▶ The default font for plain PowerPoint slides is Arial, and generally it is a good choice to stick with. It seems to work better in this medium than do serif fonts such as Times.
 - ▶ If you need to use IPA symbols, make sure that you are using a Unicode font, as Arial is. It is not advisable to use other fonts, as the symbols may not come out correctly on a system that does not have that particular font installed.
 - ▶ Avoid too much animation, and keep your animations simple – avoid things like fancy swivelling of text and sound effects. Some people like to present slides line by line or point by point. But this can be very distracting, and my advice is to generally present entire slides at once, unless there is good reason not to – e.g. an answer to a question you have posed, or some general comment on the content of the slide.
 - Animations can be set to appear after certain periods of time, or on demand, with the press of a key. Usually you will want to control when they appear rather than leave it to the whims of a timer.
 - I much prefer to use a pointer to indicate the relevant place on a slide to animation. This adds a more natural human dimension to the presentation. Gesturing is an important part of any oral presentation.

- ▶ Diagrams and tables can be very useful on your slides. But be careful how you set them up – in some cases you can lose column alignment in tables or alignment of lines in figures, e.g. when you present the slides on a different computer to the one you prepared it on.
 - One way of making sure that this does not happen is to make a screenshot or pdf file of the table or figure, and paste this into your presentation.
 - A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it is worth nothing if you don't give explanation where necessary, or if it is messed up by the software or hardware.
- ▶ If you are using example sentences to illustrate your slides, follow the advice of §4.6. It is generally preferable to set up the example in Word, and to then paste a copy of it into your slide rather than using the tab settings in PowerPoint – any font size change will result in the alignment being mucked up.
- ▶ PowerPoint allows you the option of putting notes on slides that are visible to you but not to the audience when you select the option *Extend these displays* in the Windows display settings. This can provide a very useful way of viewing the PowerPoint file when presenting your oral, as you can see your current slide, the next slide, as well as any notes on the present slide.
- ▶ One of the major bugbears of PowerPoint slides lies in hardware and software differences in the computers you use for setting up and presenting the slides, which may not be the same.
 - You may not be allowed to connect your own computer to the university system, and may have to use a university computer for the presentation.
 - In this case you will need to bring your PowerPoint presentation on a memory stick or have it on some readily accessible website. Do not rely exclusively on accessing your presentation from your email system.
 - Problems are particularly likely if the machines use different operating systems. If you are working on a Mac, and need to present on a PC, be aware that things like alignment are likely to be affected; text can even spill over from a slide, and become invisible.
 - Bear in mind that it is likely that setting things up will take a few minutes even if things go smoothly, so it may be a good idea to check whether things work the day before (assuming that is possible), or to check things out a few minutes beforehand, e.g. before the class or session, or in the break. (This may not be possible in an exam setting, of course.)

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3. Handouts

- Handouts are not all that common these days, and are usually restricted to data that you are going to discuss in the presentation. If your presentation is about a particular

set of data that is not too long – e.g. some sentences, or a short text – it might be useful to put this on a handout so that it is easy for the audience to follow what you are saying.

- ▶ It may be more convenient to present your data in this way than to present it on slides – especially if you are presenting other things on the slides.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.4. *Questions and answers*

- Questions and answers can disrupt your timing and the organisation of your talk, and in most cases it will be easier to deal with questions at the end of your presentation. It may be a good idea to ask people to save questions to the end – but if so make sure that you leave time for questions at the end.
 - ▶ Bear in mind that even if you ask people to hold off questions til the end, there may sometimes be a need for questions during your presentation, if e.g. you have not explained some important point or term.
- Wherever possible make your answers succinct and to the point. You will have probably heard rambling answers that actually say nothing, let alone answer the question; such responses are best avoided.
 - ▶ If you don't know the answer to e.g. a factual question, then say so, rather than be caught out by someone with the relevant knowledge. Such admissions are nothing to be ashamed of.
 - ▶ If you don't understand a long-winded question (or even a short-winded one), then say so, and ask for clarification.
 - ▶ Sometimes you are asked two or three (possibly even more) questions together. It may be necessary to note down the separate questions so you don't forget them – but it is not uncommon in such cases for the speaker to ask the questioner to remind them what the other part(s) of their question were.

[Back to Contents](#)

Guide to further reading

- Bauer, Laurie. 2007. *The linguistics student's handbook*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. This is a handbook for students that provides much practical information and advice, including advice on fundamental notions and conventions, reading linguistics, and writing essays.
- Booth, Wayne C., Colomb, Gregory G. & Williams, Joseph M. 2008. *The craft of research*. (Third edition.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. This very useful book provides a comprehensive overview of how to go about doing and writing up a research project. It will be of most use to those who are engaged in PhD research or who are writing an MA thesis. However, undergraduate students can also learn through browsing the book.
- Sakel, Jeanette. 2015. *Study skills for linguistics*. (Understanding Language Series.) Oxford: Routledge. This book presents a basic overview of linguistics, as well as useful tips for students of linguistics, including research methods, finding information, career options and personal skills.
- Wray, Alison & Bloomer, Aileen. 2012. *Projects in linguistics and language studies*. (Third edition.) Abingdon and New York: Routledge. This book is specifically written for students of linguistics, and gives them an introduction to some of the fundamental tools and techniques in linguistic research. It covers a range of areas including how to choose a topic, how to gather data, and how to present your ideas in written and oral media. It provides plenty of practical advice and is suitable for undergraduates.

[Back to Contents](#)

Appendix: Advice on reading

- It is important you develop skills in reading as well as writing. After all, you will almost certainly read much more than you write in your studies – if not, you need to review your study techniques right away.
- You can read for many different purposes, and the way that you read a piece of writing will differ accordingly. For instance, the way I read a mystery story is very different from the way I read a general scientific text, the way I read the monthly issues of *Scientific American*, the way I read a grant application, or the way I read an article on Aboriginal linguistics. It is obviously impossible to make rigid rules about how to go about reading generally. So the following remarks represent some considerations that you could bear in mind.
- It is perhaps easiest to begin by saying how **not** to go about reading a scientific text – unless it is a very simple one:
 - ▶ Do not start from the beginning, and read to the end, paying the same amount of attention to every point, and ensuring you understand everything in the text before moving on.
 - If you go about things this way it is unlikely you will make much sense out of your reading.
- Instead, focus on getting the most out of your reading, and approach any article or book in a non-linear way:
 - ▶ Look first at the abstract, the beginning, the end, and then the middles – where the argument is developed.
 - ▶ The arguments are important parts of academic writing, but more important can be to find out what the author is trying to say.
 - ▶ You will get and remain lost if you don't have an idea from the beginning as to what the point of the article is, where it is going – you won't be able to see the forest for the trees.
- Readings for courses in general are meant to inform you, as are readings for essays and theses
 - ▶ Your approach should be to try to get something out of them, to learn something from them.
 - ▶ It is usually not necessarily to understand every little bit, every single point.
 - ▶ Different people will get different things out of the same text, depending e.g. on their background knowledge, and what they are using the text for.
 - ▶ Value judgements are important, and you should not shy away from making them. If you have no sense of value, you will have no means of appraising knowledge and no basis for remembering one thing rather than another.

- ▶ What the lecturer gets from and uses from an article in class will almost certainly not be the entirety of the article and argument.
- ▶ Think and read independently. Don't expect your lecturer to tell you what to make of a text before you read it, or necessarily even what to focus on in your reading.
 - You need to develop skills of reading and making sense of writings, not at determining what someone else finds significant
 - You will doubtless hear what your lecturer thinks anyway in some form or other in the lectures.
- Medium – especially if you are confronted with a long or complex argument it is worth bearing in mind that the medium in which you engage with the text can be pertinent:
 - ▶ Studies (see e.g. Jabr 2013) have shown that people generally remember more of a text they have read in a paper copy than in an electronic copy.
 - ▶ It has also been shown that people are more critical when they read paper copies.
 - ▶ These findings have been replicated for both people who normally read electronically as well as those who normally read paper, and were brought up using these media.
 - ▶ In some circumstances it makes sense to use both paper and electronic copies in one's reading:
 - Paper for convenience of reading;
 - Electronic for finding particular words
- Reading is an activity in which you ought to dialogue with the author:
 - ▶ I never read an academic article or book without tools such as a pen to take notes and to write comments on the piece.
- If one is reading to gather information on a topic one is writing about, then you will want to take notes about the content of the piece. Personally I normally find it best to take notes on paper rather than on a computer file, keeping a careful record of page numbers for the information. (As usual, there are exceptions, e.g. when it may be convenient to keep records of example sentences on a computer file, especially if extracted from an electronic grammar.)
 - ▶ If one is reading an article for purposes of commenting on it or discussing it in a class, then it may be important to be able to easily make comments directly on the text in the medium you are using, and/or to underline passages of the text. If it is not easy or convenient to do this, e.g. with a pdf file on your computer, then you may be using the wrong medium, and you should think of printing the file, for instance.
- It is important to develop skills in critical reading. Some things to bear in mind in reading an article critically include the following:

- ▶ How does the article relate to other things you know about the subject domain and the world – are there problems?
- ▶ What is the main claim of the article?
- ▶ What sorts of evidence does the author adduce in favour of their thesis? What methodology do they employ, and is it relevant to their claim?
- ▶ What is the structure of the argument? Does the author present a convincing case for their thesis? Are there holes in the argument? If there are gaps in the reasoning, can they be patched up – and if so, how?
- Time for reading is usually limited.
 - ▶ Take limitations of time into account when you read, using the restrictions to focus your reading.
 - ▶ You do not generally read a text just once – especially if it is good – but a number of times.
 - ▶ You can expect to gain different perspectives on an article or book on different readings, with different knowledge and different purposes (in the reading)
 - ▶ I have on a number of occasions come back to pieces I read decades ago, only then understanding some of the more abstruse points.

Reference

Jabr, Ferris. 2013. Why the brain prefers paper. *Scientific American* 309 (11). 34-39.

[Back to Contents](#)