



Appendix 4

Guidance for writing

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Introduction

In order to gain qualified teacher status at the end of your initial teacher education (ITE) you are required to meet both teaching and any other requirements, e.g. written assignments through which you demonstrate your ability to produce academic work worthy of a graduate or postgraduate qualification. These assignments are designed to encourage you to make connections between educational theory and practice. This is to ensure that when you complete your ITE you have begun to develop an understanding of how to:

- make use of educational research and theory to inform and improve your practice;
- develop your own theories about teaching and learning, reflecting on and evaluating established practice;
- develop and assess innovative practice in your own classroom;
- respond creatively and critically to local and national educational initiatives.

Moreover, in England, undertaking academic writing is an important means by which you can demonstrate the expectation in the *Teachers' Standards* (DfE, 2011, p. 7) that you develop and maintain 'a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship'. By continuing to behave as an academic learner, you are modelling for yourself a key expectation you have of your pupils, and at the same time ensuring your practice is refreshed by new insights and understandings.

It is very likely that your education to date has provided you with many opportunities to find out what processes you need to work through in order to produce good written assignments. One literacy expert, Margaret Meek, has often argued that if we want to know what literacy practices will benefit our pupils, we should start by considering what works for us. Consequently, working on the assignments for your ITE also provides you with an opportunity to reflect on how you can support your pupils in undertaking the writing tasks you set them. If something helps you, it may well help them. We now look at some of the issues research on writing suggests you need to pay attention to in your writing, i.e. understanding the genre; understanding the purpose and mode of writing; preparation and planning; academic referencing.

Understanding the genre

Genre is the term used to define a type of text that has a set of agreed conventions. These conventions apply at different levels, including the kind of vocabulary and voice it is appropriate to use, the structure and organisation of sentences and paragraphs, and larger required structural elements. In academic writing these elements may include:

- an *introduction*, which should normally identify the focus of the assignment and outline the structure of what is to follow, i.e. the sequence in which material will be presented in the assignment;
- a *literature review*, which usually analyses the academic writing that is relevant to the topic, identifying common or contrasting views and current issues;
- a *statement of a question or hypothesis* to be investigated, which explains the scope of the investigation and the reasons for it;
- a *description and analysis of the methodology used*, which explains how an issue was investigated, the reasons for this and the advantages and disadvantages of the methods chosen;
- *data presentation and analysis*, which should enable a reader to see what is established fact in the work, where interpretation begins and how and why it has been made;
- *conclusions*, which should arise from the investigation and its results, and compare findings with established theory or positions; matters that are unresolved should be identified; recommendations for future practice may be included if appropriate;
- a *reference list*, which lists all references used in the assignment.

You bring preconceptions about academic writing from your earlier studies to assignments on your ITE. However, the genre 'essay' contains many 'sub-genres', just as the genre 'novel' includes different kinds of novels, for example, science fiction, romance and detective stories among many other kinds. You should establish which of the elements of academic writing listed above, and others, must be contained in the genre(s) you are expected to write in on your ITE.

At the same time as focusing on the purpose of writing, in England you may be offered the opportunity to submit assignments for credits towards a Master's qualification, which you can then complete in the early years of your career. Your tutors will provide you with the detailed information you need to be able to work and write assignments that meet Master's level criteria.

However, in general terms, to be successful you have to meet some of the national general requirements for a Master's qualification. You do not have to meet all of these in one or two assignments, so you should not be too daunted by them, but they are, nevertheless, challenging.

You are likely to be asked to show cutting-edge knowledge of the topic you write about, which means reading and evaluating the most recent research and practice. You may also be expected to show understanding of at least one recognised educational research method and to apply it effectively in investigating your topic, and to evaluate its usefulness and effectiveness in helping you to understand the topic and the practice you saw. You are also expected to show a high level of conceptual understanding, and a degree of originality in your work and thinking. This is demanding, particularly in the relatively short assignments you are typically asked to write as part of your ITE, so the fundamental principles of planning and writing outlined in this chapter are even more important in helping you to ensure that you meet all the requirements.

Just as it helps your school pupils if you do this, it is good practice for your tutors to teach you explicitly what is appropriate. Some methods that may be used for this include modelling and providing examples of successful work. Good modelling involves a practical demonstration of how an assignment can be constructed, e.g. by developing a plan or a paragraph. Formative feedback on plans or first drafts also helps writers to understand what is required of them, and consequently to improve. The assessment criteria for the assignment should be made explicit from the outset: these should always make reference to the kind of writing that is expected as well as the required content. It will also help you as a writer if you are given more than one opportunity to write a particular kind of assignment, so that you develop experience in using the genre.

Understanding the purpose and mode of writing

Writing may, of course, have many different purposes, ranging from description and narration to argument and persuasion. The primary purpose of many written assignments in ITE is to develop a capacity for *reflection*. This means that you are encouraged to use your writing to think about your experiences in school; your own teaching; your observations of, or discussions with, others; your analysis of school documents or activities or events that occur in school; and the content of lectures, seminars and academic literature, in order to reach a higher standard of awareness about your teaching and the ways in which pupils learn (You should find the sections on observation and action research in Units 2.1 and 5.4 useful for gathering relevant information).

Reflection requires you to stand back from a specific lesson, observation, activity or event and question it. You draw on your knowledge about, and understanding of, the work of others, research and theory, and consider it in relation to the practice on which you are reflecting. Reflection is as integral to your teaching as your ability to manage a class and pupil behaviour. It is a process that should continue into your first year of teaching and throughout your teaching career.

Evaluation of your teaching at the end of each lesson is an example of reflection. Evaluation can be carried out alone or with your mentor. When you evaluate a lesson, you question what went well in addition to what did not go well, what might have worked better and what you might do next time that will enable you to improve what you are doing. As evaluation and reflection involve recall of what took place, you need to focus your evaluation and reflection in advance. So much is going on in a lesson that unless you select one or two things on which to focus you are unlikely to collect the detailed data necessary for an in-depth evaluation. You also need to write a few notes and identify points of relevance as soon as you can after the lesson or observation so that you record your perceptions when they are fresh in your mind. There are checklists, guidelines and series of appropriate questions included in many of the texts concerned with helping teachers to develop into reflective practitioners (see further resources at the end of Unit 5.4).

Your reflections can then be used as the basis for explicitly linking the work of others to your practice in your assignments. You should aim to show how the work of others, research and theory, informs your practice and vice versa, rather than leaving the two separate, isolated from and not informing each other. Reflection allows you to give your own opinions, but you should underpin these with reference to research and theory. An assignment title that requires you to reflect does not imply that you should not include theory; nor does it mean that you should not include references. Rather, the expectation is that you should include examples from practice to support or

challenge the research and theory. When drawing on examples from your practice in assignments, you should not use the name of the school or any individual. All such references should be made anonymous.

Common pitfalls in reflective writing include discussing the issues entirely at a theoretical level so that the work fails to engage with your practical experience in school or discussing only practical experience without making any reference to the theoretical context in which your own work is inevitably set. To avoid these and other pitfalls, detailed planning and preparation, and thorough drafting and academic referencing are necessary. These processes take time in themselves, and writing is also often improved if there are time gaps between the different stages of its production. These gaps help you, as the writer of an assignment, to approach it as a reader will do, and to judge your work to date more objectively. It follows that an important first step is to plan how you are going to pace your coverage of the planning, preparation and drafting stages indicated below, to allow you to meet the assignment deadline comfortably. This involves stating early, rather than leaving the writing of assignments to the last minute.

Preparation and planning

Identifying the title, focus and audience

Before you begin an assignment, you need to be very clear about what you are writing about, i.e. the title and focus of the assignment. You may be given a title or you may have to choose your own topic or focus. In either case, you should be very clear about the topic and focus before you start. It is often helpful to have a short title that clearly focuses on the issue you are going to address. The title can be written as a problem or a question and may be intentionally provocative. Phrasing the title in this way clarifies and reminds you of the focus when you are writing the assignment. Ask yourself: 'What am I seeking to find out by writing this assignment?'

You should also establish who the intended audience for the work is. Although many assignments in ITE are primarily reflective, you may be asked to produce work that can benefit the schools in which you undertake school experience or your peers on your ITE. If there is an intended audience other than your mentor or tutor, as a monitor of your development as a reflective practitioner, this will influence how the assignment is written.

Collecting information

You should make a list of the sources of information that will help you to address the topic. You will be used to identifying and collecting together relevant notes from university-based sessions, books and articles from journals. However, you should also collect together information from school, such as lesson plans and evaluations of lessons you have taught or observed, and records of observations or interviews conducted in school, so that your written work can refer to, and link, published sources and your developing practice in school. It is helpful to keep this in your professional portfolio.

Make sure that you are familiar with the library system at your university. You will probably have an induction briefing about this. If not, find out what books and journals are available to support your ITE, both in hard copy and electronic format. Ask what databases for education are available [e.g. BEIndex (British Educational Index) and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)] and find out how to use them.

Drafting

You should give drafting your assignment high status. However, it is sometimes poorly interpreted as 'writing it out' and 'writing it out again with the spelling (and perhaps some grammar) corrected'. In fact, effective drafting is a complex process involving several stages.

Gathering ideas

Brainstorm ideas and collect key points from your reading (from books and journals), seminar or lecture notes, teaching file and material from school. At this point, include everything you think of that appears to be even slightly relevant. A spider diagram (see Unit 5.2) or arrows may be used, perhaps at a second stage, to begin to group points and ideas. It is also a good idea to identify examples and illustrations and note them next to key points and ideas: this will help you to work out which points you have most to say about and whether others should be eliminated or need more research before you start writing.

Selecting and sequencing ideas in a plan

Produce a plan that supports visually the organisation of ideas in a way that is appropriate to the content and structure of the assignment. For example, flow charts are useful if the core of the assignment is concerned with a process; columns can be used to list pairs of contrasting points or ideas and illustrations; a matrix provides a means of charting complex matters in which combinations of factors need to be taken into account. It can help to add numbers as you work out the order in which you will deal with the material. At this stage, it is possible to check whether you have appropriate amounts of information for each stage of a process to be discussed, each side of an argument, or each combination of factors. If not, you may decide you need to research or develop your thinking about part of the subject matter.

Drafting

Write some parts of the assignment, as fluidly as possible. Allow ideas to develop rather than stopping too often to check detail or refine wording. It is not necessary to write in sequence: in fact, it may help to work on the different main sections of the assignment concurrently. This can help you to work out what each section needs to include and, for example, to sort out what belongs appropriately in the introduction and conclusion. If you have a section reviewing literature or discussing examples of practice, writing about one text you have read or a lesson you have taught can help you to see how much space you have for each example, and so help you to balance the whole assignment. Clearly, you need to sequence and re-sequence the writing as it develops. The aim of this stage is a continuous draft.

Redrafting

This stage should involve careful checking of the structure and balance of the assignment. A good exercise is to make notes from your own writing, paragraph by paragraph. This will draw attention to repetition, arguments that are left unsupported or incomplete, and the overall balance or imbalance in the work. Some questions to consider include: does the introduction cover what the reader

needs to know about the context of the work? Are the arguments, illustrations and examples given appropriate space? Do the points in the conclusion really arise from the earlier discussion? Are there some unresolved issues that could only be addressed in another piece of work? Where you have used information selectively, is it clear that it has been selected from a larger set of information and for a particular reason? It may be appropriate to move or re-sequence whole paragraphs or larger sections of the text during this stage.

Editing and proofreading

Editing should always involve some consideration of what can be deleted from the work to improve it. Many assignments exceed word limits and you may be penalised for this. A GCSE English chief examiner once said how impressed he was by a candidate who had the courage to cross out a long paragraph from an answer in examination conditions: because the piece was better balanced and the arguments flowed better as a result, this action had made the answer worthy of an A* grade rather than an A.

Proofreading, or checking for technical accuracy, is often enhanced by reading aloud, which forces you to slow down, and draws attention to matters such as overlong sentences and word omissions. Reading each paragraph in turn from the end of the assignment to the beginning can also help you to focus on technical accuracy rather than the development of the content. Spelling and grammar checkers are useful tools, but remember, if this is appropriate, to use UK rather than US spelling which may be the preset option. Grammar checkers have a preference for active rather than passive constructions which may not always be appropriate in academic writing. It is also easy to click on 'change' rather than 'ignore' by mistake and vice versa when working quickly, so a final read through is still needed. We know this does not always happen from the number of times we find, for example, 'offside' in assignments rather than 'Ofsted'.

Some other technical points to consider are as follows. Academic writing is normally written mainly in the third person. However, if you are reflecting on your own practice you may want to use the first person - I - when referring to your own practice. This helps to distinguish your practice and thoughts from those of other writer(s) to whom you refer.

The first sentence of a paragraph usually identifies the main point of the whole paragraph; this is a useful signal for readers. Make sure that each sentence contains a main verb. You should use a new paragraph to mark the introduction of a new point or idea. It is important to use a variety of sentence structures. Words and expressions such as: 'however', 'nevertheless', 'on the other hand' and 'in addition' provide useful openings that help a reader to understand how sentences are related to each other.

The word 'the' tends to be overused. A statement that includes 'the', for example, 'the fact that' or 'the answer is', is a categorical statement that portrays certainty or definitiveness that may not be appropriate. Words such as 'a', 'one of', 'there is a suggestion that' or 'one possible answer is' may be better instead because they are less definite. Another overused word is 'very', for example, 'very large' when 'large' would do.

Choose your words carefully. Do not use slang, jargon, colloquialisms, abbreviations or words that need to be put into quotation marks, unless quoting somebody else. For example, the use of 'kids' is slang.

Be careful about punctuation, i.e. full stops, commas, colons, semi-colons, dashes (e.g. for an aside) and brackets (e.g. for an explanation). By using punctuation appropriately, you help the reader

to make sense of what you are saying. Underuse of commas is probably the most common error. Leaving out a comma can alter the meaning of a sentence. Overuse of the word 'and' to link more than one thought/idea in a sentence is also a common error. Different thoughts/ideas should be in separate sentences. Dashes or brackets (normally curved brackets), used at the beginning and end of a phrase or clause, may help a reader to better understand the relative importance of different parts of a sentence.

Many writers make errors when using or omitting apostrophes. Remember that apostrophes are used to indicate possession (e.g. where a word does not end in a letter s, apostrophes are used as in 'one pupil's work' or 'a group of pupils' work', 'one teacher's book' or 'teachers' books'; where the plural does not end in an s, apostrophes are used as in 'the children's work'; where the word ends in a letter s, an apostrophe is used after the last s, as in 'Camus' book' or with an additional s, as in 'Jones's book'; or where there is letter omission (e.g. can't instead of cannot; don't instead of do not; it's instead of it is; who's instead of who is); but that apostrophes are not used to indicate plural nouns [e.g. despite the habits of most greengrocers (or greengrocer's as they would incorrectly have it)]. If there is no possession or no missing letter, then an apostrophe should not be used.

Academic referencing

In academic writing, ideas, descriptions and explanations should not be taken for granted, even if everything you have read about the issue seems to provide a consensus. Ideas, assertions, descriptions, explanations or arguments should be supported by evidence from the work of others - from research and theory, appropriately referenced (e.g. you might say that: 'the research undertaken by Bloggs (2021) suggests that ... This supports/contradicts the findings of Smith (2019)'). However, alongside references to the work of others, research and theory from texts or articles, you should draw on your own teaching or observations in school, giving examples of activities or events you have observed or participated in to provide evidence from practice, where appropriate.

By 'the work of others' and 'theory' we mean explanations of teaching and learning, and descriptions of research, as well as any theories that have been developed from such work. You should use the evidence of others and your own evidence to advance your own understanding and formulate your own theories. Your own theories evolve by bringing your critical faculties to bear on the work of others and what has been happening in your teaching.

When referring to other research or to texts, a reference should always be given, together with a page number if quotations are used. It is important to show, by appropriate citation, what is your work and what is the work of others. Direct quotations should be used sparingly; otherwise they disrupt the flow of the assignment. Do not put in a quotation for the sake of it: only use quotations with a clear purpose. You need to explain whether a quotation is being used as evidence that supports or disagrees with your point of view. If you are not clear why you are using a quotation, it may be better to paraphrase the point.

References cited in the text must be included in a *reference list* at the end of the assignment. If you are not given information about how to present your references and bibliography, ask the library which system is used in your ITE programme. The Harvard system is a common system used in educational writing. Details of this are available on-line and should be available in the library.

Strategies for making neutral reference to gender

Your writing is governed by social customs and conventions. One such custom and convention in the UK is to make sure that there is no gender bias in your writing, that men and women are regarded as equal. This translates into not making assumptions that certain jobs (e.g. lawyer, doctor, lorry driver, primary school teacher, nurse) are either male or female and, therefore, not using words such as *he, him, his* to refer to someone in one of these jobs.

Thus, in your writing you need to avoid such gender bias. Three methods of overcoming the difficulty have been identified: (i) *avoidance*, (ii) *inclusion* or (iii) *disclaimer*. Unless you are prescribed one method to use, you may use any of the three methods. Avoidance is probably the most popular and effective of these methods; inclusion, the least popular method.

Avoidance

‘Avoidance’ avoids using male or female words altogether when reference is made to a person who could equally be male or female. Table A4.1 shows some strategies for avoidance.

Inclusion

Some people prefer to get round the difficulty by using the phrase *he or she*, or *he/she* or *s/he*. If used occasionally, such phrases may be appropriate, but they affect the style and interrupt the flow of the assignment when used frequently. It may be best to avoid using this approach to avoid such difficulties.

Disclaimer

A disclaimer is a statement at the beginning of the assignment that you are using words such as *he, him* and *his* throughout without wanting to convey gender bias. In other words, you claim that

Table A4.1 Strategies for gender avoidance in assignments

Strategy	Example	
	<i>Avoid this</i>	<i>by writing this</i>
Change to plural	... when a teacher meets his class for the first time	... when teachers meet their classes for the first time
Change to an article	... so that every member of the group can give his opinion	... so that every member of the group can give an opinion
Recast the clause so that a different noun becomes the subject	if the pupil cannot understand his feedback ...	If the feedback is difficult to understand ...
Use neutral words such as <i>the other, an individual, the author</i>	Each pupil must read what his partner has written	In pairs, each pupil must read what the other has written
<i>Omit the male/female word</i>	... working with each individual to ascertain her needs	... working with each individual to ascertain needs

the male words are to be read as neutral in their reference. Alternatively, you might state that you are using *she*, *her* and *hers* throughout the assignment for some particular purpose, without wanting to convey gender bias. This might be appropriate, for example, when referring to primary school teachers, as most primary school teachers are female. Thus, the statement disclaims that any gender bias is intended. Without such a statement, you are likely to offend others. Even with a disclaimer, some readers may find this strategy offensive.

Plagiarism and cheating

You should be familiar with what is meant by plagiarism and cheating, so that you avoid them. A simple definition of plagiarism is that it is cheating by passing off someone else's work as your own. This can include putting quotations into your work without acknowledging them, closely paraphrasing a source, copying another beginning teacher or someone else's work, submitting work that is not entirely your own, or reusing material from one assignment for another. Plagiarism is regarded as a very serious offence – it can potentially result in the failure of your whole ITE, which could put your whole career in jeopardy – and ignorance of the rules is not seen as a defence.

Check the general rules of your university and ITE programme and also the particular rules for an assignment (for example, you may sometimes be allowed, or even required, to work together on collaborative assignments or presentations). However, in general you will be safe if you acknowledge all sources, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, including material other than words (diagrams and website material, for example). Make sure that you do not include so much material from other sources that the work could not be properly described as your own, and avoid using the same work in more than one assignment.

Finally, universities are increasingly requiring beginning teachers to submit important assignments electronically, so that software can be used to check for plagiarism. This is in your interests, as previously markers may have spotted plagiarism in one offender's work but not another's.

Check your ITE handbook for further guidance.

Conclusion

To sum up, assignments set as part of your ITE require good academic writing, but are also designed to enable you to show that you are reflecting on research and the theory of teaching and are applying this to your own developing practice as a teacher, i.e. that you are developing as a reflective practitioner. You therefore need to combine academic writing and evidence of reflection in your written assignments.

Teachers need good writing skills. You write on the board, write notices, write reports, send letters to parents and undertake numerous other written communications. Whatever your subject, you have a responsibility to promote the development of key literacy skills in your lessons. Therefore, you need good spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction and paragraph formation. If your writing skills are not as good as necessary to write effectively for a variety of audiences in school, you should ask for help during your time in ITE. Your mentor or tutors will be able to direct you to study support units and to self-study materials available on the Internet.

Good luck with writing your ITE assignments and the written communications you make as part of your teaching.

Acknowledgement

The section on strategies for making neutral reference to gender is adapted from a paper produced by the Department of English and Language Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University.

Further resources

Creame, P. and Lea, M. (2008) *Writing at University: A Guide for Students* (3rd edn), Maidenhead: Open University Press.

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