

Final year dissertations and review paper formatting guidelines

1. Importance of proper formatting

It often happens that students are more interested in the scientific content of the write-up than in the actual presentation or formatting. A typical statement that a student may use to justify his attitude is: “If the scientific content of my write-up is good, why should I bother with the formatting?”

However, things are not that easy. Remember that science revolves around having a systematic approach in your dealings. This applies not just to the scientific investigations begin carried out but also to the grammar, punctuation, spelling, formatting and the like involved in the write ups. For this reason, proper formatting of the write-up is part of the skill you are expected to learn while reading your degree.

If such an explanation does not convince you, there is always another way of looking at things. We live in a world that is dictated by aesthetics: When we decide to buy a product, tendentially we don't just look at its performance but we also take into consideration it looks. A simple way of checking this out is asking yourself whether you would prefer a car that runs on almost nothing but looks as if it came from prehistoric times or a sports car irrespective of how much it consumes. Put in simple terms: If you want to sell something you'd better make it look nice otherwise you will not make a good profit.

2. Language, spelling and grammar

Preferably the write-up should be in UK English, even though US English will also be accepted. However, you should ensure that you don't mix the two. As a tip remember that the default spell check language of most word processors is English US. Thus if you want to make sure that you don't have a mixture of spelling of UK and US English, you should change the default setting.¹

The write-up should also be free from spelling and grammatical mistakes. You can use the spell check utility provided by the word processor you are using to help you discover this type of errors. Even so, some typos like writing “meat” instead of “meet” can still persist as it often happens that when we proof read our own work we repeat the same mistakes. One way of trying to reduce the number of spelling mistakes is to proof read the work a month or so after first writing it. This will allow you to look at it with fresh eyes.

In some cases sentence structure might be an issue. The generally recommended procedure would be to use short sentences and to limit the number of ideas expressed in one sentence to the minimum. This will avoid getting you into long argumentations

¹ Please note that due to the variety of word processors currently in use, it is not possible to give instructions that apply for each one of them. You should refer to the help manual of the word processor you are using for assistance.

that can end up being hard both for you and any reader to follow. As a general rule remember that if a sentence is more than a couple of lines long, it can probably be split up into two. Also a paragraph consisting of one single sentence is definitely not on.

Please remember that it will always be your duty to ensure that the write-up is free from grammatical and spelling mistakes and you should not expect your tutor to deal also with this problem. If you think that your English is not good enough it is permissible to ask a third person to proof read your work. This does not mean that you are allowed to ask a third person to write the report himself but just to read your work and suggest improvement. Obviously the person's work should be duly acknowledged in your write-up.

3. Font and font size

The font should preferably be Times New Roman. This font has been chosen because it is very easy to read. As for the font size, this should be set to 12 points so as to make the text readable.

4. Page, paragraph and line formatting

There are two accepted ways of formatting a paragraph:

- Either you start flush from the left and you skip a line between paragraphs, or
- You indent the first line but then you don't skip a line between paragraphs.

You may choose any of the two. However, a mixture of the two, like indenting the first line and then skipping a line each time, is not acceptable.

The paragraph should have a margin to the left and to the right of about 3 cm. In addition a space of about 2.5 cm should be left at the top and bottom of the page. The typed text should also be justified. Regarding the line spacing in general this should be kept to 1.5. Note that the default value in the most common word processors is single spacing (i.e. 1).

5. Capitalisation

Well this might sound easy – just ensure that the first letter at the beginning of each sentence and of names is a capital letter. In most cases you are right. However, you should remember that upper case letters are generally harder to read than the lower case ones. Thus you should try to limit the amount of capital letters you use. For example a title consisting of more than one word should only have the first one capitalised unless a name is used. Likewise if you want to emphasise some word or words, you should try to use italic, bold or underline rather than capitalise. This will make your work more readable.

6. Footnotes

Footnotes are a way of inserting annotations to the main text. They should be used with care so as not to break the flow of the work. In the case a footnote is required this should be placed at the bottom of the page. The preferred symbols to use in order to cross-refer to the footnote are Arabic numerals superscript, with the footnotes being numbered consecutively according to the order in which they are referred to in the main text. Preferably numbering should restart on every page. However, restarting at every chapter or section is also acceptable.

The footnotes should be written in the same font as the main text but with a smaller font size, namely 10 points. They should also be justified and the order in which they are listed should reflect the order in which they are cross-referred to in the main text.

7. Short hand notations and acronyms

You should not assume that the reader is familiar with short hand notations or acronyms even if they are standard in the field of work. Thus you should define all short hand notations and acronyms the first time you use them. In the case the number of short hand notations and acronyms is extensive, you should write a list explaining them at the beginning of your work.

8. Numerical values

In the case numerical values appear in the text, it is customary to write numbers from zero to ten as words while higher order values using Arabic numerals, namely a combination of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. In the case of a list containing values higher and lower than 10 they should all be written using Arabic numerals. On the other hand, if the number occurs at the beginning of a sentence this should be written as text. You should also keep in mind that the Arabic numerals should never be italic not even when they are used as subscripts.

9. Mathematical operators

The following is a table of mathematical operators that you might need to use in your work:

<i>Mathematical operator</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Addition	+
Subtraction	–
Multiplication	×
Division	÷ or /

<i>Mathematical operator</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Equals	=
Not equal	≠
Approximately equals	≈
Asymptotically equal to	≐
Greater (or smaller) than	< (or >)
Much greater (or smaller) than	<< (or >>)
Implies	⇒
Derivative with respect to x	$\frac{d}{dx}$
Partial derivative with respect to x	$\frac{\partial}{\partial x}$

List of common mistakes:

- Minus sign: This is a hyphen “-” while this is a minus sign “−”. In general word processors give a hyphen as the default option. In Microsoft Word, you should insert the minus sign using the *insert symbol* and then look for *Mathematical operators*. The proper minus sign will keep the preceding and the following character together, provided these are not spaces. This will avoid having for example 5 m s^{-1} being split with 5 m s on one line and $^{-1}$ on the next.
- Multiplication sign: This is the letter “x” (ex) while this is the multiplication sign “×”. You can insert the multiplication sign using the *insert symbol* utility.
- Degrees symbol: This is the letter “o” superscript “^o”, while this is the symbol for the degrees “°”. You can insert the degrees symbol using the *insert symbol* utility and then looking for the *degrees sign*.
- Partial derivative: This is the Greek letter delta “ δ ” while this is the partial derivative sign “ ∂ ”. You can insert the partial derivative sign using the *insert symbol* utility.
- Delta operator: When the capital Greek letter “ Δ ” is used as an operator it is not italic. Examples include its use for the gradient and uncertainties.
- Much greater (or smaller) than: The symbols for much greater (or smaller) than are “<<” (or “>>”). Using twice the symbol for greater (or smaller) than, i.e. “>>” (or “<<<”) would be incorrect.

10. Brackets

It can often happen that you will have to use a set of brackets within another set of brackets. In order to facilitate the understanding of the order of the brackets the following system is suggested:

- First use a round bracket (parenthesis), i.e. ()
- Then use a square bracket (brackets), i.e. []
- Finally use a curly bracket (braces), i.e. { }
- If this is not enough, repeat.

Thus you should have something of the form $\{ [()] \}$.

11. Units

In general the units should be in SI unless one is dealing with some particular subject where there is some other conventionally employed system. They can be written either in full, for example newton¹ seconds, or else using the standard abbreviations for example N s. However, a mixture of the two would not be considered acceptable.

There should be a non-breaking space between the numerical value and the unit and another between each unit. The latter requirement is needed to distinguish between for example metres seconds (m s) and milliseconds (ms). The negative power notation like m s^{-1} is preferred to the slash notation like m/s. Furthermore, the standard abbreviations of units should never be italic.

Non-breaking space: A non-breaking space is meant to prevent the automatic breaking of the line at its position. It is used so that for example 5 m s^{-1} is not written as 5 on one line and m s^{-1} on the next or 5 m on one line and s^{-1} on the next. In Microsoft Word you can use Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar to introduce a non-breaking space.

Common mistake: The fact that a space should be included between the unit and the value includes the use of percentages (%) and degrees Celsius ($^{\circ}\text{C}$). The only common exception to this rule is degrees ($^{\circ}$) when they refer to angles, in which case no space should be included.

12. Variables

The way in which we write variables depends on what they represent. In the case they represent quantities that have only a magnitude, we can write them in italic, e.g. the speed which can be written as v . It is also generally accepted to write symbols representing matrices and tensors in the same way. On the other hand if the quantity

¹ Note that “Newton” is a surname. On the other hand “newton” refers to a unit that was named after Isaac Newton. Therefore, you should not capitalise the unit name unless it is at the beginning of a sentence.

being represented is a vector the symbol should either be bold, e.g. \mathbf{v} or over lined with an arrow, e.g. \vec{v} .

Note that letters indicating a point are not considered as variables and hence should not be written in any special way. Thus for example if we have two points we can call them Points P and Q and the displacement between them can be written as \overline{PQ} .

In the case the number of symbols used in the work is very large, it would be recommended to have a list of symbols at the beginning of the work. The list should start with Roman type followed by the list of Greek symbols each of which should be given in alphabetical order.

13. Subscripts and superscripts

The way in which subscripts and superscripts are written follows the same rules as those given for numerical values and variables. Thus, Arabic numeric used as subscripts and superscripts should not be italic while variables should generally be italic unless they represent vectors, in which case we can write them as bold. Examples include x^2 , y_i and d_v .

In case the subscript or the superscript is a word, this should not be written in italic. For example the effective velocity can be written as, $v_{\text{Effective}}$. If one wants to abbreviate effective to “Eff” it is possible to write v_{Eff} . In short if the subscript or superscript represents a word or a short hand for a word it should not be italic.

As a particular point, please note that generally the original or initial value is denoted by a zero as a subscript not the letter “o” (ow). Thus the original length should be written as l_0 .

In the case that the number of subscripts and superscripts used is extensive, it is recommended that a list is provided at the beginning of the work. This should be placed immediately following the list of variables (Section 12) with the roman type coming first, and the Greek symbols second.

14. Equations

Equations should be labelled using consecutive Arabic numerals, starting from one, in the same order in which they appear. Conventionally the number is placed in parentheses (i.e. round brackets) flush on the right hand side of the paper as shown below:

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma} \exp\left[-\frac{(x-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right] \quad (10)$$

If the work is extensive and there are many chapters, it is possible to include the chapter number at the beginning. For example if the equation above is the 10th in chapter two it can be labelled (2.10). If this notation is used then the equations should start to be numbered again from one at the beginning of each chapter.

Regarding the location of the equation, this can either be placed at the centre of the remaining space or else it can be written after an indentation to the left. Both of them will be allowed provided the work is consistent.

In case you are wondering how you can write the above easily using a word processor, the suggestion would be to use tables. As a tip also remember that most word processors offer the possibility of automatically numbering your equations.

The numbering of the equations allows easy reference to them. For example to refer to the equation above, it is possible to write Equation 10, Equation (10), Eq. 10, Eq. (10) or simply (10). All of them would be acceptable provided the work is consistent. The only limitation occurs if you refer to the equation at the beginning of the sentence, in which case you should write the word “Equation” in full.

15. Figures and tables

Figures and tables should be used to represent results or to help in explaining things. They should be used with caution as too many figures or tables might hinder the reader from following the arguments in the text. If the number of figures or tables becomes extensive, and no way is found in order to limit their number, it is possible to place them in an appendix and only include in the main text a summary of what they represent.

The figures and tables should have a caption explaining what is contained within them. In general the caption should start with the words Figure for a figure and Table for a table followed by a number. Both the letter and the number should be written bold. The number is assigned in increasing order starting from one depending on their appearance in the work. Thus the first figure to appear is assigned the number one, the second one to appear the number two and so on. In the case the work is very long and there are a number of chapters, it is customary to also label the figures and table using the chapter number in which they are included. In this case the numbering restarts at every chapter.

All figures and tables that are included in the work should be referred to in the main text. One should take care that if a figure or a table is referred to in the main text, it should also be found somewhere in the work. The order in which the tables or figures are referred to should also reflect their position within the text. Thus, for example, the first figure to appear in the text should be labelled **Figure 1** and should also be the first one to be discussed in the main text.

In order to refer to the figures and tables in the main text one can use the label and the number. Thus if you want to refer to the second figure you can just write Figure 2 or Fig. 2. In the latter case the full label (Figure or Table) should be used when the cross reference appears at the beginning of a sentence. While there are other ways of referring to the figure and the tables, such as the use of the words, “above” or “below”

their use is discouraged. The reason for this is that the position of the figure or table might change in time due to formatting needs so that something that was initially above might end up below leading to an error in the cross-reference. Hence, in order to avoid such problems, it is advisable to use only the caption and the number.

Please note that to improve the flow of the work the figures and tables should be blended within the text so as to maximise the use of the available space. Preferably their location should be close to the location in the text where they are referred to. In addition a list of figures and another one of tables should be provided at the beginning of the work irrespective of how many figures or tables have been used.

16. References and bibliography

Applying proper references is a factor of major importance in any scientific write up. References are used either to validate the arguments or concepts being expressed or else to acknowledge the fact that what is being written is not a product of one's own work but of someone else's. One should be very careful on how to deal with references as mismanagement can lead to plagiarism which is a type of academic misconduct that is considered to be very serious and can lead to disciplinary actions against the perpetrator.

The use of references has two parts. One of them is to have a section at the end of the work, before the appendices, where you include a full description from where you have obtained the reference. The other is to cross-refer to the reference in the main text whenever you want to validate your argumentations or indicate that you are using someone else's work. The details of how to do this depend on which referencing system you decide to adopt. The main referencing systems are the Harvard and the Vancouver (or author-number) system. These are described in the sections that follow.

On going through these sections, please keep in mind that different institutions can adopt slight variations to what is suggested in this work. All of these will be considered acceptable in your write-ups provided you are consistent throughout your work.

Note that all the references included in the reference section should be cross-referred to in the main text. In the case that you have read a book, an article or the like but you are not using anything directly in the main text, then you should include that reference in another section called bibliography. Thus the bibliography will contain all the sources you came across in your work and that you actually have read but that you are not making direct use of them in your work. For consistency the style used in your bibliography should be the same one employed in the reference section. Note that a bibliographic section might not be needed if all references are used in the main text.

16.1 The Harvard system

Reference section:

The way in which the references are described in this section depends on the nature of the source. Thus for example the way to write a reference of a book will be different from that of a paper from a journal. A comprehensive list of the format that should be adopted when writing references is given below. Once the reference has been written in the appropriate manner, the list should be arranged in alphabetical order.

Books:

Surname, Initials (Date of publication). *Name of book in italic*; Publication House: Country of publication.

Illustration:

Batschelet E. (1981). *Circular Statistics in Biology*; Academic Press: New York.

Papers:

Surname, Initials (Date of publication). Title of paper; *Title of Journal in italic*, **volume(issue)**, pages.

Illustration:

Ackermann, G.R. (1983). Means and Standard Deviation of horizontal wind components, *Journal of Applied Meteorology*, **22(2)**, 959–961.

Castans, M. and Barquero, C.G. (1998). Some Comment on the Study of Low Persistence Wind: Discussion, *Atmospheric Environment*, **32**, 253–256.

Technical report:

Sometimes, a commercial company, a state agency or some academic institution produce a report that is not properly published. By this it is meant that the work carried out as well as conclusions are not published in a book or a peer reviewed journal. Hence such technical reports, as they are called, are considered to be non-standard references (*cf.* Section 16.4). At the same time, given that they are endorsed by the commissioning entity and are written by fully qualified people, the contents can in general be taken to be correct. However, alternative sources, namely books or/and published journal articles, detailing the same material should be preferred over technical reports. In case this is not possible, you can use the following format in order to list them in the reference section,

Surname, Initials (in case of a single or multiple authors) or corporation name (in case of a corporation), (Date of publication). *Title of technical report*, report reference number or code if available; institution endorsing the report, url address if available online, date of last accessed if available online.

Illustration:

Cho, S., Im, P. and Haberl, J.S. (2005). *Literature Review of Displacement Ventilation*, Technical Reports from the Energy Systems Laboratory.

PG&E (1997). *Thermal Energy Storage Strategies for Commercial HVAC Systems*, an application note of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, available online at http://www.pge.com/includes/docs/pdfs/about/edusafety/training/pec/inforesource/thr_mstor.pdf, last accessed on 3rd March 2012.

Websites:

Websites are a type of non-standard reference. Thus caution should be used if one decides to resort to them (*cf.* Section 16.4). Given that it is only recently that references to websites have become popular, the way in which they are referred to is in constant evolution. The following describes one of the currently suggested versions:

Surname, Initials (in case of a single or multiple authors) or corporation name (in case of a corporation), (Date of publication), *title of page*, url, date on which it was accessed.

Illustration:

Weisstein, E.W. (2010). *Exponential Function From MathWorld--A Wolfram Web Resource*, <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/ExponentialFunction.html>. Date accessed, 14th of August 2010.

Busuttill C., (2009). *timesofmalta.com – What’s that mysterious light in the night sky?*, <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20090323/local/whats-that-mysterious-light-in-the-night-sky>, Date accessed, 14th August 2010.

The date of access is required due to the volatile nature of the websites that can change daily without prior notice.

Citations in text:

In order to support your argumentations or in order to indicate that the work you are referring to has not been conducted by yourself, a cross-reference is included immediately after or before the text under consideration. For all the cases mentioned above, if the number of authors is less than three the format (Surname, Date) or Surname (Date) is used. Example (Johns, 1986) or Johns (1986), (Johns and Smith, 1986) or Johns and Smith (1986), Johns and Smith (1986) and Walters (1995) or (Johns and Smith, 1986, Walters, 1995). If the work has been carried out by more than two authors than you can use the format Smith et al. (1990) or (Smith et al. 1990).

Sometimes accessing the original text where work was originally carried out can be difficult and we only get to know the information we need through a second source, called the secondary source. In such a case we need to make clear that we did not read the primary source. This can be carried out by using one of these formats: Jones

(1986) as cited by Smith (1990); Jones (1986 cited in Smith, 1990); or (Jones, 1986 cited in Smith, 1990).

16.2 The Vancouver system

Reference section:

The reference section is very similar to the one for the Harvard system except that each reference is given a number. The order of the reference should reflect the order in which the references appear in the text. Thus the first reference to appear in the text should be given the number one, the second reference to appear the number two and so on.

Illustration for a book:

[1] Batschelet E. (1981). *Circular Statistics in Biology*; Academic Press: New York.

Illustration for a paper:

[2] Ackermann, G.R. (1983). Means and Standard Deviation of horizontal wind components, *Journal of Applied Meteorology*, **22**, 959–961.

[3] Castans, M and Barquero, C. G. (1998). Some Comment on the Study of Low Persistence Wind: Discussion, *Atmospheric Environment*, **32**, 253–256.

Illustration for a technical report:

[4] Cho, S., Im, P. and Haberl, J.S. (2005). *Literature Review of Displacement Ventilation*, Technical Reports from the Energy Systems Laboratory.

[5] PG&E (1997). *Thermal Energy Storage Strategies for Commercial HVAC Systems*, an application note of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, available online at http://www.pge.com/includes/docs/pdfs/about/edusafety/training/pec/inforesource/thr_mstor.pdf, last accessed on 3rd March 2012.

Illustration for a website:

[4] Weisstein, E.W. (2010), “Exponential Function From MathWorld--A Wolfram Web Resource,” <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/ExponentialFunction.html>. Date accessed, 14th of August 2010.

[5] Busuttill C., (2009), “timesofmalta.com – What’s that mysterious light in the night sky?,” <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20090323/local/whats-that-mysterious-light-in-the-night-sky>, Date accessed, 14th August 2010.

Citations in text:

In the text, it is possible to refer to the references using their corresponding number. For example if you want to refer to the fifth reference you just need to write [5]. In the case you want to refer to a number of references in succession, for example from one

to four, you can use [1-4]. You can also combine single and continuous referencing such as [1-3,5] meaning that you are referring to reference one to three and five. Regarding information obtained from secondary sources one of the following formats can be used, [1] as cited by [2] or [1] (as cited by [2]).

An alternative that is commonly used is to include the name of the author. In the case where there is only one author it is possible to write Johns [1]. If two authors are involved one can write Johns and Smith [2] and while Johns et al. [3] can be adopted in the case of three or more authors are involved. Note that the references are sometimes written as superscripts.

Please remember that the order of the references in the reference section should be the same as that in the main text. Thus the first reference to use is [1] and not for example [3].

16.3 Comparison of the Harvard and Vancouver systems

The Harvard and Vancouver systems are widely used with one being preferred in journals on some topic and the other being preferred in journals with a different topic. Thus you are free to use whichever you prefer.

However, there are some points to consider when carrying out the choice. In the Harvard system, you can include a new reference in the middle of the others without major modifications of the text. On the other hand if you include a new reference in the Vancouver system, you will have to renumber all the following references both in the reference section as well as in the text. The Harvard system has the added advantage that if you refer to a well-known source in your field, for example Batschelet (1981), from the name and year one can easily identify the work without having to check the reference section.

The advantage of the Vancouver system over the Harvard system is that you can condense a lot of references. The fact that you can identify multiple consecutive references by simply writing for example [10-25] dramatically reduces the amount of text needed.

16.4 Non-standard references

Non-standard references refer to work that has not been formally published and hence has not been peer reviewed. The fact that it has not been validated makes its use questionable. For this reason all efforts should be taken to try to avoid their use and instead adopt standard references such as books and journal articles.

The most common of the non-standard references are websites. In this internet era it has become common practice to first browse the internet for information before looking somewhere else. However, in doing so, one must always remember that there is nothing that regulates the information found on websites. Thus you need to use the information with caution.

A case in point is Wikipedia – possibly the current number one source of information on the internet and usually the first one to pop up when queering a search engine. While Wikipedia gives very useful information, there is nothing to guarantee that what is written is exact. Wikipedia can be edited by anyone, anytime, without any quality control. Thus, one cannot trust blindly what is found on it.

So should one just forget about Wikipedia? Not necessarily. Wikipedia generally provides an extensive list of peer reviewed sources. In this way Wikipedia can become a very useful starting point for obtaining peer reviewed information. This means that you are allowed to use Wikipedia as one of your references, however it should never, ever be your main or sole reference on the topic.

16.5 When do I need a reference?

If you are not sure if you need a reference or not ask the following two simple questions:

- Did I know the subject before reading about it?
- Did “I borrow” any idea or words?

If the answer to the first one is no or the answer to the second one is yes, you need a reference, since it may be the case that you are plagiarising some work. In this case you might need to do more than just adding a reference. One example would be to write the “borrowed” words between inverted commas to indicate that those are not your own words but those of the author or authors indicated in the reference.

17. Plagiarism

Plagiarism and collusion are two kinds of unethical academic behaviour. However, they are not the same thing. The former refers to inappropriate copying of some else’s work, namely because the original authors are not fully acknowledged. Another way to say it is to induce someone to think that you have done the work when in reality you just copied it in some way.

On the other hand collusion occurs when students work together and present their common efforts as two distinct works. This is a naturally occurring problem when students are asked to work in groups. However, at undergraduate level and beyond, students are expected to write reports on their own even if some practical part has been accomplished in collaboration with someone else. Whenever there is some collaborative work, only the values measured should be the same. The remainder, including

- the tabulation and formatting of the data,
- graphs, and
- the calculations of values and uncertainties

is expected to be different.

Both plagiarism and collusion are considered to be very serious academic offense and severe disciplinary actions can result. To help you understand the what exactly constitutes plagiarism the University of Malta provides *Plagiarism and collusion guidelines* that are downloadable from http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/95571/University-Guidelines-on-Plagiarism.pdf as well as the manual *How to avoid plagiarism* found at http://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/95568/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.pdf. Furthermore, students following an undergraduate degree at the University of Malta are expected to follow the course LIN1063 Academic Reading and Writing in English (<http://www.um.edu.mt/linguistics/studyunit/LIN1063>) where the subject is treated at length.

A simple way of avoiding plagiarism is not to copy and paste any material from any source. If you cannot avoid copying the material, then you should ensure that any material that has been copied is adequately referenced so as to make it clear it is not your work but that of the others. In the case you copied whole phrases or paragraphs, as discussed above, these should be placed between inverted commas and referenced. As for tables and figures, you should include “reproduced from” before the reference in the case you have copied them. In the case of figures, if you draw the figure from scratch but do not change it appreciably, then you should include “adapted from” before the reference. The “copied from” and “adapted from” together with the reference should go in the caption. Note that in principle, you should ask for permission from the copyright owners before you can copy a table or a figure. Hence you should try to draw your own figures wherever possible.

To help you identifying any problem with your work, you will be asked to upload the final document on a Turnitin portal that will be available on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). There will be two such portals, the first where you can upload a draft of the work and the second to upload the final version of the work. The draft Turnitin portal is provided so that you can check for plagiarism problems. You can then correct these without incurring any penalisation and upload the updated version in the final Turnitin portal. Note that you are only allowed submit your work only once to the draft assignment Turnitin portal.

Interpreting the result of the Turnitin portal might not be straight forward. To help you with this consider the situation where you find a sentence marked as shown below.

This is an example of what should be avoid. ³ If you encounter a situation where there is a sentence that is marked in the same way as this one, then you can be sure that you have a problem of plagiarism. Avoid such instances.

The Turnitin portal is telling you that the sentence is copied from the Source 3 (that you will find on the right hand side.). Such instances should be avoided. The sentence should be rephrased in your own works.

A more complicated instances occurs when you have various marking in the same paragraph that appear to originate from the same source as shown below.

This is another example of what should be avoided. At times it would appear that you do not have a single sentence originating from the same source. However, different parts of a paragraph have been marked to originate from the same source. This is known as patch writing and is still a type of plagiarism. It is called patch writing and occurs when you copy a paragraph from some source and simply change a couple of words here and there. Once again, such instances should be avoided.

This is indicative of a type of plagiarism called *patch writing*. This occurs when one or more phrases have been copied from some source and then some words have been changed here and there. Such instances are still considered to be plagiarism and should be avoided by rewriting the whole structure.

A very important thing to remember here is that the percentage overlap given by the Turnitin software is not indicative of plagiarism and/or collusion. What really matters is the interpretation. Thus, there is no minimal threshold above which one can expect to have problems.

Another important point is that the Turnitin portal might not help you in checking for instances of collusion as these will only be highlighted in the final assignment Turnitin portal when cross comparison between the submissions takes place. The best way to avoid collusion is to work on your own. This will ensure that you cannot copy from someone else who is working on the same project. Furthermore, no one else can copy from you.

More information about Turnitin and how to use it can be found at <http://www.um.edu.mt/vle/pds/students/pdstraining>. Step by step instructions on how to upload your work can be found here: <https://www.um.edu.mt/itservices/intranet/pds/turnitinupld-std.pdf>. If in doubt on how to interpret the result, ask your tutor(s) or anyone else of your trust to help you out. However, remember that the onus of ensuring that your work is not plagiarised lies only with yourself and with nobody else.

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