**Types of academic writing**

The types of academic writing that you are asked to complete vary according to your subject area and level of study. Below, the main types are briefly explained, together with links to sources of support for completing each respective style.

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# Essay writing

There are many variations within essay writing, but generally you are tasked to produce an argument, based on evidence, that results in a conclusion, in response to a question or statement. You are given a word limit, and may be required to include specified elements, such as using listed sources of evidence.

# Report writing

Reports are found within many subjects. All report on something and have a specified audience, with each academic discipline area having its own report types (many of which are based on real-world reports).

# Exam writing

Exams can be undertaken in person or remotely. They are a test of knowledge, understanding and skills, in a particular area of learning, usually completed in controlled conditions, including limited access to external information and a time limit. They typically demand concise writing that conveys meaning accurately. There is a huge variation in the format of exam questions and demands placed on students across disciplines and levels of study. Like Marmite, most people either love or hate exam writing.

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# Reflective writing

This type of writing demands that you consider prior learning or actions and use a framework to identify and comment on elements of what happened. You're also typically asked to articulate how changes to your actions/those of others could be made in the future.

Reflective writing is an element of most degree programmes and a compulsory part of some degrees that are accredited by professional bodies. It is a style that many students find initially difficult, but with practice, it is rewarding, due to it promoting thought about personal and professional improvement.

# Academic posters

This style of academic communication combines visual elements (eg, images, charts, graphs and diagrams) with writing to succinctly communicate an idea or series of ideas to a defined audience. A common example is a scientific poster to explain an experimental investigation.

Academic posters need complex ideas to be reduced into manageable and accessible ‘chunks’ that are curated together to convey the overall message, usually to a relatively specialist audience.

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# Dissertations

Completed at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, dissertations take two main forms. The first is based on the collection of data (primary or secondary) to answer a question/test a hypothesis and involves writing multiple chapters that overall provide an intellectual and practical explanation of the study undertaken, exploration of resultant data, a discussion of results and finally, conclusions.

The second type is an extended literature review, which means the author uses already-published information to form an argument that answers a substantive question. This can be thought of as a much longer and more ‘involved’ version of an essay, and is usually divided into chapters, the last of which is a conclusion that addresses the original question.

In both cases, there are huge variations in the structure, nature, requirements and lengths of dissertations. This means students need to carefully read all information provided within the dissertation module. They should attend lectures/seminars and interact with their supervisor to ensure they fulfil all that is asked of them by the dissertation they are required to complete. It is essential not to assume that a friend's dissertation within a different degree programme is the same, or that generic information in this guide or on the Internet/in books, is applicable to your dissertation.

# Thesis writing

Completed at PhD level and as part of research Masters degrees, a thesis is the most complex and demanding academic writing that is undertaken by students. It is an in-depth, long (circa 80000 words for a PhD) investigation of a substantial topic. The thesis, when written, is the product of two years of study for a Masters-level student, and three years (at least!) for a PhD student. It represents new findings that add to the overall discipline to which it belongs.