BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION: WRITING, REFERENCING AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM
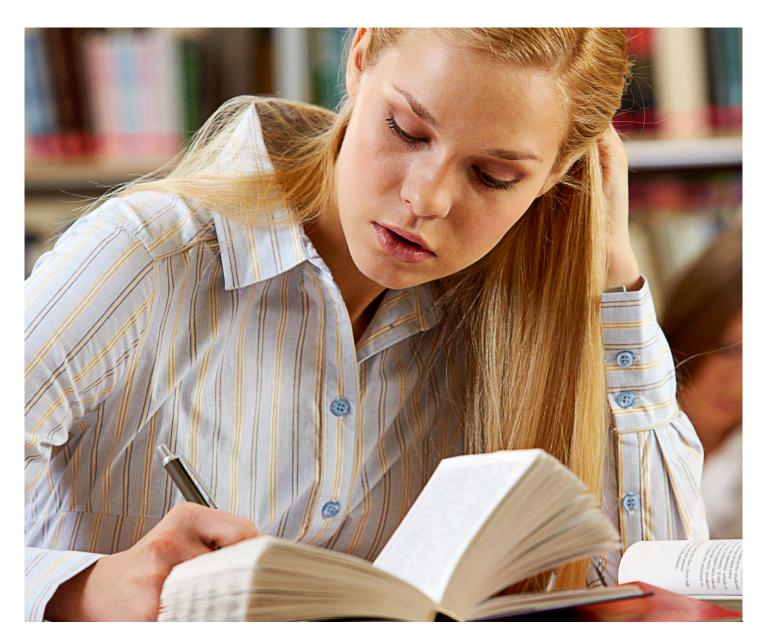
APPRENTICESHIPS

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is written for learners studying Business and Administration qualifications. It will help you understand the requirements you will need to meet in your written work. It will also help you to understand what to avoid: in particular to prevent your work being disqualified because of plagiarism. If you have any questions about this document you should speak to your Assessor.

Gaining Business and Administration qualifications will help prepare you to work in a real business environment. Therefore the work you produce must meet the expectations of your Assessor and managers in a business. They expect it to have:

• appropriate and sufficient content

• evidence of investigation (research)

• logical, clear and organised arguments, drawing on appropriate experience where that exists.

• a professional style of writing

• good presentation.

This guide will take you through each of these areas giving you some tips and suggestions to help you achieve this.

APPROPRIATE AND SUFFICIENT CONTENT

Before you start writing, or even to find out more about the topic, make sure you understand the assignment. You must answer the question asked, not one you wish the Assessor had asked. This is a list of command verbs used in our qualification specifications. Look out for these in the assignment titles you are given.

Command verb	Explanation	Example
Analyse	Separate information into components and identify their characteristics. Discuss the pros and cons of a topic or argument and make reasoned comments.	**Analyse** the effects of the Equality Act 2010 on businesses in the retail industry.
Compare	Identify similarities and differences.	**Compare** the administrative requirements of a range of statutory meetings.
Contrast	Identify differences.	**Contrast** the hierarchical and matrix models of organisational structures.
Comment	State own views clearly, supported by evidence and/or appropriate explanations.	**Comment** on the importance of sustainability to the environment.
Criticise	Give balanced judgement about a statement.	**Criticise** the planning process for HS2.
Define	State or describe the nature, scope or meaning. It is not sufficient to provide a short bullet point at Level 4.	**Define** 'disability discrimination' in the workplace.
Discuss	Give an account that addresses a range of ideas and arguments.	Selling council tax payer information without their written consent is unethical. **Discuss**.
Evaluate	Make a qualitative judgement taking into account different factors and using available knowledge, experience and/or evidence.	**Evaluate** the cost effectiveness of outsourcing payroll activities.
Illustrate	Make clear by using examples or provide diagrams.	**Illustrate** how the culture of a business is affected by the internal structure.
Justify	Present a reasoned case for actions or decisions made.	**Justify** the introduction of an ethical business code within an organisation.
Outline	A description setting out main characteristics/points.	**Outline** the benefits of taking account of ergonomic factors when redesigning work space.
Review	Survey information, methods, outcomes, conclusions, after the event, deciding what was effective or not.	**Review** the introduction of the new electronic filing system in the social services division.
State	Express in precise and clear terms.	**State** the main benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility.
Summarise	Give the main points in a CONCISE account omitting details.	**Summarise** the benefits of facilities management to the organisation.

Additional command verbs are defined in the following OCR Command Verbs document (ocr.org.uk/Images/149928-command-verb-definitions.pdf)

EVIDENCE OF INVESTIGATION RESEARCH

Before you write your final piece of work, you will need to complete the research to gather the right data and supporting texts or theories. Research might come from:

- case studies
- your own experience in the workplace
- theories and texts written by others.

Make sure that your sources of information are accurate; not everything on the internet is true! Check whether the websites you are using are written by experts or whether they are sites that anyone can contribute to. Ensure that you know whether the information you are using is fact or opinion, and make sure it is accurate. For example, Wikipedia can give you an overview of a topic, but you should cross-reference this with information from other sites and publications. See 'Referencing' later in this document for more tips . . .

LOGICAL, CLEAR AND ORGANISED DOCUMENTS

Maintain focus! Keep the writing succinct but sufficiently detailed to prove the point you are trying to make. Many good reports are spoilt because they become broad and shallow.

Your final document will need to show you have understood the research you have completed through the presentation of logical arguments. You will need to do more than just describe what you have read. Summarising the key points in your own words is a good way to do this.

To make a strong argument, you should provide both the pros and cons about your data and texts. This may require you to point out flaws in your own argument and provide opposing arguments to support your claims (the good, the bad and the ugly).

If you don't give any counter-argument, or those provided are weak, this will affect the quality of the work and it is less likely to meet the qualification requirements.

A PROFESSIONAL STYLE OF WRITING

What does report style include?

A report should:
- include a cover sheet and a contents page
- begin with terms of reference that outline what the reader may expect in terms of content
- be structured and contain a final section detailing any relevant conclusions and/or recommendations
- number pages so it's easy to refer to specific sections
- number any appendices, which should appear at the end of the work after the reference list/bibliography (some authors place them before the reference list/bibliography) – whatever your preference, be consistent
- not include information in the appendices that is critical to the report – appendices are there to help the reader but they are not necessarily expected to be read.

Descriptive vs critical

Descriptive writing shows evidence of knowledge but not of understanding.

Critical writing is reflective and shows knowledge and understanding.

This is important when deciding what type of evidence the assessment requires – for example, **explain** is descriptive but **evaluate** is critical.

A helpful table that demonstrates the difference between descriptive and critical writing can be found at the following webpage:
nottingham.ac.uk/studentservices/documents/description-vs-analysis---learnhigher.pdf (November 2015).
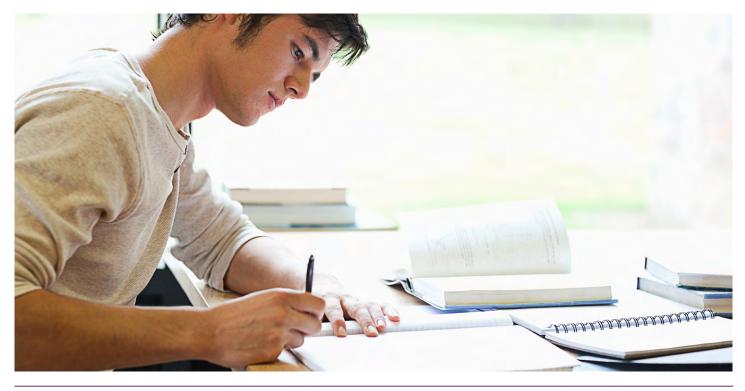
Reporting verbs

Use a range of these reporting verbs to add interest and variety for the reader:

says	suggests	points out	proves
asserts	maintains	contends	argues
indicates	believes	finds	demonstrates
reports	concludes	claims	states

Tone

Being professional means keeping to the point, not being informal and chatty in style. Use the third person – for example, 'it was done through the use of' not 'I did it by using'. In most business documents, contractions (e.g. 'weren't' or 'don't') are not used. Vocabulary should be appropriate to the topic, using specialised business words where it is appropriate to do so.

GOOD PRESENTATION

Spelling, grammar and punctuation must be accurate

Professional writing should have correct spelling, grammar and punctuation; otherwise it can signal:

- sloppiness – an uncaring approach to a report or letter is not an appropriate way to demonstrate professionalism.
- poor planning – it suggests that the work has been completed in a rush at the last moment without time for careful proofreading and potential corrections, which, again this does not demonstrate a professional attitude.

To avoid these issues:

- Use spell check, after making sure that the word processor is set to UK English.
- Check it again. Computerised spell checkers cannot always recognise the incorrect use of a word, which can result in errors being overlooked – for example, 'witch' and 'which'. Both these words are spelt correctly – one is a questioning word, one is something you see at Halloween. If you are not sure whether you have used the right word, use a dictionary.
- Put the work to one side for an hour or so and then read it again. It is amazing how often a beautifully crafted sentence looks very different when you read it word for word, rather than your brain remembering what you thought you had written. Sometimes reading your document out loud can help you identify errors you had not spotted.
- Have someone else proofread it. This is not cheating; the work is that of the author, who is merely asking someone else to check whether what has been written makes sense to them.

Citing and quoting

There are a number of scenarios where it is necessary to cite or quote other people's work:

- to indicate that the words and ideas you are using have been borrowed from somebody else, or that you are paraphrasing or summarising the ideas of another author
- to add weight to your arguments by showing that you have borrowed the ideas from someone who is knowledgeable on a particular subject
- to help other readers by allowing them to reach other informative books, journals etc. thus creating a network of referenced material
- when properly done, a good referencing system will allow you to easily access material that has been accessed in the past
- acknowledging the work of others in the field and not claiming your work as your own (see the section on plagiarism).

THE REFERENCING SYSTEM

When do you need to give a reference?

If you did not know something before you started your course or the information/idea was not yours then you need to reference where you found out about it, acknowledging the efforts of others in finding this out for you. What should be referenced?

You should reference any source that you have used, including: electronic or printed versions of books and journals, newspapers and magazines; podcasts, YouTube videos, records of personal interviews, websites, films, TV and radio, DVDs, CDs, photographs, diagrams, images and reports, etc.

How do you reference?

There are many styles of referencing. Whichever one you choose to use, you must use it consistently. Remember, the purpose of referencing is to allow another reader to find the source you have used if they wish to check the facts, or indeed, find out more about how you arrived at your ideas. For example, you must provide a citation if you talk about an individual's idea or if you quote a fact. Your Assessor/institution may wish you to use a specific style of referencing.

Do not underestimate the time required to reference properly! Do your referencing as you write, NOT when you come to the end of the report!

Reference list

This is a list of publications and other sources of information, including websites, which you have cited directly in the text. These have provided ideas and facts that are identifiable within the presented written work.

All work MUST have a reference list (this may be only a single text, with the name, author and edition recorded). Reference lists should always be on a SEPARATE PAGE, never on the same page as the report.

Useful tools

A number of styles are now available in the latest version of Microsoft Word on the drop-down menu, under 'References' and 'Style'. Another useful tool is harvardguideforonscreen.pdf (Jackie Fealey and Rob Caley, July 2014, Liverpool John Moores University).
scribd.com/doc/294445393/Harvardguideforonscreen-pdfPR1s

Bibliography

A bibliography is a list of books and articles relevant to the text but not restricted to items cited in the text. Reading different texts can confirm ideas or suggest alternatives but not all of these contribute directly to the written work.

MALPRACTICE

Malpractice can take a number of forms including, but not limited to:

- **Cheating**

  This tends to be done by individuals, for example, smuggling notes into examinations, writing on the sleeve or arm.
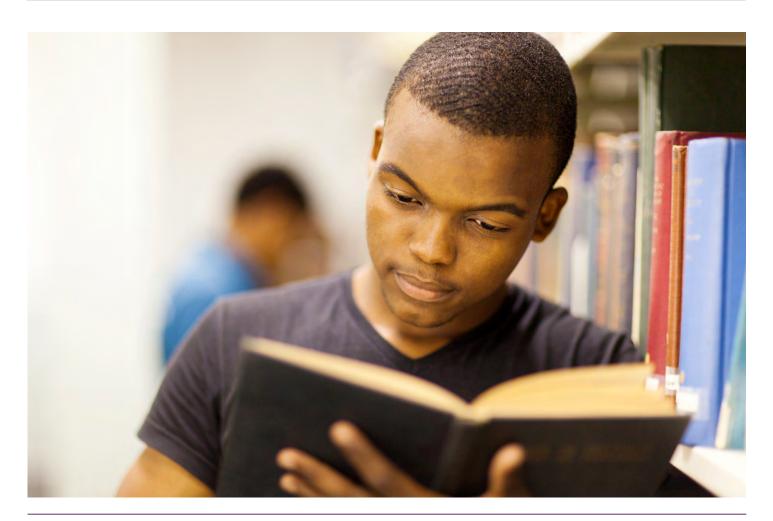
- **Collusion**

  This includes two or more people working together in a group and then each individual claiming the work as their own. To avoid this, each person should write their own individual report.

- **Plagiarism**

  This is normally carried out by an individual who copies, directly, the work of others and tries to pass it off as their own. This ranges from single sentences to entire pages of content. It also includes artwork – for example, plans, figures and photographs that were not created by the individual – and, yes, that does include clipart! Changing one or two words or rearranging sentences within a paragraph is still plagiarism.

  You can use free software – e.g. AntiPlagiarist, Viper, PaperRater – to check your own work for inadvertent plagiarism. Your Assessor may also check your work in this way.

Remember, even if the work is correctly cited – for example, quotation marks around the text and the reference – it can still result in the assessment being failed. An extract from the work of others, even when correctly cited only provides knowledge of how to research; it does not prove knowledge or understanding of the content, which is almost always required by the assignment.

Plagiarism exercise

Below is an extract from a paper by Michael Hopkins (2004) Working Paper No. 27: 'Corporate social responsibility: an issues paper'.

CSR therefore means the ethical behaviour of business towards its constituencies or stakeholders. Nevertheless, there are a wide variety of concepts and definitions associated with the term "corporate social responsibility", but no general agreement of terms. To provide some guidance to readers in this area I have included a glossary of terms in Annex I, which provides a number of definitions.

Alert readers will notice, however, a fluidity of concepts that really requires more extensive research and consideration than has been undertaken so far. Without a common language, we do not really know whether our dialogue with companies is being heard and interpreted in a consistent way.

To date I believe that such dialogue has been highly flawed, as some companies use the terms "corporate citizenship", some "the ethical corporation", while others use "good corporate governance" or "corporate responsibility".

These flaws lead some companies to consider CSR as pure corporate philanthropy, others (such as Shell) as a new corporate strategic framework, while others dismiss the notion entirely.

In this context, a lively debate has led some authors, mainly academics based in the United States, to prefer to use the concept of "corporate social responsiveness", rather than "corporate social responsibility" per se.

For example, they argue, Ackerman and Bauer among them, that the connotation of responsibility is that of the process of merely assuming an obligation. This places emphasis on motivation rather than performance but, they believe, such motivation is not enough, because responding to social demands is much *more* than deciding what to do; thus there remains the management task of *doing* what one has decided to do: this is social responsiveness.

However, I believe that managers must accept the notion of social responsibility *before* they work out what to do. There is no argument about the fact that, once it has been accepted, the next step is the response, or in other words that acceptance of the motivation to be socially responsible *immediately leads* the manager into what should be done next, that is into social responsiveness.

Acceptance does not, of course, come easily and much work is going on around the world to show that corporate social responsibility makes sound economic, as well as social, ethical, and philosophical sense.

Four versions of the original that may be offered as evidence are shown on the following pages.

Which version/s would be considered to be plagiarised versions of the original and which would not?

Example 1:

CSR therefore means the ethical behaviour of business towards its constituencies or stakeholders. Nevertheless, there are a wide variety of concepts and definitions associated with the term "corporate social responsibility", but no general agreement of terms.

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However, I believe that managers must accept the notion of social responsibility before they work out what to do.

Example 2:

> **There are a wide variety of concepts and definitions associated with the term "corporate social responsibility", but no general agreement of terms. Alert readers will notice, however, a fluidity of concepts that really requires more extensive research and consideration than has been undertaken so far.**
>
> **Without a common language, we do not really know whether our dialogue with companies is being heard and interpreted in a consistent way. This places emphasis on motivation rather than performance but, they believe, such motivation is not enough, because responding to social demands is much more than deciding what to do; thus there remains the management task of doing what one has decided to do: this is social responsiveness. However, I believe that managers must accept the notion of social responsibility before they work out what to do.**

Example 3:

> CSR therefore means the ethical behaviour of business towards its constituencies or stakeholders. Nevertheless, there are a wide variety of concepts and definitions associated with the term "corporate social responsibility", but no general agreement of terms. To provide some guidance to readers in this area I have included a glossary of terms in Annex I, which provides a number of definitions.
>
> Alert readers will notice, however, a fluidity of concepts that really requires more extensive research and consideration than has been undertaken so far. Without a common language, we do not really know whether our dialogue with companies is being heard and interpreted in a consistent way.
>
> To date I believe that such dialogue has been highly flawed, as some companies use the terms "corporate citizenship", some "the ethical corporation", while others use "good corporate governance" or "corporate responsibility".
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> These flaws lead some companies to consider CSR as pure corporate philanthropy, others (such as Shell) as a new corporate strategic framework, while others dismiss the notion entirely.
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>
> Acceptance does not, of course, come easily and much work is going on around the world to show that corporate social responsibility makes sound economic, as well as social, ethical, political and philosophical sense." Michael Hopkins (2004) Working Paper No. 27: "Corporate social responsibility: an issues paper".

Example 4:

Hopkins, M (2004) argues that the term "Corporate Social Responsibility", while widely used, is not always interpreted in the same way by all organisations. He provides a number of definitions and posits that these differences mean that there is no common understanding of what the term means and therefore it is highly possible that discussions with various organisations may be interpreted differently by those organisations.

He further argues that the different terms such as "corporate citizenship" or "corporate governance" applied to corporate social responsibility have led to firms to interpret it as a philosophy, a strategic framework or to ignore the whole thing.

He also takes issue with those in the United States who argue that, rather than "Corporate Social Responsibility", the term used should be "Corporate Social Responsiveness" as the former suggests an acceptance of a duty rather than the latter which suggests carrying through what must be done.

Hopkins argues that managers cannot put plans and actions in place before they accept responsibility.

Answers:

1 and **2** are clearly plagiarised as they directly copy all or extracts of Hopkins' paper without any acknowledgement.

3 – This does place the extract in quotation marks and provides the reference and so this is not plagiarism. However, it does not demonstrate knowledge or understanding of the topic, only of the ability to locate content related to Corporate Social Responsibility. Thus, as an answer it would fail.

4 – This refers to Hopkins directly but puts his ideas into the writer's own words. Therefore, this is not plagiarism.

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or call our Customer Contact Centre on **02476 851509**

Alternatively, you can email us on **apprenticeships@ocr.org.uk**

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