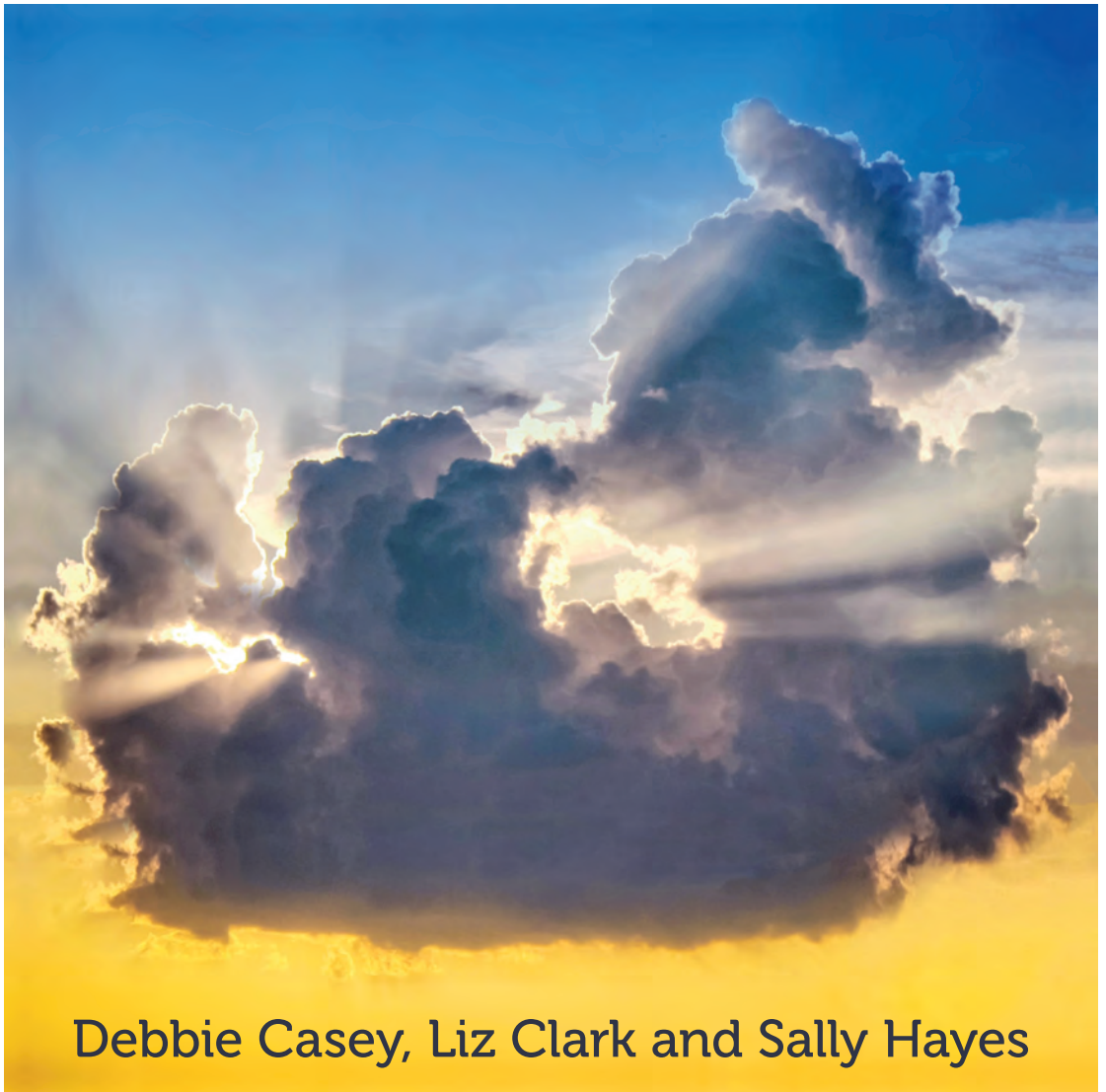


SECOND EDITION

Study Skills for Master's Level Students

A Reflective Approach for Health and Social Care

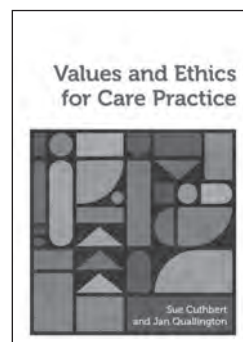
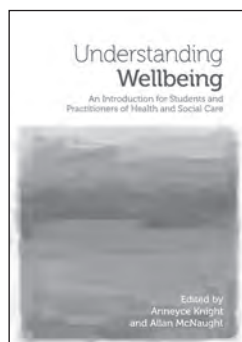
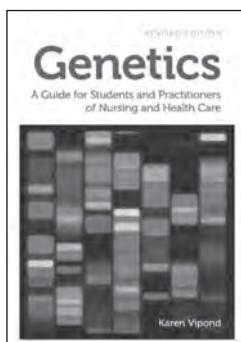
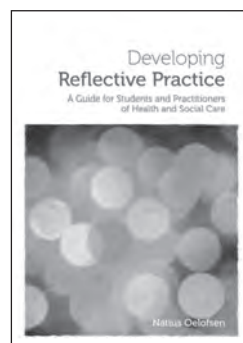
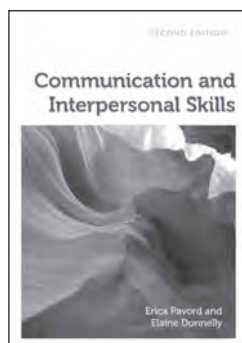
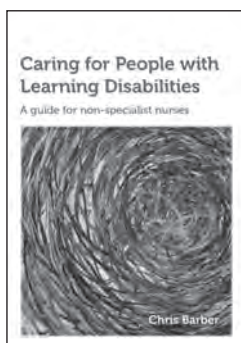


Debbie Casey, Liz Clark and Sally Hayes

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Health and Social Care**

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Debbie Casey, Liz Clark and Sally Hayes



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The authors and publisher have made every attempt to ensure the content of this book is up to date and accurate. However, healthcare knowledge and information is changing all the time so the reader is advised to double-check any information in this text on drug usage, treatment procedures, the use of equipment, etc. to confirm that it complies with the latest safety recommendations, standards of practice and legislation, as well as local Trust policies and procedures. Students are advised to check with their tutor and/or mentor before carrying out any of the procedures in this textbook.

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This book is dedicated to all the health and social care students who have inspired and motivated us in our teaching. We hope the book will enable future students to aim high and achieve their potential in their studies.

ABBREVIATIONS

AACN	American Association of Colleges of Nursing
AP	Advanced Practitioner
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DH	Department of Health
FHEQ	The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institute
ICMJ	International Committee of Medical Journal Editors
IT	Information Technology
NHSI	National Health Service Institute for Innovation
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NMC	Nursing and Midwifery Council
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SQ3R	Survey, Question, Read, etc.
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of an increasing graduate workforce and the resulting development of postgraduate provision for continuing professional development (CPD), there is a general understanding in higher education (HE) circles that, at postgraduate level, students aim to be independent and self-directed learners. Therefore, within Master's level courses there exists an expectation of relative independence alongside an emphasis on the centrality of the student's individual learning needs. As experienced academics working in HE, we feel that there is a paucity of guidance to enable students to understand what becoming an 'independent learner' entails and on how to identify and recognise individual learning needs.

This text will therefore explore the world of Master's study – its context, regulation and operation – in order to assist students to develop capability in both thinking and writing at Master's level. This will be achieved through the use of practical and reflective activities aimed at recognising and developing the use of higher academic skills. Such skills include critical thinking, using literature and writing to demonstrate distinctive and independent thought with the synthesis of ideas and critical engagement with alternative views. Also, through being encouraged to think reflectively, analytical thinking skills and self-learning will be developed.

However, please note that this text will focus mainly on the needs of taught Master's students (for our definition of what this is, please see Chapter 1). Also note that, although research as a discipline is not specifically addressed in the text, the thinking and writing skills required for undertaking a research project are developed throughout the book. Research skills will be referred to in the text and the students will be signposted to the plethora of texts that exist specifically to develop skills in research methods.

USING THIS BOOK

This book has been written to support students who are new to studying at postgraduate level and who want to understand the difference between studying at Bachelor's level and studying at Master's level. The book may also be useful to those students who would consider themselves established within a postgraduate course but who need to revisit the principles

of studying at that level, and may even be a useful resource to those academic staff who are supporting students at Master's level. While we would encourage you to read the book as a complete narrative, you may wish to dip in and out of chapters as your needs arise over the duration of your studies.

Content and coverage

Chapter 1, 'What is Masterly?' This chapter essentially sets the context for the book by introducing the reader to a number of different facts about, and approaches to, postgraduate study. By examining the difference between Bachelor's level and Master's level of study, it seeks to demystify learning outcomes by encouraging the student to consider both the specific personal aims of postgraduate study as well as considering the wider goals of postgraduate education, and to consider how these might be achieved and evidenced.

Chapter 2, 'What is Critical Thinking?' This chapter examines more closely one of the key skills of working and writing at Master's level – that of critical thinking. The concept and theory of critical thinking will be explored and activities will be used to develop students' critical thinking skills.

Chapter 3, 'Becoming an Independent Learner'. This chapter examines the concept of independence as it applies to higher-level study. This is about strategies that the students can employ in order to manage their postgraduate studies effectively and includes support mechanisms for students during their programme of study.

Chapter 4, 'Finding and Critiquing Literature'. This chapter aims to develop students' ability to find high-quality literature, to critique it, to challenge theory, and to apply the findings within debate and argument. The issue of plagiarism will also be considered.

Chapter 5, 'Writing at Master's Level'. This chapter explores the expectations for students' writing at postgraduate level. It covers addressing posed questions, pursuing arguments, structuring the argument, examining the skill of writing interesting and appropriate introductions and conclusions, and considers the use of abstracts. The use of theory, concepts and paradigms is also explored.

Chapter 6, 'How to get Published'. This chapter presents and considers the obligation to share knowledge among the academic community and discusses both tools and tips for getting published.

Chapter 7, 'Applying Postgraduate Knowledge and Skills in the Workplace'. This chapter looks at why it is so important to apply postgraduate skills within the workplace. The concept of employability will be explored and students will be encouraged to examine and develop the skills that make them 'employable'. There is also a discussion of the benefits of Master's thinkers in the workplace, including the impact on improving practice and the quality of care delivery.

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5

WRITING AT MASTER'S LEVEL

This chapter covers the following key issues:

- academic writing as a postgraduate skill;
- key characteristics of Master's level writing;
- key writing genres/styles;
- planning and preparing for writing at Master's level;
- organising and structuring an essay;
- referencing skills.

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- discuss the expectations and processes of written work at Master's level;
- critically reflect upon your own writing skills and identify areas for development;
- discuss the processes involved in writing a coherent, well developed essay;
- reference your work correctly using the Harvard referencing system.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing, in its broadest sense, can be defined as 'writing that fulfils a purpose of education in a college or university' (Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006). Writing at Master's level has been described as a specialist activity (Atherton, 2010; Craswell, 2005) in the sense that postgraduate course requirements dictate purpose and remit at a specific level. In order to study at Master's level, there will, generally, be an expectation that students will have successfully demonstrated the ability to write academically (Atherton, 2010).

The QAA (2015) identifies that assessment methods at Master's level are diverse and dependent on the overall aims for each specific programme. Most Master's degrees include a research project but there are also many other methods of assessment which may include the following:

- essays;
- practical reports or portfolios;
- dissertations or other output from research/project work;
- written examinations;
- problem-solving exercises;
- oral presentations;
- posters;
- placement reports.

It is clear that most of these involve writing and, as such, you will need to further develop your writing skills at Master's level if you are to demonstrate your in-depth knowledge effectively (through your writing) and successfully achieve your Master's degree.

ACTIVITY

What do you think the purposes of assignments are?

Giles and Hedge (2002, cited in Gatrell, 2006) clarify this by suggesting that the purposes of assignments are:

- to reinforce and consolidate learning;
- to evaluate learning;
- to demonstrate knowledge and understanding;
- to apply theoretical concepts to the real world.

Submitting written work to the scrutiny of others can feel daunting and perhaps a little threatening, and this is understandable. Even the most experienced writers have concerns that their work will not be of an acceptable standard and, as such, will be negatively criticised.

This chapter will explore and discuss the requirements and expectations of written work at Master's level. It will allow you to consider, evaluate and further develop your academic writing skills and writing style to increase your confidence and competence. The chapter should be read in conjunction with Chapter 2 on critical thinking, Chapter 3 on becoming an independent learner and Chapter 4 on finding and using literature.

EXPECTATIONS OF WRITTEN WORK AT MASTER'S LEVEL

Atherton (2010) has suggested that, at postgraduate level, there is an expectation that you will have mastered the basic 'rules' of academic writing and states:

... I believe it is reasonable to expect that anyone who goes around with the letters MA after their name – which places them in some kind of intellectual elite – has an obligation to be able to express themselves clearly and literately.

ACTIVITY

What do you consider are the basic rules of expressing yourself clearly and literately?

Atherton identifies the following.

- Writing is intelligently structured using appropriate models or frameworks like, for example, models of guided reflection if writing a reflective piece.
- Paragraphs are correctly used – one key issue/idea per paragraph. In this way you construct a clear argument or make a clear case for your discussion.
- Style is clear and professional, with no abbreviations or slang.
- Sentence construction, grammar and syntax are correct.
- An absolute understanding of what plagiarism means (see Chapter 4).
- References are presented correctly in the text and in the reference list.

In addition to work being literate, there will be other criteria for Master's level writing. Craswell (2005, p. xv) identifies these as follows:

Conciseness in writing is valued in general by the academic community, as is treating information critically, attending to audience needs, consistency in the mechanics of academic writing, careful referencing of sources, coherent development of texts, sound logic and evidential support in arguments.

Atherton (2010) largely concurs with Craswell (2005) while also offering some further useful criteria for work at Master's level.

1. It addresses the module outcomes.
2. It has evidence.
3. It is critical.
4. It explores implicit values – '... it is easy to write about what should or ought or must happen. But at M level you are expected to dig behind these self-evident truths and to expose the assumptions behind them and to entertain the potential alternatives'.
5. It contextualises.

6. It pursues an argument.
7. It does not try to say everything about nothing – an assignment topic needs to be tightly defined.
8. It brings something of you into it – ‘... you are drawing on all the knowledge and experience you have accumulated thus far, and doing something with it ...’.

You need to consider Atherton's last point carefully – that postgraduate writing should bring something of you into it.

ACTIVITY

What does ‘bringing something of you into it’ mean?

You may have considered that you need to demonstrate the ability to synthesise the issues relevant to your subject with your own professional experience. This is wider than just providing examples to illustrate understanding of theory. It means applying appropriate theory, concepts and paradigms to systematically investigate issues relating to your own professional work. An awareness of how the skills you have developed through your postgraduate study inform your professional practice is crucial in your work.

In summary, writing is a key skill that will need to be further developed to enable you to effectively develop your arguments and demonstrate your postgraduate knowledge and skills. Indeed, the absolute foundation of postgraduate academic writing is critical analysis. This is what differentiates writing at postgraduate level from that of undergraduate writing. Postgraduate writing goes beyond description and discussion that simply accepts information as it is. Writing at this higher level involves evaluating information before accepting or rejecting it, while also providing appropriate evidence for doing so.

TYPES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Generally, assessment at postgraduate level will involve producing work from different academic genres.

ACTIVITY

What is meant by ‘different academic genres’?

You will need to become familiar with those academic genres relevant for your studies in order to successfully progress through your course. Some may be unfamiliar and you will therefore need to understand, for example, the specific style, language and structure of each. You will also need to understand the specific writing practices and conventions that are associated with the discipline being studied and the institution where you are studying.

ACTIVITY

Spend some time familiarising yourself with the expectations of your specific course, with particular focus on the assessment requirements and the academic genres.

There are many different genres or types of academic writing including lecture notes, analytical essays, research proposals, scientific reports, reflective essays, dissertations, journal articles and books. Each type or genre has a different purpose and a different language depending on audience. For example, a research proposal will be written in a different style to a research report or dissertation, with the different purpose requiring a different process. Each of these will be written in the third person, as contrasted with a reflective essay that may well be written in the first person. Specific differences between essays, reports and reflective pieces will be considered in detail towards the end of the chapter but it is important to acknowledge here that different institutions set out the criteria for each of the assignments you will be required to produce and, again, it is important to familiarise yourself with the specific requirements before you commence writing.

Writing and presenting essays

An essay is a formal piece of writing that aims to explore a particular topic in accordance with a specific set of conventions (Connelly and Forsyth, 2012). It is generally written in a formal, academic style and needs to be grammatically sound. Essays are one of the most common forms of assessment within higher education and there will be some expectation at Master's level that you have understood and successfully demonstrated some basic techniques prior to commencing your course. If you feel that your essay-writing skills require major development, or that essay writing is a major part of your course, then you may find it useful to read books with a specific focus on developing academic writing skills. Further resources relating to this are identified at the end of this chapter. Leeds Beckett University (2014) identifies conventions relating to essay writing as follows.

- Writing should be in continuous text, although sometimes an essay might have sections with subheadings. Paragraphs should be effectively used to break the text up into readable chunks. The onus is always on the essay writer to organise his or her writing in such a way that it is easy for the reader to follow.
- The essay is formal in both structure and language. It should have a well-defined introduction, body, and conclusion. Standard English should be used as opposed to colloquial English.
- Essays can vary in length anywhere from 500 to 5000 words. Such a range is not set in stone, but shorter pieces might constitute some form of brief reflection, whereas longer pieces of writing would probably be called projects, theses or dissertations.

- The English word 'essay' is derived from the French *essai*, meaning 'a try'. It is worth bearing the original meaning in mind. Historically, the essay has been a means of expressing everyday concerns or reflections and not a format used to express ultimate answers to things. The modern university essay differs considerably from its historical cousin, yet something of its older ethos remains. As a student writer, you will not be expected to produce an ultimate answer, but rather to 'try' your best to produce a plausible answer to a topic that probably has no set or singular answer.

Additionally, you will also need to adhere to set conventions relating to the presentation of your work. You may find specific information regarding your own institution's presentation requirements in your course or module handbooks.

ACTIVITY

What do you think are important aspects with regard to the presentation of work? Write a list of your key points.

You may have considered some or all of the following.

- Identification of your work on the front page – for example, student number, course, title of assignment.
- Word-processing of work with no typographical errors.
- Spacing and margins.
- Logical organisation of work with clearly defined paragraphs, headings (if appropriate) and inclusion of word count.
- Work presented in an appropriate form – for example, a folder, binder, etc.

As already mentioned, you will need to check the specific requirements for your course.

Essay planning

Before you start writing your paper or essay, your lecturer should have had some initial discussions with you, either as part of a large group or on an individual basis as part of a tutorial. You do need to have a good understanding of what is expected of you before you start. If the assignment remit is unclear to you, you run the risk of not answering the assignment brief correctly and therefore there is the possibility of failure. Writing an excellent answer to an unset question will result in a penalty and possibly a fail and you will be penalised similarly if you stray too far from the set word limit. Therefore, to minimise this risk, you should ensure that you fully understand the assignment criteria including any word limit and presentation requirements. If you are at all unsure, you should arrange to discuss this with your lecturer.

ACTIVITY

Reflect on a time when you were asked to complete an academic assignment or task. How did you organise yourself and the work itself to ensure it was completed effectively?

Cottrell (2013) identifies a seven-point plan that will assist the development and writing of your essay (see Figure 1). Dividing the task into various activities will give some structure that may support you with your time management and also make the task feel less daunting.

1. Clarify the task – make sure you know what you are looking for.
2. Collect and record information – get the information you need but be selective.
3. Organise and plan – organise your work as you go along.
4. Engage, reflect, evaluate – when you have gathered the information think about where you have got to e.g. what have you discovered, has your viewpoint changed?
5. Write an outline plan and first draft – structure your writing.
6. Work on your first draft – develop and improve your writing.
7. Final drafts – edit, check and refine your final draft.

Figure 1. A seven-point procedure for writing assignments (Cottrell, 2013, p. 282)

Additionally, at Master's level there is a requirement that you demonstrate the ability to critically analyse theoretical concepts and ideas. With this in mind, it is important that you consider carefully your own ideas and how you will develop these as your work progresses. Therefore you do need to consider in some depth:

- the implications of the title;
- the ideas relating to the title;
- what it is that you are specifically being asked to explore;
- what kinds of examples from your practice you can use to strengthen your discussions.

Do not worry if things feel more complicated and complex at this stage. This is normal and somewhat inevitable as you consider various ideas and concepts and attempt to make sense of them. You will be expected to find your own perspective and apply theoretical concepts to your own professional practice. You will need to examine the literature (see Chapter 4) in some depth as you critically evaluate your findings in terms of rigour and relevance.

Structuring and organising an essay

The four key parts to an essay are:

- introduction;
- main body;
- conclusion;
- references.

ACTIVITY

What do you need to consider including within the four key parts of an essay?

The introduction

Your approach to the question, your understanding of the question and the content you intend to cover.

(University of Worcester, 2010, p. 46)

The introduction should be utilised as a signpost for the reader regarding what you intend to cover within the essay and how you intend to do this. Therefore a detailed discussion of your aims and objectives is required. Your aims should demonstrate what you hope the assignment will clarify and/or critique in tackling the topic or title of the assignment. Including some of the key essay title words within the introduction will facilitate focus. You may also wish to include a statement relating to the value and relevance of this assignment to health and social care practice generally, or your specific professional area of practice.

You also need to include a statement of the scope of your assignment. It is unrealistic to think that you will be able to cover all aspects of a particular subject or issue within the word limit so you will need to give this careful consideration. Identify what you have chosen to focus upon and why, but also what you are not focusing upon and why. This will demonstrate that, through your reading, you have developed an awareness of other issues surrounding the topic but that you acknowledge that you do not have the space to consider all issues in depth.

It is useful to summarise how you intend to sequence your discussions at the end of the introduction. This aids readability and acts as an advance organiser for the reader. A clear introduction always improves the organisational style of a piece of work and may facilitate focus for you as the writer.

The body of the assignment

Each paragraph should contain a theme or topic, backed up by supporting arguments and analysis. You should include other writers' ideas and arguments ... You need to analyse the material and give your views.

(University of Worcester, 2010, p. 47)

This section is the heart of the essay and is your opportunity to demonstrate your in-depth knowledge and understanding within your specific area of study (QAA, 2010). It is clear that you will not be able to include all issues relating to a particular topic so you will need to be selective and identify the most important issues for consideration. By doing this you will be able to consider and critically analyse issues in the depth required at postgraduate level.

Assessment criteria at Master's level will include some aspect of critical analysis. This means you must move beyond description. You must examine and weigh up the evidence and determine your own perspective, using the literature to support your discussions (see Chapters 2 and 4). You will also be expected to write concisely and get points across as clearly and precisely as possible.

Through identifying, discussing and utilising appropriate theories you should be able to demonstrate your understanding of the issues and also demonstrate skills in evaluation and, as previously mentioned, critique. Utilising these skills effectively will enable you to usefully comment on and contextualise issues while adding your own views to the debate.

The conclusion

A summary of the essay showing the conclusions of your analysis of the evidence presented.

(University of Worcester, 2010, p. 47)

The final section of your assignment is the conclusion. It is useful to begin with a summary of the key findings or arguments, considering only the most significant outcomes. The conclusion should not raise any issues or new material that has not previously been identified or discussed. You should relate the content to the literature that has been reviewed and take a stance – did you reach the same conclusions or not and, if not, why not? This may relate to consideration of the issues from a different professional viewpoint and/or context.

You should utilise the conclusion to further enhance overall cohesion by referring back to the introduction and your aims. You should identify whether you have met your aims or not and, again, explain why this might be. You should identify any weaknesses or

limitations that may have constrained your discussions and conclusions. These are inevitable – acknowledging them does not suggest weakness but rather strengthens the work as it demonstrates critical thinking skills.

Finally, your conclusion should clearly indicate any implications or recommendations for practice that you can make based on your previous discussions. A useful way to end the conclusion is to identify any future areas of research that may have been identified through your discussions. As has been discussed previously, Master's level study frequently raises many new questions as well as answering the ones you initially wished to explore. This is a key point and is expected at this higher level.

Referencing

There is an expectation at postgraduate level that students will read widely and acknowledge their sources throughout their work. You will therefore need to ensure you have an understanding of how to accurately acknowledge and reference source materials, both within the text and the reference list.

Your sources are important in terms of the arguments and position you adopt within your written work and, as such, they must be acknowledged. Failure to conform to an agreed referencing style may be construed as plagiarism (see Chapter 4).

The two most common referencing styles utilised within academia are the 'author–date' style and the 'numerical' style.

- Author–date style
 - References are acknowledged within the text and there is an alphabetical list of references (by author name) in a list at the end of the work. This style includes the Harvard referencing system.
- Numbered style
 - There is a numerical list of references that is organised according to the order in which the works appear in the text. This style includes the Vancouver system.

You do need to be aware of the specific referencing requirements for your course and these may be included within your course handbook.

ACTIVITY

Find out which referencing style is utilised at your institution and on your course. Identify a referencing guide and other referencing resources that will support your studies.

Higher education institutions generally provide details of their preferred system and these will usually be available in a published form at the library and/or via an online learning resource. The Harvard system is widely adopted within higher education (Denby *et al.*, 2008).

ACTIVITY

Undertake the following quiz to assess your referencing skills. Identify areas where you may need to improve.

Harvard Referencing Quiz

1. Using Harvard referencing, suggest two ways in which this quotation could be cited in your text. It comes from research undertaken by John Haimes in 2004.

pain and anxiety are inextricably linked

2. How could the above quotation be paraphrased in your text?

3. Correct the following references:

- (Shelley and Jones, 1999) stated that in order to use reflection as a learning tool it is essential to use a structured framework.
- Brown hypothesised that an increase in the ratio of trained to untrained staff may not necessarily have a positive impact on care.
- Other studies have been found to agree with these findings (Black, Smith, Bloggs and Casey, 2001; Akram 1999).

4. Which is generally considered the correct citation in the following reference list, using the Harvard system?

- Jones DW, 2000. 'The oranginess of oranges' in *Fresh Fruit Monthly*.
- 1) Jones, D.W. (2000) The oranginess of oranges. *Fresh Fruit Monthly*. 14,6,78–84
- DW Jones. The oranginess of oranges. *Fresh Fruit Monthly*. No.14 pages 78 to 84, year 2000
- Jones, D.W. (2000) 'The oranginess of oranges'. *Fresh Fruit Monthly* 14,6,78–84

5. You are using Harvard style and you need to reference two papers published by the same author in the same year. For example:

Jones 2000, 'The oranginess of oranges' and Jones 2000 'The fruit I like'.

How are they displayed in the reference list? Choose one of the following,

- Define them by month of publication, e.g. Jones (June 2000) and Jones (August 2000).
- Define the first as Jones (1, 2000) and the second as Jones (2, 2000).

- Define the first as Jones (2000a) and the second as Jones (2000b).
- Just reference as normal, the titles of the citations should be enough to decide which is which.

6. You have made reference to a book. What is normal to include in the reference list?

- Publisher's name.
- Publisher's name and edition number.
- Publisher's name, edition number and place of publication.
- Publisher's name, edition number, place of publication and ISBN number.

7. How would you cite a website in the reference list?

- Woodfield, R. (2010) Age and first destination employment from UK universities: are mature students disadvantaged? *Studies in Higher Education* [online], 36 (4) June, pp. 409–425. Available from: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03075071003642431 [accessed 20 April 2017]
- Woodfield, R. (2010) Age and first destination employment from UK universities: are mature students disadvantaged? *Studies in Higher Education*, 36 (4) June, pp. 409–425
- Woodfield, R. Age and first destination employment from UK universities: are mature students disadvantaged? *Studies in Higher Education* 2010 [online], [accessed 20 April 2017]

8. What is wrong with these references in the reference list?

- Rowe J.A. Accountability: a fundamental component of an allied health professional's work *British Journal of Dietetics* 2000 9, 70, 334–339
- Health Education England *Raising the Bar Shape of Caring: A Review of the Future Education and Training of Registered Nurses and Care Assistants*
- Dimond B. Legal aspects of nursing 7th ed. Pearson 2015

Answers – Harvard Referencing Quiz

1. 'Pain and anxiety are inextricably linked' (Haimes, 2004, p. 6) Haimes (2004, p. 6) has stated: 'Pain and anxiety are inextricably linked'.
2. Haimes (2004) found a link between pain and anxiety in his research into ...
3.
 - Shelley and Jones (1999) stated that ...
 - Brown (2002) hypothesised that ...
 - (Akram, 1999; Black *et al.*, 2001)
4. Jones, D.W. (2000) 'The oranginess of oranges'. *Fresh Fruit Monthly* 14,6,78–84
5. Define the first as Jones (2000a) and the second as Jones (2000b).
6. Publisher's name, edition number and place of publication.

7. Woodfield, R. (2010) Age and first destination employment from UK universities: are mature students disadvantaged? *Studies in Higher Education* [online], 36 (4) June, pp. 409–425. Available from: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03075071003642431 [accessed 20 April 2017].
8.
 - Rowe, J.A. (2000) 'Accountability: a fundamental component'. *British Journal of Dietetics* 9, 70, 334–339
 - Health Education England (2015) *Raising the Bar. Shape of Caring: A Review of the Future Education and Training of Registered Nurses and Care Assistants*. London: Health Education England
 - Dimond, B. (2015) *Legal Aspects of Nursing* (7th ed.). Harlow: Pearson

Acknowledging your sources and referencing correctly and consistently within the text and the reference list will enhance your work. It is important that there are no discrepancies between the references you have cited within the text and those included within the reference list. Referencing skills are relatively easy to learn and further develop. You should ensure you adhere to the recommended referencing style for your course and consult and follow the guidance you are given. Examples of how to reference in different circumstances are readily available. Indeed, you will see many examples within the literature as you progress your reading. Referencing can account for up to 10 per cent of the total marks available, therefore accurate referencing will ensure you do not lose any marks unnecessarily. Adopting a managed approach by keeping an ongoing, up-to-date record of your sources will facilitate success with your written work.

Assignment checklist

The following checklist should be used following completion of the first draft of your essay. This will facilitate further development of your work and allow you to focus on the key areas.

Introduction

- Is there a clear rationale for the topic area?
- Is there reference to the question being asked?
- Are the aims and objectives clear?
- Is there evidence of signposting with a clear summary of how discussions and ideas will be sequenced and developed?

The body

- Have key areas been included as outlined within the introduction?
- Does each paragraph have a clear focus and topic area?
- Is the literature appropriate and relevant for discussions?
- Is there sufficient evidence to support discussions/arguments?
- Does the work flow smoothly from one paragraph to another?
- Is literature effectively utilised within the essay and well incorporated within discussions?
- Are all references correctly cited in the text and the reference list?

Conclusion

- Is there an effective conclusion?
- Does the conclusion refer back to ideas stated in the introduction?
- Does the conclusion summarise the key findings?
- Does the conclusion offer appropriate suggestions based on the findings/issues?

Report writing

As a professional it is likely that you have some experience of writing reports as part of your professional practice.

ACTIVITY

Reflect on any previous activity in relation to report writing. What skills and knowledge did you require to undertake the task? Can you identify any developmental needs in relation to producing a report for academic assessment purposes?

As you may have realised, report writing is a skill that is valued in many disciplines (Race, 2007) and, as such, it is a useful assessment method within professionally focused courses. Reports are distinctive documents with a particular style that is quite different from that of essays. Gimenez (2007, p. 110) defines reports as documents that:

- have a very clear objective and a specific purpose;
- are written for a specific audience;
- have a distinctive structure and layout;
- contain information as well as recommendations.

As Gimenez (2007) identifies, reports have a specific convention with a specific structure and style that distinguishes them from essays. Cottrell (2013, p. 357) provides a useful comparison between reports and essay writing (see Figure 2).

Reports	Essays
Reports originate from outside an educational context: they are typical of writing required for the world of work.	Essays originate in academic settings: they are rarely used anywhere else.
Reports present research data and findings that you have collected yourself – through a laboratory experiment, a survey, a questionnaire or a case study, or by applying theory to your work placement or some other situation.	Essays focus on analysing or evaluating theory, past research by other people and ideas. They seldom present findings of new research.

Essays and reports have different structures:	
A report is divided into separate sections.	Essays do not have sections; they flow as a continuous piece of writing.
A report contains tables, charts and appendices.	Essays generally do not include tables or appendices.
Reports are divided into sections and each section of the report is given a heading. Each point is numbered.	Essays do not include section headings or numbering.
Reports utilise different writing styles, depending on the section. They are written concisely and give specific details.	Essays use a consistent writing style throughout.
Reports include descriptions of the methods used.	Essays do not refer to the method used in arriving at conclusions.
Reports should include a discussion section with comments on how the research could have been improved, and areas for further research.	Essays are not usually reflective about the process of researching and writing the essay itself.
Reports often include recommendations for action.	Essays generally do not include recommendations.

Figure 2. *A comparison of reports and essays (adapted from Cottrell, 2013, p. 357)*

However, there are also some commonalities between essay writing and report writing in that the writing must be grammatically accurate, points should be made concisely and the style should be fluent. Report writing conventions can vary so it is important that you explore and understand the specific requirements for your course.

Reflective writing

Reflective writing differs from essay writing or report writing as the subject matter may result from personal experience and, as such, may be quite subjective, using the first person. Reflective writing for assessment purposes is utilised quite frequently within professionally focused courses in health and social care.

ACTIVITY

What is your understanding of reflection within professional practice?

The concept of reflection is defined by Moon (2004, p. 82) as:

... a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we may use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome or we may simply ‘be reflective’ and then an outcome can be unexpected. Reflection is applied to relatively complicated, ill structured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding that we already possess.

The idea that reflection enables practitioners to gain further insight and understanding of complex practice situations, and indeed their own practice, has been viewed positively by health professional bodies and educationalists. This has resulted in reflection and reflective practice being widely incorporated into many professional courses (Moon, 2004).

Reflective practice is a relatively recent concept that came to be used in practice settings following the work of Schön (1983). The term ‘reflective practice’ encompasses the use of reflection within a professional context allowing practitioners to consider the complexities and unpredictability of practice situations in order to cope more effectively in the future (Moon, 2004). At Master’s level, critical reflection on practice facilitates students to consider practice issues in greater depth and provides an opportunity to bring, as previously discussed in this chapter, ‘something of you into it ... you are drawing on all the knowledge and experience you have accumulated thus far, and doing something with it ...’ (Atherton, 2010).

Utilising a reflective framework

Utilising a reflective framework or model within your writing will enable you to consider and view experiences from different perspectives (Ashby, 2006).

ACTIVITY

Have you utilised reflective frameworks/models previously? Consider why you chose a particular framework and reflect on its effectiveness in achieving your aim.

Various frameworks are available, including Gibbs (1988) and Johns (1995), but you should choose a reflective framework that best suits your purpose. For example, if your focus is on an ethical issue you should choose a framework that best supports your thinking in this area. Johns’ model identifies ethical knowing within the framework, drawing on Carper’s work (1978), so utilising this model would enable you to focus on this area in greater depth. Using a framework, providing a rationale for its use and critically evaluating its use from a personal and practice perspective will give an added dimension to your work.

Reflection at Master's level

Moon (2004) identifies 'levels of reflection' as reflective activities, including reflective writing, that are a progression from description to much deeper forms of reflection. This 'depth' of reflection implies the higher thinking level that is a characteristic of Master's level study and, therefore, you should consider this in relation to the development of your reflective writing. Moon (2004, p.102) characterises depth of reflection as 'increased flexibility and ability to manage the framing process in an open and flexible manner'. She clarifies this further through a generic, developmental framework for reflective writing where reflective writing at its deepest level is identified as follows (see Figure 3).

- Description now only serves the process of reflection, covering the issues for reflection and noting their context. There is clear evidence of standing back from an event and there is mulling over and internal dialogue.
- The account shows deep reflection, and it incorporates a recognition that the frame of reference with which an event is viewed can change.
- A metacognitive stance is taken (i.e. critical awareness of one's own processes of mental functioning – including reflection).
- The account probably recognises that events exist in a historical or social context that may be influential on a person's reaction to them. In other words, multiple perspectives are noted.
- Self-questioning is evident (an 'internal dialogue' is set up at times) deliberating between different views of personal behaviour and that of others.
- The view and motives of others are taken into account and considered against those of the writer.
- There is recognition that prior experience and thoughts (one's own and others') can interact with the production of current behaviour.
- There is recognition of the role of emotion in shaping ideas and recognition of the manner in which different emotional influences can frame the account in different ways.
- There is observation that there is learning to be gained from the experience and points for learning are noted.
- There is recognition that the personal frame of reference can change according to the emotional state in which it is written, the acquisition of new information, the review of ideas and the effect of time passing.

Figure 3. *A generic framework for reflective writing (Moon, 2004, p. 214)*

This framework should support your reflective writing and enable you to consider clearly any developmental activities that you need to undertake to progress your reflective writing skills at Master's level.

SUMMARY

This chapter has encouraged postgraduate students to acknowledge the importance of being able to write effectively in order to successfully present academic arguments and an academic stance. A number of key writing genres/styles have been considered in relation to Master’s level assessment and students have been presented with various tools, techniques and further resources to support their writing. Academic writing is a vehicle for students to demonstrate their developing knowledge, skills and understanding. Effective academic writing is a key requirement of postgraduate study and investing time to develop and refine these skills is crucial to ensuring success.

Critical reflection	
Identify at least three things that you have learned from this chapter.	<div>1.</div> <div>2.</div> <div>3.</div>
How do you plan to use this knowledge?	<div>1.</div> <div>2.</div> <div>3.</div>
How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your plan?	<div>1.</div> <div>2.</div> <div>3.</div>
What further knowledge and evidence do you need?	<div>1.</div> <div>2.</div> <div>3.</div>

FURTHER READING

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The Study Skills Handbook*. (4th Ed.) London: Palgrave

This book is an excellent general study skills guide for all undergraduate or postgraduate students.

Another useful study skills guide is:

Lloyd, M. and Murphy, P. (2008) *Essential Study Skills for Health and Social Care*. Exeter: Reflect Press

Connelly, J. and Forsyth, P. (2012) *Essay Writing Skills: essential techniques to gain top grades*. London: Kogan Page

This book provides practical support and useful techniques that will support the development of good essay writing skills.

Craswell, G. (2005) *Writing for Academic Success: A Postgraduate Guide*. London: Sage

This book provides a detailed guide to writing at postgraduate level with some useful exercises and examples.

Moon, J.A. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge Falmer

This book provides some good, detailed discussion and analysis relating to reflection and there is a very useful resource section.

University of Worcester (2010) *Moving On: Academic Writing*. Available at: **www.worc.ac.uk/movingon/Academic%20writing.pdf** (last accessed 20 April 2017)

This guide provides a useful 'step-by-step' guide to academic writing and may be useful as a revision guide for students who have not studied for some time.