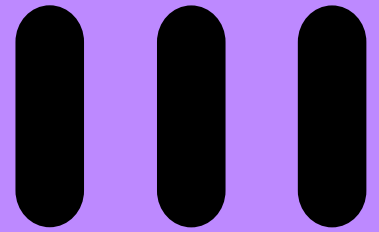# ACADEMIC WRITING

For your assessment you may be asked to write an essay on a topic, or to prepare a report on a situation. What's the difference and how do you go about structuring and completing the written task. This handout is designed to answer those questions and perhaps even more.

The handout will cover:

- Essay and reports: differences and structure
- The writing process
- Formatting
- Referencings and Appendices
- A glossay of terms

ESSAYS AND REPORTS

The purpose of this module is to improve your ability to write essays and reports.

There is a large difference between writing to a friend on Facebook or writing an email to a friend and writing for academic or business purposes.

When a marker is marking your assignment, they are looking for key ideas and a coherent argument. The structure and format of an essay or report help to provide a logical framework for presenting your key ideas and information.

So, an organised structure is very important for an essay or report and will help you gain success in your written assignments.
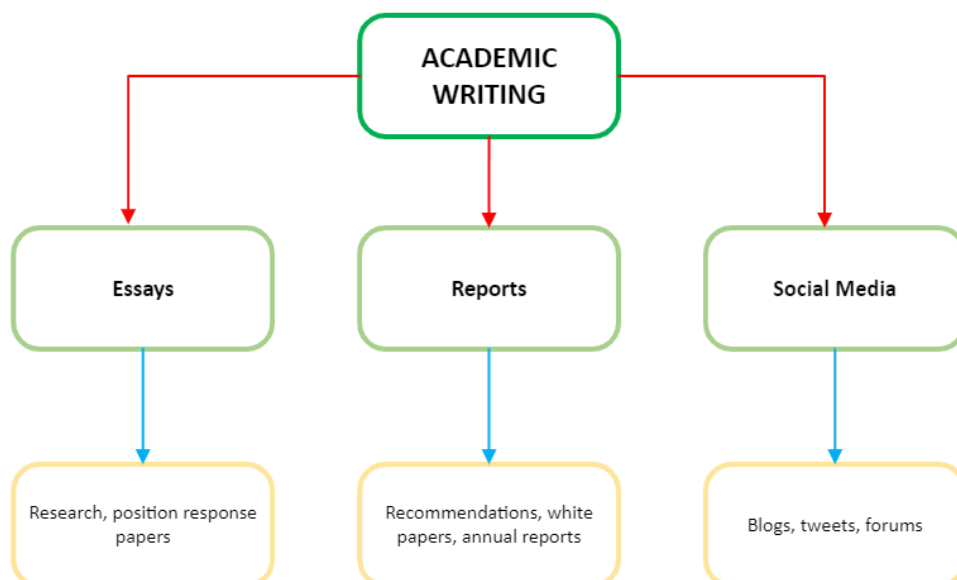
Differences Between an Essay and a Report

A report and an essay format are similar as both include an introduction, main body, and conclusion, however, in other ways they are different:

The Report

- You will be asked to write a report if you are presenting an analysis or the results of research.
- A report will usually include a contents page. The report begins by introducing the topic and outlining the aim of the research or analysis.
- The body of a report will include sections – with section headings and subheadings. The sections are written in paragraph format and may also include graphs and charts and include the use of bullet points.
- Information is fact-based.
- The report will finish with a conclusion and sometimes a section on recommendations.
- A report is usually produced for a specific audience, for example, your employer or to a committee, or for academic purposes.

The Essay

In contrast, an essay finds answers to a question and may require you to express an opinion or present an argument. It may also involve the pulling together of information.

- The essay structure includes an introduction, body, and conclusion
- The essay is written in a paragraph format with one paragraph following on from the other.
- It does not make use of section headings or subsection headings. It does not include bullet points, charts, graphs, or tables
- When writing your essay, you should introduce your topic by creating interest, make all your points, summarise your points into an argument, and finish with a strong conclusion from the argument.

Writing for Assessment

1. Plan of attack

Read the assessment instructions carefully. You will have an outline of what your assessment should contain, information that needs to be researched, and questions that need to be answered. Clarify any questions you may have. Does your assessment require an essay or report format or another type of format such as a Q&A format?

Don't be afraid to ask if you have a question or are unsure about some of the content, you can be sure a fellow classmate is feeling the same.

What do you need to have access to? – a computer, textbooks, workbooks, etc.

Give yourself a timeline to complete the tasks

The very first step to writing is to understand what is required in the assessment -you do this by analysing the task and its requirements.

> Practice Question
> Ecotourism: Discuss the impacts, including the economic impacts, of ecotourism on three South East Asian countries.
>
> Word Count: 1,000 +/- 10%

2. Assessment detail/instructions

Go over the criteria in detail. Look at each question carefully and make notes. Asking these questions may help.

- What does the question mean?
- What is the topic?
- How do I need to answer it or what do I have to do?

3. Outline of assessment

Create an outline to help you follow a structure when writing your assessment, this allows you to have a checkpoint as you work. It is a great way to prepare for the fourth step.

There is an old saying when it comes to the structure and the writing of reports and essays:

> TELL THEM WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO TELL THEM.
> TELL THEM.
> THEN TELL THEM AGAIN.
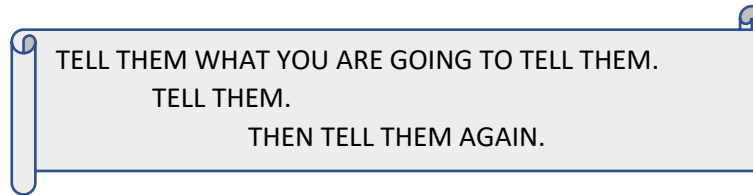
Your outline will include:

— **Introduction** – you are introducing your topic/subject here. This is giving the reader (trainer marking), a brief overview of the assessment and what you will be covering.

This is when you TELL THEM WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO TELL THEM!

Always check this after writing your assessment as the introduction can change as you are collating your information

— **Discussion** or **main body** of an assessment (answering the questions or topics, reporting your research findings). The bulk of your assessment should be here.

This is when you TELL THEM!

When writing a report, you may need to have chapters or headings. The information written under them needs to be in paragraphs. Normally your paragraph will start with a sentence that introduces the main theme, with information about the theme explained in detail within the paragraph.

— **Conclusion** – this essentially is the completion of your assessment. It is a summary of your discussion. Don't include any new information in your conclusion. If this happens you need to move it to the main body of your assessment or remove it if it is not relevant.

This is when you TELL THEM AGAIN!

Don't start writing yet!

4. Collate information

Research your topic or questions before you start collating the information. This gives you an idea of what you will expect to find. Use a variety of sources, not just those that are provided in your programme. Credible sources are the ones to use, some random dude's travelling blog during the time they were in Cambodia is not something to be collected. This is the time to extend your understanding of the topic. Some examples are the library, various websites, discussions with experts

Ask yourself, what do I know about this subject? Often you will have some idea before you start gathering information. It's like gathering all your ducks together before you put them in a row.

This can help you decide

- What do I need to find out?
- How am I going to do this?

Keep records of all places you gather your information from. Assessments usually require you to have a reference list. This is a page added to the end of your assessment, referencing all sources of your information, websites, books, discussions, etc. There are guidelines on how to add a reference list is at the end of this document.

A large part of writing ironically is **reading**. You will use reading to get your ideas, check facts and confirm your thinking. So, it's very important that you can read efficiently and have something to show for all the time spent. If you have a written text Word document or even a PDF, you can highlight as you go. Highlight keywords or ideas as you are reading. When you are finished reading the paragraph, go back and re-read the highlighted parts – not the whole thing. This way you are starting to summarise the information and it also creates focal points for later when you want to reference the document.

As you collate information, skim-read the main points; ensure it relates to what you need or supports your discussion.

Things to remember!! – NOT EVERYTHING you read on the internet is correct!! This is a very important point to remember.

- Think about what you can google, e.g. I have a sore throat and a fever – what is wrong with me? Often you will find out you are on death's door!!
- Lots of information is not edited or reviewed before it is uploaded to a website. When you are looking through websites, try to find information about the author, this could be from a single person, a company, or a government-regulated official site.
- Check the date of publication, this will tell you if it is something recent or 10 years old. Generally, the more up-to-date - the better.

As you collate your information, think about it critically. Don't always accept everything you read is correct.

Analyse what you have:

- Are there trends or similarities in the information collated? – look at key points, you can create an informed document, as you have information from several sources and have compared them.

You can use diagrams, pictures, etc to support your writing in a report, however, you need to reference where they came from, so don't forget to add this to your reference list.

5. Write your assessment

Using the outline you created earlier, and the information collated, it's now time to write your assessment. This will be your **draft**. Often it will change after you have read it, i.e., you add/remove points when and where necessary.

Refer down to the Writing Process section to help you.

A good idea is to start with the body of the assessment or the conclusion; this gives you a chance to write your assessment around what your findings are, don't worry about perfecting your introduction yet. Although you will have an idea of what your introduction is, this often changes as you write your assessment. It is easier to write an introduction about something when you know what the discussion is.

Once you feel you have it written, have a break, 30 minutes at least; this gives you time for your brain to refocus, gather your key points from number 2. Use these as a guide as you read over your assessment. This is the time to make changes, refine your information, add/remove portions and ask yourself - am I happy with this?

Paragraphs and subheadings

Paragraphs are used for creating flow in the writing, the basic rule of thumb is *1 idea 1 paragraph* and multiple paragraphs are therefore multiple ideas forming an argument.

6. Final Check

This is the time to critique yourself. Read your assessment from start to finish:

- Does it make sense?
- Is it easy to read and follow?
- Have you included everything, title page, contents, bibliography/reference list?
- Have you included where you gathered your information from?
- Have you answered the questions?
- Have you checked it against the marking criteria?
- Is it within the word count – exclude the reference list and any coverpage?
- Ask someone else to read your assessment, did it make sense to them?
- Ask them to proofread it for spelling and grammar
- Is it your own work? i.e. you have not cut and paste directly from a source, you have interpreted it into your own words. Where you have quoted someone, have you used the correct referencing?
- Is your name on it?

Structure of an Essay
    Summary of Key Points:

INTRODUCTION
    Introduce the topic by stating what you are going to tell the reader.
BODY
    Expand your ideas here- be specific, use facts, and quote others. Show the reader you understand the subject. (Tell them)
SUMMARY
    At the end of the body if you haven't summarised as you go - write a paragraph drawing all the arguments together.
CONCLUSION
    Show the reader your argument in a summarised form. There must be no new information here. If you find yourself saying something that wasn't said before, put it in the body - All you are doing is restating very clearly your argument. (Tell them again)

STRUCTURE OF A REPORT
    Summary of Key Points:

CONTENTS PAGE

INTRODUCTION
    Introduce the topic by stating what you are going to tell the reader.
BODY
    Expand your ideas here- be specific, use facts, quote others, and make comparisons. Show the reader you understand the subject. (Tell them)
        Heading 1
        Subheading
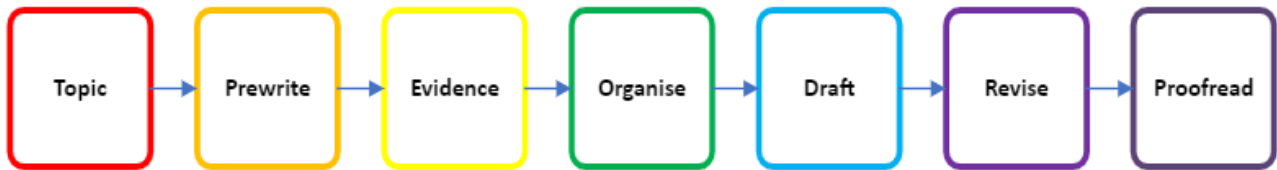   Heading 2
        Subheading
CONCLUSION
    Tell the reader what you found out. There must be no new information here. If you find yourself saying something that wasn't said before, put it in the body - All you are doing is restating very clearly your information. (Tell them again)
RECOMMENDATIONS
    Not always required

The Writing Process

Once you've identified the keywords, you can begin to compose the body of the essay or report. The body of the essay or report is always worked on first, followed by the summary, conclusion, and finally the introduction. However, when you put everything together, of course, the introduction comes first (even though this is one of the last things you do when writing an essay or report).

Body

Using some of the keywords from the essay-style question, you could structure the body of your essay-style answer like this:

Economic impacts of tourism in Vietnam are …..

Economic impacts of tourism in Cambodia are …..

Economic impacts of tourism in Myanmar are …..

Once your structure is established you can look at each one separately, do your research and draw conclusions. Then create a summary of your findings.

Summary

The overall impacts of tourism on developing countries that I have looked at are…

Discuss the similarities and differences….

Then write a conclusion.

Conclusion

I have shown how tourism changes a developing country's economy by….

The conclusion should be short and punchy leaving the reader in no doubt about your understanding.

Once you have written your conclusion go back and write the introduction. It will be easy because you know what you have already said.

Introduction

In my essay I will show how the impacts of ecotourism change the not only the economies but the environment of three developing countries located in South East Asia. These countries are……

Don't forget the introduction goes at the top of the essay.

You now have a potential structure for your essay and you're able to go and complete research and start to fill in each area.

If you are writing a report, use subheadings to let the reader know what they are about to read. You have already created these subheadings when you analysed the question. (Use the "Heading 2" style in the home tab of the Word document for your subtitles for a report).

So, from the first question example, my subheadings in a report would be:

> INTRODUCTION
> VIETNAM
> CAMBODIA
> MYANMAR
> SUMMARY
> CONCLUSION
> REFERENCES

Using headings informs the marker of your assignment which part of the question your report is about to address, and it helps you keep on track.

When writing an essay, you can also use subheadings (delete before handing the assignment in) to keep you on track and help with essay structure. For each subheading start a new page, including the reference list and the conclusion. That way you can watch your essay take shape. You can use the "Page Break" to help you create the structure, found under the "Insert" tab.
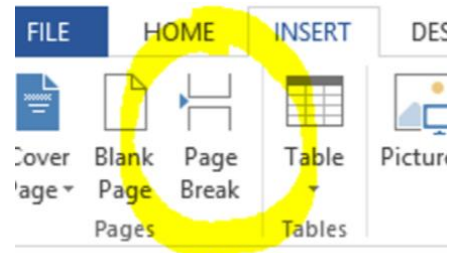
When you have the first draft of your essay – recombine the pages and get rid of all the gaps and delete the subheadings.

Reading and Summarising

As stated above – if you have a written text or Word document or even a PDF you can highlight as you go. Highlight keywords or ideas as you are reading. When you are finished reading the paragraph go back and re-read the highlighted parts – not the whole thing. This way you are starting to summarise the information and it also creates focal points for later when you want to reference the document.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs are used for creating flow in the writing, the basic rule of thumb is "1 idea 1 paragraph" and "multiple paragraphs are therefore multiple ideas" forming an argument.

Here is an article about water in food without paragraphs: How do you feel when reading it?

> *We're constantly being told we don't drink enough water, and being advised to get in eight glasses a day - which has led many of us to constantly cart around a water bottle in an attempt to guzzle our daily dose. But it seems those efforts to sip your way through the day may be in vain as experts declare we should turn off the tap and start "eating" our water instead. While beauty experts often tout the benefits to our skin from drinking a lot of water it is also considered essential for lubricating joints, carrying nutrients around the body, and regulating body temperature. However, health experts are now arguing the "drink more water" messages may have been overplayed and instead recommend we shift our focus to consuming water-rich foods. On an average day, a quarter of our liquid comes from food. Almost all food contains some water (even a slice of bread can hold as much as 33 percent H2O). But fruit and vegetables are the most water-laden, with cucumbers, lettuce, courgettes, and radishes boasting more than 95 percent*
> (NZ Herald, 2021)

It's a bit overwhelming right? Can you see how many ideas are in the paragraph?

Proofreading and Punctuation

So, you are close now you have done the first draft. Once you have finished the draft, you must stop and take a significant break i.e. at least overnight. Let yourself relax – that way when you proofread you are fresh and don't miss all those little mistakes that detract from your brilliant ideas. Or use a free tool such as Grammarly. Remember it's your assessment, so you make the decision on the issues, not the computer.

> punctuation nad speling make roiding essy
>
>   Or…
>
> Punctuation and spelling make reading easy.

Remember the marker should find your essay/report easy to read so that they are able to focus on your thinking not what you are trying to say.

Word has an inbuilt spell checker, look for the red, blue, and green lines in your document. Often the spelling is correct - just be careful that you are using one language in your writing either British, American or New Zealand English. If you mix the two up there will be lots of issues to sort.

You can change the language in the document settings. Generally **New Zealand English** is the accepted standard.

Proofreading is essential. If you finish a first draft and then submit it, there will be many mistakes in it. So re-read your essay/report checking the structure and that your argument flows from start to finish and of course - that there are no spelling mistakes.

Finalising the Document Formatting:

Academic writing across tertiary institutions is presented in a standard format. Ensure you use the format that is stated in the assessment's instructions. If there are none, then the following guide will help you format your text:

- FONT SIZE 12
- FONT TYPE Only
    - ARIAL

      or
    - TIMES ROMAN
- 1.5 SPACING

Make it look nice by using the "Justify" setting in the home tab.

Finally, give the essay or report a heading or a title at the top of the first page by using "Heading1" in the styles tab and save the document. Have a quick read-through to make sure no parts are missing and print it off.

Exercise

Now practise formatting the text on the following page using the headings styles, justify function and font styles, break the text into paragraphs, and proofread to correct (spelling and punctuation). Highlight the areas where you think the author used references and where the text should have in-text citations to form part of the reference list. Look for more information on in-text citations and referencing in *Pou-Support Resources*.

If you find that easy grab some more text and add it to the document - don't forget to reference it.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism based on the concept of organising travel to places of natural beauty, but doing so in a way that avoids damaging the environment, while also helping local people. It can be viewed as a means of limiting the damage caused by travelling to natural areas while trying to leave a positive legacy. Generally speaking, ecotourism places a strogn focus on areas featuring plant life, animal life, and cultural heritage. There is also often an educational component to ecotourism, with travellers aiming to learn something from their trip and to give something back to the people who are living in the area too. The concepts of ECOtourism and sustainable tourism or green tourism share some similariries, including a focus on environmentally responsible travel. However, there are some significant differences too and it is important that these differences are fully understood by marketers, providers, and travellers. Ecotourism has a clear focus on travel to areas of natural beauty, combined with naturally conservation and benefiting the local community. By contrast, sustainable tourism is primarily focused on sustainability and making travel more harmful. As a result, sustainable tourism can include a greater number of different types of travel, to a wider variety of locations, whereas ecotourism has a narrower focus on nature and conservation efforts. Ecotourism is a kind of responsible tourism and is especially popular with environmentalists and those who are concerned with protecting the natural world. Another key aim of ecotourism is to minimise negative consequences that may be linked to a human presence in locations of natural beauty so that future generations can enjoy them too.

https://www.revfine.com/ecotourism/

(HINT: Did you find 4 errors. 3 were spelling and 1 was a grammatical error.

combined with naturally conservation should be *combined with natural conservation*)

Referencing and Appendices

When you write your assessment it MUST BE WRITTEN IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

Paraphrasing means putting someone else's ideas into your own words without changing the original meaning. Also - where you get your information from must be acknowledged.

Referencing is where you acknowledge the work of others in your essay. It is vitally important that if you use other people's ideas- that you say so - if you do not, it amounts to academic theft or plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offence particularly when you are studying – as we all don't want that and it's easy to avoid - here's how you do it.

APA Referencing

At most institutes worldwide there is a referencing style called APA, the current and most used version is the 7th edition.

Yoobee Colleges use this version as the standard for referencing in all its work. There are many styles and differences so ensure you know what referencing style is requested when you venture into further study.

Anything from a website to a book, magazine, brochure, or even a personal conversation can be referenced whereas common knowledge or facts do not..

There are many guides online about APA referencing and software that even does the referencing for you.

The APA style has two components to it, intext citation and the reference list.

In-Text Citation

The in-text citation is where you reference the source of the idea directly in the sentence or paragraph in your writing. There are basically two ways to do this depending on what you want to say and how you want to say it.

OPTION 1

Smith (2022) states that "To begin a tourism operation in Cambodia you must first…. (p. 28)

OPTION 2

Or if you want to use the article to support your argument:

Tourism in Cambodia can be difficult to establish (Smith, 2022) unless you first ….

Direct quotes must be in italics and if the quotation is longer than three lines remove it from the paragraph, indent it and use a slightly smaller font size so that it doesn't interrupt the flow of your essay, For example:

> The effects of tourism on developing countries can be seen in the creation of work and an increase in the GDP of the country. Elements of setting up tourism within a country like Cambodia can be difficult to establish.
>
> *To begin a tourism operation in Cambodia you must first establish a close relationship with all the local bodies. Local government, village elders, and those directly affected by the operation. It can be difficult to make these contacts but experience tells me that if you don't - when things don't go right it can take a very long time to get up and running again*. (Smith, 2022, p. 28).

You will have noticed that the spacing between the lines of the direct quote is less also - this stops your essay from spreading out and it makes it easier for the reader to find the quote later.

Reference List

This is where you list all the source documents so that the reader can go and find them and read them as well. It is called a reference list, and it should be alphabetically ordered. It has a very set format. It should be clearly labelled and at the end of the essay or report before any appendices.

References
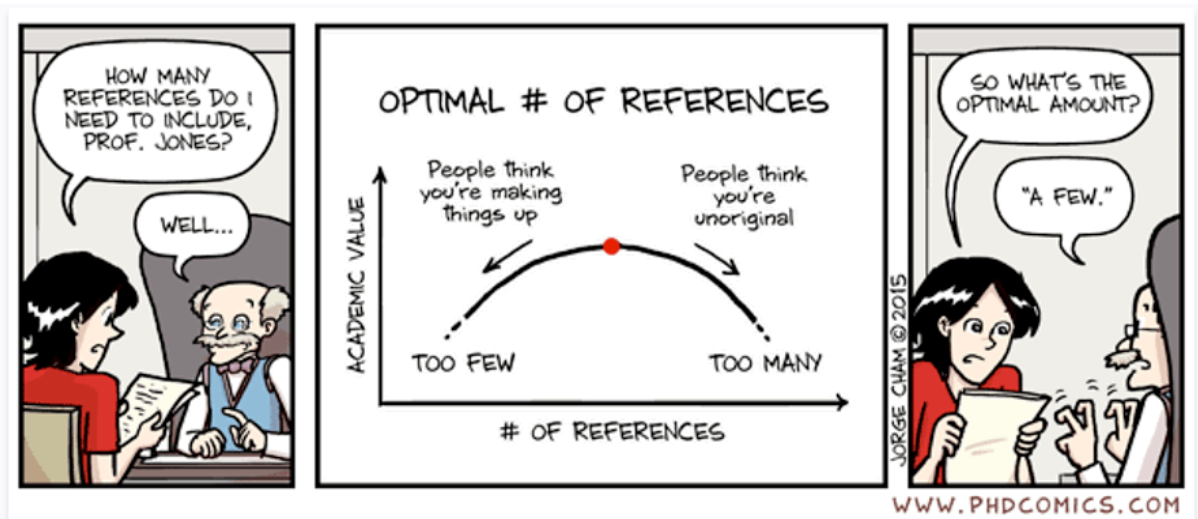
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- Ticker, W. P. (2021). Beans and you (3 ed.). Hamilton NZ: abc publishing.
- Victoria University. (2022, 2 19). APA Referencing. Retrieved from Library guides: http://libraryguides.vu.edu.au/ld.php?content_id=16196944
- Waikato University. (2022, March 7). Retrieved from: https://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/236120/apa-quick-guide.pdf

So how do you do it all?

Well, you can type it all up using the guide in the appendices of this document – or technology can help you.

The reference list and in-text citations that have been created above are all done by the word program this document was written in. For the purposes of referencing here at Yoobee Colleges, that's all you will need.

If you are going on to higher levels of study the Word referencing tool may not meet your needs.

There are three major referencing tools available Microsoft End Note – available to purchase from Microsoft and Zotero or Mendeley – both free to download and use.

Both have their advantages and limitations, if you intend to study further it is recommended that you start using these tools. They build your library of references, and you can re-use them over and over again.

The sooner you start, the better your library gets. Most graduates with a degree would have hundreds of references they can draw on - so the beauty of using any of the three above is that you only need to build your reference once then it is done forever.

Conclusion

Academic writing needn't be difficult. It is an invaluable skill that you can learn over time, and with practice. Using simple structures can help you design and publish your document. The assessor will get an idea very quickly that you understand the topic, and therefore, is able to provide you with positive feedback.

NOTE: For the composition of this document, below are the references used:

References

- NZ Hearld. (2021, February 19). Eat water don't drink it - Experts. Retrieved from: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11592281
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