



MA Professional Practice (Neuro Coaching)

**Neuro Minds Ltd and University of Wales Academy for
Professional Practice and Applied Research**

Developing and presenting your work

Please refer to your timetable for the submission dates for your modules!

Introduction

There are a series of guides to help you with your work. These include guides for each module which should read carefully to be sure of the assessment requirements for specific modules.

During your post graduate studies you are asked to remember that this is an advanced and adult programme of study. You will not be given sample assignments. You are expected to develop your own work and this is good practice for your dissertation year. Your supervisors are available for questions and to mentor you through the process, they are your first port of call if you cannot find the answers you need in the collection of programme guides.

You should also connect with your fellow students through the various forms of social media provided. A key part of reflective learning is peer feedback and discussion. Previous cohorts report that this support has been invaluable and reduced any possible feeling of isolation especially at the dissertation stage.

There is also valuable information including up to date academic policies on the University website. It is your responsibility to consult these policies to ensure you are conforming to academic regulations.

Developing your work

The style of writing you will be expected to use for academic work is likely to be different to other styles you use every day. It is part of your academic training to learn how to write in this more formal style - it demonstrates discipline and thoughtfulness, and is important to communicate your ideas clearly. These pages offer advice on developing your academic writing and look at:

- Presenting and submitting your work
- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Writing style
- Proof reading

Books on essay writing can be found at the **378.17** classification mark in the library. There are plenty of study skills guides.

It is worth ensuring you read this guide, you will lose marks if you do not submit and present your work correctly and as a post graduate student it is your responsibility to ensure you get it right.

Presenting your work

Every assignment must be presented as follows;

- Written in English (UK) as a word document in 12 point font
- One and a half or double spaced
- Include a cover sheet (shown below) which clearly identifies you.
- All referencing in Harvard Reference style (see guide)
- Clearly labelled tables and diagrams (can be in colour or black and white)
- The pages shall be consecutively numbered through the main body of the text and the bibliography/references. The pagination should apply to diagrams or charts that occupy a whole page. The appendices should have a separate pagination.
- Refer to the learning outcomes for the assignment (found in module guide and can be included as a table)
- Your submitted file must be less than 20 MB in size.
- If you have written work such as calculations or sketches these can be scanned and converted into a PDF.
- If you have an Excel spreadsheet you'll need to convert it to a PDF before you submit.
- Your assignment must be submitted as one single file. If you have separate files for your assignment, bibliography or appendix you'll need to combine these into one file.
- Assignments must be submitted by 17.00hrs on the due date and this is non negotiable.
- If you don't submit on time you'll have seven days after the deadline in which to submit the work. This assessment will be capped at 50%

Grammar;

Grammar is the system we use for organising language so that it is deliberately meaningful. It is not a set of absolute rules, but rather a kind of code that we all agree to as English language speakers, so that we can communicate ideas to each other. In informal writing, like texting or instant messaging, grammatical errors are usually overlooked. In creative writing and colloquial speech, the system can be tweaked for effect; if you are studying any form of creative writing as a primary text, you will get used to analysing the kinds of effect that are caused in this way.

However, in other situations, where it's necessary to convey ideas accurately and clearly, writing grammatically is important. In academic writing, where you are expected to demonstrate your understanding of very complex ideas, it is absolutely essential.

Challenges with words

Words are the basic units of the grammatical system. Words belong to various **word classes**, with each class doing a different job in constructing the meaning of a sentence. There are seven major word classes: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions.

When to capitalise a noun;

Nouns are commonly thought of as 'naming words': cup, John, sky, summer, truth.

Common nouns are used to identify instances of a class of things - for instance, cups:

- **a cup** is more useful if it has a handle
- **the cups** were on the second shelf
- **cups** can be a welcome present in a new home

Proper nouns are the names which particular individuals, things, or places claim as their own. They are distinguished from common nouns by being capitalised - for instance:

The **World Cup** is probably the most sought-after trophy in international football

A common error is the capitalisation of common nouns. Before you capitalise a noun, ask yourself:

- does this name identify a specific person or thing? [proper noun, needs capitalising]
- or does it identify something which is an instance of a group of things? [common noun, no capitals]

Ambiguous pronouns

Pronouns are words which stand in for nouns in a sentence. They are used to refer to something quickly, to give variety and avoid repetition. For example, in the previous sentence I could have used the noun "pronouns" again, but that would have been rather boring for the reader, so I used "they" instead.

A common error is to make the meaning of your writing unclear by **using ambiguous pronouns**: that is, where the noun that they replace is not obvious. For example, read the following sentences:

- *"The stated purpose of this process was to capture the image without disturbing the subject. It was not very clear, so it was not obvious whether it had been achieved."*

What do the first, second and third instances of "it" refer to? The purpose? The process? The image? Something else not mentioned in the first sentence? A better sentence would have been:

- *"The stated purpose of this process was to capture the image without disturbing the subject. As the image was not very clear, it was not obvious whether the purpose had been achieved."*

When you read through your work, make sure that there is no doubt about the things that pronouns refer to.

Verbs - using the passive voice

Verbs are words that describe actions: argue, raining, throws. Verbs are arguably the most important class of words as far as sentence construction goes - if there is no verb, it is not a sentence. (See below for more on sentences.)

The most common concern students express with using verbs in academic writing is when to use the **passive voice**. The difference between the active and passive voice is that with the active voice a subject performs an action; with the passive voice a subject has an action done to it. This problem most commonly occurs when describing a set of actions undertaken (for instance, for a report on research). So:

"I **sorted** the samples according to size" = **active** (sorting is an action done by a person)

"The samples **were sorted** according to size" = **passive** (sorting is a process done to the samples)

Traditionally academic writing uses the passive voice, because it seems to make actions more objective by taking the variable of the human subject out of the sentence. More recently though it has been recognised that taking the human being out of the sentence doesn't actually take them out of the actions! Some disciplines, including the field of coaching, do now welcome the use of the active voice in academic writing: for instance, as a recognition that you cannot separate the reader from the text. If you are not sure what your supervisor prefers, use the passive voice.

The exception to this is if you are asked to produce a piece of reflective writing - perhaps evaluating your experiences while conducting a project or at a work placement. In this case your active experience is the point of the piece.

[Imprecise and subjective descriptions - adjectives and adverbs](#)

Adjectives and adverbs modify nouns and verbs by adding to their description, for example:

- "The emperor ruled" - this doesn't give us much information.
- "The emperor ruled **wisely**" - this makes the statement more interesting.
- "The **teenaged** emperor ruled **wisely**" - this makes it very interesting indeed!

A common problem with adjectives and adverbs in academic writing is the use of imprecise and subjective description. Your descriptions should be as accurate as possible, especially when you are reporting research. So avoid expressions like:

- "the resulting liquid was a beautiful blue" - maybe better to say "an intense blue"
- "the wind was extremely strong" - better to state the exact wind speed

It is also a good idea to avoid superlatives - these are adjectives and adverbs that describe extreme cases like greatest, longest, best, worst. Unless you are describing something you have observed, this type of description might be difficult to prove.

[Building your vocabulary](#)

There are many ways to increase the store of words you have to call on when you are writing academically and especially at post graduate level. E.g. instead of the author 'says', you might use words such as; suggests, discusses, shares, postulates.....

The easiest way is simply to pay attention to what is around you - the everyday things that we passively soak up without thinking. As well as the academic reading you will be asked to do, and the kinds of leisure reading you might be familiar with (like novels, comics and poetry), these might include:

- speech - conversations, television and radio news, lectures, TV programmes and films, song lyrics
- writing - signs, forms, newspapers and magazines, websites, inscriptions, advertisements

When you notice a new word that you would like to use, write it in a notebook, along with its context if possible (the sentence, phrase or situation in which you found it). Use a dictionary to discover its meaning, then place it in a sentence to make sure you understand it.

Collecting new words and using them to play with language can be fascinating. For instance, you could:

- try to work out the exact words to describe to a friend in another continent the colour of the sky outside your window right now - even if it's the middle of the night
- make a list of your ten favourite words of less than four letters - or more than twelve.
- look up words in a dictionary to discover their etymology - where they derive from. After a while you will become used to identifying common prefixes and suffixes (the parts of words at their beginnings and endings), and will be able to use them to help you work out what a new word means.

Challenges with sentences

A simple way of describing a sentence is to say that it is "*a complete thought expressed in words*" (Peck & Coyle, 2005, 40). More formally, a sentence must include a verb, or it is just a phrase. So:

- Mary **paints** the chair blue - is a sentence, because it includes a verb
- Mary's blue chair - does not include a verb, so it is a phrase

The sentence above is a **simple sentence** with just one main clause. In academic writing, you will need to write more **complex sentences** which use main and dependent clauses and phrases. The good news is that, although it sounds daunting, this is probably what you are used to doing everyday! You just need to be aware of the possible problems that can arise in academic writing.

Writing complete sentences

There are two particular problems to watch out for with sentences. The first is to make sure the sentence is a genuine sentence - that it includes a verb, and that it is not simply a dependent clause. Take this sentence, for example:

- "The document, which had been restored by the conservator, was put on display."

This includes a main clause: "The document was put on display." This includes a verb, and doesn't depend for its meaning on any other clauses or phrases.

It also includes a dependent clause: "which had been restored by the conservator". This includes a verb, but cannot stand as a sentence in its own right because it depends on something in the main clause for its meaning ("the document"). You could make two sentences by putting the subject back into the dependent clause, so you would have:

- "The document was put on display. It had been restored by the conservator."

However, this would result in a string of simple sentences which do not feel very academic in their purpose. Academic writing is about joining up your ideas and showing how they relate to each other, rather than just describing things.

Keep your clauses separate

The second thing to watch out for is that your clauses are carefully organised so that the reader can understand all the separate ideas and how they relate to each other. This means using punctuation carefully to separate clauses, and making sure they come in the right order in the sentence. For instance:

The methodology used in this experiment differs from that of the previous experiment which was different again from that used by Smith and Brown as a result of the materials which were available which were unlike those in the first experiment.

This is difficult to make sense of. Using punctuation to separate the clauses makes it easier:

The methodology used in this experiment differs from that of the previous experiment (which was different again from that used by Smith and Brown), as a result of the materials which were available; these were unlike those in the first experiment.

Reading your sentences aloud is a good way to check whether they are easy to understand. It can also show you if they're too long - if you're gasping for breath, you may need some more punctuation, or to break the sentence into two shorter ones.

Make sure your tenses and plurals all agree

One final common problem with sentences often occurs when you are composing your writing at the computer, because it is so easy to cut and paste and move sections around. What often happens is that tenses and plurals then don't 'agree' with each other. Always read your work carefully before submitting it, preferably aloud - you are less likely to miss words, or assume it says what you want it to say.

Using paragraphs

Paragraphs act as signposts in your writing, telling whoever reads your work where your ideas are going, and when you are moving on to a different point. Since paragraphs are used to explain your argument in stages, it is important that you only express one idea or set of ideas in each paragraph. If you try to say too much, your reader will be confused and your argument will be clouded.

How do I structure a paragraph?

A paragraph should contain:

Lead sentence – this tells the reader what the paragraph is going to be about.

Middle section – here sentences expand on the ideas in the lead sentence. This section may add to the initial idea in any of the following ways: it can refine the idea mentioned, it can give examples that back up the idea, it may present dates, data or statistics, interpret theories or it could examine the opposing idea. [N.B. This list is *not* exhaustive – just remember that this section is where you need to support, in some detail, the idea in the lead sentence.]

Concluding sentence - sums up the main part of the argument in that paragraph. Having written this, you should feel that everything to do with this part of the argument has been concluded, and there should be correlation between the idea in the first line and the summing up in the last sentence.

An example of a structured paragraph:

[**The lead sentence=**] The University of Reading is an increasingly popular choice for applicants. [**The middle section=**] Reading receives well over 20,000 applicants each year from all over the world. Our degrees have currency in blue chip, research and educational arenas. 94.5 per cent of new graduates find employment or enter higher study within six months of graduating (CAS, 2006). Recent market research (Broad, 2006) indicates how highly University of Reading degrees are rated by a range of employers. [**The concluding sentence=**] Overall Reading students are highly successful in obtaining graduate jobs.

How long should a paragraph be?

A paragraph should be at least three sentences long; any shorter than this and you need to question the decision to start a new paragraph. On the other hand, if your paragraph is longer than half a page, check to make sure that you are only dealing with one idea in that paragraph. You may be able to split it into two smaller units.

Using software to check your grammar

The grammar checker in Microsoft Word can be a useful tool to help you improve your grammar. Make sure it's switched on by going to Tools>Options>then clicking on the Spelling and Grammar tab. Make sure Check Grammar with Spelling is ticked. When you check spelling, errors in grammar will now also appear, marked with a green underline. To see why something has been marked, right-click on the line, then click on Grammar>Explain. In addition to any suggested changes, a box will appear that explains why the selection was made.

A word of warning - never just accept all proposed changes in spelling or grammar made by an electronic spell or grammar checker - they can radically change the meaning of your writing! Always check each one separately.

Punctuation

Knowing how to use punctuation properly is not just a matter of fussiness or pedantry. Appropriate punctuation acts like a set of 'road signs' to guide the reader through the ideas expressed in your sentences. Punctuation marks can tell the reader when to slow down, speed up and stop. By breaking up your sentences, they contain and structure your ideas.

This guide includes advice on using some of the most common types of punctuation.

Using Commas (,)

Commas are used to break up different parts of a sentence. They allow someone to make sense of what they are reading. Commas occur where ideas are grouped, to make it easier to understand these ideas. It may be helpful to think of commas as places where a reader might draw breath. The comma forms a natural place in a sentence where the reader can pause, to make sense of an idea. As a comma signifies a pause, it follows natural speech pattern. Here are some of the ways it can be used.

- **To separate words in a list:**

He lost his house, his heritage, his hair, and his handkerchief.

- **To separate parts of a sentence:**

Firstly, I would like to consider the merits of supplementing the diet with zinc extract.
Secondly, vitamin C can be introduced to combat infection.

Here the comma separates the first word from the body of the sentence, to indicate that this idea is only the first.

- **To separate two parts of a linked idea:**

After the French Revolution had taken place, many other European countries were concerned about civil unrest.

Many scientists believe in evolution, although some are trying to disprove Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

- **To separate a final phrase, which is an afterthought:**

Few people enjoy arduous and demanding exams, especially on Saturdays.

I would like to run the London Marathon, if I were fit.

Using the Semi-Colon (;)

The semi-colon contains a comma and a full stop. It may be helpful to think of semi-colons as halfway between the two. They are used in the following ways:

- **To link sentences that are closely related:**

The night sky was the deepest sapphire; Claire realised that she had not observed its beauty until now.

A full stop between the two sentences would detract from Claire's observation, and a comma would not make enough of a break to allow the reader to make sense of the two ideas.

- **To link sentences that are in opposition to each other:**

His research methods were fundamentally flawed; nonetheless, he collected the data.

In each of the examples above, the set of words after the semi-colon must be able to stand as a sentence on its own. However, there is a very common use of the semi-colon where this is not the case:

- **To separate items in a list:**

Mrs Brown was assisted by other members of staff: Dr Benham from Animal Husbandry; Mr Gleeson from Botany; and Dr Chalk from Soil Science.

Using the Colon (:)

When a colon is used in a sentence, the parts it separates do not need to be complete sentences in their own right. Colons are used in the following ways:

- **To introduce a list:**

The results of the indoor team games were as follows: Wessex came first, Bridges and Wantage were joint second, and Sibby came last.

- **To link two sentences thematically:**

Psychological studies into domestic violence are usually centred on an idea of the nuclear family: Henry Davis decided that he should undertake a more radical approach to research in this area.

Here the two sentences could exist separately, but by connecting them with a colon the reader is led from one idea to the next.

- **To draw out a conclusion:**

Language acquisition is a difficult but immensely rewarding task: without it, there is little hope for global communication.

Here, what is said in the first sentence is contextualised by what is said in the second sentence.

Using the Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe has two functions:

To show that letters are missing. This is known as **contraction**.

To indicate ownership. This is known as **possession**.

- **Contractions**

When letters are missing in a word, and the word becomes shorter, the apostrophe is used to show where the missing letters belonged.

For example:

I am becomes I'm

You will becomes you'll

They would becomes they'd

Contractions are used in informal writing. Essays and reports **should not** contain informal writing.

- **Possession**

Apostrophes are also used to show that something belongs to something else.

For example:

The girl's hat - means that the hat is owned by the girl.

The girl's hats - means that the girl owns more than one hat.

The girls' hat - means that the girls all share ownership of one hat.

The girls' hats - means that the girls own several hats (or one each).

As you can see, the apostrophe usually comes before the 's' if the subject is single ('the girl'), and after the 's' if it is plural ('the girls'). However it may be different if the word for a single subject ends with 's' like princess, Venus or Socrates. One useful way to deal with this is to see if the 's' is pronounced.

For example:

Venus's arms *or* the princess's coronet

In both of these examples the 's' is pronounced, so there is an additional 's' with the apostrophe before.

Socrates' wife

In this example the 's' is not pronounced, so there is no additional 's' and the apostrophe goes after the final 's' in Socrates.

Common problems with the apostrophe

Its/it's

The cat licked its paws.

There is no need for an apostrophe, because 'its' is a pronoun in its own right which stands in for 'the cat's' and indicates ownership.

It's an amazing idea.

A missing letter has been replaced by the apostrophe, so it really means 'it is':

Whose/who's

Whose shoes are they?

Here whose is a special kind of pronoun (like its) which indicates ownership already, so there is no apostrophe.

Who's coming to dinner?

A missing letter has been replaced by the apostrophe, so it really means, 'who is'.

Dates

The 1960s were a period of radical changes in morality.

In the '60s, public morality underwent radical changes.

1960s' morality was quite different to that which had gone before.

- In the first sentence, '1960s' is a plural referring to all the years between 1960 and 1969, so there is no apostrophe.

- In the second sentence there is a contraction with '19' missed off. The apostrophe replaces the missing numbers.

- In the third sentence, what is being referred to is the morality of the 1960s, so the apostrophe indicates possession.

It is worth remembering that **words may end with 's' because they are plurals, and not because they indicate ownership or contraction**. Look at what the word is doing and apply an apostrophe only if appropriate.

Punctuation checklist:

Use a comma **to create a pause**, to separate ideas in that sentence.

Use a semi-colon **to create a break**, but recognises connection of ideas

Use a colon **to connect two sentences** thematically

Use a full stop **to create the end** of that sentence.

Use an apostrophe **to indicate ownership or missing letters/numbers**.

Writing style

Academic writing is formal and structured. It should communicate clearly and unambiguously. This guide will provide advice on writing with clarity, precision and structure.

As different subject areas have their own conventions, do refer to programme handbooks for specialist guidance. You can also look at publications, such as research journals, in your area to see their writing style.

Write formally and with clarity

Writing should be formal, but it does not need to be pompous. To maintain formality, there are various colloquialisms and shortened forms to avoid:

Avoid shortened forms:

Shouldn't, it's for it is

Avoid popular phrases or clichés such as:

at the end of the day; in a nutshell; when it comes to the crunch

Replace with: finally, in summary, in a crisis

Avoid casual everyday words such as really, okay, maybe.

Think b4 u rite! :-)

One recent poll of students at a US university found that an average student in the class would write 42 pages for class in a semester but more than 500 pages of email.

In our everyday lives we are used to communicating by writing texts, emails and notes. These have their own conventions, such as using abbreviations ("txt"), using symbols (" :-)"), figures (4 rather than four) and not writing in sentences. When writing formal essays and reports we have to take extra care that our texting and emailing habits do not creep in by accident.

Correct use of grammar and punctuation are important. They show that you care about your work and have adopted a disciplined attitude to writing academically. They also help to make sure your meaning is understood. Most common mistakes by inexperienced writers include: incomplete sentences; the wrong use of semicolons and colons; the wrong use of apostrophes; nouns and verbs where singular /plural do not agree; and inconsistent use of tenses.

Good writing makes a point clearly and may illustrate it to help the reader's understanding. To avoid rambling, plan the points that you wish to convey and the evidence that you will use to illustrate. Include only necessary detail.

When presenting a point of view, such as a line of argument for an essay, decide on the main points that you want to communicate. Plan one main point per paragraph. A paragraph can be planned (like a mini- essay) as follows:

Sentence introducing the point

Sentence making the point with necessary detail.

Illustration of point using reference: research example, case study, figures, etc.

Critical analysis of point

Sentence summing up the point and showing how it addresses the question or contributes to your argument.

Where **abbreviations and acronyms** are required to avoid repetition, ensure that, on first mention, the unabbreviated term appears together with the abbreviation or acronym, for example:

First mention: "An article in the AJPh (American Journal of Philology) reported..."

Subsequent mention: "Writing in the AJPh, Brown concluded that..."

Write concisely and with precision

Do not be tempted to use complex language or expressions that are not your own, just to make your writing appear "academic". Use straightforward language. Your reader needs to understand the information or ideas that you are conveying.

Communicate succinctly without losing vital information or meaning. It is often easier to write fluently and then to edit out unnecessary words and phrases.

Some editing tips to reduce word-count:

Go through a paragraph that you have written and cross out any words, or phrases or even a sentence that may be unnecessary. (Or 'grey it out' – change the text colour of the words you might remove to light grey.) Read it again to see if you have lost anything essential to the information or meaning. If you have not, then delete it permanently.

Replace phrases with single words meaning the same:

The researcher wanted to find out / The researcher enquired

Some academic writing, such as scientific research methodology, needs to be precise. A reader may need to have all the information required to understand exact conditions of a scientific study and to replicate it. Using simple sentences can be helpful.

Avoid using non-quantifiable descriptions, such as :

The company's production rate was high./The company produced 16,00 units per week.

The wind was strong./The wind measured 6 on the Beaufort scale.

Writing with a purpose

Academic writing has a purpose. It may provide background information, the results of other peoples' research, the critique of other peoples' research, your own research findings, your own ideas based on academic research conducted by others, etc. It may be a combination of a few of these.

Decide on your purpose and what you intend to convey. If there is a brief follow it. If there is a given question, make sure that you answer what has been asked. Write down your main points. (**Mind-mapping** can help with this.)

Decide on the audience for whom you are writing. If you are writing a university assignment, pretend that you are writing for an intelligent colleague from a related academic field, rather than for your professor who knows everything

For most subject areas the writing is expected to be objective. For this the first person (I, we, me, my) should be avoided.

So **I analysed the data** becomes **The data was analysed**

However, writing passively isn't always suitable. For instance, if you are asked to write a reflective piece, you will need to refer to your own actions and experiences. The important thing is to consider the purpose of your writing - that will help you to decide how to write it.

Write to a structure

Structure is important in academic writing - it helps to make your ideas clear, guides the reader's comprehension and can strengthen your arguments. Some academic writing, such as scientific reports, has a given structure. Just find out what is required under each heading and keep to it. Other writing (such as essays) requires the writer to select and organise the material they are writing and so develop a structure.

Usually in the introduction the writer sets out the structure so that the reader knows what to expect and the order in which it will be presented. The order in which information is presented should be logical so that the reader can follow the thinking, ideally with just one point or idea per paragraph. In addition the ideas should flow or be linked so that the reader is drawn through an explanation or argument, rather than stopping and starting at each new point. The conclusion to the piece should draw together all the points or ideas and come to a conclusion.

Referencing your work

In academic writing you are responsible for the writing you produce. If you are using research or ideas based on work by others (books, journals, websites) you must reference everything fully and in a standardised way. If you fail to do this, you are implying that the ideas etc. are your own and then you may be accused of plagiarism.

For more, see our guide to Harvard Referencing and get someone to check your referencing for you.

Effective proof reading

Your written work may be interesting, well structured and informed. Yet it may still make a bad impression because of poor proof reading.

Part of your assessment will usually relate to the standard of your written English. It's important to pay attention to things like tenses, gender, plurals and the structure of your sentences, especially if you have rewritten or moved sections of your work. It's easy to lose marks - but it's also easy to make sure you don't.

Please note: we cannot proof read your work for you, or recommend professional proof reading services. It is always better for you to learn how to do your own proof reading, as only you know what you were trying to say - also you will not learn from your mistakes if you just pay someone else to correct it. It may be useful to look for the University's policy on the use of editorial and proof-reading services.

Ten tips for better proof reading

Print it off - it's much more difficult to read onscreen and there's always the temptation to start doing major rewrites.

Leave it a day - if you can, leave some time between finishing your full draft and proof reading. It's easier to read critically when it's not so fresh in your mind.

Read aloud - small errors of expression and punctuation are more likely to become obvious if you read aloud.

Punctuate your reading - put pauses in for punctuation when you read, timed differently for different punctuation marks - so take a breath for commas, come to a halt for full stops. This is a good way to see if your sentences are too long or too short.

Take it slowly - if you have time to do a really thorough proofing, first read each sentence in a paragraph one at a time to make sure each makes sense. Then read the whole paragraph. Finally, when you've read all the paragraphs, read the whole essay through.

Take care with cut and paste - if you decide to move things about, don't forget to check the whole sentence again afterwards to make sure all the tenses, genders and plurals agree. Using the grammar check tool in Microsoft Word can help to prevent any errors.

Learn punctuation rules - make sure you know how to use commas, apostrophes, colons and semi-colons. For more on this, see our notes on punctuation

Check your referencing - always check your course handbook for preferred conventions - if you have to reference something that's not covered there, be consistent.

Get another view - ask a friend to read through your work and tell you if it makes sense (NOT correct it for you). Offer to do the same for them. Especially good if you can't leave time between writing and proofing - another pair of eyes will be fresher.

Use your feedback - always read and learn from your academic feedback. Use it to make a list of the things you often get wrong. Look out for these especially. They should start to disappear as you get used to doing them right.