

To: Students, Melbourne Law School

From: Chantal Morton, Legal Academic Skills Centre

Date: Last revised January 4, 2016

Re: Legal writing checklist for essays

<b>Preliminary matters</b>	
	I have reviewed the materials provided by my professor and ensured my paper answers the questions posed for the assessment.
	I have reviewed the materials in the Guide to Academic Success about writing for law, and referencing.
	I have made a contribution to the broader discussion. (Have I answered the “so what?” question?)
	I have used a tone appropriate for my audience.
	I have read the primary sources of law cited in my analysis (and not relied on secondary descriptions of the primary source of law).
<b>Structure</b>	
	My introduction states the question to be answered/explains the problem to be considered and concludes with a “roadmap” that provides the reader with an outline of the argument to follow.
	I have organized my sections in a manner that the reader can follow my argument.
	I have used informative headings/sub-headings.
	Each section makes a substantive contribution to my argument.
	Each section has a transition to the next section.
	Each paragraph stands for a single key idea.
	Each paragraph has a topic statement that clearly states the key idea. Every other sentence in the paragraph supports that key idea.
	Each key idea flows in order.
	I have read through the paper to eliminate any (unnecessary) repetition.

<b>Argument</b>	
	I have communicated an argument (and not just a description).
	I have backed up my argument with logic and citations.
	I have provided enough background for each assertion for the reader who is legally trained, but not a specialist, to follow the argument.
	I have acknowledged, and addressed, the debates and disagreement on my topic.
<b>Referencing</b>	
	Every claim, quotation and reference has a citation.
	My footnotes are in AGLC format.
	All references to case names and legislation in the text and footnotes are in italics.
	All direct quotes are correctly formatted.
<b>Grammar/Style</b>	
	I have reviewed each sentence for clarity.
	I have eliminated unnecessary (and often confusing) language. All modifying words and phrases are necessary, specific, and precise.
	All subject-verb combinations agree.
	I have not used contractions.
	I have removed legalese, clichés, and colloquial language.
	All direct quotations are necessary. Are you interpreting original text in your paper? Then yes. Is it an idea that is elegantly phrased in a way that you cannot improve? Then yes. If not, paraphrase, synthesize and/or summarize.
	My direct quotes do not exceed 10 percent of the word count, and are only used when appropriate.
<b>Finishing touches</b>	
	My headings are in AGLC format.
	I have included the bibliography for my essays and it is in AGLC format.
	I have put my student number on the document and removed anything that can identify me by name.
	I have inserted page numbers.
	My paper is in 12 point font.