

**HOW TO GUIDE #4**

**HOW TO FORMAT YOUR  
ASSIGNMENT**



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## **How to:**

### **Format Your Assignment**

Formatting rarely features in the marking criteria for law assignments. However, it is still very important. Markers have expectations about the way that a polished piece of work should look. They also have formatting preferences based on what visual features make marking easier. While there may be no set marks for formatting, the happier that you can make your marker, the more inclined they will be to reward your content. This Guide outlines formatting recommendations.

#### **Read and follow formatting instructions**

Before you begin your assignment, it is important that you have read the assignment instructions and assessment information in your course materials. Does the assignment have a page limit or a word limit? Is Times New Roman the preferred font? Is there a minimum acceptable font size? Are margin widths specified? Some topic co-ordinators are very particular about formatting, and it can be safely assumed that if they have gone to the trouble of specifying do's and don't's that they will be upset if you flout their instructions. Once you have finished your assignment, re-read formatting instructions to make sure that your paper is compliant.

## **Avoid major manipulations of the margins and font**

It is very common for students to manipulate their assignment's margins and font type and size in an attempt to make their over-the-word limit paper appear within the word count. However, this doesn't really do you any favours as markers are wise to these tricks - formatting abnormalities are obvious. To avoid frustrating your marker with size 10 text, or 0.2cm margins, try and stick to the default word processing settings. This means size 12, Times New Roman font with margins of at least 2.5cm. If you feel you must use a different font to Times New Roman— stay with something familiar like Arial, Cambria, or Garamond.

## **Adopt 1.5 or double line spacing**

Depending on the length of the assignment, markers might mark anywhere between 5 and 20 papers in a day. When dealing with such a volume of papers, the marker is likely to become frustrated by single-spaced papers that make tired eyes more tired. Apart from being physically hard to read, these papers also leave little room for feedback. Be considerate to your marker and use 1.5 or double line spacing.

## **Use subheadings**

Like appropriate spacing, subheadings make papers easier to read and mark. They also convey an impression of an organised argument. In problem solving questions, appropriate subheadings include the party names or party actions (eg. *Party A v Party B*) or alternatively, headings such as Issue, Rule, Application, or Conclusion if

you are applying the IRAC Method. In an essay, headings such as Introduction, Background, and Concluding Remarks can also be used, as well as headings based on your substantive arguments. Remember that while subheadings are useful, you need to be careful that the volume of subheadings does not impede the clarity and cohesiveness of your argument.

### **Italicise primary sources of law**

Where references to cases and statutes appear in the body of your assignment, they should be italicised. This is also true of the short names for these primary sources.

For example, the Australian Consumer Law should be formatted as: *Australian Consumer Law* or *ACL*. Apart from being mandated by the Australian Guide to Legal Citation, using italics also makes it easier for the marker to identify your use of primary sources.

### **Format short and long quotations differently**

Quotations of three lines or less should appear in the body of your text in single quotation marks. Quotations longer than three lines should be indented from the left margin, with no quotation marks. They should be single spaced or a smaller font size used. See the following two examples:

Example 1: ‘The support for *sui generis* intervention lies with the belief that culturally specific legislation can provide significant, tailored protection of Indigenous cultural works.’ This quote should appear in single quotation marks in the body of the text.

Example 2: 'The support for *sui generis* intervention lies with the belief that culturally specific legislation can provide significant, tailored protection of Indigenous cultural works. This is preferable to expanding common law or equitable principles because it more truly reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and creating works.' This quote should appear as:

The support for *sui generis* intervention lies with the belief that culturally specific legislation can provide significant, tailored protection of Indigenous cultural works. This is preferable to expanding common law or equitable principles because it can more truly reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and creating works.

These conventions apply to quoting legislative provisions and cases as well as commentary.

## **Remember to format your footnotes**

Approximately one in ten law assignments has unformatted or poorly formatted footnotes. Not attending to your footnotes comes across as lazy and depending on the mistake, may fail to meet the marking criteria for referencing. Aside from consulting the *Australian Guide to Legal Citation* for the rules regarding the formatting of each source type, general formatting conventions include: using single spacing, adopting size 10 font, and putting full stops at the end of footnotes. Make sure that your footnotes are not indented (except where long quotations have been cited).

## **Include a bibliography**

Particularly if your assignment is a research essay, it is helpful to include a bibliography at the end of your assignment. Bibliographies remind the marker of the depth of your research. There is no standard format for bibliographies so check to see if your law school advocates one format over another. However, generally speaking your bibliography should: only contain the sources that you have footnoted in your essay, be broken up into primary sources (statutes, cases and treaties) and secondary sources (journal articles, books and book chapters, government reports, electronic sources) using appropriate subheadings, and list sources alphabetically (by the author's last name if a secondary source).



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