

# Tip sheet

- 1 Know your reader
- 2 Think about what you want to tell your reader and why
- 3 Think about how many words you've got and how much time you have
- 4 Put your topic in the form of a question
- 5 Read everything you can about your question
- 6 Take notes, highlight passages, photocopy pages, copy and paste paragraphs, download passages from the Internet, and collect ideas from other sources into a computer file or hard-copy folders
- 7 When you keep finding the same references, stop reading and start grouping your materials into categories
- 8 Identify gaps, trends, themes, and differences of opinion
- 9 If needed, get more material to fill the gaps or to clarify the issues
- 10 Brainstorm your answer; if it helps, use a mind map
- 11 Write some headings and subheadings to frame your answer; use your categories to help you
- 12 Phrase your headings like they're summaries of your arguments
- 13 Paste or transcribe the material you've collected under the relevant headings
- 14 Start writing, without stopping

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# Tip sheet

## The introduction

- 15 Tell the reader the question you're answering
- 16 Give your answer upfront
- 17 Briefly explain the reasons for your answer ('I have answered this way because ...')

## The body

- 18 Focus each paragraph on one idea that supports your answer
- 19 Use the first sentence in each paragraph to explain the point of that paragraph
- 20 Use the rest of the paragraph to amplify your point, support it with evidence, qualify it, or give examples
- 21 Link your paragraphs by—
  - opening with words like 'But', 'Also,' and 'Moreover'; or
  - opening with words like 'This', 'That', 'These', 'Those'; or
  - echoing the last words of the preceding paragraph

## The conclusion

- 22 Keep your conclusion short
- 23 Summarise your answer, but restate it freshly
- 24 End powerfully; consider:
  - suggesting the next step
  - ending with a good quote
  - linking to the introduction
  - listing the reasons your answer is right
  - leaving the reader with a powerful image
  - mentioning the implications of your answer
  - ending with a slightly different angle on your answer

# Tip sheet

- 25 Write for your *reader*
- 26 Write as if you're talking with your reader
- 27 Use 'I' and 'you'
- 28 Use contractions unless your writing is formal
- 29 See if you can avoid 'am', 'be', 'is', 'are', 'was', 'been', 'were', and 'being'
- 30 Prefer small words to big words
- 31 Prefer simple words to hard words
- 32 Prefer specific words to general words
- 33 Prefer English words to foreign words
- 34 Prefer non-technical words to technical words
- 35 If you must use a foreign word or a technical word, then define the word
- 36 Know the difference between 'that' and 'which'
- 37 Prefer verbs to nouns (for example, use 'apply' rather than 'make an application')
- 38 Prefer short sentences to long sentences (aim for an average of 20 words)
- 39 Prefer short paragraphs to long paragraphs (aim for an average of under 100 words)
- 40 Use 50 to 70 characters a line
- 41 Don't write 'he/she' or 'he or she'
- 42 Don't write 'and/or'
- 43 Avoid clichés
- 44 Avoid exclamation marks
- 45 Connect modifying words to the words they modify (for example, 'I gave him **only \$1**', not 'I **only gave** him \$1')
- 46 Use the same word for the same thing
- 47 Change negative phrases to positive phrases (for example, write 'he forgot' rather than 'he did not remember')
- 48 Ignore the 'rule' that you can't start sentences with 'So', 'And', and 'But'
- 49 Ignore the 'rule' that you can't end sentences with words like 'to' and 'of'
- 50 Take care with pronouns—make sure your reader knows what 'it' refers to
- 51 Don't use 'former' or 'latter'
- 52 Avoid filler phrases like 'It should be noted that'
- 53 Be consistent with matters like '-ise' and '-ize' and capitalization
- 54 Use 1 noun to name 1 thing
- 55 Don't use '&' unless it's in a company name

## Tip sheet

- 56 List a series in order of syllables, like this: 'pea, grape, apple, orange, and cucumber' (unless there's a simpler, explicit, familiar, or otherwise better order)
- 57 Put a comma before the last item in a series, like this: 'a, b, and c'
- 58 Define your acronyms—for example, 'the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC)'
- 59 Don't use periods in abbreviations (for example, write 'Mr' rather than 'Mr.')
- 60 Don't abbreviate 'for example' to 'eg'
- 61 Don't abbreviate 'that is' to 'ie'
- 62 For light interruptive phrases, like this, use commas rather than em-dashes
- 63 For heavy interruptive phrases — this is an example — use em-dashes rather than parentheses
- 64 Use well-recognized symbols rather than words (for example, write '99%' rather than '99 percent')
- 65 Hyphenate adjectival phrases (for example, 'well-recognised symbols')
- 66 For introductory phrases, use a comma
- 67 Put footnote numbers after punctuation, like this.<sup>1</sup>



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# Tip sheet

- 68 Put more space above headings than below headings
- 69 Use larger type for headings than for subheadings
- 70 Use larger type for subheadings than for sub-subheadings
- 71 Left-align your headings
- 72 Left-align your text
- 73 Use lists for important ideas
- 74 Unless you want to rank your ideas, or you want to cite your list, use bullets for lists
- 75 Don't have single words as the last line on the top of the page
- 76 Don't have single lines at the top or bottom of the page
- 77 Use examples to help your reader to understand
- 78 Don't underline
- 79 Use **bold** and *italics* for emphasis, but don't overdo them
- 80 Prefer lowercase to uppercase
- 81 Don't write in ALL CAPITALS
- 82 Avoid slashes (/)
- 83 Don't use hyphens for en-dashes(–) or for em-dashes (—)
- 84 Use 10-point, 11-point, or 12-point font size, or higher for special documents
- 85 Use lots of white space
- 86 Use serif fonts like Times New Roman for print
- 87 Use sans serif fonts like Arial for websites
- 88 Use no more than 2 fonts in 1 document
- 89 Order your information down columns rather than across rows
- 90 Put citations in footnotes
- 91 Don't hide important ideas in footnotes
- 92 Don't have headings at the bottom of the page



Power  
Tip

# Tip sheet

- 93 Put your work away for a few days before reviewing it
- 94 Cut redundant words
- 95 Cut wordy phrases
- 96 Cut a quarter of your first draft
- 97 Check your spelling
- 98 Take care with words that sound the same (like 'their', 'there', and 'they're')
- 99 Use software to help you (see [www.write-better-english.com](http://www.write-better-english.com) for a list)
- 100 Edit your work at least once on paper
- 101 Get someone to read your work

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