



ESSAY WRITING HANDBOOK

Department of Social Sciences



Table of contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Getting Started	3
Writing Style	4
Presentation	6
Plagiarism	7
Referencing	8
Confidentiality	12
References and useful resources	13
Appendix 1: Assignment Title Page	14
Notes	15

Acknowledgments: Photographs by Sinead Freeman

INTRODUCTION

Assignments in the form of essays, reports, reflective journals, observations and dissertations are central to the evaluation of students' performance at college. Unlike exams, continuous assessment gives you the opportunity to research a topic extensively, organise your material, plan carefully and write up the essay in a less stressful situation. A high quality of written work is therefore expected. While the proverbial "person in the street" can write an intelligent and well-argued essay, an academic essay must go a stage further and show familiarity with theoretical concepts, frames of references and research.

These guidelines are designed to help you produce high quality written assignments and they focus particularly on essay writing.

GETTING STARTED

Protecting your work

Never trust a mobile device to store your work. Laptops die all the time. Always store your work securely, for example by emailing yourself a draft, or storing your work in the cloud.

Define the problem. The first task is to define the problem. Underline the key words in the title and if necessary clarify with the Lecturer and/or consult a dictionary or key textbook. Clear definition of terms is a hallmark of academic writing.

Consider the instructions carefully. Clearly, an essay requiring 'comparison' would be very different to one involving 'discussion'. An assignment that does not meet the requirements of the title cannot hope to achieve a good mark and may even result in a failed assignment. Commence by decoding the question: what question does the lecturer want you to answer? Consider the following frequently used instructions:

<i>Analyse:</i>	<i>examine in detail, showing pros and cons</i>
<i>Assess:</i>	<i>weigh up the value of and give a judgement</i>
<i>Compare:</i>	<i>show the similarities between two given items</i>
<i>Contrast:</i>	<i>point out all the differences between items</i>
<i>Critique:</i>	<i>show both the good and bad points</i>
<i>Define:</i>	<i>give the exact meaning</i>
<i>Describe:</i>	<i>give a detailed account of</i>
<i>Explore:</i>	<i>examine from various standpoints, showing the implications</i>
<i>Outline:</i>	<i>give the main points of</i>
<i>Summarise:</i>	<i>give a brief account of</i>

(Rose, 2012).

Define the limits. Time spent at the start in limiting the problem is important. A problem is limited by reducing the scope of the investigation (*for example, “the essay will focus on services for under twos in Dublin” rather than “all preschool age children”*) not by omitting relevant information. Unrelated information is likely to lose you marks.

Plan the Assignment. Before you begin to write, you should have a clear framework that provides a structure for both the writer and the reader. Remember, assignments are marked on **structure** and **content**. All assignments have (a) an introduction, (b) a body and (c) a conclusion.

- (a) The introduction should indicate the problem and the main issues to be addressed in the assignment. The introduction should not include details but should outline what is to follow. An introduction should achieve two objectives: first demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities posed by the question; and second introduce the writer’s own argument and approach to the topic.
- (b) The body of the assignment should present the evidence. Theories and issues should be presented (with examples and comment where relevant) as per instructions, for example, discuss/compare/ summarise.

A new paragraph or heading should be used for each new point.
- (c) The conclusion should sum up the main points discussed with reference to the problem set but should not be a repetition of material already covered. Conclusions should be drawn based on the evidence/ comment presented. If there is a question in the title, it must be answered.

This standard format can be shortened to:

- Say what you are going to do
- Do it
- Say what you have done (and answer the question if there is one).

WRITING STYLE

Write in a simple, clear, precise style taking particular note of the following points:

- Drafting and re-drafting is a vital part of academic writing and helps to tighten the structure and content of your writing. If there is a ‘secret’ to academic writing it is multiple drafting. You may need to add or delete material as well as re-order material. It is best to leave some time between reading drafts to ensure you will look at the work with a fresh eye. Much of the incomprehensible writing one encounters

can be prevented simply by re-reading and re-drafting what has already been written. **Always re-write your essays multiple times.** Hemingway claimed to have re-written the ending to *A Farewell to Arms* **39 times** before he was satisfied with it! (Paris Review, 1958).

- As a general convention, writing in the first person is inappropriate in an essay. You should avoid using ‘I’ or ‘My’. So, instead of ‘In my essay, I will examine ...’ write ‘This essay shall examine ...’ It is, of course, incorrect to refer to oneself as ‘one’, as in ‘One chose to research this topic because ...’ One would imagine that this goes without saying, but not so!
- Be consistent by using the same tense throughout.
- Clichés, jargon, colloquial speech and slang are not acceptable, as academic writing must be factual and precise. Keep your language specific. Precise, scientific language allows clearer communication with your reader. Take for example the two sentences below:
 - » “B.F. Skinner experimentally investigated the effects of punishment and concluded that, while effective as a means of controlling behaviour, punishment may bring about negative consequences such as a generalised state of fear in the organism.”
 - » “A guy called B.F. Skinner got down to the business of looking into punishment and figured out that it can work but also went on about the down side being that it may make the person afraid.”
- Accuracy is essential...
 - » “Recent research...” is better stated as “Research since 2015...”
 - » “Some researchers have shown...” is better stated as “McNaughton and Hughes (2019) have shown...”
- Abbreviations and Acronyms. Abbreviations such as “e.g.”, “etc.”, “i.e.” are not acceptable. One must write in full “for example”, “and so on” and “that is.” Acronyms are acceptable if one has previously indicated the full meaning of the acronym. Thus, to use “ESRI”, one must have initially used Economic & Social Research Institute.
- Ensure the subject of a sentence is either singular or plural. It cannot be both, as in ‘A person [singular] can choose themselves [plural] whether or not they [plural] send her [singular] children to fee-paying schools.’ Your examiners will notice such poor writing and they will judge your work to lack clarity and precision. You are therefore likely to attract poor marks because the point being made is unclear. The sentence above should be rewritten as **either** ‘People can choose themselves whether or not they send their children to fee-paying schools’ or ‘A person can choose him/herself whether or he/she sends his/her children to fee-paying schools.’ The former is more elegant.
- Spelling and grammatical errors are not acceptable and spelling/grammar checkers and proofreading should ensure a high level of accuracy.
- Good punctuation enhances the clarity and readability of your assignment. Accuracy is assumed and not taught on our programmes. If you need a fun but rigorous revision, see ‘Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation’ by Lynne Truss.
- Paragraphing sorts a piece of writing into sections and helps the reader understand your meaning. Generally, a new point requires a new paragraph.

PRESENTATION

Assignments should have a title page (a template for the title page is provided in Appendix 1) and should include the following information:

- Student Number
- Lecturer's Name
- Programme (degree)
- Year
- Module
- Submission Date
- Word Count
- Title of Assignment
- Declaration of ownership and date

Assignments should be typed on A4 paper according to the following guidelines:

Style and Font: Times New Roman, Font size 12.

Spacing: The body of text should use 1.5 line spacing. Quotations, footnotes, tables and figures and appendices require single spacing.

Punctuation: No space before a full stop. Text resumes two spaces after a full stop. No space before commas, colons or semi-colons. Text resumes one space after commas, colons and semi-colons.

Justification: The text should be left justified (straight edges on left and ragged margin on right side of the text).

Paragraphs: Leave a line space between paragraphs so they are clearly distinguishable.

Margins: The usual margins recommended are 2.5 cm at the top, bottom and right side of the page and 4cm at the left of the page

Pagination: Pages should be numbered starting with the first page of text. Title page is not numbered.

Examiner's Comments: A single clean page should be included at the back of the assignment for the examiner's feedback.

Submission of Assignments: If required by the lecturer a hard copy of the assignment should be submitted. Pages should be stapled with a single staple. Assignments must not be submitted in plastic pockets or any other binder unless specifically requested by their lecturer. In addition, an electronic version of the assignment in Microsoft Word should be submitted through Brightspace'.

Keep a copy or back-up file as all your assignments are retained by the university for one year after submission.

PLAGIARISM

The American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism is the act of presenting the words, ideas, or images of another as your own; it denies authors or creators of content the credit they are due. Whether deliberate or unintentional, plagiarism violates ethical standards in scholarship ... Writers who plagiarize disrespect the efforts of original authors by failing to acknowledge their contributions, stifle further research by preventing readers from tracing ideas back to their original sources, and unfairly disregard those who exerted the effort to complete their own work. Writers who try to publish plagiarized work face rejection from publication and possible censure in their place of employment. Students who plagiarize may fail the assignment or course, be placed on academic probation, or be expelled from their institution (American Psychological Association, 2020, pp. 254-255).

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and may lead to disciplinary action, for both students and lecturers.

For example, in Spring 2005 a Professor George Carney of Oklahoma State University was forbidden by his university to teach as he “stole passages from a slew of authors over the years, sometimes taking entire paragraphs word for word” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 4th March 2005). In 2011, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg resigned as German defence minister after being engulfed by a PhD plagiarism scandal. In 2012, Pál Schmitt resigned as President of Hungary after Semmelweis University withdrew his doctorate because of plagiarism (The Guardian, 2nd April 2012).

Of course, students are expected to read the ideas of others and use them in their essays. However, the work must be fully referenced. All students will be required to submit their dissertations (and other assignments) to the plagiarism checking tool in the VLE *Brightspace* which will compare your text with all pages printed on the Internet, and all other assignments submitted by students in the thousands of other colleges using *Brightspace* worldwide. Where substantial matches occur, a plagiarism investigation will take place. Students who author their own work and properly reference their sources will not be penalised. Where plagiarism is confirmed, penalties will be applied as per the University’s General Assessment Regulations.

Other forms of cheating

It is possible to purchase academic work on line, or to commission a bespoke piece of work, be it an undergraduate essay or a PhD chapter. Not only is this unethical and pedagogically self-delusional, firms that offer to write material for university students for a fee can be prosecuted in Ireland under Section 43A (Offence to provide or advertise cheating services) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019.

REFERENCING

Academic writing requires that you read and cite the work of others. Any material that is not your own must be sourced to the original author. There is an art to using direct quotations. Quotations should be used sparingly. You should avoid overuse such that your essay has great chunks of quotations, or a string of quotations with little interpretation / narrative from you. Essays that are a string of quotations without any or minimal original text composed by the student are likely to fail.

A quotation should not be used to simply define a term and should be reserved for giving an example of an author's reasoning behind a concept or a finding.

A good use of quotation is using the author's own words to justify or support an argument being made by you. A poor or inappropriate use of a quotation is simply substituting your words and thoughts with the words of the author.

Only material which is publicly available should be cited so lecture notes, for example, should not be referenced.

The use of quotations and references in the text is followed up by a list of references, alphabetically presented at the end of the work, which is known as the **References**. There are specific guidelines that you must follow for referencing in the text and in the References section. The referencing system adopted by the Department of Social Sciences is the American Psychological Association Style, or **APA Style**. What follows is a summary outline of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition. An outline tutorial can be found at:

<https://apastyle.apa.org/learn/quick-guide-on-references>

Referencing format to be used in Text

- a) After a summary of an author's work, or a reference to his/her work you must insert the author's surname and the date of publication:

(Murphy, 2018).

In the case of two authors, both are listed: (Wilson & Thomas, 2020).

As listing three or more authors would be quite cumbersome, in such cases list the first author followed by et al. (from the Latin, meaning 'and others') for the first and subsequent citations of this source:

(O'Brien et al., 2020).

When citing an author who has published two or more works in the same year, use lower case letters (a, b, c) with the year to distinguish them:

The Department of Education and Science (2019a) has reported that ...

- b)** If you are including the author's name as part of your sentence, you should put the date in brackets after it as follows:

Graham (2020) has argued that ...

In the case of two or more authors being cited in the text, use 'and' between them (rather than ampersand '&' which is used in parentheses. So,

Lincoln and Chomsky (2018) have argued that ... (Lincoln & Chomsky, 2018).

- c)** A direct quotation must include the page number from the original source (or a paragraph number where page numbers are not available):

However, it has been noted "this is a phenomenon which is not unique to Ireland" (Coetzee, 2016, p. 12).

- d)** When you are summarising someone else's ideas:

Addis (2020) has argued that it is not just Ireland that has experienced such difficulties; other countries including Finland have also faced similar economic problems.

If you are citing a number of works to support an argument or position, they should be listed alphabetically, separated by a semi-colon:

A considerable number of researchers have reported similar findings (Barry, 2012; Doyle, 2017; Zacchus, 2019).

- e)** Let's say you are reading a book by Dawkins, and in Dawkin's book there is a quote from another book by Darwin. You decide that you would like to include the quote by Darwin in your essay, but you have not read Darwin's' original source. You present this kind of material as follows:

More evidence to support this assertion has been presented by research in the Galapagos Islands (Darwin, as cited in Dawkins, 2017, p. 254).

The page number given is the page number from the book by Dawkins from where you got the quotation from Darwin. Your References will contain the book by Dawkins.

As you progress through your degree, you will increasingly be expected to cite from original, rather than secondary sources.

- f)** If referencing from a newspaper, follow the same format as above. If there is no identifiable author, use the name of the newspaper, the date and page number if required:

(The Irish Times, 19th January, 2018, p. 6)

- g)** Quotations

A short quotation of less than a line may be included in the body of the text in quotation marks but if it is longer (typically, 40 words) start a new line and indent it. All direct quotes of more than 40 words must be single spaced and indented. This makes it easier for the reader to establish what is sourced work and what is your own work. Include the page number if using a direct quote (note: inverted commas are not necessary in this instance, as the indentation of quote over 40 words makes it obvious as a quotation):

Kilcommins et al.'s (2018) work on the victim in the Irish criminal process details the responsibilities of Gardaí. They note

The Victims Charter places significant recurring responsibilities on the Gardaí to provide information to victims. When a victim makes a complaint, s/he must be informed of the name, telephone number and station of the investigating Garda and the PULSE (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively) incident number (2018, p. 91).

- h)** Referencing Internet sites or online journals.

The suggested format for WWW page entries in the text is Constructor (person or organisation), year, page no. [if given]:

Department of Health and Children (2016, p. 8).

Many webpages do not contain page numbers. Try to include a marker to help your reader find the relevant passage, for example a paragraph number:

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2017, para 121).

REFERENCING FORMAT (IN THE 'REFERENCES' SECTION AT END OF ESSAY)

'References' is a list of all the sources you quoted or paraphrased to prepare your paper. You should arrange entries in alphabetical order by the author's last name or, if there is no author, by the first main word of the title. It should start on a separate page at the end of your essay; label the page 'References' centred at the top of the page.

Use **hanging indent paragraph style** (align the first line with the left margin, and indent all subsequent lines one tab space from the left margin). Type all authors' names with the surname first, separated by a comma. Use only initials for the first and middle names, and an ampersand [&] before the last author's name.

EXAMPLES

(a) Books

The title of the publication should be *italicised*. Capitalise only the first word, the first word after a colon and proper nouns.

Ferguson, H., & Norton, J. (2011). *Child protection practice*. Palgrave.

Kessler, S., & Bayliss, F. (2015). *Contemporary British industrial relations*. Macmillan. [in the case of two or more authors, note the comma before the ampersand '&'].

Where an organization is the author:

Department of Education and Science. (2016).

Where there have been multiple editions of a book, you should reference the edition of the book that you have read:

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Real names of clients, staff, agencies or locations should not be used in assignments and any details, which might make it possible to identify any of the above, should be avoided. Special care must be taken if photos are used and permission from client/parent/guardian/agency must be obtained. A breach of confidentiality in a written assignment may result in a failed assignment.

References and useful sources

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association.

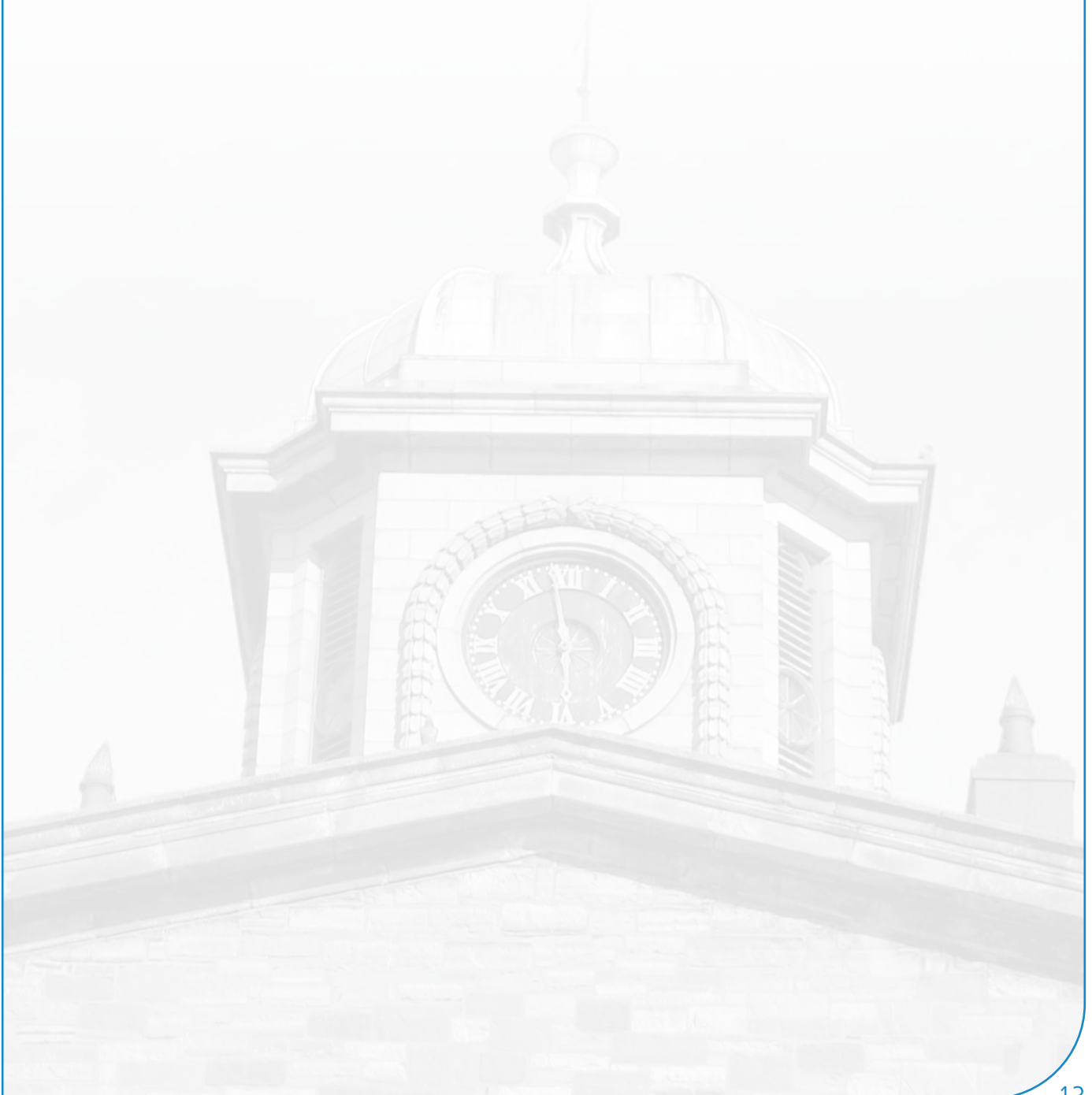
Becker, H. S. (2007). *Writing for social scientists: how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. University of Chicago Press.

Crene, P., & Lea, M.R. (2008). *Writing at university: A guide for students*. (3rd ed.). Open University Press.

Hemingway, E. (1929 [1935]). *A farewell to arms*. Penguin Books.

Rose, J. (2012). *The mature student's guide to writing* (3rd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Truss, L. (2003). *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. Profile Books.



APPENDIX 1: ASSIGNMENT TITLE PAGE

Department of Social Sciences Assignment Title Page

Student number:

Lecturer's Name:

Programme (degree):

Year:

Module:

Submission Date:

Word Count:

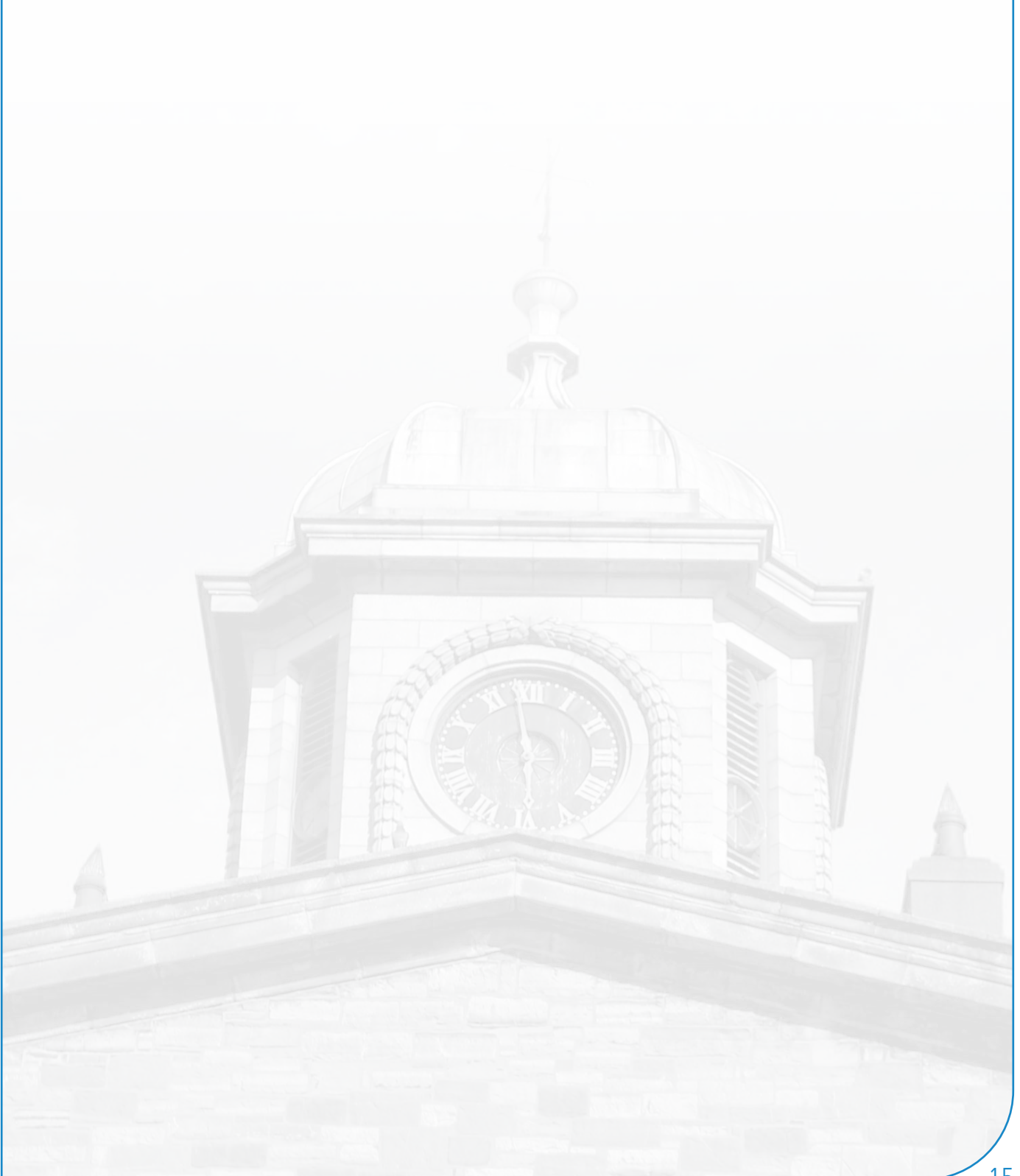
Title of Assignment:

Declaration of Ownership:

I declare that the attached work is entirely my own and that all sources have been acknowledged:

Date: _____

NOTES



T OLLSCOIL TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA
BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
DUBLIN
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

