



Preparing for your M level  
PGCE study

Information to support  
University of Exeter PGCE  
candidates



## WORKING AT MASTERS LEVEL: GUIDANCE FOR TRAINEES

Your PGCE includes two modules which are assessed formally at Post Graduate Masters level through written assignments.

You may find the following texts useful for reference:

Denby, N. et al (2008), Master's Level Study in Education: A guide to success for PGCE students. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Sewell. K. (ed.), (2008) Doing your PGCE at M-Level: A guide for students. London: Sage.

Completing a PGCE that includes 60 credits of Masters Level study requires the ability to juggle a demanding workload and to work independently. This guide draws together a small selection of recommended resources and information designed to help you to gear up for the demands of the course.

Once you are enrolled with the university, you will have full access to the study skills support available at the Study Zone, which includes extensive online support materials as well as the opportunity for 1-1 support sessions: <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/academic-skills-engagement-team/academic/>

Some of you may wish to focus at this point on refreshing or developing your general literacy skills to ensure that you are able to write with a high degree of **clarity** and **accuracy**. To this end, we recommend the following websites:

- <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/informatics/punctuation/>
- [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar\\_tutorial/index.htm](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/index.htm)
- <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/writing/style>

There is also a wealth of online material which covers how to **write** particularly at **Masters level**. Our recommended websites for this are:

- <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/skills/asc/documents/public/pgtcriticalwriting.pdf>
- <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing>

Much of the writing you will be producing will be '**reflective**' - for more information specifically about what 'reflective writing' means, see:

- [https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/14011/writing/113/reflective\\_writing](https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/14011/writing/113/reflective_writing)
- <http://www2.port.ac.uk/media/contacts-and-departments/student-support-services/ask/downloads/Reflective-writing---a-basic-introduction.pdf>

## Suggested Activities

1. When undertaking pre-course reading, use the 'Questions to support critical reading' to evaluate your sources.
2. Use the 'Make effective notes' and 'keep records' guidance from the 'Effective academic reading' section to guide you in making notes based on your pre-course reading, and in the first weeks of the online course.
3. Use the table of 'descriptive vs critical writing' to analyse one of the documents you've been asked to read - where is it descriptive and where critical?
4. Practise writing reflectively by writing about an incident you've observed in school, using the guidance from the websites linked at the start of this booklet.
5. After reading a relevant article, practice summarising the key points from it in your own words. Then select a couple of key quotations that you think are important, and write a paragraph about the ideas they express, using and referencing the quotations correctly.

If you would like to practice analysing and writing about relevant documents, you could use any of the speeches made by Ofsted or education ministers. Use the 'questions to support critical reading' to guide you, but also use these as an opportunity to critically reflect on the ideology or values which underpin what they're saying (which may be hidden or may be explicit). Try writing your own response to the speeches, drawing on your experiences but also any other reading you've done to critique them.

Here are a couple you could choose from as a starting point:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-purpose-of-education>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmci-commentary-curriculum-and-the-new-education-inspection-framework>


## An example of high level Masters writing in education....


Examine how this introduction demonstrates knowledge, understanding, engagement with research literature, criticality, argument, accuracy and clarity of communication:


### Introduction


As the gateway to the rest of the curriculum and a crucial life skill, learning to read is a central aspect of Primary education – however, there is a disparity between research evidence and policy (Wyse *et al*, 2013). In both the USA and Britain, the main distinction between good comprehenders and poor comprehenders relates to students concentrating on reading accurately, often at the expense of understanding or linking to the accumulative meaning of the text. In Britain, current policy places emphasis on phonics rather than comprehension or reading for meaning. However, research suggests that successful decoding does not entail effective text comprehension, nor is it sufficient as a strategy for understanding the meaning of a text (Tennent, 2015; Gough and Tunmer, 1986; Duke *et al*, 2004). Towards the end of Key Stage 2, children develop habits and attitudes towards reading that they take with them into secondary education. In my own class, one can quickly identify some children who are able to read a text, appreciate the facets of language that bring together its meaning, discuss its relevance, and ask intelligent questions that demonstrate a deeper level of engagement. A distinction is visible between these deeper readers, who are confident discussing meaning and displaying higher-order comprehension skills in their responses, and the less able readers, who concentrate on accuracy when reading aloud and pay comparatively little attention to meaning. This reflects a problem in the primary classroom nationally, and one that has been widely identified in research.


Comprehension, described as the essential “goal” of reading (Dechant, 1964; Nation, 2005; Rasinski and Padak, 2008), is difficult to define because of its componential nature. A number of discrete elements work in an interactive manner. Furthermore, the understanding of any text will be unique as each reader brings their own life and reading experience to it, while the


 **Watson, Annabel**  
Sets up importance of the topic, immediately indicates a 'problem' in the gap between research and policy


 **Watson, Annabel**  
Sets up the context of the study, up to date


 **Watson, Annabel**  
Note that the developing argument begins immediately - use of conjuncts to structure the argument

 **Watson, Annabel**  
You can reference multiple texts at once

 **Watson, Annabel**  
Also situates the study within a personal context - look at how this introductory paragraph brings together academic discussion and personal experience

 **Watson, Annabel**  
You could expect a reference or two here - though these have been given above so it's not a big problem

 **Watson, Annabel**  
Now the key 'problem' and context have been introduced, the assignment gets into definitions of the concepts that will be used

 **Watson, Annabel**  
Not over-simplifying but showing the complexity of the issue

On the next page is the current assessment criteria for taught Masters programmes (note that this may be subject to change for future courses). Have a look at this criteria and consider what it's asking of you.

Note that not all criteria applies to all assignments and our online course will take you through some of the knowledge and skills - so where we ask you to show understanding of research methods, our online course will teach you that.

**Please note:** Some criteria may not be applicable to all assignments - your module tutor will inform you of the relevant criteria for each assignment. The table is indicative, a guide rather than a prescriptive mechanical aid to grading.

Marks	0-39 (Fail)	40-49 (Fail) (may be condonable in some programmes)	50-59 (Pass)	60-69 (Merit)	70-85 (Distinction)	86-100
Assessment categories						
Knowledge of subject	~ very limited knowledge of the topic	~ some knowledge of the topic and awareness of relevant issues, but with notable gaps	~ adequate knowledge of the topic and awareness of relevant issues	~ good knowledge of the topic and sound awareness of relevant issues	~ excellent and comprehensive knowledge of the topic and critical awareness of relevant issues	(High Distinction) This work often exceeds the standard for distinction across all sub-
Understanding of subject	~ very limited understanding of the topic	~ limited understanding of the topic	~ adequate understanding of the topic	~ a good depth and breadth of understanding of the topic	~ detailed, holistic and insightful understanding of the topic	
Critical analysis	~ very limited or no critical analysis	~ limited critical analysis	~ adequate analysis, with some evidence of critical evaluation	~ sound and consistent critical analysis	~ excellent and complex critical analysis	
Argument	~ argument absent, or lacking any clarity and/or logic	~ argument is attempted, but is limited in clarity and/or logic	~ evidence of the development of relevant argument	~ clear development of relevant argument	~ excellent construction of argument with aspects of originality	
Use of literature/ sources	~ inadequate range of literature/ sources	~ narrow range of literature/ sources	~ adequate range of sources	~ good range of sources	~ excellent range of sources	
	~ failure to select and use appropriate examples from relevant sources	~ limited selection and use of appropriate examples from relevant sources	~ satisfactory selection and use of appropriate examples from relevant sources	~ a good selection and use of appropriate examples from relevant sources	~ excellent selective and focussed use of examples from relevant sources	
	~ no critical engagement with literature	~ little critical engagement with literature	~ some critical engagement with literature	~ critical engagement with literature is evident throughout	~ substantial and insightful critical engagement with literature	
	~ no evidence of organisation or appropriate structure	~ limited organisation and appropriate structure	~ content is adequately organised and structured	~ content is well-organised and structured	~ excellent organisation and structure	

<b>Organisation and presentation</b>	~ very poor style of writing	~ in general, poor academic style of writing	~ an appropriate academic style of writing	~ in general, a good academic style of writing	~ very good academic style of writing
	~ conventions for referencing and appendices do not conform to standard requirements	~ limited ability to employ the conventions for referencing and appendices	~ an ability to employ the conventions for referencing and appendices	~ employs the conventions for referencing and appendices with a few minor errors	~ successfully employs the conventions for referencing and appendices throughout
	~ use of English is very difficult to follow and/or very poor spelling, punctuation and grammar	~ use of English is difficult to follow and/or spelling, punctuation and grammar unsatisfactory	~ generally clear English used, and spelling, punctuation and grammar generally correct	~ good, clear English used, and spelling, punctuation and grammar generally correct	~ fluent and correct use of English throughout
<b>Professional skills</b>	~ few, if any, links between theory and practice	~ unsatisfactory or insufficient links between theory and practice	~ satisfactory links between theory and practice	~ theory and practice are well integrated	~ theory and practice are very well integrated
	~ inability to work flexibly, independently and/or as part of a team	~ ability to work flexibly, independently and/or as part of a team, but with areas of weakness	~ ability to work flexibly, independently and/or as part of a team	~ good ability to work flexibly, independently and/or as part of a team	~ very good ability to work flexibly, independently and/or as part of a team
	~ very limited or no reflection evident	~ limited reflection evident	~ some evidence of reflection	~ good evidence of reflection, with some criticality	~ excellent reflection with significant criticality
	~ very limited communication skills	~ limited communication skills	~ satisfactory communication skills	~ effective communication skills	~ very effective communication skills
<b>Research skills</b>	~ little or no skill in selected techniques applicable to own research	~ some skill in selected techniques applicable to own research, but with some areas of weakness	~ adequate skills in selected techniques applicable to own research	~ good skills in techniques applicable to own research	~ advanced skills to conduct own research
<b>Understanding of research processes</b>	~ very limited or no understanding of research processes	~ limited understanding of research processes	~ some understanding of how established research processes are used to create and interpret knowledge	~ good understanding of research processes	~ excellent understanding of research processes
<b>Ethics</b>	~very limited or no reflection on ethics evident	~limited reflection on ethics evident	~some evidence of reflection on ethics	~good evidence of reflection on ethical dimensions and complexities	~excellent reflection on and analysis of ethical dimensions and complexities

All of the following materials are drawn from the Study Zone at the University of Exeter and should not be shared or reproduced.



# Skills for academic honesty

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To work with academic honesty - you need to be able to:

- differentiate between material that needs to be referenced and that which doesn't
- use in-text referencing
- write an appropriate reference list and understand the difference between this and a bibliography
- adopt good habits of record-keeping
- work appropriately with quotations
- manage the presentation of others' ideas in written work

## Deciding what needs to be referenced

You need to know and to be able to recognise what does not need to be referenced - the following fit into this group:

- common knowledge - defined as that in everyday use, in the common domain
- facts that are generally agreed, or which are common to a variety of sources
- personal ideas, suggestions etc.

In terms of what does need to be referenced - the list includes the following:

- direct quotations
- references to others' ideas in paper or web-based materials
- references to a reference already cited by another in a text
- paraphrases and summaries of others' quotations
- paraphrases and summaries of others' ideas
- statistics, figures, charts, tables, pictures, graphs etc
- references to material within an edited text.

Clearly it requires judgement to decide what does and does not need to be referenced. If in doubt, reference!

## Using in-text referencing

This is a matter of understanding how to cite in text and how to construct a reference list. There are different conventions, and sometimes there are variable interpretations of the convention adopted. Some work with reference lists at the end of the text, some work with footnotes or endnotes that are linked from the text by number. Different disciplines tend to adopt different conventions, and academic journals and publishers often differ in the conventions adopted. They will usually indicate their convention. You need to find out which system your discipline requires you to use. This will usually be indicated in your course or module handbook.

## The layout of a reference list and its distinction from a bibliography

A reference list is a list of the references to material to which you have referred in your text. A bibliography is a reference list, plus any extra material that might provide general or further information about the topic. In academic work, it will mostly be reference lists with which you work.

You will need to familiarise yourself with the particular layout techniques for a reference list in your discipline and be consistent with your style.

## Adopt good habits of record-keeping

You need to work out a way of keeping a record of the references of what you have read and what you think you will need to seek and read. This may involve paper/card or electronic records. If you are working with websites, record the date on which you accessed the site, as this is required in the reference list. You will need to work out how to mark the following in your notes so that you do not make a mistake when you refer back to them at a later stage:

- direct quotations (and remember to note the page number)
- paraphrases and summaries that need to be referenced;
- your own ideas and your own comments about another's text

It is frustrating to find good ideas written in your notes, and not to be sure whether they are your own comments on what you have been reading, or the ideas of others. You will need to decide a personal code and use it consistently.

## Work appropriately with quotations

Working with quotations involves referencing the quotation correctly and then following the appropriate local conventions about formatting and abbreviating where relevant. In terms of formatting, use single quotation marks around quotes of less than two lines and put them directly into your text. For any quote longer than two lines indent the quote and set it apart from your text with an extra line space at the beginning and at the end. In this case you do not need quotation marks. In both cases you will need to reference your source, including the page number.

## Manage the presentation of others' ideas in written work

Managing the relating of others' ideas is a central task in higher education writing. It involves the following:

- Summarising skills where you need to give a general picture of what you have read. You need to reference the summarised material

- Paraphrasing skills where you need to abbreviate while being specific and precise about the subject matter. In a paraphrase you do not directly quote the text – you use your own words. You need to reference the paraphrased material.
- The ability to relate one idea to another (assembling ideas as evidence, comparing ideas and so on). This involves, for example:
  - showing how ideas or points from different sources relate to each other,
  - showing how ideas or points from different sources have built on other ideas,
  - using ideas from several sources to support the main point you are making,
  - showing where ideas contrast,
  - stating the significance of the ideas or points you are using,
  - showing by the way you reference, which ideas are your own

### What is quoting?

Quoting is using the exact words you found in your source.

#### When should I use this option?

Quote when the words used in the source express a point so succinctly and well that you wish to reproduce them. Quoting is to be used sparingly.

#### How should I present quotes?

Use single quotation marks around **quotes of less than two lines** and put them directly into your text.

**For any quote longer than two lines** indent the quote and set it apart from your text with an extra line space at the beginning and at the end. In this case you do not need quotation marks. Your quote must fit grammatically into your text.

### What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is rewording some key points that you have read without necessarily condensing the information.

#### When should I use this option?

Paraphrase when you want to communicate some key points, using a similar number of words to the original. Make sure that you change the wording enough to avoid being accused of plagiarism.

### What is summarising?

Summarising is condensing information you have read into a concise account of the main points.

#### When should I use this option?

Summarise when you want to communicate the essence of what you have read, keeping it brief.

# Effective academic reading

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## 1. Select material appropriately

- Be guided by reading list and recommendations of tutor
- Ask tutor or library staff for help if confused
- Select reading that relates to your assignments
- Be directed by the length of your assignment
- Be guided by how readable something is – if it is impenetrable, find something more straightforward
- Select by reliability and up-to-dateness (tutors can advise on reliability of sources and authors)

## 2. Identify purpose for reading

- If your purpose is clear, you will find reading much easier and more focused
- Some possible purposes: reading for an assignment, reading to prepare for a seminar, tutorial or lecture, reading for more background information, reading to find some specific detailed information.

## 3. Use appropriate style of reading to match purpose

- Browsing – the web/the library/electronic journals (to find if something is suitable for your purpose)
- Relaxed reading – for background information/interest (e.g. newspaper article)
- Skimming – to get the gist/main idea (quick reading)
- Scanning – to pick out specific information (glancing to find something specific)
- Intensive reading – key material for course/assignments/exams, usually accompanied by note making

## 4. Read critically

- Reflect – be aware of your own reaction to what you are reading
- Question – the purpose, assumptions, implications of the text
- Identify – the line of argument in the text, the stance of the author
- Evaluate – the strength/value of the argument – e.g. what evidence is used to support the argument? Is it reliable/valid?
- Compare – with other arguments, stances

## 5. Make effective notes

- They should be accurate
- They should be concise – include main points only
- They should show overall organization and development of ideas clearly
- They are neat – easy to refer to at a later date
- Record the source
- Useful for revision
- Use your own words to make a concise summary of what you have read

## 6. Keep records

- For accurate referencing and to avoid accusations of plagiarism
- So you can check things again
- Start reference list early and add to it as you read
- Record source every time you take notes, including page number so you can check again. Keep with notes, neatly filed.
- Use quotation marks when you write something word for word
- File your notes carefully so you know how to find something quickly

# Questions to support critical reading

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If you are new to critical reading it can be helpful to use a list of questions to guide you as you read.

Some useful questions you might consider are:

1. **Who is the author?** e.g. Are they a key name in the field? Have they been mentioned by your lecturers? Have they been cited by other key authors? Are they from a particular university or organisation? Could this bias them in any way?
2. **When was the text written?** e.g. Is it up-to-date enough for the subject you are studying? If it is a key text from the past how is it likely to have been influenced by the time when it was written? How have subsequent writers built on this?
3. **What kind of text is it?** e.g. Is it a core text-book for your course? Is it an article from a peer-reviewed journal? Is it from a government website? Could there be any bias?
4. **What is the key argument?** i.e. What is the main point the author is trying to make?
5. **How does the author support this argument?** e.g. Do they use evidence based on research or theory? Do they use logical reasoning?
6. **Is the evidence sound?** e.g. Is it up-to-date and reliable? Are there any weaknesses in the research? Is every step of the reasoning logical and coherent?
7. **How does this argument compare with other texts you have read on this subject?** e.g. does it agree or disagree? Does it perhaps build on the argument of another writer and develop it further? Or does it come from a completely different perspective? If so how does it differ? Why is it different? Is it convincing?
8. **What are the implications of the text?** e.g. What are the consequences of what has been argued? How does this link to the wider debate? What is the logical next step in terms of further research or debate?
9. **Is there any information the author has omitted?** e.g. Has the author taken other perspectives into account?

## Descriptive versus critical writing

This table compares descriptive writing with critical writing.

	<b>Descriptive writing</b>	<b>Critical writing</b>
1.	Describes what happens/ happened.	Identifies the significance of what happens/happened and explains why it is relevant to the essay question.
2.	States what something is like.	Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of something, or highlights the significant points about something for the purposes of the essay.
3.	Describes a method used	States why a method is appropriate or suitable for the purposes of this assignment.
4.	States the different parts of a process or situation	Weighs up the importance of different parts of a process or situation, highlighting the most significant aspects for answering the essay question.

## Top tips for planning and structuring your essay

1. Interpret the essay question- identify the topic and instruction words.
2. In your Introduction- outline your arguments and the sequence they will follow.
3. Signpost the reader through your arguments in the body of the essay using words such as, 'conversely', 'nevertheless', 'moreover'.
4. Emphasise your key points and illustrate them with examples.
5. In your Conclusion- draw your arguments together and restate their significance in relation to the essay question.

# Essay editing checklist

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## 1. Organisation

- Is there a clear opening section?

Does the introduction explain what the essay is going to explore and how?

- How does the essay move from the introduction to the beginning of the discussion?

Is there a linking paragraph or sentence?

- How are the paragraphs developed?

Do they have clear topic sentences? Does the paragraph develop the theme of the topic sentence?

- How are the paragraphs linked?

Does each paragraph lead naturally into the next? Is your signposting adequate?

- How coherent are the sentences?

Are they clear and easy to read? Is the main point evident? Do they link the ideas within them coherently? Do they link clearly with the other sentences either side?

- Is there a clear concluding section?

Does it link back to the issues raised in the title and the introduction? Does it draw together the main points of the essay?

## 2. Referencing

- Is all information from other sources clearly referenced? Have you used a variety of reporting verbs? Check the grammar of the sentence including the reference.

## 3. Relevance

- Have you included everything you need to include?

Is there adequate support for your ideas? Are your examples well-chosen?



- Is there anything that could be omitted from the essay?

Are there any unnecessary explanations, repetitions? Does everything focus on the question that has been asked?

#### 4. Academic Style

- Is your style consistent?

Is any of the language too emotive? Are there any colloquialisms or clichés? Have you used abbreviations anywhere instead of the full form? Does the style sound too chatty and informal? Does the style sound natural? Is this your voice?

#### 5. Language accuracy

- Are you confident with your punctuation and grammar?

Are all the sentences grammatically correct? Do they all contain a full verb with a clear subject? Are complex sentences clearly expressed? Do you need to simplify? Check every punctuation mark. Is it correctly used? Is the spelling correct and consistent? Use the spell-checking and grammar-checking facility to help you.