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Introduction / Purpose

Writing an essay and case studies can be daunting, especially if you have never written at Master's level or did so a long time ago. This document has been compiled to help you ensure that you are addressing the Master's level competencies and present your writing in an academic style.

1. Make sure you understand the task and meet the assessment criteria

You are required to submit three case studies and an essay. Case study 1 should focus on a counselling issue, Case study 2 should focus on an ethical issue and Case study 3 should focus on a scientific issue. The essay* should be on a topic directly related to genetic counselling and/or its operational context. [* An article or other scholarly piece of work can be submitted in place of the essay and guidance for this can be found in Marking Rubric Essay (**072_DOC**).]

The GCRAB provides separate marking rubrics for the case studies (**071_DOC**) and essay (**072_DOC**). It is essential that you understand and use them if you are to succeed in preparing work that is judged appropriate for registration. Read the instructions carefully to make sure you know what must be demonstrated. In addition to the assessment criteria, the rubrics contain clear descriptions for each piece of work (including how to structure your submission and content).

An important point to remember is that you must anonymise material relating to any patient.

Both rubrics contain links to online resources to support you in completing your case studies and essays. There are also lots of other guides to writing that you will find online and in print. Some of the key things to consider are included in this document but it is not exhaustive, and so GCRAB suggests you use this document in combination with the rubric and any additional resources that you identify and find helpful.

2. Use of Generative AI

Generative AI is 'artificial intelligence that can create original content —such as text, images, video, audio or software code—in response to a user's prompt or request' (What is Generative AI? IBM https://www.ibm.com/topics/generative-ai Accessed 22nd November 2024).

Applicants should follow the guidance provided by the AHCS in its document: 'Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in AHCS Equivalence' when preparing essays and case studies for submission to GCRAB.

3. Finding your voice and writing in an academic style

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As you will be aware from reading journal articles and other literature, academic writing is typically more neutral in tone and more measured in the claims and assumptions that are made. '[Academic Writing: A practical guide](#)' by the University of York provides a useful starting point to help you develop your academic voice and style. Writing in this way may currently feel unfamiliar or difficult, however the more you read academic literature and write (drafting *and* redrafting!), the easier it will become.

It is important to present your work in a clear and logical way. The use of headers and sub-headers (where appropriate) can help to demonstrate this. When you begin to write you may find it helpful to start by drafting an outline structure for the essay or case study using headers and sub-headers. Key words or phrases added under each header can then be used as prompts to help you to further organise your thinking and start writing sections of text. The headers and associated text can be reordered as you draft and redraft your work so that you end up with an output that is both well-structured and flows logically from one sentence to the next, and from one paragraph to the next. You don't have to start at the beginning and write in a 'linear' way. Build confidence and momentum by writing the sections that feel most familiar or 'doable'.

Below you will find information about different aspects of academic writing, followed by an example of how this might look in practice. You should follow the American Psychological Association, seventh edition ['APA7' style guidelines](#) which also includes guidance on inclusive (i.e. 'bias-free') language.

a. *Formatting*

If you choose to use headers, be consistent throughout the text. Using the 'Styles' option in Microsoft Word (or the equivalent in other writing software), enables you to consistently apply predefined formatting to selected text.

A typical format that illustrates the hierarchy of the headings is:

BOLD 14 pt for main heading

BOLD 12 pt for sub-headings

Bold 12pt *italics for sub, sub-headings.*

In academic writing, CAPITILISING and underlining are generally not used.

Grammar, punctuation and spelling are all important elements of writing. Writing software can check for errors and suggest corrections. Do ensure that you have these checking functions turned on. Some examples of how to use punctuation, and present numbers, quotes and abbreviations within text are given below.

b. *Punctuation*
- One space after a comma, colon or semi-colon.

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- No spaces between the previous word and the punctuation.
- No space between the first bracket and the word inside the bracket.
- References in brackets are part of the sentence and come before the full stop.

Example: 'Although you might think Heather is a pedant, it is important to be consistent and to use punctuation correctly. This adds to the overall appearance of the work, doesn't it? Several other authors support this approach (Smith, 2014; Jones, 2019; Lewis et al., 2017; Morecombe & Wise, 2016).'

c. Numbers

For numbers ten or under, spell it out (e.g. seven). For numbers 11 or over, express in numerals (e.g. 256). However, at the start of a sentence, always spell the number out.

Example: 'Although only eight people in this study were men, their beliefs about termination of pregnancy were very similar to those of the 27 women interviewed. Eleven of the 27 women had experienced termination of pregnancy in the past.'

d. Using direct quotes

In general, try not to quote directly from a source. You need to show that you can analyse and synthesise the material and if you use direct quotes, you don't have a chance to demonstrate these skills. However, there may be times when you think it is very important to use the direct quote (for example when quoting a seminal piece of work). If you use a direct quote from a reference, you must always put it in inverted commas and put the page number in the reference.

Example: 'As Skirton states, "… it is better to reference well than not at all." (Skirton, 2009, p3).'

APA7 style guidance on the [use of quotations](#) is available.

e. Abbreviations

Use only recognised abbreviations e.g. DNA. In general, if you abbreviate a term, use the abbreviation at least three times. The first time you use the phrase in the text you must spell it out and then put the abbreviation in brackets after it. You can then just use the abbreviation subsequently in the text, except at the start of a sentence. Use abbreviations consistently. Do not switch between an abbreviation and its spelled-out version

Example: 'Huntington disease (HD) is a neurodegenerative condition. People with HD experience depression and a movement disorder, as well as a degree of dementia. Huntington disease can be inherited from either parent.'

APA7 style guidance on the [use of abbreviations](#) is available.

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f. Proofreading

If you ask someone else to proofread the text, they will be more likely to pick up errors but be aware of any potential breach of confidentiality.

4. Using evidence in your writing

It is important that you use a range of current references to underpin every key statement in your work. This shows you are an evidence-based practitioner and can access appropriate resources. Use of references also helps to show you are not passing others' work off as your own i.e plagiarising. (See also Section 7).

Usually references less than 10 years old are acceptable, but you can use older ones if they report seminal work in the field. It is expected at Master's level that you will mainly cite primary sources of research evidence – the original research papers that report and interpret the data. Secondary sources provide analysis, synthesis, interpretation and evaluation of primary research. Systematic reviews (if conducted well) are regarded as good quality secondary sources.

a. Finding evidence that is credible

There are many different tools available to help you find the evidence you need to support your work. Familiarise yourself with the library services that you will have available to you via the NHS and/or any university that you are affiliated to. As well as print resources, libraries also provide access to electronic resources often through multiple databases of curated content that may differ in terms of subjects covered, so be aware that you may need to search in more than one database! [Google Scholar](#) provides a straightforward way to search a broad range of scholarly literature online.

If you are including other sources of evidence beyond peer-reviewed journal articles (e.g. policy and strategy documents, clinical guidelines, patient information resources), it is important that you only use credible sources of evidence. Therefore, you should know how to recognise when a source is credible or not. A simple approach is to apply the CRAAP acronym developed by California State University:

- **Currency**: Is the source up to date?
- **Relevance**: Is the source relevant to your research?
- **Authority**: Where is the source published? Who is the author? Are they considered reputable and trustworthy in their field?
- **Accuracy**: Is the source supported by evidence? Are the claims cited correctly?
- **Purpose**: What was the motive behind publishing this source?

More examples of the questions that you can ask yourself when evaluating journal articles, books, web and news articles can be found at [Scribbr (Applying the CRAAP Test & Evaluating Sources](#).

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The skills that distinguish Master's level work from undergraduate level work are critical evaluation/appraisal and synthesis of the published research literature. These skills must be demonstrated in all the academic pieces of work submitted in the portfolio (essay and case studies).

5. Critical appraisal of published research

You need to use a range of current papers to underpin your arguments and key statements, but you should show that you can assess the quality of the papers you cite. This is critical appraisal and must be demonstrated in the academic pieces of work submitted in the portfolio. Generally, papers should be those reporting research, and you can demonstrate your ability to critically appraise by commenting on the rigour or power of the study. Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- Did the authors use an appropriate method to answer the research question?
- Was the sampling strategy likely to recruit a sample from the target population?
- Was the sample appropriate and of satisfactory size? How representative was the sample recruited?
- Were the correct methods used to analyse the data?
- Do you think the results justify the conclusions of the authors?
- Can the findings be generalised beyond the sample recruited?

You can then use your conclusions to make comments within the essay/case study.

'White et al. (2019) suggested that genetic counsellors are not well educated in the United Kingdom (UK). However, those authors used a small sample of only five genetic counsellors working in one genetic centre and there is therefore some doubt about the generalisability of the results. In contrast, Black et al. (2018) conducted a survey of 198 UK genetic counsellors from seventeen centres and found that almost all had been educated at Master's level.'

6. Synthesis of published research

You need to compare or contrast findings or group them together to show you can synthesise several pieces of evidence. It is not enough to make a list of descriptive statements such as:

'Bloggs et al. (2012) found that people with genetic conditions were worried about their children. Jones et al. (2019) found that people at risk of autosomal dominant conditions were most concerned about passing on the condition to their children. Parents carrying recessive conditions were also worried about their children being carriers (Smith, 2014).'

To show you can synthesise, you could work these statements together:

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Example: 'While some authors found that people with genetic conditions were concerned mainly about passing the condition to their children (Jones et al., 2019; Bloggs et al., 2012), Smith (2014) suggested that parents who carried recessive conditions were also worried about their children being carriers.

The Academic Phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers and gives examples of phrases that can be used when demonstrating the skills of analysis, synthesis and critiquing.

7. Plagiarism

Plagiarism, i.e. "Presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement" (University of Oxford https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism Accessed 22nd November 2024), is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

All the evidence used in your essay and case study should be referenced accurately and appropriately. (Section 8)

Essays and case studies must be checked for similarity and AI generated content before submission using the iThenticate platform. A copy of the report generated by iThenticate should be downloaded and submitted as a separate (PDF) document with your portfolio. GCRAB provides instructions for using iThenticate (including how to set up an iThenticate account) (**034_Doc**).

8. Referencing

You should use the American Psychological Association, seventh edition 'APA7' referencing style which includes in-text citations that use: the first author's surname (or organisation name, if for example it is a government report), 'et al.,' if there are multiple co-authors, and the year of publication.
Parenthetical citation: (Grady et al., 2019)
Narrative citation: Grady et al. (2019)

The use of sequential numbering for references ('Vancouver style') in the essay or case studies should not be used.

A reference list at the end of your essay or case study is also required. Note that each type of evidence (journal article, book chapter, website etc) will have its own APA7 format. Further details are available at APA Styles Reference Examples.

a. Software to manage your references

Software that allows you to store bibliographic information in one location and output the information as a formatted citation can be very useful; saving you time and frustration that often

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comes with the creation of a reference list. For individual pieces of writing that only contain a small number of references, you may feel that it is not worth the initial investment in time and effort required to start using a reference manager application for the first time. However, as you will be completing four outputs for your GCRAB submission you may well find that it is worth the effort and will also provide you with a great starting point to grow your own personalised library of references that you can add to and use for future work.

There are many reference manager applications available including Endnote, Mendeley and Zotero. Mendeley and Zotero are both free. GCRAB does not recommend or endorse the use of a specific application. Citations are easily imported from databases like PubMed or direct from a journal's website and can also be added 'by-hand' into the application. Some software also include 'cite while you write' (CWYW) capability which allows you to search your library for individual or multiple references, directly insert them into the document (e.g. Microsoft Word or Google Doc) that you are writing, and auto-generate a reference list/bibliography in the specific style format you require (e.g. APA7).

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