# Design of student materials

## Lecture handouts

### Format

* Electronic provision of handouts in Word format such as .doc or .docx.

### Text

* Left-aligned black text on light or cream coloured background.
* San serif font (eg Verdana, Arial, Calibri), one font style throughout, minimum size 12.
* Bold text for emphasis.

### Structure

* Use headings and sub-headings as navigational markers
* Use built-in styles for headings and sub-headings
* Separate text using bullet points or short paragraphs only
* Generous margins and line-spacing

### Format

Handouts and other documents which are published electronically (for example, via Moodle) should be provided in word format so that students are able to adapt the font size and style, as well as the colour of text and background colour, to best suit their needs. This is because the needs of individual students may differ. For example, some students find a pale colour text on a dark background simpler to read. Electronic materials, which are designed to be accessible, can be adapted by the student to suit their learning needs and are compatible with [assistive technology](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CenxcqvG7YFHMGZhEHQjQ_WDiArIMysn933KunJRzXA/edit).

### Text

“Not good when handouts ... are given in very small print - I can’t read it - good for saving paper but you don’t get the information!”

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

Use left-aligned text as margins justified on both sides create uneven spaces between words and are more difficult for students to read. Dark-coloured text on light coloured background will be accessible to most people. White backgrounds should be avoided in order to minimise glare. Red and green should also be avoided as this is problematic for anyone who is colour-blind.

Ornate fonts, such as Times New Roman, are more difficult for students to read than sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Verdana and Calibri. It is important that the font size is minimum 12.

Use bold text for emphasis as underlining and italics are more difficult to read. Similarly two or three words in capitals are acceptable but continuous text in capitals should be avoided.

### Structure

Headings and sub-headings are useful as navigational markers. The use of built-in styles facilitates access for students who make use of screen-readers and text to speech technology. The [documents are therefore more accessible](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1l238wVKd96RhSExuB7dYczcd_IWU9L8LzUQ3ZUmIeDs/edit).

Dense text and long sentences should be avoided on handouts as some students will find it difficult to extrapolate information from text. Generous margins and line-spacing create space on the page which makes documents easier to read. Hence the use of bullet points and short paragraphs is easier for students who struggle to read large volumes of text.

## Presentation slides

### Text

* Left-aligned black text on light or cream coloured background.
* San serif font (Verdana, Arial, Calibri), one font style throughout, minimum size 22.
* Bold text for emphasis.

### Structure

* Separate text using bullet points or short paragraphs only.
* Generous margins and line spacing.

### Animation

* Keep slide transitions to a simple fade where needed.
* Provide text descriptions for graphs or pictorial elements.

### Format

* Electronic provision of presentation slides in word format (with space for note taking) AND/OR
* Electronic provision as PowerPoint (remove lecture notes to enable students to write own notes).

### Text

Use left-aligned text as margins justified on both sides create uneven spaces between words and can be more difficult for students to read.

Dark-coloured text on light-coloured backgrounds is accessible for most students. White backgrounds should be avoided in order to minimise glare.

Red and green should also be avoided as this is problematic for anyone who is colour-blind.

Ornate fonts, such as Times New Roman, are more difficult to read than sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Verdana and Calibri. It is important that the font size used in slides is minimum 22.

Use bold text for emphasis as underlining and italics are more difficult to read. Similarly two or three words in capitals are acceptable but continuous text in capitals should be avoided. It is not recommended to use colour for emphasis, as a screen reader will not pick this out.

### Structure

“I don’t like too many words in there, lots of text is distracting”

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

Headings and sub-headings are useful as navigational markers. Use standard slide layouts to facilitate access for students who make use of screen readers and text to speech technology.

Dense text and long sentences should be avoided. Generous margins and line-spacing create space on the page which makes documents easier to read. Hence the use of bullet points and short paragraphs is easier for students who struggle to read large volumes of text.

### Animation

Animation and other effects can be disorienting and difficult to view and also may cause difficulty for screen readers and other forms of assistive technology. Hence these should only be used where crucial to the content of the presentation. Simple fades for transitions are acceptable.

### Format

Presentation slides which are published electronically (for example, via Moodle) may be provided in Word or PowerPoint format. Students are able to adapt the font size and style, as well as the colour of text and background colour, to best suit their needs on each of these formats. This is important because the needs of individual students may differ. For example, some students find a pale colour text on a dark background simpler to read.

There should be no more than two slides per page on word documents and space should be provided for note taking. Remove personal lecture notes from PowerPoint slides published electronically for students so that they can write their own notes. The [documents are therefore more accessible](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1l238wVKd96RhSExuB7dYczcd_IWU9L8LzUQ3ZUmIeDs/edit).

## Key terminology

* List key terminology and/or formulae with short explanations (this is an introduction only).
* Follow formatting and font guidelines set out under Lecture Handouts.

Provide a list of key terminology and/or formulae at the top of the lecture handout. Emphasise these in the handout or in the PowerPoint when used for the first time. Additionally it may be useful to provide a glossary of terminology and/or formulae for use throughout the module.

## Feedback on assignments

* Written individual feedback should be typed where possible.
* Oral feedback should be available either as an audio file and/or in contact time.
* Provide comments on how to improve as well as what has been done well.
* Provide pointers to lecture notes, cases, texts where this would aid student understanding or deepen knowledge.
* Supplement individual feedback with generic feedback.
* Provide examples of strong answers or model answers.
* Where students attach a blue card to their script, add a comment to acknowledge that this has been taken into account in the marking process.

It is useful to provide feedback in different formats (e.g. written, verbal, audio file). Written feedback should be typed to avoid difficulties of legibility. This may either be printed and attached to the coursework, or provided electronically on the individual’s coursework via Grademark or Turnitin. Feedback may be provided by means of in-line annotation with the Moodle assignment tool if the students' submissions are in .pdf format and with Grademark. For additional consistency rubrics may also be used with both Moodle assignments and Grademark. A source of information for staff who want to use online submission and marking in their modules is available at the [On-Line Assessment and Feedback](https://sites.google.com/brookes.ac.uk/olaf/home).

Individual feedback should make it clear what students did well and what they need to do to improve their work.

It is useful to supplement individual feedback with generic feedback, which highlights common strengths and weaknesses and can be given to the whole cohort. This should be posted on Moodle so that students can refer back to this as required.

Examples of strong answers, or model answers, provide an additional aid to understanding the requirements of the coursework and how to structure answers. Always ask permission from the writer of the “model” before using their work and anonymise where appropriate.

## Seminar and reading material

* Brief outline of topic objectives.
* Prioritised reading lists (e.g. essential, recommended, further reading).
* Questions to prepare.
* Follow guidance on lecture handouts for font style, size and layout.

It is useful to provide a summary of the learning objectives so that students have the ‘bigger picture’ before breaking it down into composite parts.

This will help a student with reading difficulties as a result of dyslexia to use prior knowledge and vocabulary as a scaffold.

Questions to prepare in advance of the seminar are useful. This enables students to focus their reading, take time to prepare, and prevents the possible embarrassment of having to read in class in order to answer questions.

Prioritised reading lists are helpful to ensure that students are able to focus on the key reading.

## Moodle Materials

### Section headings

* Clearly labelled headings by topic, rather than by date, to organise material.

### Section content

* Do not include longer text under topic or weekly headings, instead upload files and include links to longer text materials to keep each section uncluttered.

### Location of materials

* Uploaded materials and links to sources should be included in each relevant location (e.g. links to articles may be included in more than one topic area, seminar questions may be placed in module guide and under topic area).

### Coursework and assessment information

* Coursework information should be collated in one clearly labelled section.
* Include the submission date and time clearly in the heading.
* Coursework question(s) should be emphasised in bold.
* Include all information about font, deadlines, submission requirements and availability of feedback in one document.

### Supporting materials

* Embed a variety of supporting lecture resources into the relevant Moodle topics (e.g. podcasts, online tests, narrated PowerPoint slides, video, YouTube clips).

### Section headings

Headings which identify the subject matter of material contained within a particular section are helpful. These should be linked to semester week numbers where relevant. For example, Week 2: Registered and Unregistered Land. Sections heading which refer solely to a date or week number are less helpful as students have to search through other material, such as module handbooks, to find where a particular subject content is placed within the Moodle site.

### Section content

In the same way as bullet points facilitate reading of key points of information, a link to uploaded materials under the section headings facilitates easier reading of the contents available under each section within Moodle. Some students will be unable to skim read and will have difficulty in finding information if they have to keep scrolling through text. Hence, for example, upload a document which contains the seminar questions rather than pasting the questions themselves under the relevant section heading. Uploading the document will create a link which students can click to take them to those questions.

### Location of materials

“…example of a history module that has in Moodle a very nice lay out: introductory bit (that explains what the module is about) … [each] week there is a drop box of things you need to do, drop box by topic, helpful lay out because it’s easier to understand the work that you need to do.”

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

Some students will have difficulties finding information if they have to look through dense text and also forget where information is stored. It is useful, therefore, to place links to documents in each relevant section within Moodle. For example, a link to an article which is relevant to more than one seminar topic should be placed under each relevant topic heading. It is also useful to have a folder above the topic headings which contains links to all additional reading materials which are available through the Moodle site. In another example, it may be useful to have a link to the seminar questions for each particular topic under the relevant section for that topic as well as within the module guide.

### Coursework and assessment information

Follow guidance on lecture handouts for structure, formatting and font styles and sizes when collating all course information into one document. It is good parctice to give guidance on useful sources, such as specific journals, search terms for cases and academic writers. To encourage the use of feedback as part of the learning process, we recommend explaining here what format feedback will be given in and how it can be accessed.

### Supporting materials

A range of materials maximises the opportunity for students to learn, particularly those who have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear (Sloan, Stone and Stratford, 2006).

## Important Information and emails

### Important information and notices

* Use more than one form of notification if possible (email, notice in class, Moodle).

### Emails

* Concise paragraphs.
* Use headings to separate points in longer emails.
* Bold text for emphasis.
* Larger font size may be useful.