

Language Usage: Shortened Forms of Words

For most academic essays, you are expected to use a formal writing style. You need to learn about the **DOs** and **DON'Ts** of this style so that you can edit your work effectively. Also, when you shorten words or phrases for academic writing, there are specific punctuation and capitalisation rules that must be followed. You should understand some basic rules about:

1. Shortened words
2. Shortened phrases
3. Other common abbreviations



GRAMMAR CHECKERS do not flag the use of shortened forms of words. They have no idea of the appropriateness of these shortened forms in your academic writing and will not signal their correct or incorrect use. You need to know the correct punctuation, capitalisation, and rules of use.

1. Shortened words

Most shortened forms of words are not acceptable in your formal writing. There are two main types of shortened words: contractions and abbreviations. You need to know about these when you are writing so that you can proofread your writing for correct usage.

• Contractions

There are two types of contractions: grammatical contractions and single word contractions.

1. **Grammatical contractions** join together two words to make a single word. In formal writing, you need to retain the two words.

Examples: ~~it's~~ (it is, it has); ~~don't~~ (do not); ~~can't~~ (cannot); ~~you'll~~ (you will); ~~should've~~ (should have); ~~would've~~ (would have); ~~we're~~ (we are); ~~aren't~~ (are not); ~~isn't~~ (is not); ~~shan't~~ (shall not); ~~let's~~ (let us); ~~who's~~ (who is, who has); ~~they're~~ (they are); ~~doesn't~~ (does not)

2. **Single word contractions** are the shortened form of words that begin and end with the same letters as the original word and do NOT have a full stop. Generally speaking, you should avoid using these in your writing unless they are commonly used in a particular field of study (discipline) or used in a reference list or in-text citation.

Examples: ~~govt~~ (government), ~~dept~~ (department), ~~Cwth~~ (Commonwealth), ~~Qld~~ (Queensland)

• Abbreviations

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word that does NOT end in the same letter as the original word. Generally, full stops are used. Unless the word is used in your reference list or is an accepted form for in-text references, it is important to follow the rules for formal writing and write the term in full.

1. **Days and months:** Write in full in your text but use the correct standard abbreviation for longer months when it is used in your reference list

Examples: Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.

2. **Compass points:** Write in full in your text and hyphenate compound forms—do not capitalise unless you use the abbreviated form in diagrams or illustrations.

Examples: north, south, east, west, south-western, south-easterly winds

3. **Geographical features:** Always write the full name of geographical features in your written text—do not use abbreviations as you would do on a map or diagram.

Examples: Sydney Harbour, North Island, Snowy Mountains, Brisbane River, Cape York

2. Shortened phrases

There are TWO main types of shortened phrases: acronyms and initialisms. Most shortened phrases are acceptable in your formal writing if you follow the rules. Some shortened phrases can be used as acronyms and initialisms without writing in the full term first as explained below, but this will depend on discipline requirements and common usage.



RULE: If the full name is required first, then give the full name on the first occurrence followed by the shortened form in parentheses/brackets. Then, you can use the shortened form for the rest of the essay (e.g., The **University of New England (UNE)** reported that students needed training in plagiarism issues. Consequently, the program at **UNE** now requires students to ...). DO NOT give the shortened form unless you intend to use it again in your writing.

• Acronyms

Acronyms are strings of initial letters of a group of words/phrase that are PRONOUNCED as a word. They are usually written in capitals, but some more familiar acronyms use lower case.

Examples: TAFE, NATO, WHO, AIDS, ROM, ATSC, CD, Telstra, Anzac, Qantas, scuba, radar

• Initialisms

Initialisms are strings of initial letters that are PRONOUNCED letter by letter. The initials are written in capital letters and no full stops are used.

1. **Geographical terms:** Always write the names of countries and geographical places in full in your formal academic texts

Examples: United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), New Zealand (NZ)

2. **Australian states and territories:** Write in full the first time, then use the correct standard abbreviation—In **New South Wales (NSW)**, the law states that ...

Examples: NSW, Vic., Qld, WA, SA, Tas., ACT

3. **Commonly known terms:** If a term is mostly known by its initials, then you can use it that way; otherwise, you must follow the rule.

Examples: UNE, DVD, HTML, IBM, ABC, BBC, IRA, FAQ, DNA, IOU, TB, NESB



- If you need to make an acronym into a plural, then add a lower case 's' **without** using an apostrophe (e.g., TAFEs, PhDs, IQs).
- While a shortened phrase may be in capitals, only use capital letters for the full name if the original words require capitals (e.g., TB=tuberculosis, FAQs=frequently asked questions)

3. Other common abbreviations

• **AVOID USING COMMON ABBREVIATIONS.** It is BEST to write the full term in the text of your writing.

Examples:

- cf. (use **compare** instead)
- e.g. (use **for example** instead)
- etc. (use **and so forth** instead)
- i.e. (use **that is** instead)
- viz. (use **namely** instead)
- vs. (use **versus/against** instead)
- & (use **and** instead)
- NB (use **note that** instead)



If you do use the abbreviations i.e. or e.g., then they must be placed inside parentheses (brackets).

For example:

The rules of plagiarism, that is, copying another's work inappropriately, were carefully explained.

OR

The rules of plagiarism (i.e., copying another's work inappropriately) were carefully explained.