

Guide to avoiding common mistakes found in PGCE coursework

Many items of coursework submitted by BTs (not just or indeed particularly IT PGCE BTs) suffer from deficiencies in their use of English. Below, in no particular order, are some points designed to help you avoid the more common problems. In addition you will find help on referencing, formatting and distinguishing fact from opinion.

1. 'Its' when indicating possession, does NOT have an apostrophe.
2. Plurals of dates or abbreviations do NOT have apostrophes.
3. 'a girls' school' is correct – 'a girl's school' is not
4. Collective nouns (e.g. staff) are singular so 'There is a large staff' not 'There are a large staff'.
5. Similarly, 'there is a large number of resources' is correct not 'there are...'
6. Numbers in the text denoting small quantities should be written as words, but numbers can be used to denote years and key stages.
7. 'Oral' should be used to refer to the spoken word not 'verbal'.
8. Titles of books given in the text should be in italics.
9. Full references should be given for all publications (including web sites) quoted or mentioned.
10. A reference to a web site should include the date on which it was last accessed.
11. Shortened forms and acronyms (e.g. GNVQ) can be used in the text but the first time they are mentioned the full name should be given followed by the shortened form in brackets.
12. One way of avoiding the his/her problem is to change to the plural form e.g. 'All teachers have their own computer room'.
13. Please retain confidentiality. People should not be named in your coursework.
14. Sentences should have verbs and almost invariably a subject and/or an object – usually both. Many written by BTs do not.
15. Please try and avoid the 'Star Trek' syndrome of split infinitives, i.e. not 'to boldly go' but either 'boldly to go' or 'to go boldly'.
16. Paragraphs should normally have more than one sentence.
17. Paragraphs are groups of sentences related to one point.
18. Block paragraphs (c.f. indented ones) should have a space between them so that the reader can easily see where they start.
19. When you give a quotation in the text, indent it on both left and right and give the page reference as well as the author and date. However when a quotation is very short it can be inserted directly into the text – but the page etc. must still be given.
20. There is a tendency to rely on spell-checkers. However, as the previous sentence shows, this can be a mistake. Spell-checkers only tell you if a word exists in English (or American) not whether it is the correct one to use.
21. Clearly distinguish three things: what you know to be the case (e.g. a room has ten computers); what you believe to be the case (e.g. you could teach something better than you have seen it taught); and what others (in the literature) have claimed to be the case (e.g. Papert believes that Logo is wonderful).
22. Where you present your beliefs/value judgements you need to give evidence for them.