301 Academic Skills Resource:
Headings and Tables of Contents

Most essays only include the essay title and reference/bibliography list heading. Section headings may be required for some longer or more structured types of academic writing, such as project reports, dissertations and theses.

Check the specific formatting guidelines issued with your brief and make sure that formatting is consistently applied throughout the document.

Longer lab reports may require a table of contents to help the reader navigate between sections. Contents tables are generally standard practice in longer assignments such as dissertations and theses.

Correctly formatted headings are important for accessibility of digital documents, and make it possible for screen-readers to separate each section of text.

The example lab report used in this document is taken from the Engineering department guide to lab report writing, written by Adam Beagles, Stephen Beck, Lizzy Cross, Andrew Garrard and Jen Rowson.

Creating headings in Microsoft Word

1. Check your assignment description for advice on the headings your document will need to include. It is easier to set up your heading formatting first, and then use headings as you write, rather than going through a large document later to create headings.
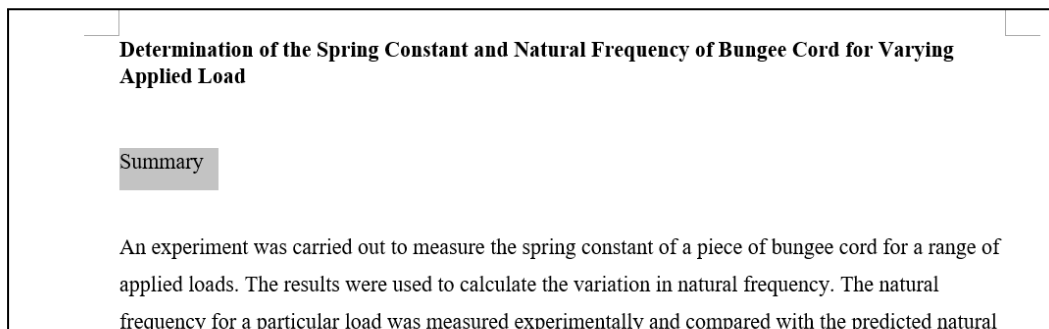

2. Highlight the relevant heading. Go to the Styles Gallery of the main Home menu tab. Select a heading from the styles options. Make sure to use a consistent system throughout the document, e.g. selecting heading 1 for main headings and heading 2 for subheadings.
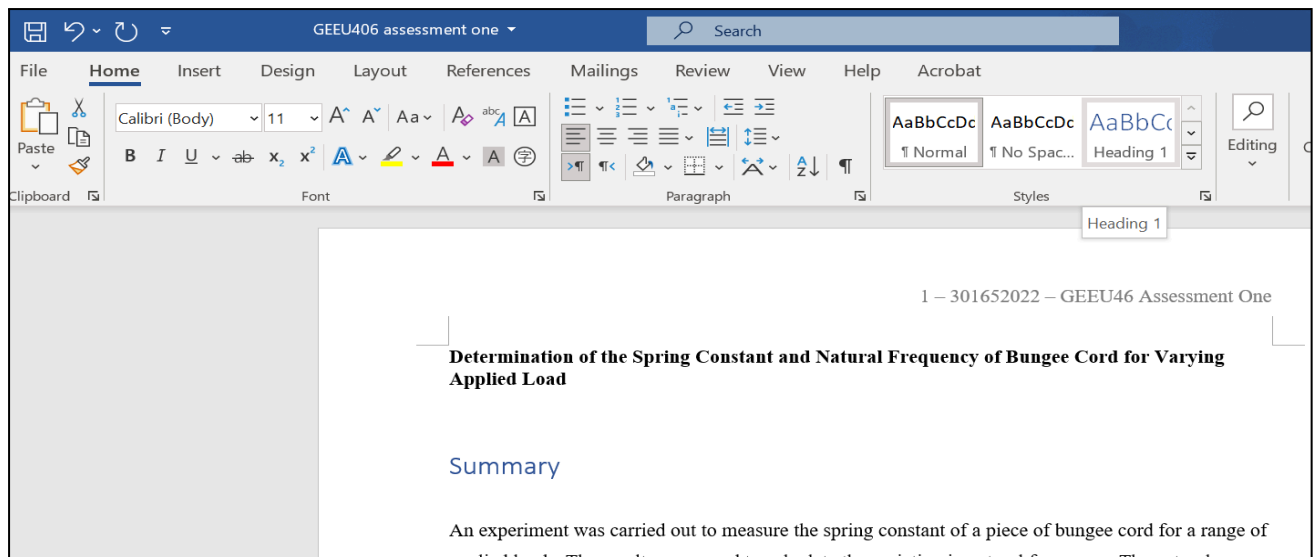
3. You can adapt the heading format to match your guidance (e.g. the font, colour, and text size of the headings). Once one heading is in your preferred format, you can save these settings by right clicking the Heading type in the Style Gallery and selecting Update Heading to Match Selection. After this, every heading of that type will look the same.
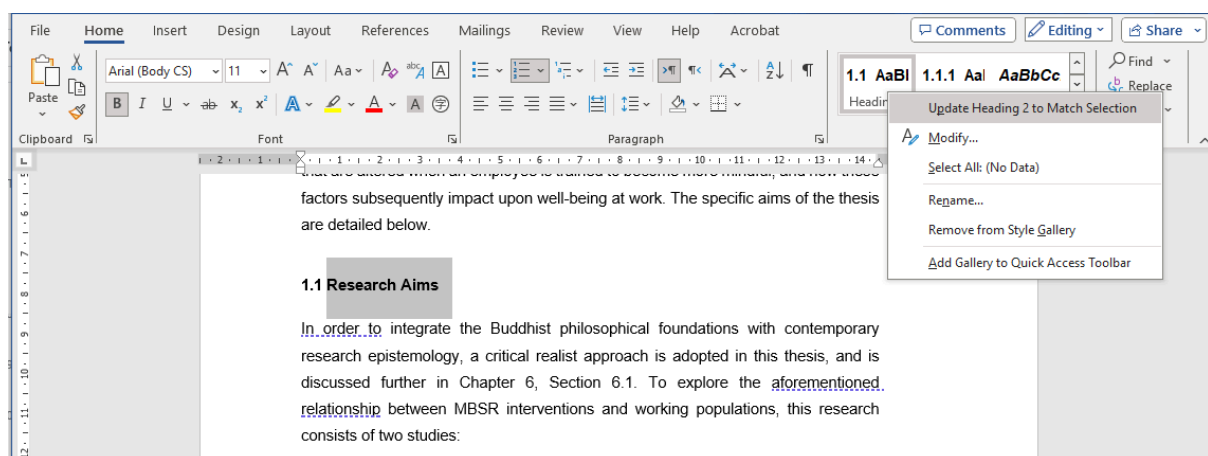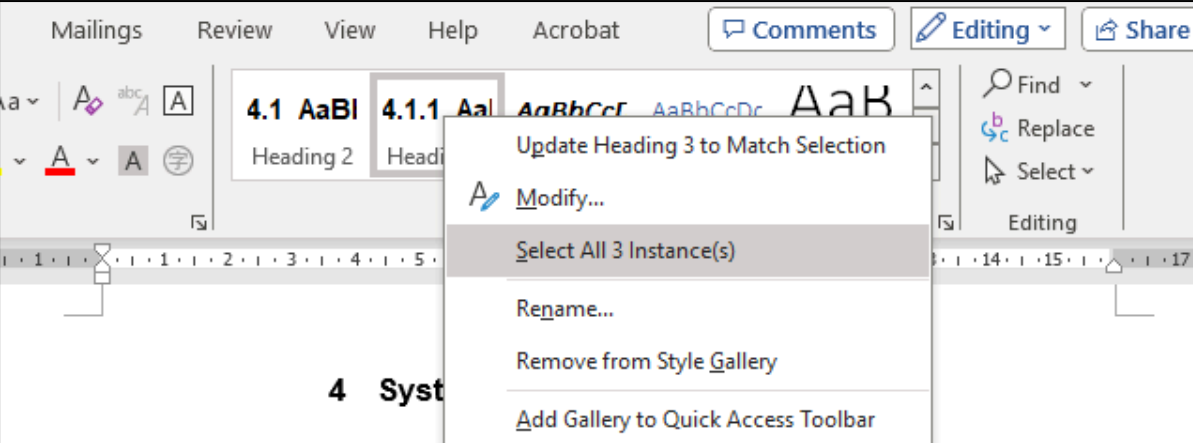

4. Even if you are not generating a contents page, it is recommended that you use properly tagged and formatted headings. Having heading types saved in the Gallery ensures that all of your formatting is consistent, saves time and makes the document more accessible for screen-readers. Headings are also used in the navigation pane (turn this on in the View menu), which helps your reader navigate the digital file easily. (see below)
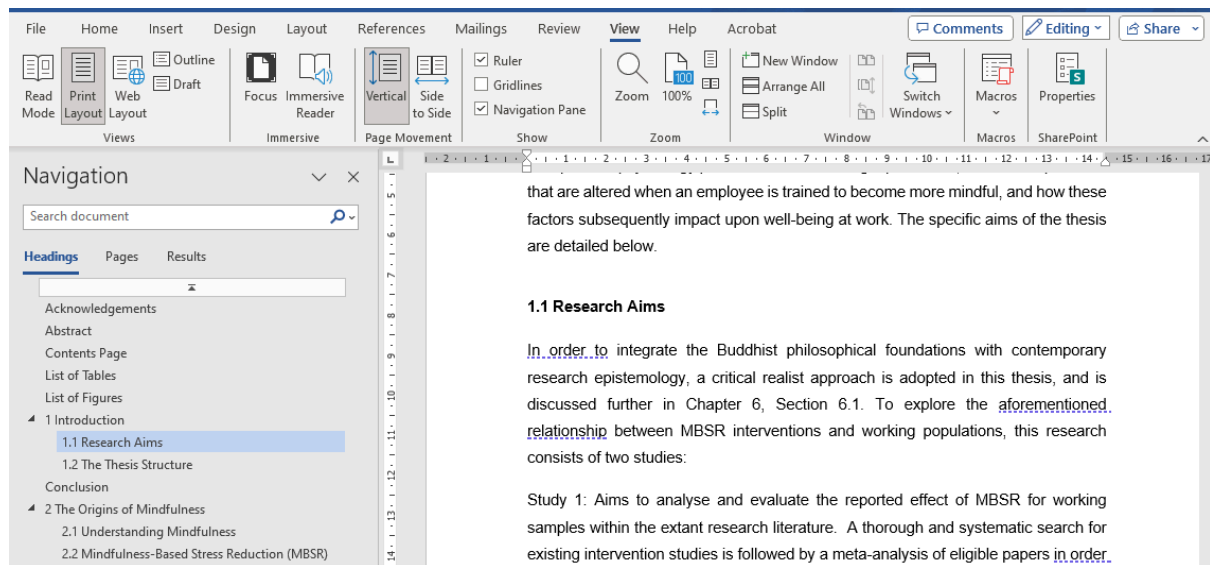
5. Whilst formatting your headings, you may wish to number them. This aids readability when there are multiple levels of headings and sub-headings. Create a consistent system using numbers and sub-numbers (e.g. 2.1, 2.2, etc). Once you have added numbers, indentation, or specific line spacing to a heading, you can again update the heading type as shown in step 3. Above.

6. The below example includes Four levels of headings (Heading Styles 1-4) set up according to APA guidelines (with some variation), the four headings types also appear in the navigation pane.
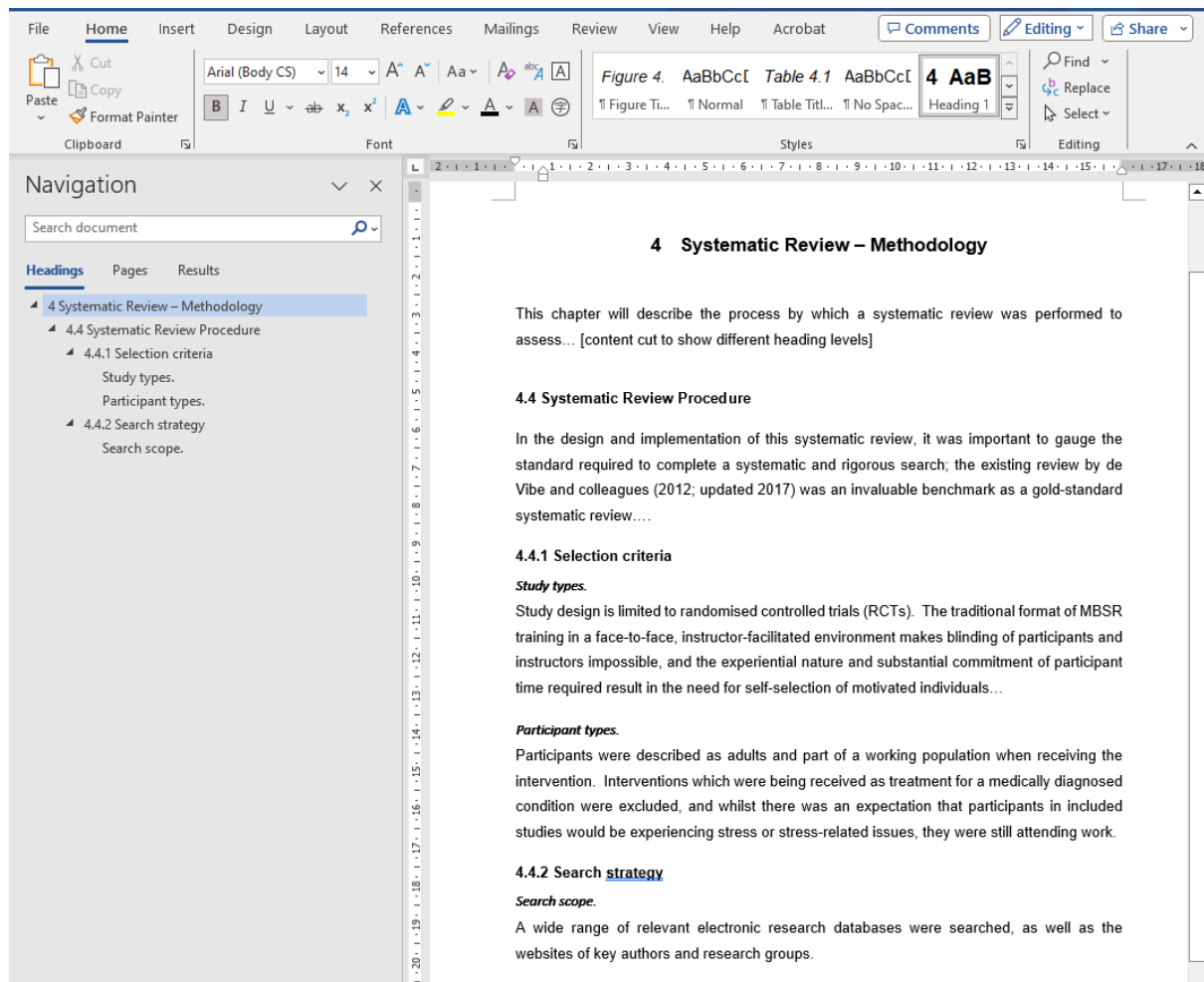
7. An advantage of saving your heading formatting to the Style Gallery, is that if you decide to change the formatting of a saved heading type, this can be applied to all existing headings of that type in your document, saving a lot of time. To do this, right-click on the heading style in the Style Gallery and click Select All (see below). You can now make changes that will apply to all of the selected headings. If you then want to replace the save formatting with these changes, you can do this by following step 3. again.

4.1 AaBl   **4.1.1 Aal**   *AaBbCcL*   AaBbCcDc   AaB

Heading 2   Headi

Update Heading 3 to Match Selection

A✏️ Modify...

Select All 3 Instance(s)

Rename...

Remove from Style Gallery

Add Gallery to Quick Access Toolbar

🔍 Find ⌄
↻ Replace
Select ⌄

Editing

4   Syst

This chapter will describe the process by which a systematic review was performed to assess... [content cut to show different heading levels]

4.1.1 Systematic Review Procedure

In the design and implementation of this systematic review, it was important to gauge the standard required to complete a systematic and rigorous search; the existing review by de Vibe and colleagues (2012; updated 2017) was an invaluable benchmark as a gold-standard systematic review....

4.1.2 Selection criteria

Study types.

Study design is limited to randomised controlled trials (RCTs). The traditional format of MBSR training in a face-to-face, instructor-facilitated environment makes blinding of participants and instructors impossible, and the experiential nature and substantial commitment of participant time required result in the need for self-selection of motivated individuals...

Participant types.

Participants were described as adults and part of a working population when receiving the intervention. Interventions which were being received as treatment for a medically diagnosed condition were excluded, and whilst there was an expectation that participants in included studies would be experiencing stress or stress-related issues, they were still attending work.

4.1.3 Search strategy

Search scope.

A wide range of relevant electronic research databases were searched, as well as the websites of key authors and research groups.

8. Another advantage of saved headings is that the heading types are linked hierarchically, so for example, if you moved the chapters around in a thesis, so that your previous Chapter 4 was now Chapter 3, as long as the Chapter Level heading has the correct number applied, the numbering of all lower heading levels will automatically change to match the Chapter heading. Similarly, if you delete a numbered subsection, the later sections will be renumbered so that there is no gap in the numbering order.

Things to check at this point:

- ☐ Is the style of heading I have used saved to the Style Gallery consistently applied throughout the document?

- ☐ Is the style of numbering I have used saved to the Style Gallery and consistently applied throughout the document?

- ☐ Does the style and numbering of the headings match the instructions given in my assignment description?

- ☐ Does the style and numbering of the headings match the instructions given in my referencing guide?

- ☐ Are my headings clearly distinguishable from the body of the text?

- ☐ Do the font and colours used in the headings match with the rest of the format of the document?

Creating headings in Google Docs

1. Check your assignment description for advice on the headings your report or dissertation will need to include. It is easier to set up your heading formatting first, and then use headings as you write, rather than going through a large document later to create headings.

**Determination of the Spring Constant and Natural Frequency of Bungee Cord for Varying Applied Load**

Summary

An experiment was carried out to measure the spring constant of a piece of bungee cord for a range of applied loads. The results were used to calculate the variation in natural frequency. The natural frequency for a particular load was measured experimentally and compared with the predicted natural frequency, calculated from the spring constant. The two values were found to be in good agreement.

2. Highlight the relevant heading. Go to the 'styles' section of the main home toolbar. Select a heading from the pre-made styles. Make sure to use a consistent system throughout the document, e.g. selecting heading 1 for main headings and heading 2 for subheadings.
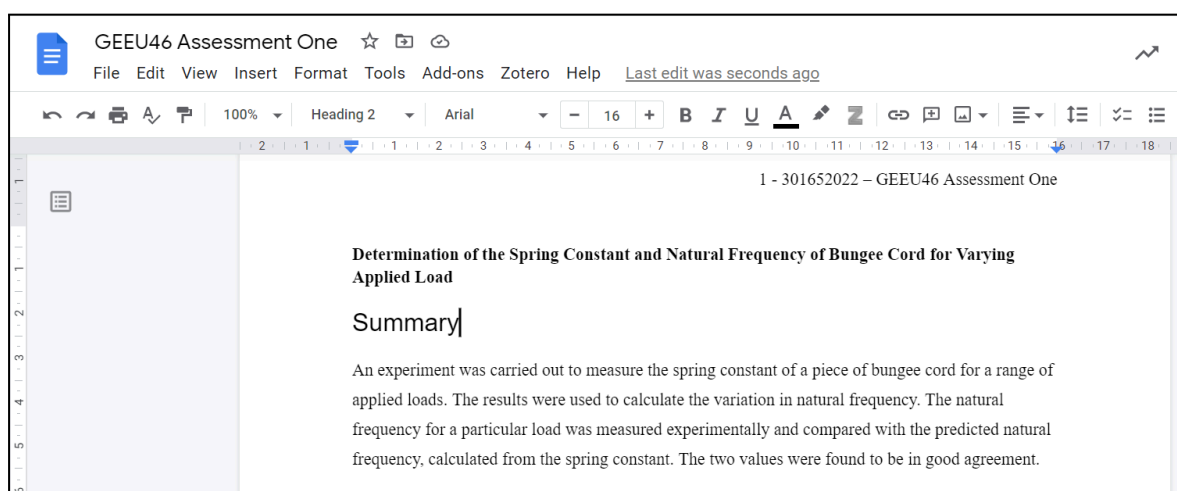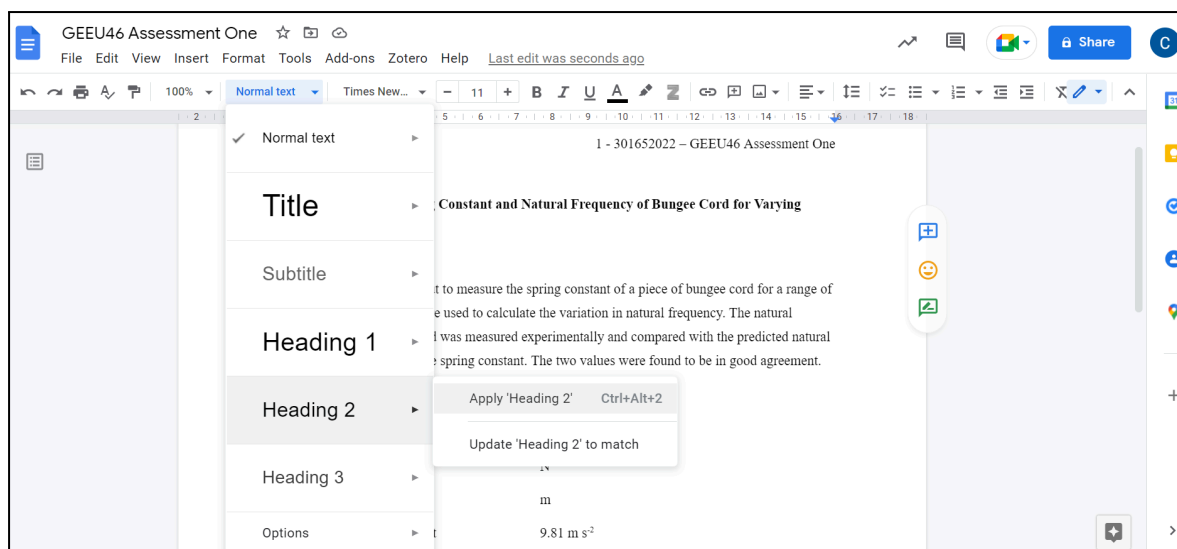
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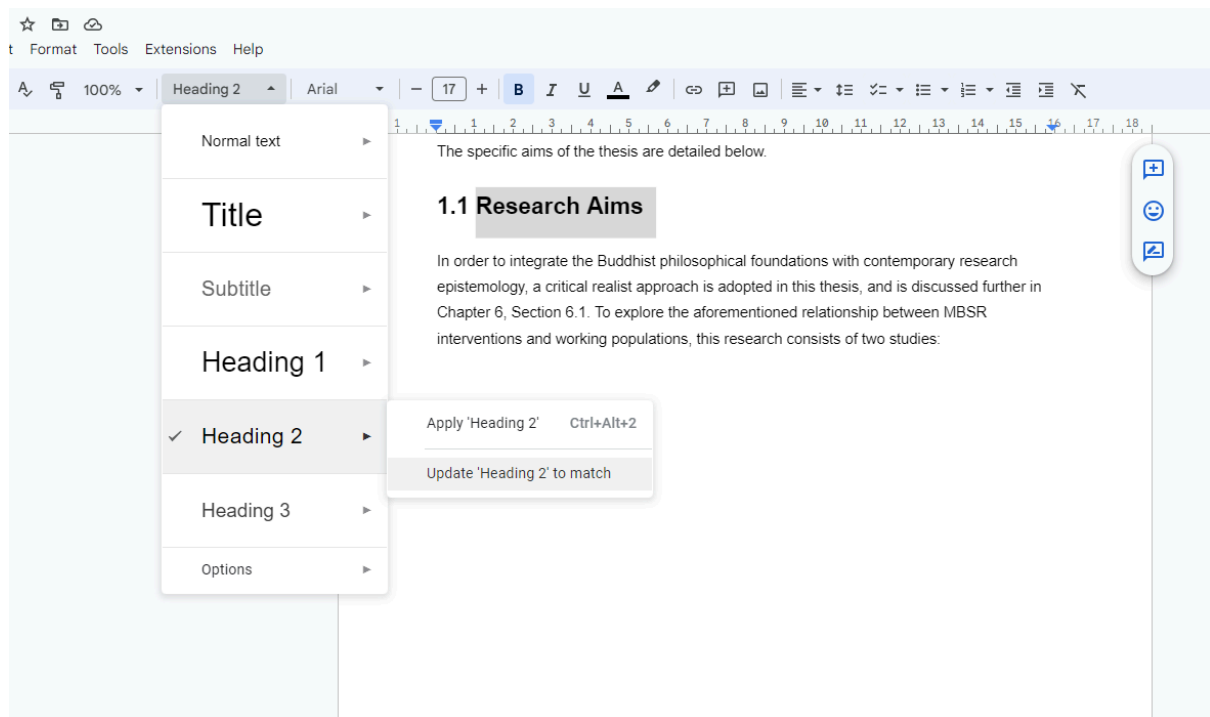
4. Even if you are not generating a contents page, it is recommended that you use properly tagged and formatted headings. Having heading types saved ensures that all of your formatting is consistent, saves time and makes the document more accessible for screen-readers. Headings are also used in the document outline panel (click the circular button at the top-left of the page which says Show document outline when hovered over), which helps your reader navigate the digital file easily. (see below)
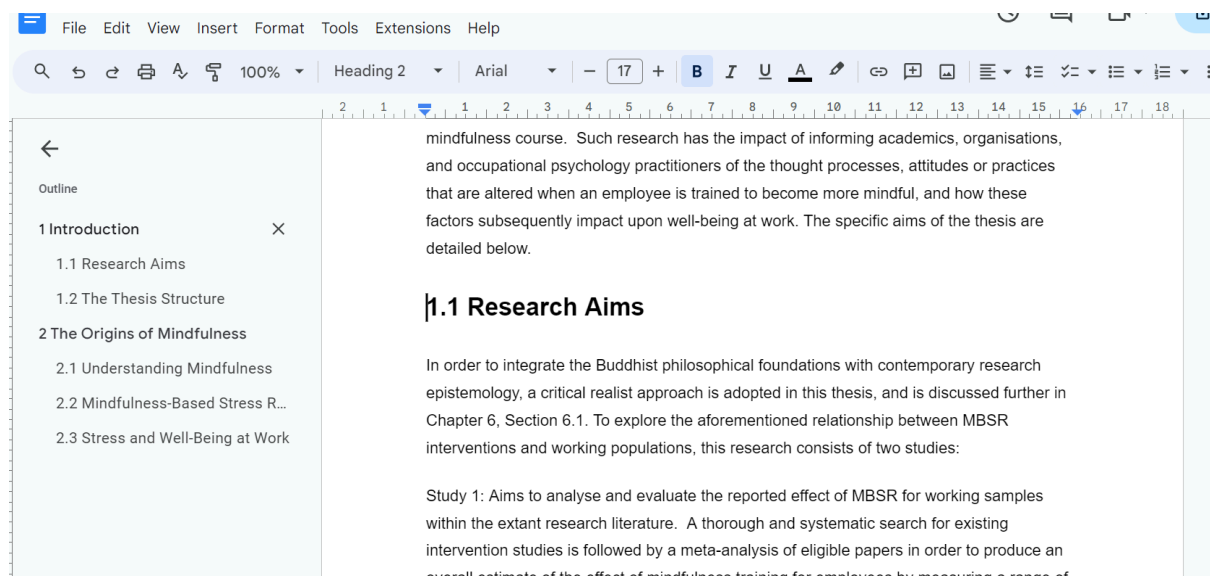
5. Whilst formatting your headings, you may wish to number them. This aids readability when there are multiple levels of headings and sub-headings. Create a consistent system using numbers and sub-numbers (e.g. 2.1, 2.2, etc). Once you have added numbers, indentation, or specific line spacing to a heading, you can again update the heading type as shown in step 3. Above.

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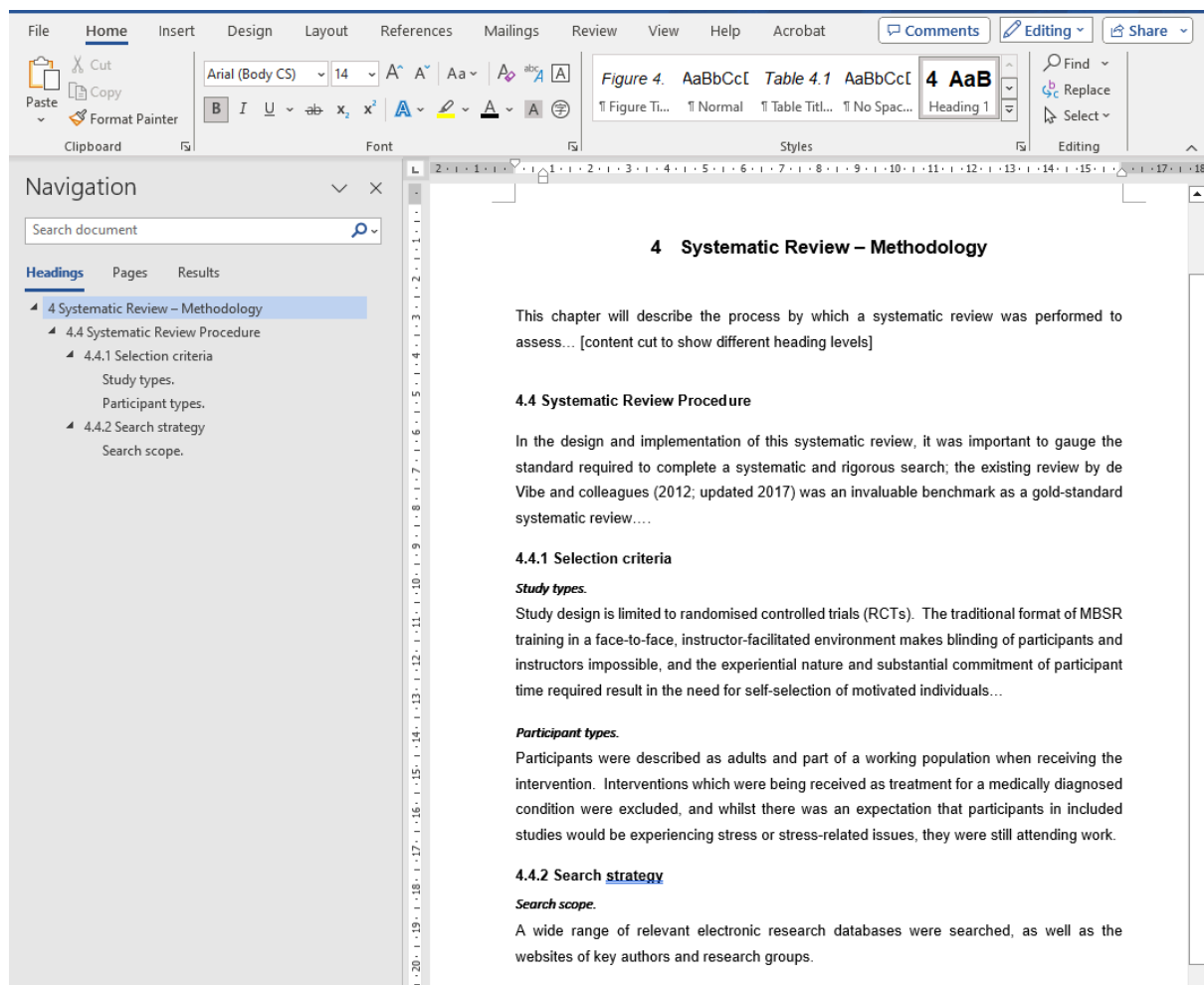
Things to check at this point:

☐ Is the style of heading saved and have I used it consistently applied throughout the document?

☐ Is the style of numbering I have used consistently applied throughout the document?

☐ Does the style and numbering of the headings match the instructions given in my assignment description?

☐ Does the style and numbering of the headings match the instructions given in my referencing guide?

☐ Are my headings clearly distinguishable from the body of the text?

☐ Do the font and colours used in the headings match with the rest of the format of the document?
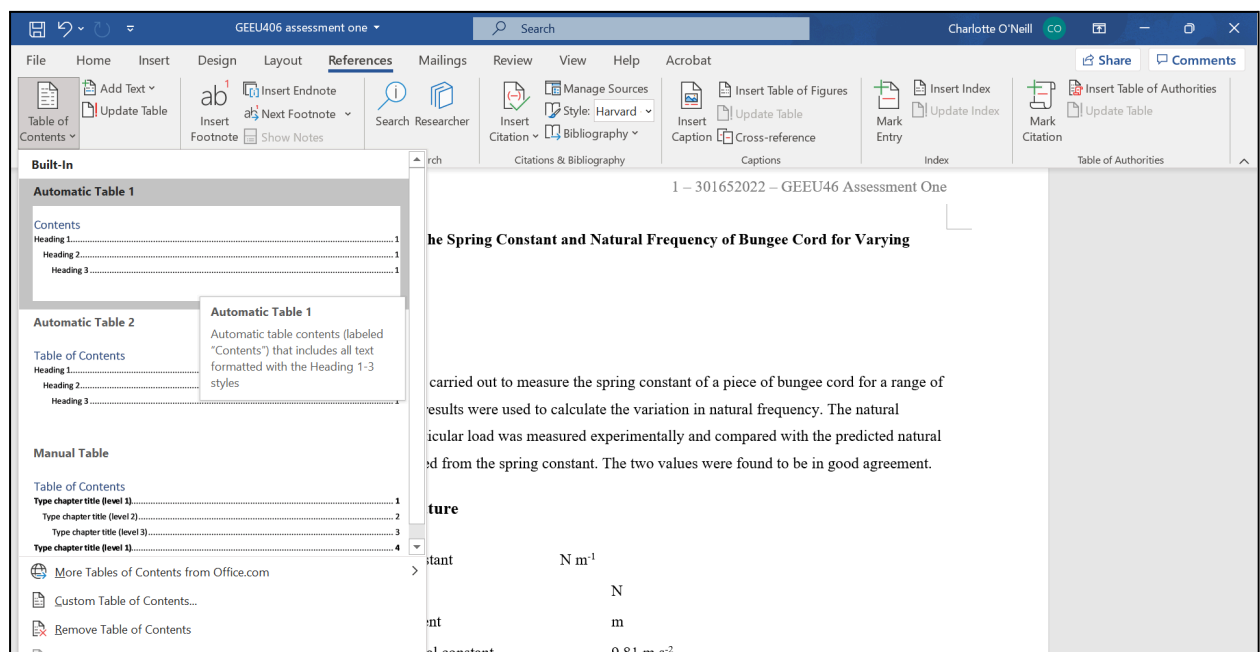
Creating a table of contents in Microsoft Word

1. When you have created your headings using the Word headings settings (see above), you can automatically create a table of contents. Click into the section of the document where you would like to insert the contents table (usually below any titular information).

2. Switch to the 'References' tab in the main toolbar and click the 'Table of Contents' button. This will bring up a drop down menu with various different options for automatic and customisable table formats. Select the option you would like to use.

3. This will automatically create a table of contents that matches the heading style you have used in the document. As illustrated below, you can change aspects of the font, text colour, etc. to match your preferred formatting style or any specific instructions in your referencing guide or assignment description.
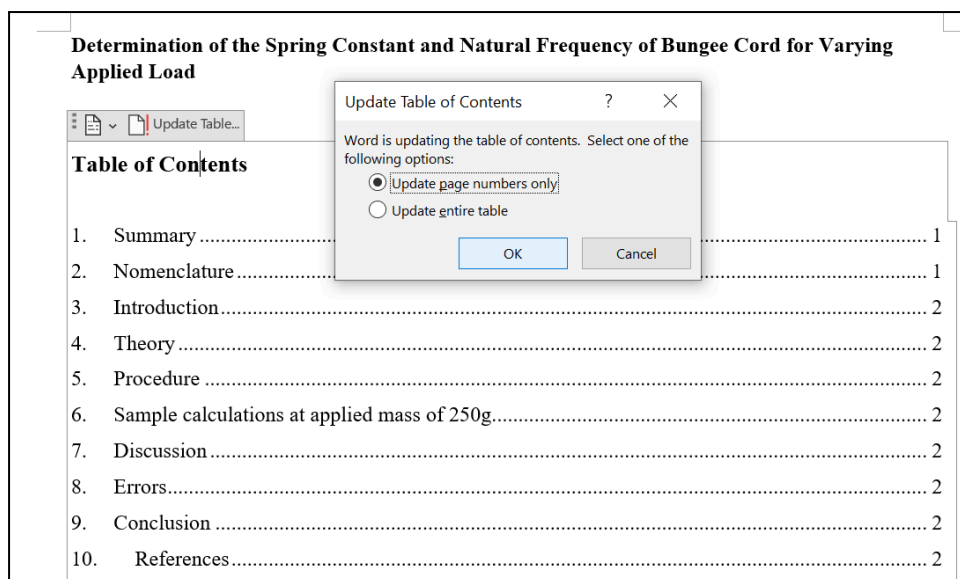
Contents

Table of Contents

4. To automatically update the table as you add additional headings or pages to the document, hover your cursor over the table and click the 'Update Table' button. You will be given the option to update the entire table, or just the page numbers.

Determination of the Spring Constant and Natural Frequency of Bungee Cord for Varying Applied Load

Update Table...

Table of Contents

Update Table of Contents   ?   ✕

Word is updating the table of contents. Select one of the following options:

◉ Update page numbers only
◯ Update entire table

OK   Cancel

Update Table...

Table of Contents

5. Before you submit, double check that the contents table is correctly organised and that the headings match the page numbers.

Creating a table of contents in Google Docs

1. When you have created your headings using the Google Docs headings settings (see above), you can automatically create a table of contents. Click into the section of the document where you would like to insert the contents table (usually below any titular information).
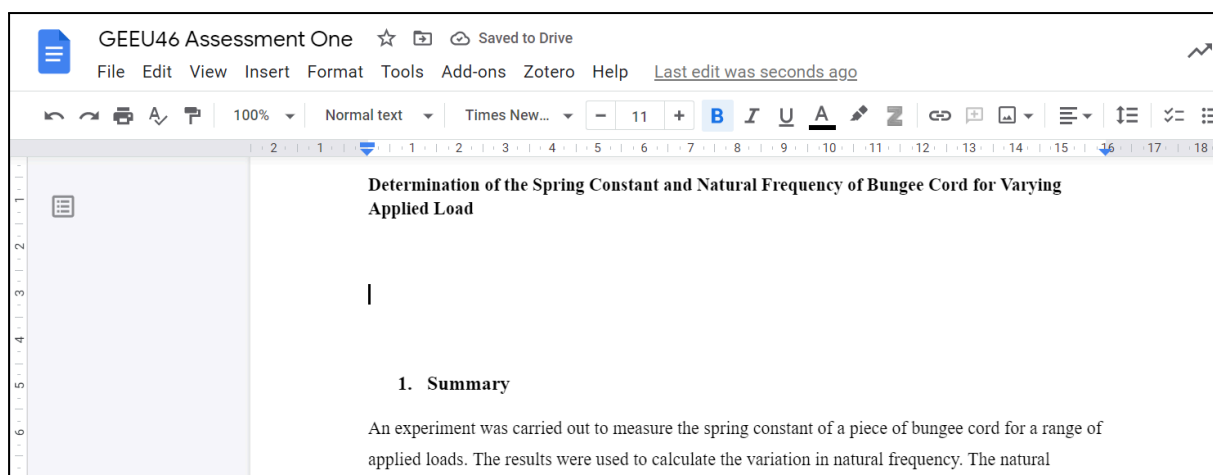
2. Click the 'Insert' menu in the main toolbar. Scroll down to the bottom of the drop-down menu and click 'Table of Contents'. Select the 'with page numbers' option.
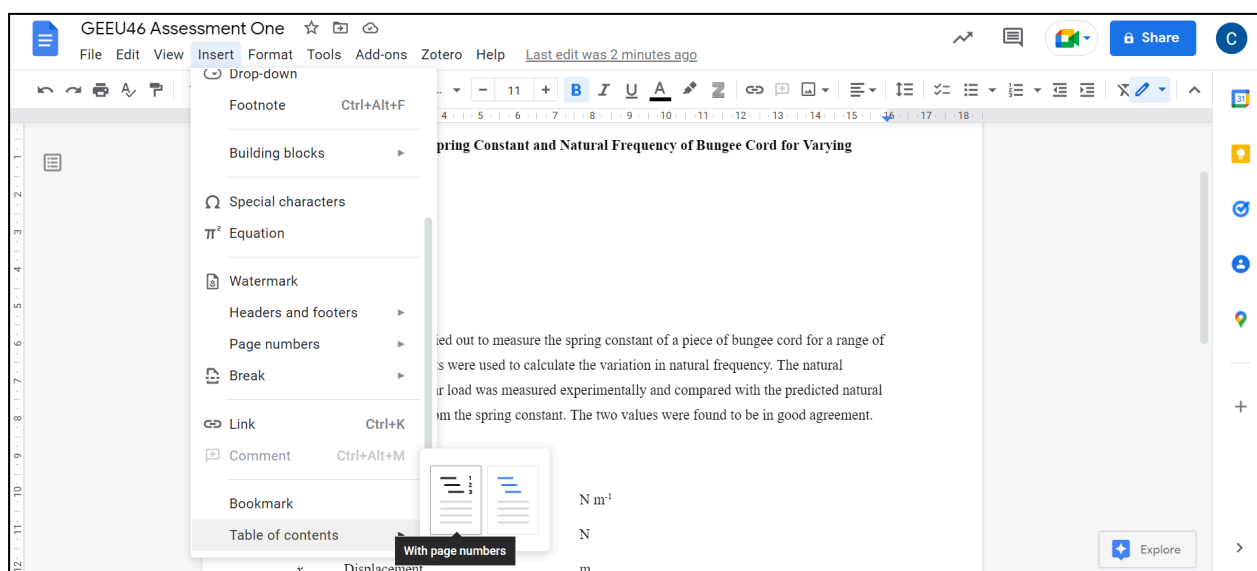
3. This will automatically create a table of contents. As illustrated below, you can change aspects of the font, text colour, etc. to match your preferred formatting style or any specific instructions in your referencing guide or assignment description. Google Docs does not add a 'Table of Contents' heading, so make sure to add this if your referencing guide specifies that you should do so.

Table of contents

4. To automatically update the table as you add additional headings or pages to the document, hover your cursor over the table and click the refresh symbol. Sometimes the formatting of the table is changed when the table of contents is updated, so make sure to check the table formatting at the end.

Determination of the Spring Constant and Natural Frequency of Bungee Cord for Varying Applied Load

Table of contents

Update table of contents

5. Before you submit, double check that the contents table is correctly organised and that the headings match the page numbers.