

Guidance for using the assignment brief template

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY

Assignment Brief

Academic Year 2021-22

Module code and title:	E.g. AB123 Research methods	Module leader:	E.g. Alan Smith
Assignment No. and type:	E.g. CW1: Research proposal	Assessment weighting:	E.g. 100%
Submission time and date:	E.g. Before 14.00, 2 nd Nov 2021	Target feedback end date:	E.g. Before 14.00, 23 rd November 2021

Assignment task
Please see section 1 of the Guidance on using the Assignment Brief template document.

This assignment has been designed to provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the following module learning outcomes:

LO1	Include text of learning outcomes here. delete rows if not required
LO2	Include text of learning outcomes here. delete rows if not required
LO3	Include text of learning outcomes here. delete rows if not required
LO4	Include text of learning outcomes here. delete rows if not required
LO5	Include text of learning outcomes here. delete rows if not required

Task requirements
• Please see section 3 of the Guidance on using the Assignment Brief template document.

Referencing and research requirements
Please reference your work according to the [name of style] style as defined in Cite Them Right Online (<http://www.cite-them-right.com>). This information is also available in book form: Peers, R. and Macmillan. Copies are available via the University library.
Please see section 4 of the Guidance on using the Assignment Brief template document.

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Internal approval: Name, Date

About this document

The following recommendations represent an initial guide to the preparation of assignment briefs using the assignment brief template. Numbered main headings correspond to the relevant sections of the template, sub-headings refer to key aspects of those sections that should be considered when framing the brief. Sections in yellow in the assignment brief template are intended to be edited according to the requirements of particular assignments and/or deleted if irrelevant.

The guidance in this document is based on a growing body of scholarship and research into assignment brief design and its impact upon learning and teaching. Gilbert and Maguire's *Assignment brief guidelines: developing academic communication to enhance the student experience of assessment* (2014) produced by Oxford Brookes University and the HEA has been particularly useful. A copy of this publication is available in [BEN](#).

Scrutiny and approval of assignment briefs

The University's Assessment and Feedback Policy (2017) sets out requirements for the internal and external scrutiny and formal approval of assessments and reassessments before they are made available to students. The policy can be viewed on the university [website](#).

Please ensure that the Quality Assurance Record in the footer of the first page of the assignment brief template is completed and kept up to date.

Making assignment briefs available to students

Before making the final, approved brief available to students via Blackboard, please ensure that any text highlighted in yellow has been edited or removed as required and the 'DRAFT' watermark has been removed. The following instructions assume you will be using Microsoft Word:

On Windows computers:

1. Go to the **Design** tab
2. In the **Page Background** group, click **Watermark**
3. Click **Remove Watermark**
4. Save your document

On Macintosh computers:

1. Go to the **Design** tab
2. Click on **Watermark**
3. Select **No watermark**
4. Click **OK**
5. Save your document

Before publishing the final, approved brief to Blackboard, please save it in PDF format:

On Windows computers:

1. Go to **the File menu**
2. Select **Save As**
3. In the **Save as type** menu, select **PDF**
4. Click **Save**

On Macintosh computers:

1. Go to the **File menu**
2. Select **Save As**
3. In the **File Format** menu, select **Export Formats > PDF**
4. Click **On My Mac** to save to your machine or **Export** to save to a another location

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1 Submission date and time

When specifying the date and time for submissions and feedback in the table at the top of the brief, please use the 24-hour clock and the long date (i.e., 14 February 2023) to avoid any possibility of ambiguity.

Where appropriate (i.e., on distance and international courses, please specify that the deadline is defined according to UK time.

Please note that the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy (2017) requires electronic or hard copy coursework submissions to be received before 14.00 on the due date.

1 Assignment task

This section should include a clear, concise and well-laid out description of the assignment task.

Bear in mind that writing effective instructional text can be challenging – consider asking a colleague to read over the brief and check it for clarity. Academic Practice and Curriculum Development and Student Learning and Achievement are also useful sources of advice on framing assignment tasks.

Please consider the following aspects of your assignment task:

- Purpose and assignment type
- Authenticity
- Structure
- PSRB requirements
- Word limit
- Presentation
- Language

1.1 Purpose and assignment type

Aim to make the overarching purpose of the assignment explicit. Clearly stating the learning aim or rationale of the task will help ensure it serves the purpose for which it was intended. The purpose and nature of the assignment task should of course align with the learning outcomes it aims to assess.

It is also useful to identify the type of assignment explicitly. That is, it should be clear to students whether the assignment is an essay, report, poster, article review, business plan, etc. Try, too, to ensure that the assignment type aligns with its purpose. For example, essays and reports have different purposes, structures and conventions. Requiring students to write an essay when a report would be more suitable is likely to make it more difficult for students to complete the assignment successfully.

It is also useful to work within the conventions of common assignment types. Students approach assignments by drawing upon their existing knowledge and experience of that assignment type. For example, reflective essays typically involve the use of the first-person form, so a reflective essay assignment that requires

students not to write in the first person may cause confusion and unnecessarily complicate the process of completing it. It may also lead to further requests for clarification. If non-standard elements of an assignment type are required, then these should be stated explicitly. However, you are encouraged to consider the necessity for such variations carefully. It may be that the assignment type itself should be reconsidered in order to align more closely with the assignment requirements.

Where students are required to engage with unfamiliar assignment types, consider making exemplars and models of the type available via Blackboard and direct students to these resources in the assignment brief. It is also useful to devote time in the classroom (or virtually) to activities that provide students with opportunities to develop their understanding of the function, structure and characteristics of unfamiliar assignment types before requiring them to engage with them as part of assessed tasks. Paired or small group marking activities in which students work together to analyse examples of assignment types and/or assess them against the criteria that will be used to assess their own summative work can be particularly useful.

1.2 Authenticity

Authenticity in assessed tasks means designing tasks that meaningfully reflect real world activities and concerns. Authentic assessment has been linked to improved outcomes, particularly in relation to employability, increased student engagement and higher levels of student motivation.

When using authentic approaches, ensure that the purpose and audience for the assignment reflect its authenticity. Students should be clear about their role in any scenario that is devised to provide a context for the assessed task and should also be given a clear and authentic purpose and audience. Without such an explicit statement of role, purpose and audience, students will be less likely to select an appropriate approach when framing their response to the task. Equally, consider the form of the assessed task and how this relates to its authenticity. For example, an assignment requiring an events management student to assess the suitability of a venue for a particular band may be better served by a report format, than an essay.

1.3 Structure

Where the assignment has structural requirements, i.e., in the form of specific headings and sections (and particularly where the assignment type is unfamiliar), consider how these might be provided as part of the task description in order to scaffold the development of students' understanding of the assignment type.

Ideally, and particularly for key text types in the subject area, the way in which students are progressively encouraged to develop their understanding of such text types should be considered at a programme level. For example, in relation to business reports, it may be useful to provide the section headings that students should use at Level 4, along with an indication of the content expected in each. At Level 5 and 6, however, when students might reasonably be expected to be developing, or have developed, an understanding of how reports are structured, this scaffolding could be partially or completely withdrawn.

Note that if it is the intention of the assignment is for students to determine for themselves how a given assignment type should be structured, this should be stated

explicitly as a requirement of the task.

1.4 PSRB requirements

If your professional statutory or regulatory body has particular requirements for student work, such as demonstrating safe practice or maintaining confidentiality, please specify this in this section.

1.5 Word limit

Always include the word limit, or equivalent, identifying, where appropriate, which elements of the assignment do not contribute to the limit, e.g., executive summary, reference list, etc. Where an assignment has multiple components, consider indicating the proportion of word limit to be allocated to each. Where the assessment of different elements of an assignment is weighted differently, this should be reflected proportionately in the word limits for each element.

If there are restrictions relating to word limit, such as the requirement for students to complete work within +/- 10% of the word limit, these should be explicitly stated in this section. The consequences of failing to meet these requirements should also be clearly stated. It may be useful to confirm usual practice with your colleagues, course lead or Head of School. Programme teams are encouraged to adopt a consistent approach.

1.6 Presentation

Use white space and other formatting options to lay out the requirements of the assignment as clearly and logically as possible.

If at all possible, aim to avoid breaking any sections of the brief across pages – requiring students to flick between pages in order to read a section adds to the cognitive burden required to process and understand it.

1.7 Language

In general, aim for a warm, helpful tone, avoiding officious language, emphatic capitalisation and negative instructions (e.g., you must NOT...).

Briefs should be brief. Aim to be as concise as possible (but no more concise than is necessary...) Too little information may create uncertainty and anxiety (and result in increased requests for clarification); too much information may overwhelm and confuse (even when provided with the best of intentions).

Aim, too, to be consistent and unambiguous in your use of terminology and avoid the use of synonyms. For example, if the assignment is a reflective essay, use only this term when referring to it, rather than also referring to it as a reflective commentary or report.

Where possible, use commonly used assignment task verbs (e.g., describe, discuss, compare, analyse, critically evaluate, etc.) Using academic language of this kind consistently and accurately will develop students' ability to recognise what is required of them and support them in the process of developing their academic and assessment literacies. This is particularly the case when combined with classroom-based (or virtual) activities designed to develop understanding of such terms.

2 Learning outcomes

Include the full text of the learning outcomes that will be assessed by the assignment. Please delete unused boxes as required.

3 Referencing and presentational requirements

Be sure to include the name of the referencing style required in this section.

The university's definitive guide to all styles of referencing is Cite Them Right Online (<http://www.citethemrightonline.com>).

For assignment types based on real world text types that are not normally academically referenced (e.g., blog postings, magazine articles, etc.), consider whether or not it is also necessary for students to reference their work. In either case, please aim to be explicit about what students should be expected to do.

Please also use this section to communicate any presentational requirements relevant to the completion of the assignment. This might include the requirement to use a specific font, line spacing, etc. If you wish students to use a coversheet of template as part of their submission, please specify this in this section.

4 'Before you submit' assignment checklist

The 'Fit to submit: Assignment checklist' has been removed from the assignment brief template in the interests of brevity.

Foundation Year and Level 4 students may still find it useful to have access to the checklist, in which case it should be shared as a separate document in the same location as the assignment submission points. A PDF version of the checklist has been made available via the same page as the assignment brief templates in BEN for this purpose.

The checklist may help some students as they prepare formal academic written work for submission. It is one of the proven 'recipes for success' as part of the PReSS (Practical Recipes for Student Success) initiative to support student attainment at BNU. Colleagues should use their judgement as to whether it will be useful to their students or not.

5 Assessment criteria

Please use the template provided to include the assessment criteria for the assignment in the form of a rubric, or grid.

Full guidance on how use the relevant learning outcomes and the [institutional grading descriptors](#) to develop assessment criteria can be found on [BEN](#).

You should aim to include 4 to 5 criteria using the categories identified in the grading descriptor (e.g., knowledge & understanding, analysis & criticality, etc.) which are relevant to the assignment and its associated learning outcomes. Depending on the learning outcomes and focus of the assignment, you may decide to have more than one criterion for a particular category and none for another. There is no requirement for each of the four categories to be included in each set of assessment criteria.

For further advice on developing assessment criteria and rubrics, please contact Academic Practice and Curriculum Development (academicpractice@bucks.ac.uk).

6 Disseminating the assignment brief

Assignment briefs, along with definite submission times and dates, should be made available to students via the VLE as soon as possible and ideally at the outset of the module in order to allow them to plan and manage their time effectively.

6.1 Engaging students with the brief and its future development

There is strong evidence to suggest that actively involving students in the process of interpreting assignment requirements can have a positive impact upon their ability to engage successfully with their assessed work.

Providing students with opportunities to engage with the assignment brief and how assignment requirements are communicated to them can improve their understanding of what is expected of them and better enable them to deliver work of the required form and standard. Engaging them in this way also increases their active involvement in the assessment process, i.e., they are more likely to view it as something in which they actively participate and have a voice, rather than merely something which happens to them. Engagement of this kind also provides useful opportunities for the development of students' academic and assessment literacies.

The following outlines two approaches to engaging students with assignment brief design: a classroom-based approach and a virtual approach.

Classroom-based activity

At an appropriate time before the submission date of an assignment, devote time in class for students to collaboratively engage with the brief.

Provide the brief in hard copy to facilitate engagement and encourage students to work in pairs/small groups to discuss the brief and highlight areas they find useful and/or which require clarification. Have each group feedback any issues they have found with the brief and capture these on the board or screen. Discuss any problematic aspects of the brief in order to clarify understanding, unpack key terms (such as 'critically analyse'), etc., as a class.

Work collaboratively with the students to determine how they would prefer these aspects of the assignment to be communicated in the brief. This information should be noted and used to shape subsequent versions of the brief in future iterations of the module.

Virtual activity

At an appropriate time before the submission date of the assignment, establish a Blackboard discussion forum relating to the assignment brief and encourage students to post any questions, concerns and requests for clarification to the forum. Insist on the use of the forum for any communication relating to the assignment. Consider the use of an anonymised discussion forum if you are concerned that students may be embarrassed about exposing what they might feel could be perceived as failings in their understanding of the brief. Provide clarifications where necessary, either via the discussion forum or, if applicable, as part of a classroom-based activity.

Encourage students to state their preferences for how the assignment requirements should be communicated in the brief. This information should be noted and used to shape subsequent version of the brief in future iterations of the module.

6.2 One brief to rule them all...

Wherever possible, avoid the need to provide extra documentation to support students in their engagement with the brief.

'How to do the assignment' guidance documents are provided with the best possible intentions but can serve further to complicate students' engagement with and interpretation of assignment briefs. Instead, aim for a single source of information about the assignment requirements in the form of a well-formed, clear and explicit brief.

The more documentation there is that relates to an assignment, the more different sources of information the students will be required to collate and process in order to interpret what is expected of them, thus requiring them to spend more time on working out how to do the assignment rather than actually completing it. Creating more documents than necessary also increases the likelihood of inconsistencies and contradictions between documents, which is likely to cause further anxiety and result in more requests for clarification.

In programmes where there are large modules with multiple tutors, module leaders are reminded to arrange opportunities for all module tutors to develop a shared understanding of assignment requirements to minimise the possibility of conflicting and contradictory interpretations of assignment briefs.