Essay

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| **Essay** | |
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1. Understand the assignment

**Read and understand the assignment task that you have been given and determine what is expected of you.**

The first step of any assignment is to understand what is expected of you. Read through your module guide to find the task brief and marking criteria. Carefully examine these sections to be clear in your mind what you need to do and how it is to be marked.

The second step is to clearly identify what the task at hand is. Use **this** guide to de-code what the task, content, and limiting words are.

Establish between five and ten keywords concerning the topic you are writing on. You can consider events, places, specialist terms, people, and related terms that you will use for conducting research. These keywords will be used when searching databases, books, and other resources.

If you are confused about what you need to do, speak to your tutor for clarification. It is better to start the assignment with a clear understanding of what needs to be done.

1. Plan your assignment

**Develop a plan for how you will approach and complete the assignment.**

Brainstorm your initial ideas about the task and what you might direction you might take. You could try listing the key concepts or ideas related to the subject. Think; how would you argue or present this information? You can watch this video by Tony Buzan on **‘How to Mind Map’** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Y4pIsXTV0>).

Check the word count for the assignment and use an **essay plan template** to identify how you will structure and approach the essay, including how many words you will spend on each sentence. Identify any headings or sub-headings for your essay and establish the idea that each paragraph will be addressing. Draft a topic sentence for each paragraph to help guide you whilst writing.

There are several questions to consider when preparing for the writing:

**Content**

What is your main argument?

What information is to be included?

**Context**

Why is this essay being written?

What is the broader circumstances in which this essay is written?

**Purpose**

From what angle is the topic going to be examined?

In what ways is the topic of this essay interesting?

**Audience**

Who is going to read the essay?

What do you need them to know?

**Help Sheets**

* Practical considerations for essay writing
* Reading the question
* How to Mind Map

1. Conduct research

**Draw upon the existing literature and scholarship to confirm or contradict your argument.**

When you understand the assignment, have a plan, and have considered the above questions, you can begin conducting your research. Using the key words you have identified, start conducting searches of academic research portals, such as those provided by the Newcastle College Library (library.ncl-coll.ac.uk). On the Newcastle College Library Website you can consult the EbscoHost Discovery Search and ProQuest to find academic journal articles and texts for use in your work. Similarly, the Library Catalogue contains thousands of items that can be used in your assignment. During this time, you will want to record the bibliographic details of the sources you consult.

Other resources include:

* Google Scholar ([www.scholar.google.com/](http://www.scholar.google.com/))
* JStor Open ([www.jstor.org/open/](http://www.jstor.org/open/))
* Microsoft Academic ([www.academic.microsoft.com/](http://www.academic.microsoft.com/))
* Core (<https://core.ac.uk/>)

**Help Sheets**

* Using online resources
* Note-making Template
* Reading
* Referencing
* Visit the Newcastle College Library

1. Evaluate sources

**Establish the veracity and suitability of sources by carefully evaluating and critiquing them.**

When you find a source that you consider to be useful, it is important to evaluate it to determine its trustworthiness and suitability for inclusion. Journal articles and other sources that have been peer-reviewed are generally more trustworthy and appropriate for academic purposes. A defining aspect of academic writing is how it includes evidence to support an argument. Consider the following questions:

* When was it published?
* Who is the author?
* Why was the research published?
* What is the central argument?
* Where was the source published?

When consulting websites, check to see if there is an author and when it was published. Unlike publications, websites can be easily changed. Make sure you draw on a range of sources and give greater priority to academic sources, such as journal articles. After the evaluation, determine the examples and evidences that you will use for each paragraph. Reflect critically on the sources you use and identify how the different pieces of literature relate to one another.

**Help Sheets**

* Using online resources
* Checking websites
* Finding and Evaluating Journal Articles

1. Write a first draft

**Present your argument and ideas into a coherent flow of text supported with evidence and examples.**

Using your essay plan, begin writing the essay. For each of your pre-determined paragraphs, support the topic sentence with the relevant examples and evidence that you identified during your research. Ensure that each of your paragraphs has a concluding sentence that links to the topic sentence and leads on to the next paragraph. As you write, make sure you are inputting citations to back up the points you make. Your first draft should aim to produce a coherent and logical piece of work, however, it is not expected to be perfect. Limit your sentences to a maximum of twenty-five words to keep your writing concise. Use headings or section breaks to help you stay focused as you write. These headings should be deleted before you submit your work and essays do not usually have headings.

**Help Sheets**

* Signposting in your work
* Citing your evidence
* Dos and don’ts of academic writing

1. Revise, re-write, and edit

**Read through and make adjustments to your writing to ensure it fits the expected standards.**

Once you have a first draft, you can now read through it and consider how well it reaches the learning outcomes. Meet with an Academic Achievement Coach to receive feedback on general aspects of your writing. During the revising and editing stage you need to make sure the essay fulfils five key features of academic writing:

1. **Objective**- based on facts and research rather than feelings or opinions.
2. **Formal language**- make your point clearly and accurately, and develop language appropriate to your subject.
3. **Passive voice** - this means concentrating on the action which has taken place rather than who performed it. This involves not using personal pronouns (for example: I, we, me, our) unless you are writing a reflection.
4. **Structured** - you need to plan your work so that it guides the reader step by step from the introduction, through your argument supported by evidence, to the conclusion.
5. **Includes citations and references**- an essential part of academic writing is to provide evidence of research and acknowledge your sources.

(Staffordshire University, 2018)

Ensure that if you have used a quote that there is some form of analysis to discuss or explain it. Similarly, confirm you have referenced your work correctly and that there is a corresponding entry in the reference list for each citation.

**Help Sheets**

* Writing Strategies
* Editing documents

1. Proofreading

**Make final alterations to your work to ensure it is error free and fulfils the learning outcomes.**

Prior to submission, you will need to carefully read through your work and check for any mistakes – this is known as proofreading. For some people, a physical printed copy of your work makes it easier to read through and check work. Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?

Some common points to consider include the following:

* Check in text citations have a corresponding entry in the reference list
* Ensure your reference list is complete and in alphabetical order
* Identify whether you have used the same font and formatting steps throughout your work
* Remove any highlighting, comments, or tracked changes in the document
* Confirm you have inserted page numbers
* Complete a cover sheet if requested
* Read each sentence out individually to spot spelling mistakes, grammatical violations,
* Ensure your sentences are no longer than 25-30 words
* Review the punctuation of your work

**Help Sheets**

* Proofreading Checklist
* Checking References