



Overview

- ✓ An explanation of the purposes of Assessment
- ✓ Help with style and other considerations in academic writing
- ✓ Explanation of some of the process words used in assignment titles, and the vital importance of understanding and fully answering the question
- ✓ Specific guidance for writing essay-style assignments
- ✓ Hands-on tips for Exam preparation

Introduction:

"If you don't know where you are headed, you'll probably end up someplace else." Douglas J. Eder, Ph.D.

"The systematic assessment of student learning outcomes is essential to monitoring quality and providing the information that leads to improvement." Middle States Standard XIV

The Purposes of Assessment:

« The purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate fulfilment of the objectives of the programme of a study and achieve the required learning

outcomes at least to threshold standard » Manchester Metropolitan University Website

« The purpose of assessment is to provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate, develop and share their critical understandings of current theory and practice in the area of.... » University of Derby Website

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA):

- Assessment is a generic term for a set of processes that measure students' learning skills and understanding.
- Diagnostic assessment enables attributes or skills to be identified in the learner that suggest appropriate pathways of study, or learning difficulties that require support and resolution.
- Formative assessment is designed to enable the learner to obtain feedback on his/her progress in meeting stated objectives (learning outcomes) and reviewing goals.
- Summative Assessment provides the means whereby a clear statement of achievement or failure can be made in respect of students' performance in relation to stated objectives. (QAA, 2000).

Key Principles:

Assessment: Any of the processes which are implemented with the purpose of measuring the current progress of learners; examinations and assignments are the common forms of assessment.

Formative Assessment: Assessment which may be used to make a judgement of the future needs of individual learners.

Summative Assessment: Assessment which takes place at the end of a period of study to make a final measurement of achievement.

The Basic Structure of an Essay:

- **Introduction**
- **Main Body**
- **Conclusion**

- **References and Bibliography**

- **Introduction :**

The introduction will do exactly as the title suggests, it will introduce the topic, the question to be answered and your approach to answering the question. You will give your interpretation of the question and set out the content you will cover. In most cases, the introduction will equate to approximately 1/10 of the overall length of the essay. It is the context for the ideas you will deal with in the main body of the essay.

- ✓ **Defining certain terms (Key Concepts) in the title**
- ✓ **Locate your essay in time: providing a brief idea of events, movements, or people influencing the topic to be covered.**

- **Main Body :**

It is made up of a series of paragraphs, each one dealing with a particular theme or topic, and each one linked to the next. All of the points you make should be supported by arguments, analysis and supported by quotations from source material. That is, the ideas of other writers must be acknowledged and correctly referenced. You need to analyze the material and give your views. Your views do have a place in the academic submissions that you make. Your views will be considered, and you will have arrived at them as a result of your study and understanding; they will not be something picked from the air, or read in passing in a newspaper.

- ✓ **Make use of the skills of selecting, organizing, interpreting and analyzing the material relevant to the question.**
- ✓ **Present ideas in a clear, logical and coherent structure.**
- ✓ **You must consider sides of controversial positions through argument.**

« OK » Essay VS « Very Good » Essay:

- Be wholly consistent
- Link ideas together, and
- Proceed logically and step by step to a sound conclusion

The Structure of a Good Essay:

- **Introducing your argument (Having considered the background to the topic, we will now look at each of the causes in detail) or (the next point to consider is....)**
 - **Developing your argument**
 - **Conclusion**
 1. Topic Sentence (introduce the topic) (The next aspect of ... is ...) or (Now that the causes have been outlined the effects will be considered)
 2. An explanation of any terminology that might not be clear, or which has not been defined earlier.
 3. Evidence, or other comments, to support the point being made. This could be in a range of different formats. For example, a brief background to the topic; development of the argument of the paragraph, setting out the reasoning behind the argument; the provision of evidence to support or even challenge the argument of the paragraph. This evidence, of course, can be in many different forms- facts, statistics, quotations, brief anecdotes, all with full and appropriate referencing.
 4. An evaluation of the evidence that you have presented. If possible, you should compare it with evidence from a different source. It might be advisable to do this in a new paragraph, but you should explain in the opening sentence what it is that you are doing.
 5. Analysis of the causes or reasons for what you have presented.
 6. A discussion of the points made, including any consequences resulting from them counter-examples, for example.
 7. A concluding sentence. This sentence will relate directly to the topic of the paragraph, and in most cases look forward to the next paragraph or section of your work. There will be times when a conclusion to a paragraph is not needed.
-  **Brief and to the point**
-  **Think of the reader**
-  **Make your work a straightforward process**

Conclusion:

It is the section where you sum up all that you have written. You give the conclusions that you have drawn from your reading and the analysis of the evidence that you have presented. Essays should lead to a well-founded conclusion, drawing together the ideas examined in your writing. Where the title specifically asks for a personal opinion, the conclusion is the place to include it. Many essay questions either explicitly ask a question, or a question is implied. Questions need answers. When the title of an assignment asks a question, the biggest single fault made by students is not to answer it. The conclusion represents 1/10 of the overall length of the essay and balance neatly with the introduction.

How to Get Started ?

- Select the title or question
- Divide the overall task into smaller individual tasks
- Record your thoughts, ideas and sources, in one place and write a plan
- Collect source material together
- Write a first draft
- Read your work and make corrections
- Produce a final draft and proof read it one last time.

Process Words:

<u>Process Word/ Phrase</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
<u>Account for</u>	<u>asks for an explanation. Even though it looks similar to give an account of, this process word is rather different. You should give a description with details. The description should clarify the concept, and don't forget to give reasons.</u>
<u>Analyze</u>	<u>calls for an outline of the components. Take the issue, and break it down</u>

(divide) into the parts that make up the issue. Your task is not only to describe the different parts of the issue, but also to show (examine) how they relate to each other.

Describe

is one of the most straight-forward tasks. You're asked to outline the main aspects of an issue or point of view. Say what something is like. Sometimes the order of events is important. Your answer should always include illustrative examples to bring the argument alive. The structure of the answer is important: don't jump around, picking up bits and pieces on the way. Instead, plan a logical and coherent way in order to cover all the main aspects. This process word often occurs together with others, such as in describe and criticize.

Discuss

It is very common to be given a quote or provocative statement, followed by just this word: discuss. Your answer should include an outline of the problems and then evaluate the different arguments or points of view. Weigh up the points for and against. It's important to illustrate your argument, and refer to established work. Very often your own opinion is asked, usually in form of an evaluation of the different points of view. Look out for key debates that are involved. The statements that come with this process word are often deliberately

	<u>provocative.</u>
<u>Explain</u>	<u>asks you to focus on how things work.</u> <u>Rather than focusing on things as they are, this process word asks you to focus on how things got there. So you'll always need to give reasons.</u> <u>The answer will include some describing and analyzing. It's important to make explicit the workings and mechanisms.</u>
<u>Justify</u>	<u>on the surface asks for a defence of a particular statement, theory, or point of view.</u> You should cite evidence and give examples that support the case. <u>However, for a balanced answer, it'll be necessary to look at the arguments against.</u> The justification thus is a form of evaluation. Your conclusion may be that the statement can't be justified (in the light of certain evidence), or outline limits.

Assessment Criteria:

- ✓ Relevance of material to question set
- ✓ Evidence of understanding
- ✓ Structure and organization
- ✓ Evidence of background reading
- ✓ Relevance of background reading
- ✓ Adequate and correct referencing
- ✓ Style appropriate to the assignment

- ✓ Spelling and grammar
- ✓ Presentation

Food for the Thought/ Exam Preparation



- ▣ Give yourself enough time to study
- ▣ Organize your study space
- ▣ Use flow charts and diagrams
- ▣ Practice on old exams
- ▣ Explain your answers to others
- ▣ Organize study groups with friends
- ▣ Take regular breaks
- ▣ Snack on 'brain food'
- ▣ Plan your exam day
- ▣ Drink plenty of water

Conclusion:

“Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and program goals and that graduates meet appropriate higher education goals.”

"If we always do what we've always done, we will get what we've always got."

Adam Urbanski

References:

- Pritchard Alan (2000) **Studying and Learning at University: (Vital Skills for Success in your Degree).** An E-BOOK that could be downloaded through <http://www.bookzz.org>