

Academic writing PROC308 (Level 6)



Dr Jason Truscott

Learning Development

www.plymouth.ac.uk/learn

Learning Development can help with:

- writing and presenting
- developing thinking
- using literature critically
- managing projects
- articulating knowledge
- communicating ideas
- preparing for exams and assessment



The Writing Café

- Drop in (no booking!)
- 4th floor of Babbage 1pm – 4pm Mon-Fri (Semester time)
- Coffee, tea and food!



English Language Centre

'English as a second language'

Writing Café

Mondays & Fridays (Only)

10am to 12 Noon



Help with
grammar

[https://](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/international-students/english-language-centre)

www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/international-students/english-language-centre

Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow (writing tutorials)

- How to structure an essay
- How to make your writing clearer
- How to write a good introduction or conclusion
- Help with dissertations
- Help with writing a PhD
 - and anything else directly related to academic writing.
 - Individuals only



[Katherine Roberts](#)



[Morgan Witzel](#)

30th book,
'The Ethical Leader'

[**www.plymouth.ac.uk/learn**](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/learn)

Open Hours with Jason

Business, Science and Engineering

Writing Cafe

Thursdays

10am to 12 Noon

www.plymouth.ac.uk/learn

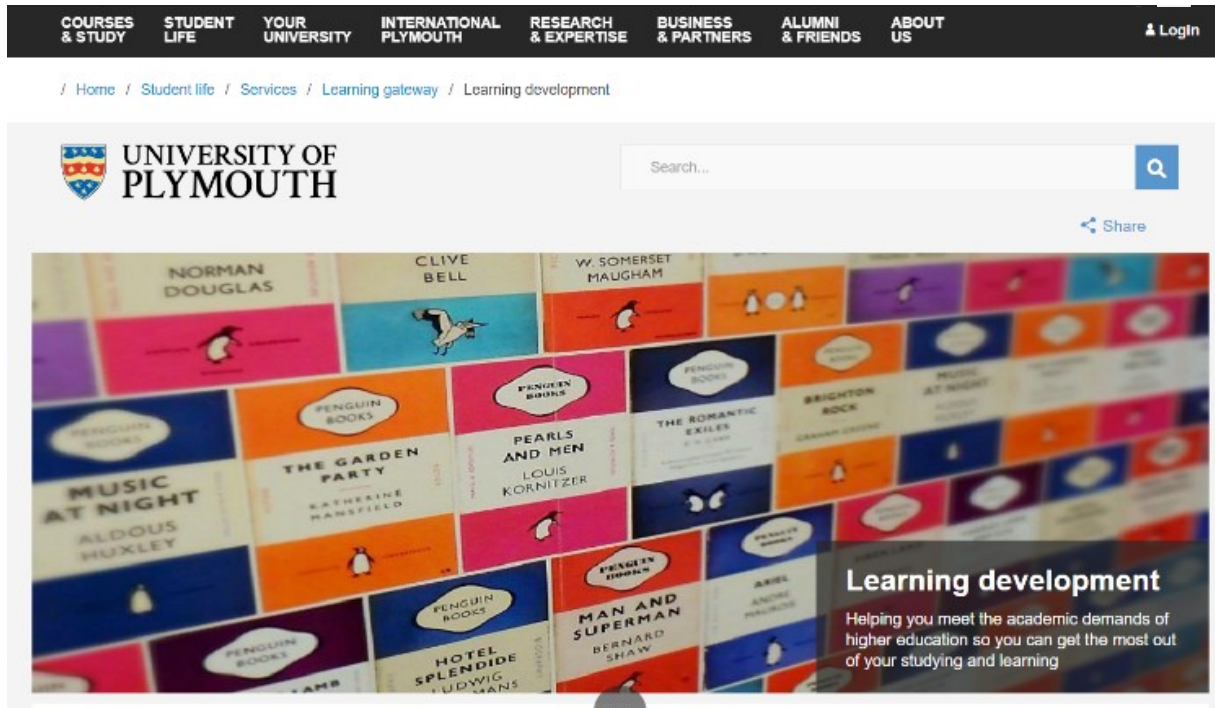


Study skills advice
Drop in for a chat

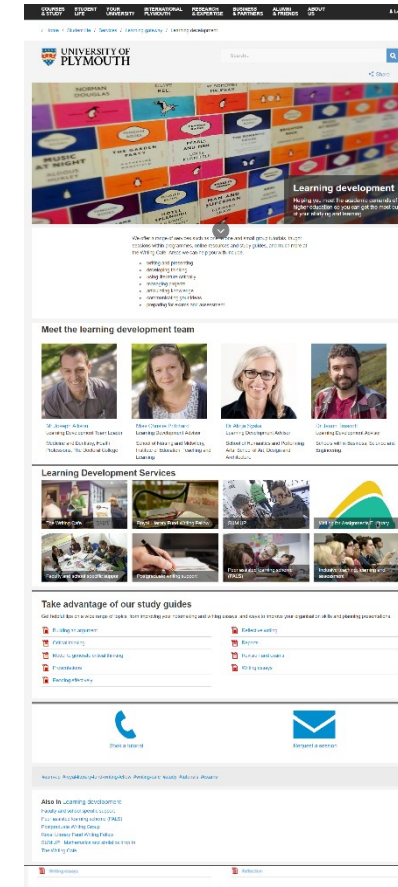


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Further details here:



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Challenges

- What do YOU think are the most important elements of report writing?
- 3 minutes free writing



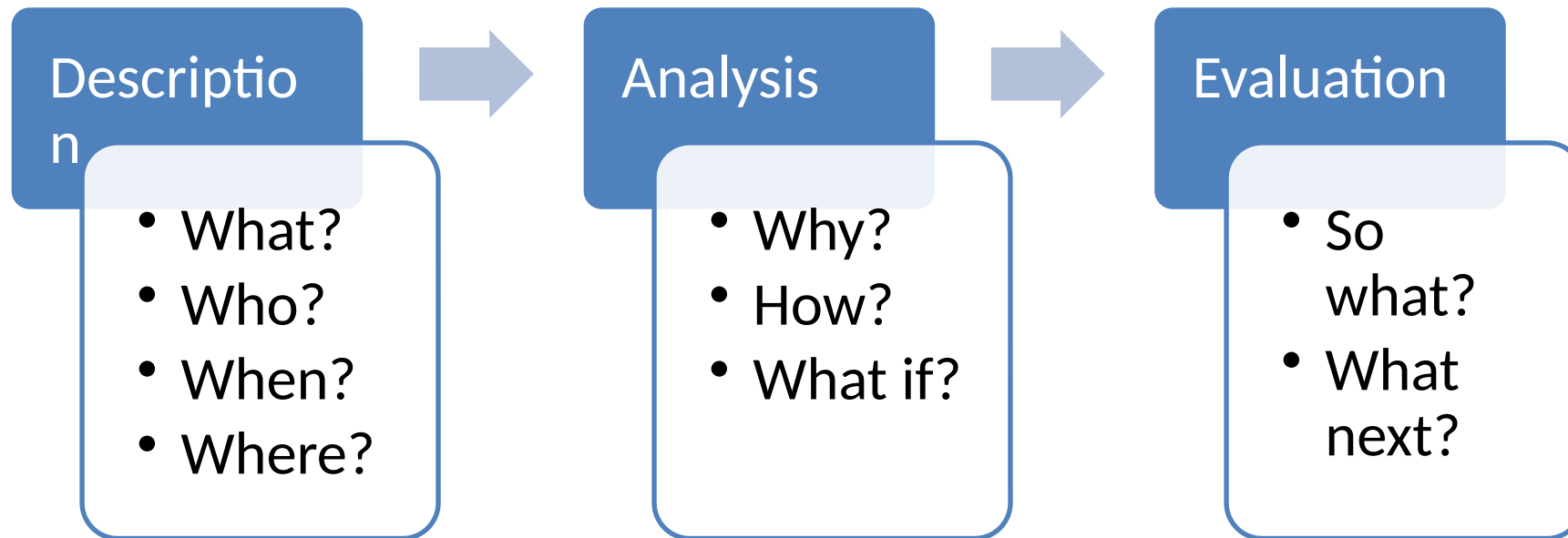


A closer look at academic writing

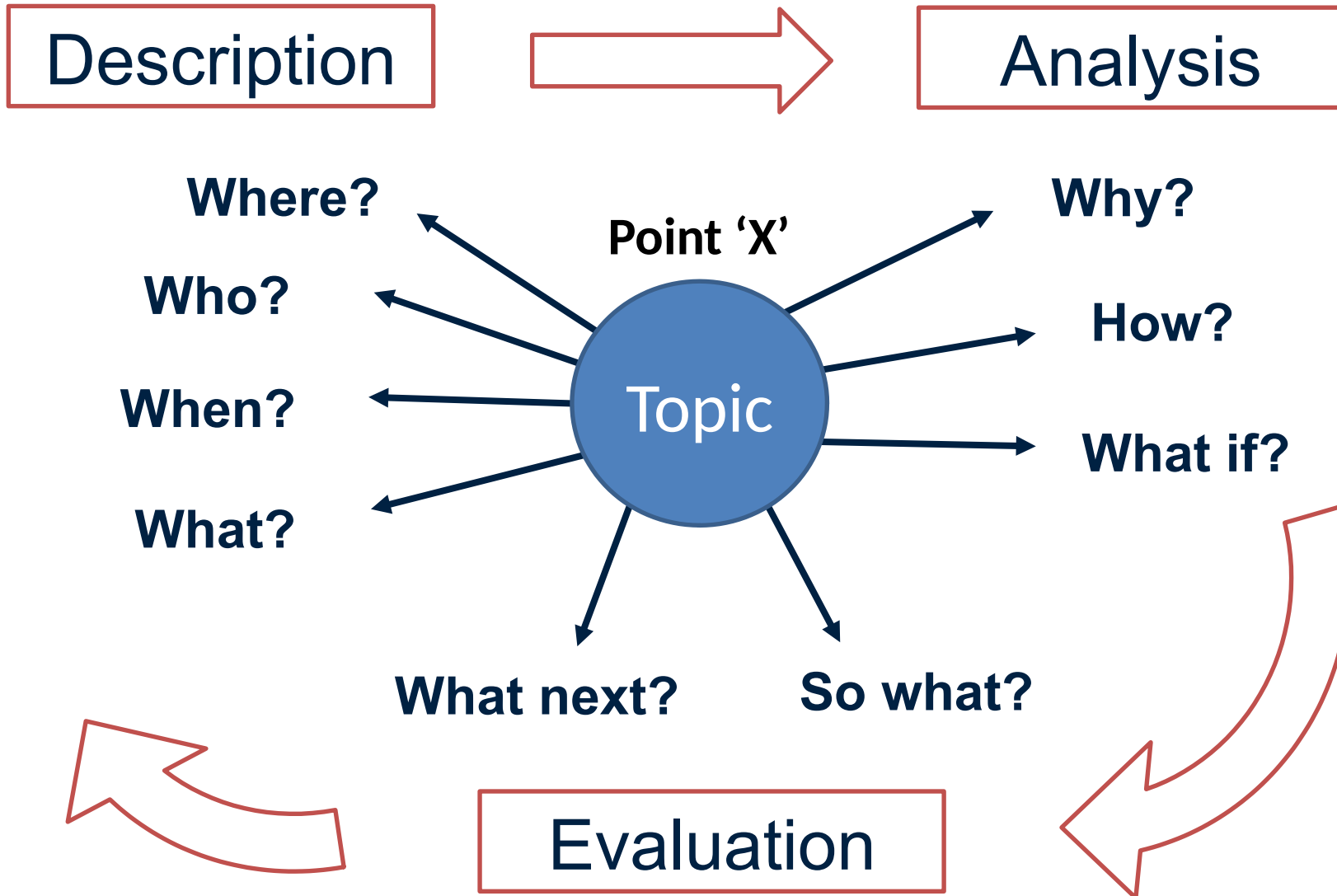
What is the most important aspect of academic writing (and practice)?

Critical thinking

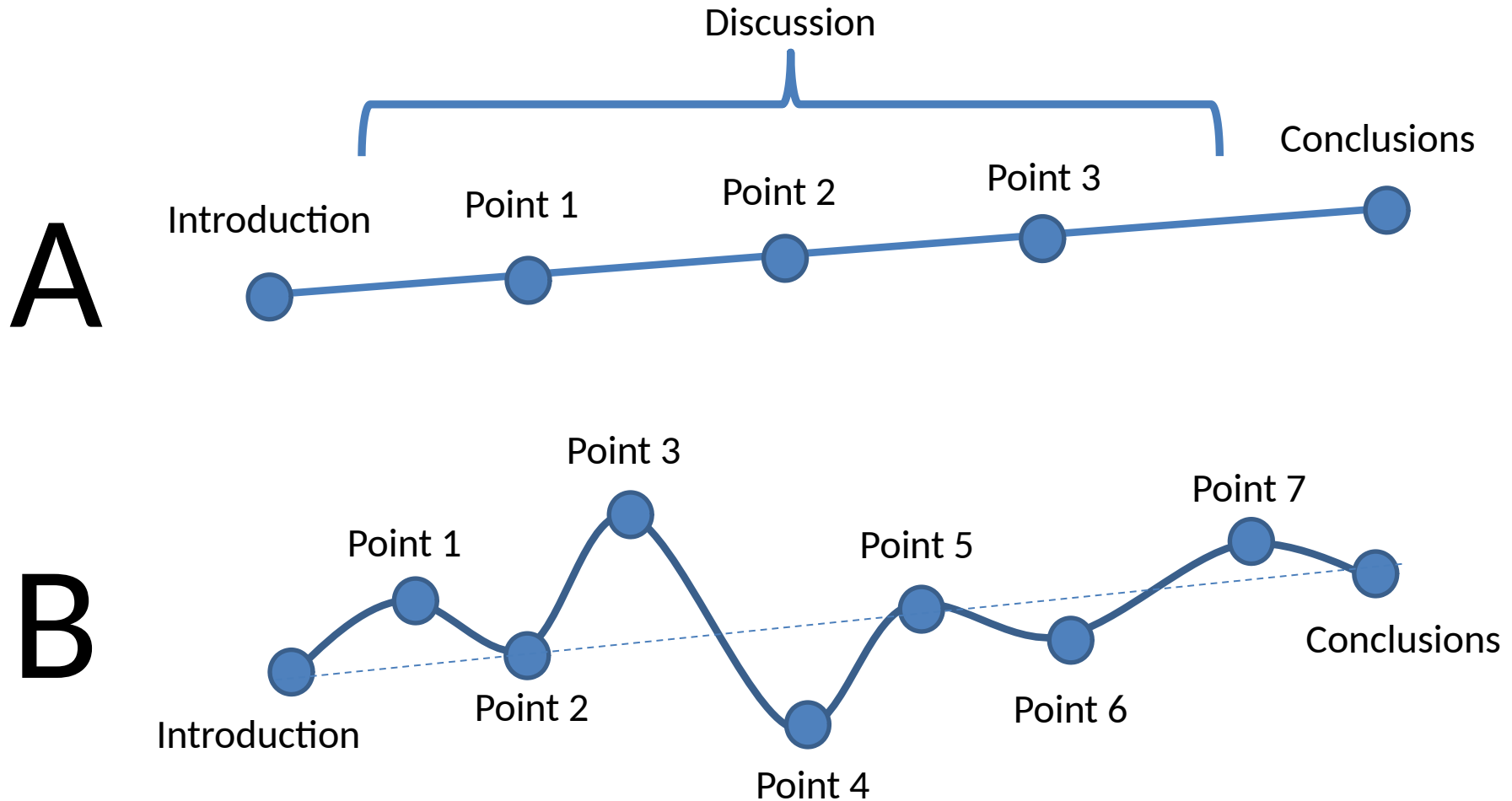
- This is the foundation of academic writing. Critical thinking can be linked to practice.



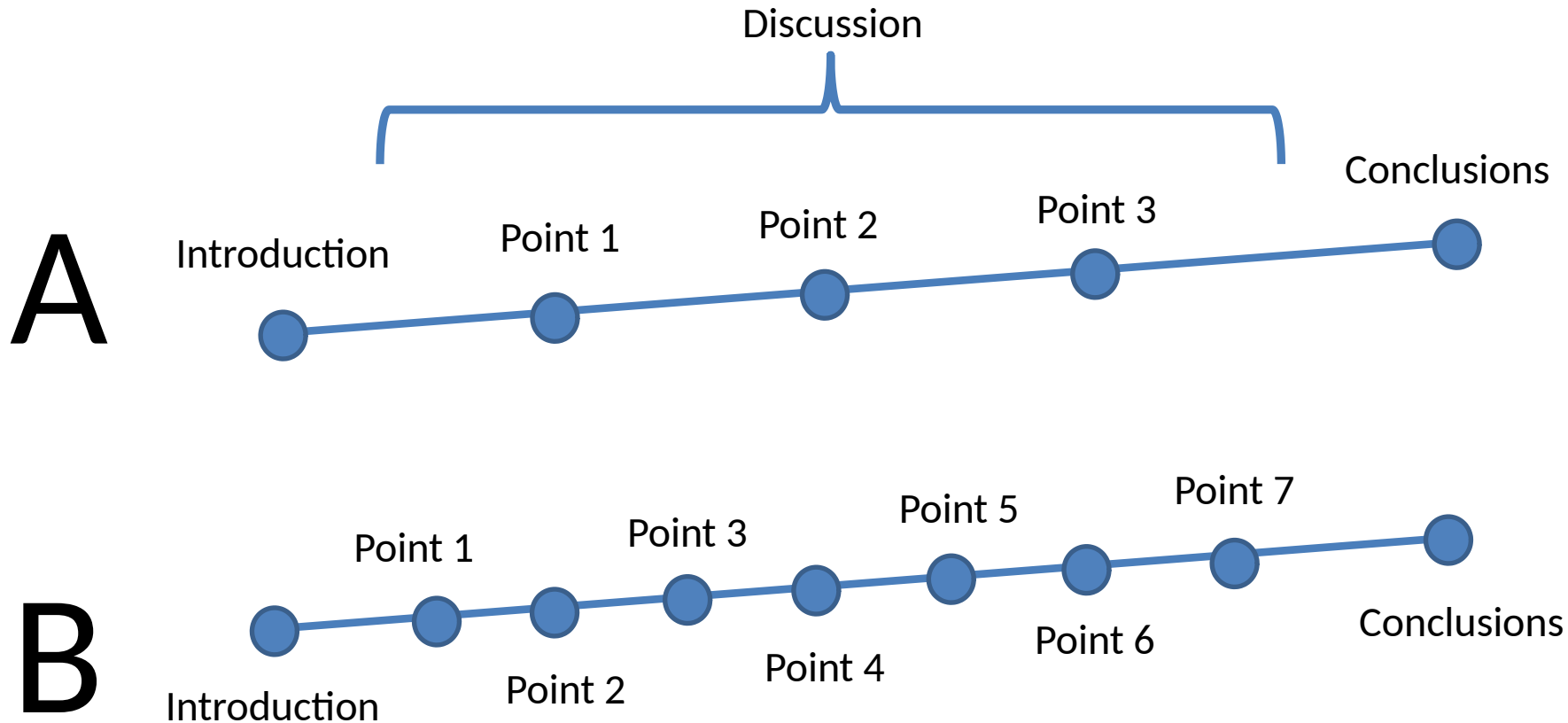
Thinking critically



In terms of writing an essay, which is better?



For a 3000 word essay, which is better?

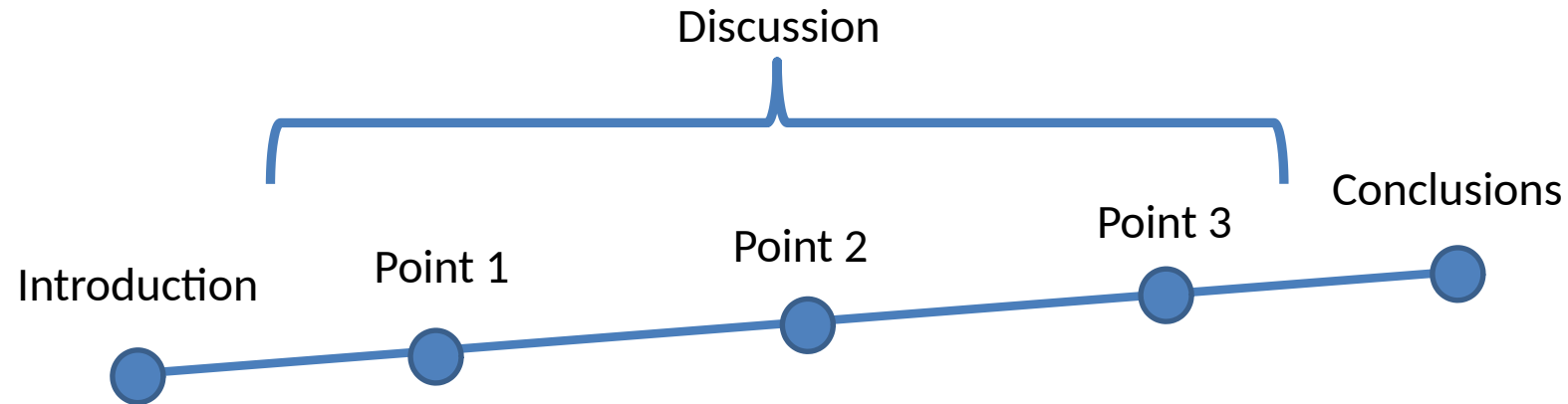


Why those many points?

- For example, a 3000 word essay:
 - Introduction is 10-15% (450 words)
 - Conclusions around 10% (300 words)
 - Discussion ~75% max (2250 words)
- How many points in 2250 words?
- **Level 6** about **800 words** per point
 - $2250 / 800 = 2.8$ (Approx. 3 main points)
- **Masters** about **1000 words** per point
 - $2250 / 1000 = 2.3$ (Approx. 2 main points)

Typical academic writing

- Each point in the discussion has:
 - Critical thinking
 - Points move logically



Title: A typical example of academic writing

Introduction

- First sentence relates to title and has a 'hook' to keep reader interested.
- Background
- Say what points will be discussed.
- Predominantly future tense. E.g. 'The following **will** be discussed...'

Discussion

- Discuss those points in the same order...
- **Point 1** – Describe, analyse & evaluate.
- **Point 2** – Describe, analyse & evaluate.
- **Cont.** – Describe, analyse & evaluate.
- Ensure logical flow of ideas

Conclusions

- Are a summary of the evaluations!
- Don't add anything new.
- Write mainly in past tense. E.g. 'It **was** found'.

Deconstructing report writing

- Academic/report writing is writing...



- ...With a few additional rules

Differences between reports and essays

Reports are:

- Formally structured
- Informative and fact-based
- Written with a specific purpose and reader in mind
- Written in a style appropriate to each section
- Always include section headings
- Sometimes use bullet points
- Often include tables or graphs
- Offer recommendations for action

Essays are:

- Semi-structured
- Argumentative and idea-based
- Not written with a specific reader in mind
- Written in single narrative style throughout
- Usually do not include sub-headings
- Usually do not include bullet points
- Rarely include tables or graphs
- Offer conclusions about a question

Learnhigher (2012) What's The Different Between Reports And Essays?

<http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/writing-for-university/report-writing/whats-the-different-between-reports-and-essays/>

(Accessed: 08/02/2018)

Third person or First Person

Are you familiar?

What is required for the assignment?

Project handbook!

Understanding the brief or creating a title

- Analyse two key areas of ...computing and critically evaluate the impact it has on ...

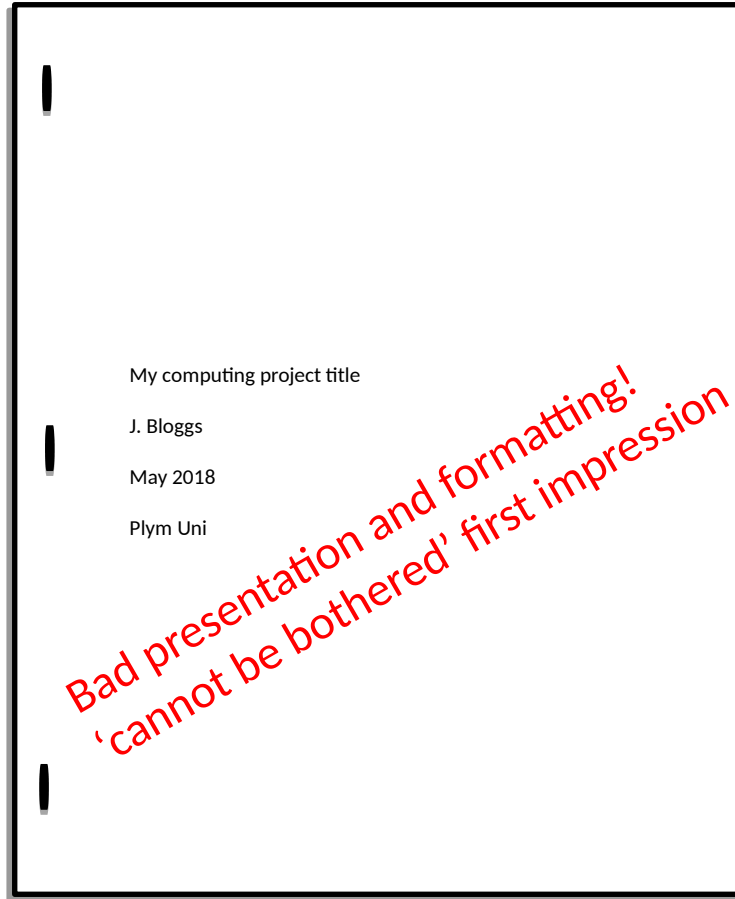
T.A.P. model: Topics, Actions, Parameters

Additional parameters:

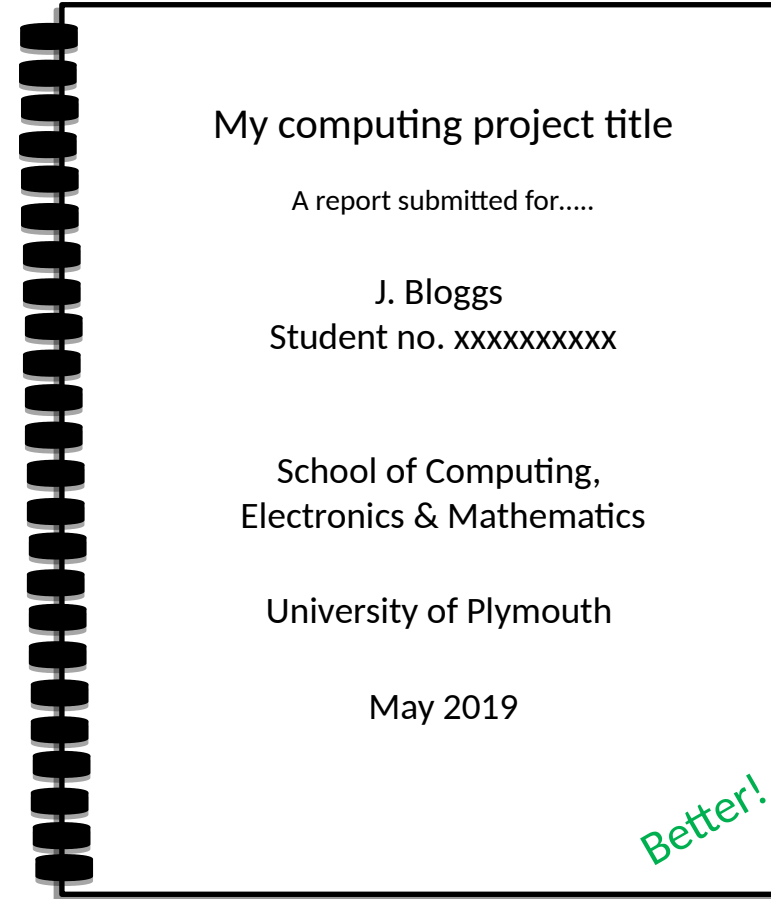
What else do you need? ...Word count, font size, use of table and figures, preferred reference style? Etc ...Look at your Project Handbook and marking benchmark!

N.B. The project handbook has report styling requirements

Good presentation (title page)



Examples only



N.B. often a student number is required in place of a name for certain work, so always check!

N.B. Check your brief and examples, as numbering the sections are not always required.

Title page: Typical scientific/technical report

Summary (Abstract)

Acknowledgments - thanks or recognition

Often placed before the recommendations

Table of contents

1. **Introduction** (Sets scene: project aims, objectives and background)
2. **Main body**
 - 2.1 **Discussions about 1st topic:**
Describe, analyse and evaluate
 - 2.2 **Discussions about 2nd topic:**
Describe, analyse and evaluate
 - 2.3 **Discussions etc.....**
3. **Conclusions**
Are a summary of the evaluations
4. **Recommendations**
Can also be drawn from evaluations

References (sources that are used in the main text)

Bibliography (Sources read but not used in text)

Appendix/Appendices

Report writing (numbered)

- Tend to be a numbered format:

1.0 Introduction

1.1 ...

1.2 ...

2.0 Main Body (contain topics of discussion)

2.1 Subsection to 2.0

2.1.1 Subsection to 2.1

3.0 Main body topic 2

4.0 Main body topic 3

5.0 Conclusions

6.0 Recommendations (not always needed)

References

Appendices

This is a simplified example – check your brief! (Project handbook is written like a report)

What should I write?

1.0 Introduction

1.1 - What you will discuss, and why

2.0 Main body topic (Point): Describe, analyse & evaluate

Mention points in order (as per introduction) Use critical thinking!

3.0 Main body topic (Point): Describe, analyse & evaluate

3.1 – New topic (Point): Describe, analyse & evaluate

However, these sections **MUST** include some discussion, not just bare facts.

This is a simplified example – check your brief! (Project handbook is written like a report)

What should I write?

3.0 Conclusions

3.1 These are a summary of the evaluations from discussion that are not recommendations

3.1.1 - DO NOT add anything new...

This is a simplified example – check your brief! (Project handbook is written like a report)

Main body (DO NOTs)

Should **NOT** normally include

- Lists of raw results
- Minute details of hardware
- Complete listings of software
- Repeated calculations of the same kind

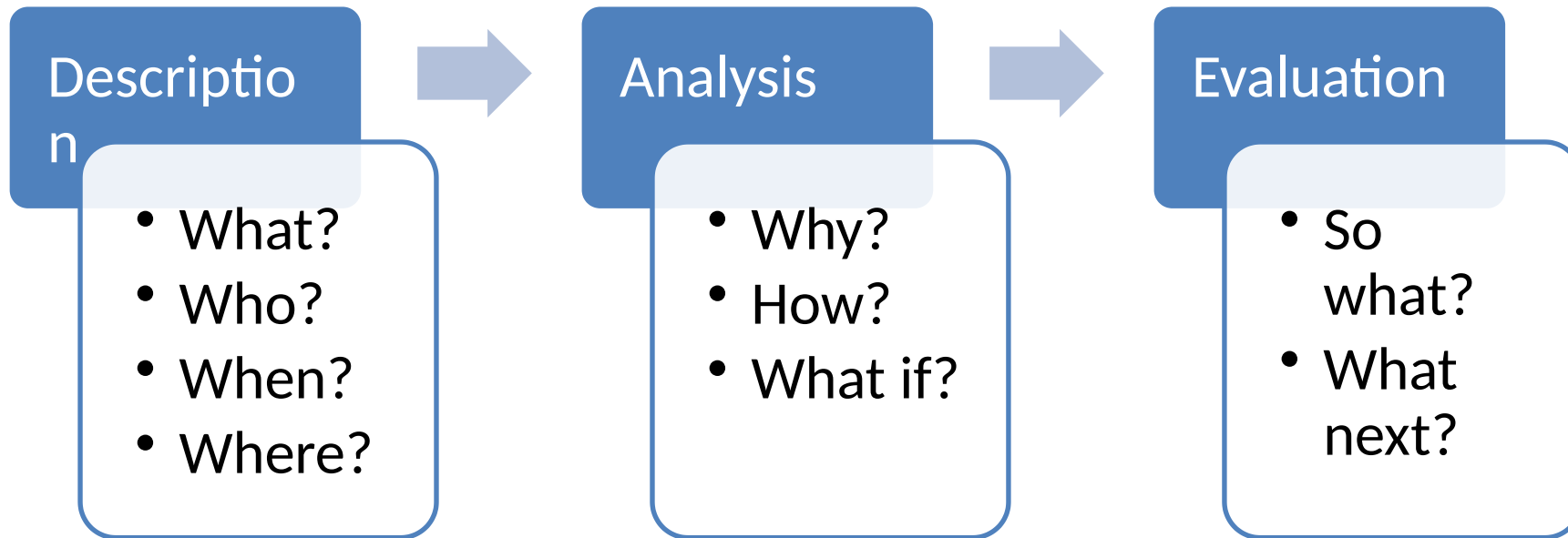
Table of contents

Summary.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 xxxxxxxx.....	1
2. Main body.....	3
2.1 xxxxxxxx.....	4
2.1.2 xxxxxxxxxxxx.....	5

And so on....

Did you know (I expect you did...): if you use the MS Word style sheet for headings, you can automatically create a table of contents!

Academic writing / Critical writing



Imagine you are a Hollywood director...

...and handed some scripts to read.

The film brief: a murder mystery about an important person murdered in a public place, at night.

Script 1

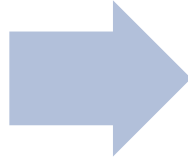
- Professor Plum
- Stabbed to death
- In the library
- Last night

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Script 2

Description

- Professor Plum
- Stabbed to death
- In the library
- Last night



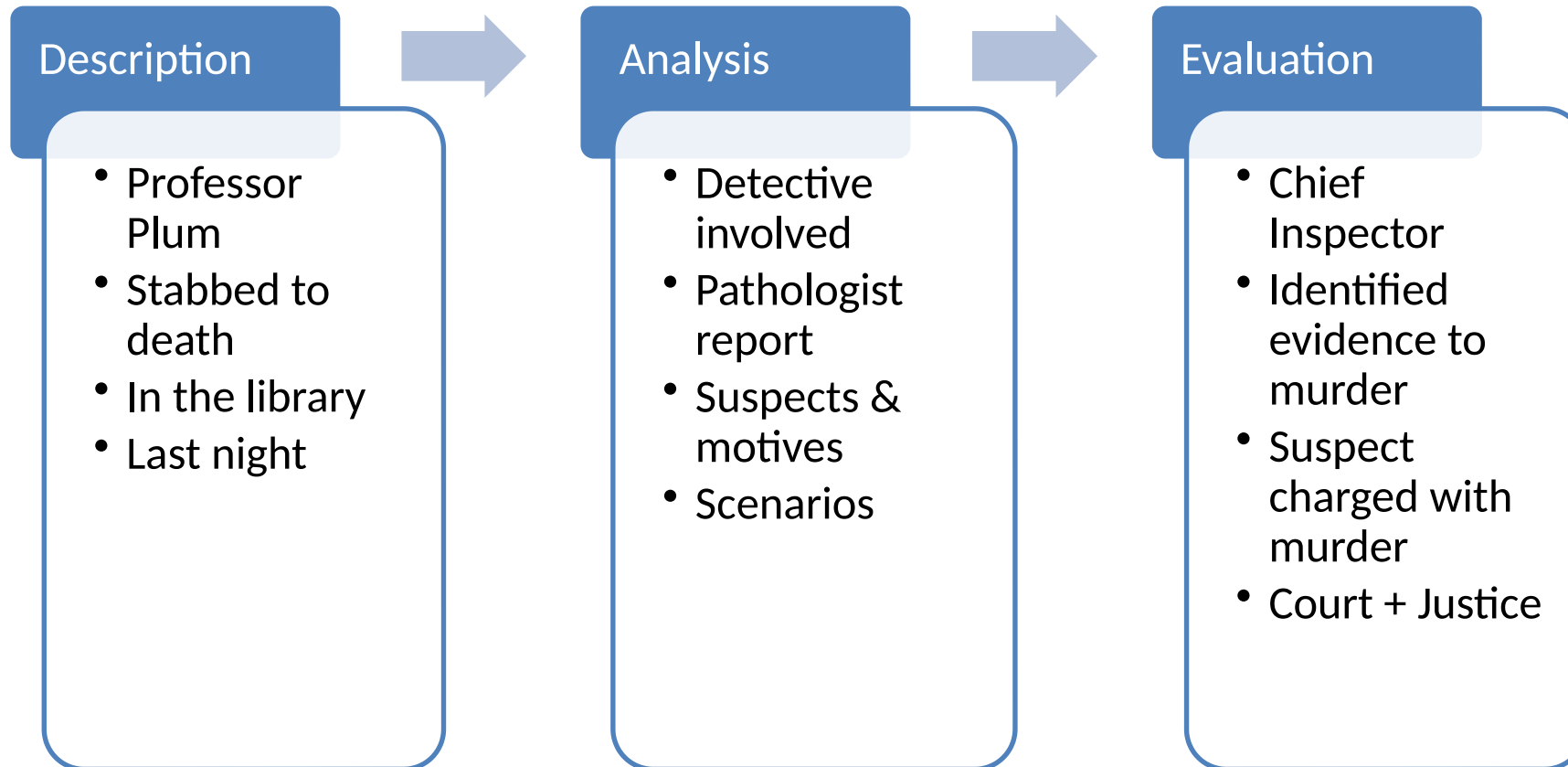
- Detective involved
- Pathologist report
- 2 Suspects & 2 motives
- Scenarios

THE END

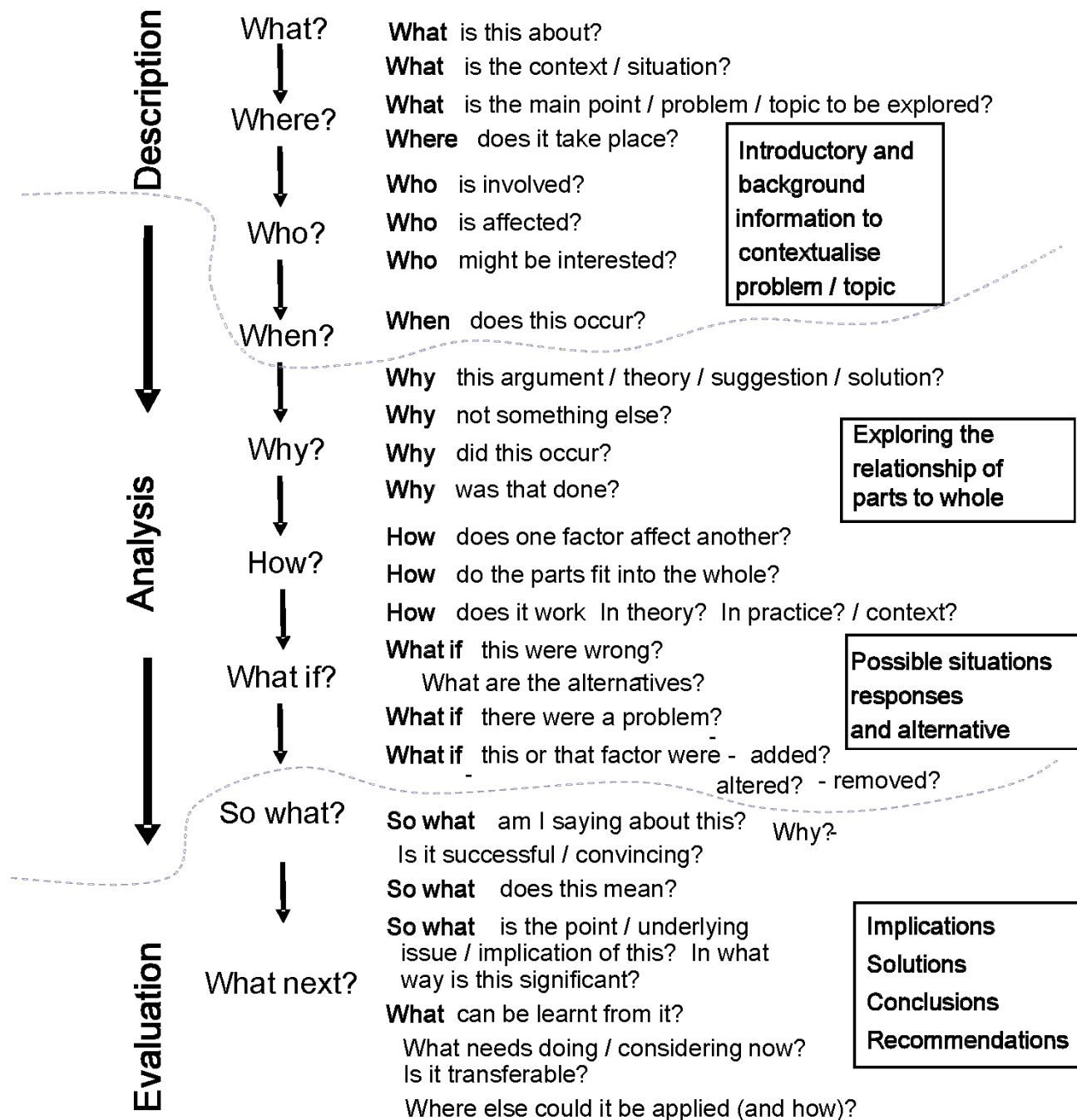


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Script 3



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Discussion?

- **Is this a good discussion?**

Forsyth (2013, p.36) states that '...others in the field of computing should do the following...' There are also a number of suggestions that computing practice should be... (Jones, 2016). Jones (2016) also describes this initial process as having...and there are a number of things to consider... According to Harvey (2015) it is required that computing specialists carryout... The guidelines also details certain aspect of practice required... (Fredrick, 2016). Jones (2016) touches on this by demonstrating...

NO! This is sentence after sentence of facts (only description)...

However, it is a good use of Harvard ('in-text' citations) referencing.

Sentence flow

‘Leaving aside the issue of structured training, normal daily physical activity is a neglected area. Daily exercise can...’

(Godfrey, 2013: 36)

Paragraphs

- Typically 5-7 sentences in length
 - Help break up the text
 - Makes it easier to read
 - Only use as a rough guide
- The first sentence of the paragraph most important!
 - Helps with the flow

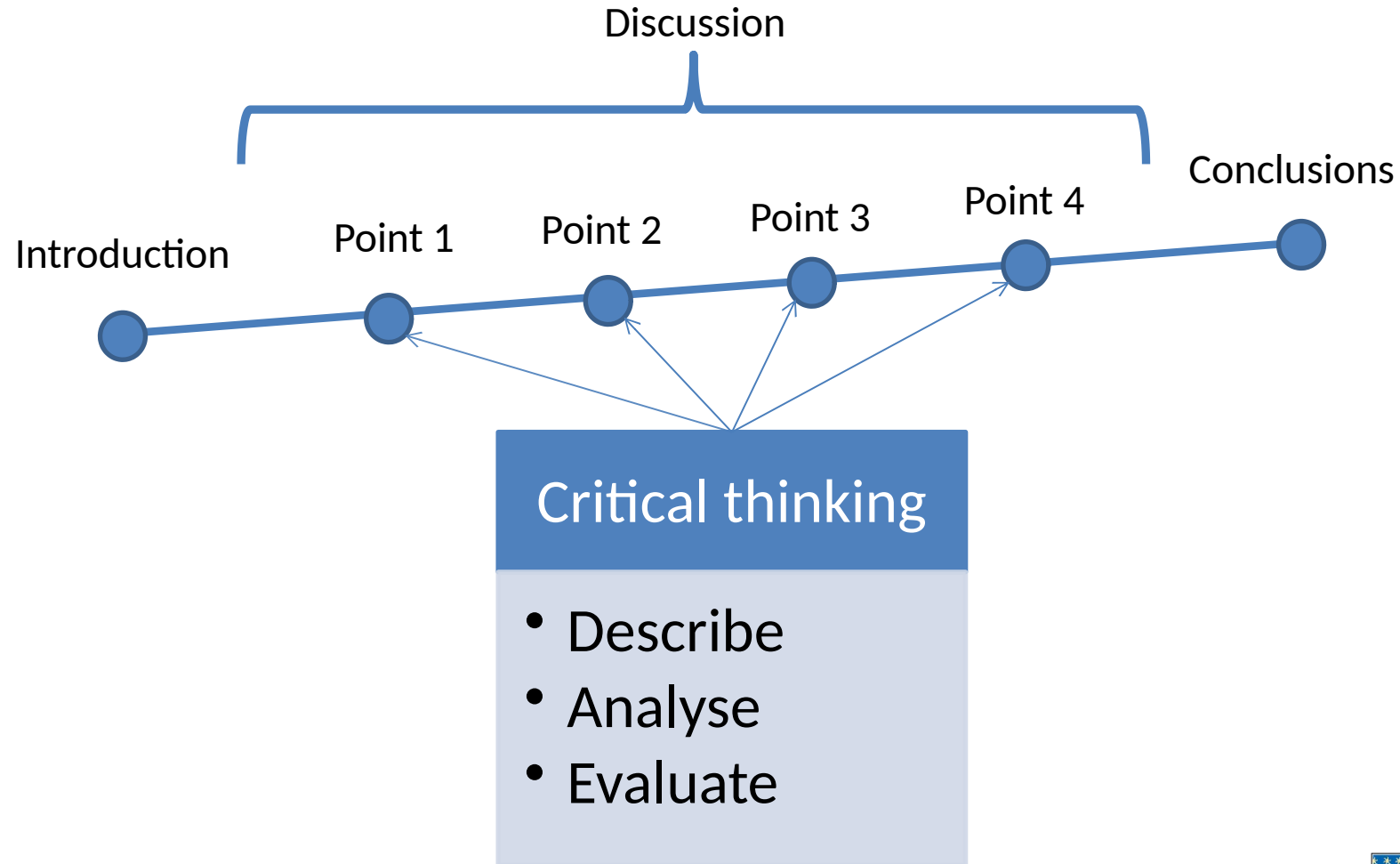
Making paragraphs flow

- The first sentence should help the reader understand the direction of writing:
 - Continuation from the last paragraph
 - Or starting a new point

‘The previous paragraph outlined the main sources of automatic ageism. There are also several other more minor sources.’

(Godfrey, 2013: 36)

Critical thinking



Describe, Analyse and Evaluate

Looking at individual design stages for any computing project, ...it is particularly important... (Harvey, 2016). Good computing practice should always... (Matthews, 2015). Certainly Frederick (2016) demonstrates many approaches to help avoid potential failures with certain computational designs...

However, to gain a better understanding of where poor design can lead to project failure, it is important to examine... ..certainly **I.T.** specialists need to communicate clearly what... as also suggest by Adams (2006). **Although, one major drawback** of this approach is that... (Harvey, 2016). In order to ensure that any design is...and performs as intended..., a new approach is required to overcome those issues... **However**, Brian (2016) provides a solution that would lead to better...

Having considered all the important issues associated with computational design practices, there is **clear evidence** that more needs to be done..., particularly... Making these changes would not only improve practice, but also lead to further improvements in...resulting in fewer failures... It is therefore **recommended** that...

PLEASE NOTE: make sure the acronyms are explained

E.g. Information Technology (**I.T.**) - appreciate this one is obvious, however, doing so ensures absolute clarity!

Writing with critical language

- www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk
- Manchester Phrase Bank

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester

Academic Phrasebank

Introducing Work Referring to Sources Describing Methods Reporting Results Discussing Findings Writing Conclusions

HOME » Being Critical

GENERAL LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- Being Critical
- Being Cautious
- Classifying and Listing
- Compare and Contrast
- Defining Terms
- Describing Trends
- Describing Quantities
- Explaining Causality
- Giving Examples
- Signalling Transition
- Writing about the Past

ABOUT PHRASEBANK

An enhanced and expanded version of PHRASEBANK can now be downloaded in PDF:

As an academic writer, you are expected to be critical of the sources that you use. This essentially means questioning what you read and not necessarily agreeing with it just because the information has been published. Being critical can also mean looking for reasons why we should not just accept something as being correct or true. This can require you to identify problems with a writer's arguments or methods, or perhaps to refer to other people's criticisms of these. Constructive criticism goes beyond this by suggesting ways in which a piece of research or writing could be improved.
... *being against* is not enough. We also need to develop habits of constructive thinking.
Edward de Bono

Introducing questions, problems and limitations: theory or argument

The main weakness with this theory is that ...
The key problem with this explanation is that ...
However, this theory does not fully explain why ...
One criticism of much of the literature on X is that ...
However, there is an inconsistency with this argument.
A serious weakness with this argument, however, is that ...
One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether ...
Smith's argument relies too heavily on qualitative analysis of ...
Smith's interpretation overlooks much of the historical research ...
Many writers have challenged Smith's claim on the grounds that ...
Smith's analysis does not take account of X, nor does he examine ...
It seems that Jones' understanding of the X framework is questionable.
The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.
One of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not explain why...

– Note the left navigation menu:

- Being Critical
- Being Cautious
- Classifying and Listing
- Compare and Contrast
- Defining Terms

Etc...

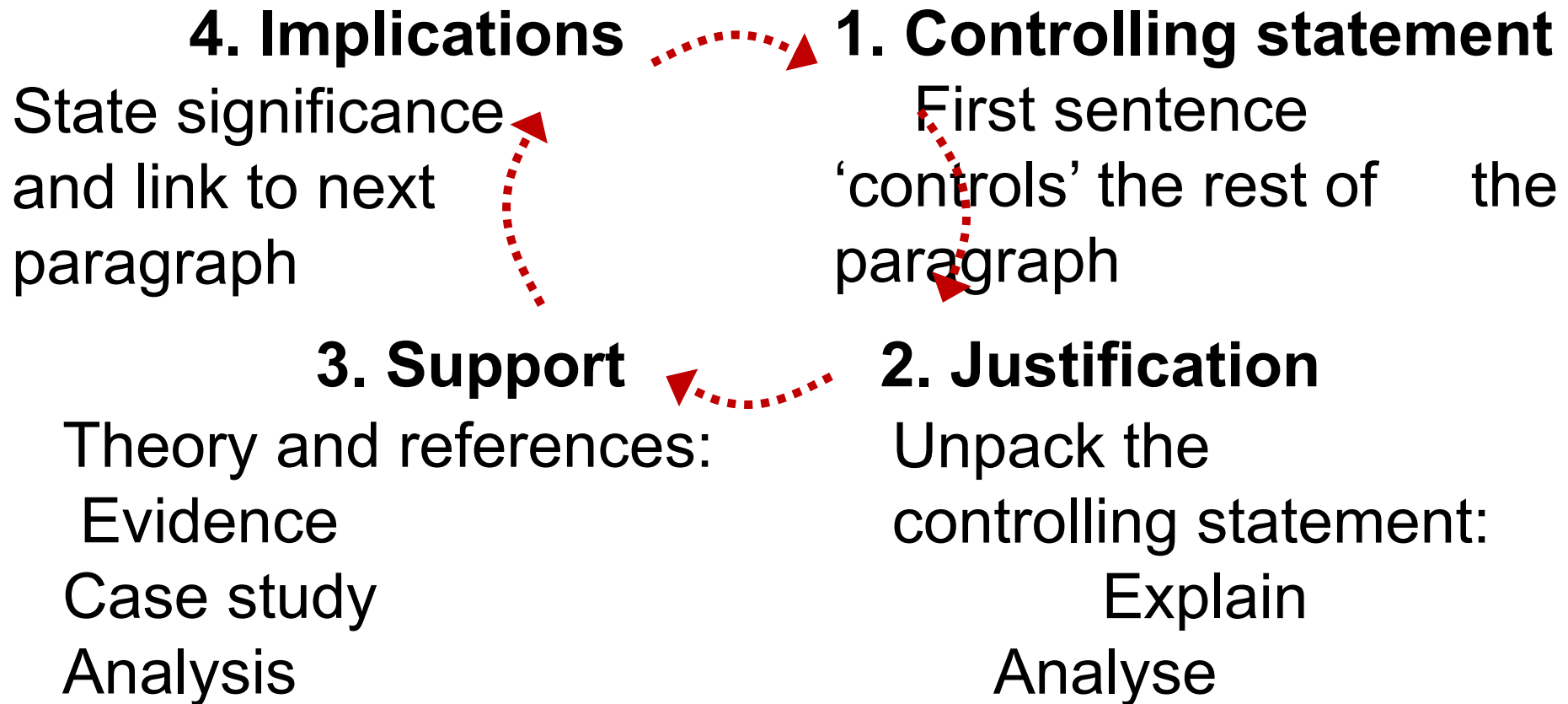
Other examples

- Other example reports (N.B. some provided on module DLE)
- What about journal articles? E.g.
 - Analyzing the ecosystem of malicious URL redirection through longitudinal observation from honeypots
 - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016740481730007X>
 - Structures can vary (headings and sub-headings)
 - Can provide ideas for structure approach

Making an argument?

Everyone clear on this?

Developing arguments



How to reference

- Cite Them Right (book and also online)
<http://www.citethemrightonline.com.plymouth.idm.oclc.org/>
- Off campus
 - This link includes university authentication (bookmark for future reference)
- Always check your assignment brief for preferred referencing format.
The following example is the commonly used 'Harvard' format.

How to reference a book (example)

- Be consistent with references and in text citations (Harvard):

In text citations:

(Johns, 2013, p. 25) or Johns (2013, p. 25)

Reference:

Johns, J.B. (2013) *A guide to good computing practice*. London: A publisher.

How to reference (journals)

- More than three authors (Harvard):

In text citation:

(Jacobson *et al.*, 2014) or Jacobson *et al.* (2014)

Reference:

Jacobson, R.J., Harrison, T., Ford, H., and Jones, P. (2014) 'Hackers and Phishers: what really goes through their minds?', *Journal of Information Technologies*, 33(3), pp. 323–326.

Reference list (Harvard: alphabetical order)

References

Adams, B. (2013) *Household router security*, London: A publisher.

Hamill, L. (2011) *Understanding the death of Flash*. 3rd ed.
Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Jacobson, R.J., Harrison, T., Ford, H., and Jones, P. (2014) 'Hackers and Phishers: what really goes through their minds?', *Journal of Information Technologies*, 33(3), pp. 323–326.

Johns, J.B. (2013) *A guide to computing practice*, London: A publisher.

Vivoni, E.R. and Camilli, R. (2003) 'Science and truth: are they really synonymous terms?', *Philosophy in science*, 13(4), pp. 457-468.

Bibliography

- This is different to a reference list
 - The bibliography items are things you might have read, but not cited (referenced) in the main report
 - Highlights 'useful' additional reading
 - Demonstrates wider reading

Appendices

- **Appendices are not typically included in the word count!**
- Items you might consider:
 - Requirements List
 - Concept sketches and photos of prototypes (not needed in main body)
 - Drawings and other illustrations not appropriate for the main body of the text
 - Concept evaluation tables
 - Project milestone tables
 - Meetings
 - Sample code
 - **Anything that would make the main body difficult to read**

However....DO NOT use the appendices as a dumping ground!

Think about why you are writing

- Planning:
 - The aim of my essay/report is to...
 - My argument will be valuable because...
 - My main points are... (Check the brief)
 - My conclusion will be...
 - My recommendations will be...

Writing the first draft

- Free writing maybe all you need to get started
- Ensure you structure your writing appropriately
 - Decided on appropriate sub-heading or sections needed
 - Easier to establish the main structure earlier on
 - What is it that your tutor wants?
 - How can you achieve this?

Keep writing

- Write regularly, 15-30 mins a day, to maintain momentum
- Avoid over elaborate writing, be concise and to the point; being aware of linking phrases and flow
- Proofread aloud and carefully to ensure proper language use and readability
- Talk about your ideas and writing as much as you can with others
- Read academic texts to see how they 'sound', follow the principles of their good practice

Report check list

1. What is the purpose of this report, and has it fulfilled that clearly?
2. Are your ideas presented logically?
3. Is there enough information, is the information included accurate?
4. Does the report cover all the key points?
5. Do you **analyse** your evidence/data?
6. Data & information → conclusions → recommendations?
7. Language, tone and style clear, direct and formal?
8. Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling correct?
9. Is the layout simple, clear, logical and consistent?
10. Clear, useful figures and tables, integrated and referenced?
11. Appropriate range of sources? Acknowledged properly?
12. Should there be a glossary? If there is one, is it comprehensive?
13. Are the appendices clearly labelled and signposted?
14. Have you left it for a while, gone back and reviewed it?

Feedback on this workshop

Enter in web browser

<https://bit.ly/2xxq1gS>

Or use your mobile scanner



Questions?

