**Subject: Tips for writing your assignment**

Your task of writing an assignment is a process which can be considered as part of an operation. Like any process within an operation, thisprocess needs managing. Your workshop, lectures and seminars on the subject of Operations Management in the Supply Chain context can be, and should be, used to help you get that grade A, which must be your goal.

Many concepts and tools have been covered on the subjectof Operations Management, including Total Quality Management (TQM) and Lean Management. These two areas of Operations Management can be used effectively not only in your assignment tasks, but also in the process of writing your assignment. Here are some steps to illustrate this, which if followed and applied, will increase the chance of not only passing your assignment, but achieving a high grade. Good luck.

**The Supply Chain**

The elements of the writing of your assignment of the total supply chain areas are follows:-

(Supplier) (Customer) (Supplier) (Customer) (Supplier) (Customer)

Tutor Student Student Tutor Tutor Student

Grading the assignment

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Writing the assignment

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2 day workshop

Note that the Tutor and Student exchange roles as supplier and customer which can be the case when defining internal suppliers and customers within an organisation and also when defining external suppliers and customers of the whole supply chain network.

**The ITO Model**

The **I**nput- **T**ransforming- **O**utput model can be used for any of the above three processes, but for the purposes of this paper, it will be focused on the process of the student writing his/her assignment for his customer i.e. the Tutor. Note that when the assignment is finally submitted via the University blackboard system (Turnitin), then the next process in the supply chain can be started which is the marking and grading of the assignment. Note that here the tutor now becomes the supplier and the student becomes the customer of the output of the process, namely the results and feedback. This alternating of the role of supplier and customer for an individual, department or organisation is a feature of establishing supply chain networks, processes or organisations. It is therefore important to know what “hat” you are wearing when working in any supply chain. The ITO model for the process of writing your assignment both TQM & Lean could look something like this:-

**Inputs Transforming activities Outputs**

Assignment brief reading and re-reading assignment brief final written assignment

Computer saving and backing up work addition to learning experience

Microsoft Word using consistent text and format increased knowledge

Library researching appropriate books increased understanding

Internet accessing safe information online increased portfolio of “tools”

Course lecture notes reading and reviewing course materials enhanced employability

Workshop activities understanding and applying valid “tools”

Time establishing a schedule for the task

Mentor seeking help from a local mentor

**Managing**

The managing process is made up of many activities and sub processes. These can include analysing, benchmarking, communicating, decision making, evaluating, funding, guiding, housekeeping, investigating, judging,“kanbanning”, listening, motivating, organising, planning, questioning, researching, scheduling, testing, undertaking, valuing, etc. Note that these examples are from a toz, but examples for x, y, and z are difficult to find.There are many more which can be found in my book Employability – Tips for a brighter future which can be accessed on [www.mentorquiz.wordpress.com](http://www.mentorquiz.wordpress.com) . The key sub processes for any managing activity, whether it is marketing, banking, engineering, manufacturing, etc., or in any industrial sector such as retail, health, logistics, education, automotive, etc., are remembered from the acronym **POSTED.** These are;

**P = Planning**

**O =Organising**

**S = Scheduling**

**T = Timing**

**E= Executing**

**D = Delivering**

In the context of writing an assignment, these six stages of the process of managing are:-

**Planning.** The plan has really been established for the student by the University of Northampton; in so much as the assessment method for crediting the student with a pass is an assignment. Alternative plans for assessment could have been an exam, a presentation or a Q & A session. However the Assignment brief is the plan of what is required in terms of a “do-able” set of tasks. The student should read .the assignment brief as a plan.

**Organising.** This involves establishing what resources are needed to start to assignment, to progress the assignment and to finally submit the assignment for grading. This could include establishing what tools are needed and the accessing channels to these tools. More specifically, these could include a work station with a computer and internet access, a library, course materials, student notes from workshops, text books, journal articles, newspaper reports and access to a mentor if required.

**Scheduling.** Having established the plan and what resources and materials are needed, it is now time to undertake the scheduling. This must be like a mini project plan using a Gantt chart approach. The first step is to establish the time available between now and the submission date. The submission date for assignment 1 (TQM)is March 3rd 2017. The day of the last workshop was January 21st 2017. Therefore the number of days available is 40 including weekends. Depending on the student’s abilities, knowledge, understanding, work ethic, learning efficiency, the balancing of conflicting priorities or work, family, leisure, and the time available, then only can an effective schedule be put together. For capacity planning and scheduling purposes, a workload of 40 hours to complete the assignment is used to determine the “project plan”.

Remembering the 96 minute theory for maximising productivity, then each session should be no more than 2 hours. This will avoid “cramming” and low productivity sessions of 4-6 hours or more. This also facilitates regular sessions where frequent gaps between sessions will give a greater chance of “inspirations”, so always keep a method of jotting down notes when in a taxi, or walking out. If 40 hours is used, then based on a two hour session per day as a maximum, then 25 days out of the 40 available need scheduling. Some people are “larks” and work better in the morning; some are “owls” and can work better in the late evening. So the student should pick their time of day for their optimum window. These two hour work sessions should not be in front of the TV, but in a quiet and private space, with phones switched off a “do not disturb sign” on the door. This is not being rude, but being pragmatic, productive, and professional. An example schedule is shown in Assessment Information on the Nile site. This can be modified by the student to fit their windows of work, novice/expert status and of learning.

**Timing.**Once the schedule is in place then tasks need launching according to the date and time. Attention is needed to the sequences, the start times, the duration and the end dates of each step. Adjustments may be needed to the schedule if some tasks are completed earlier or later than scheduled. This is normal practice. Also make sure that, like any project plan, that any predecessors are completed. If you are skilled in project planning, you may want to develop the critical path, but that is not essential for this assignment task.

**Executing.**This is the “spade work” of your work. It is work in progress and some questions must always be asked “is this adding value?”, “is use of time productive?”, “is their still focus?” and “is some rescheduling needed?” These questions and adjustments need to be done for a few minutes after each 2 hour session.

**Delivering.** This is the closing stage, but before final closing the assignment on the day of submission, allow 2 days to check against the checklists, fine tune, check again and fine tune. A last minute rush will reduce the chances of a good grade.

**Martin Lewis**

Martin Lewis OBE, author, television presenter, and financial expert states quite simply that in order to succeed in business and lifestudents have to “tick” 4 boxes. These boxes are:

1. **Skills**. Having a strong and increasing skills set. Having a good number of “tools” in the student” tool box”. Having a sound knowledge and understanding of the core subject and core concepts. Having the ability to research and find out new knowledge and understanding to add to the student’s portfolio of talents.
2. **Work Ethic**. Having the determination and commitment to do all the necessary work and put the hours in to complete the assignment both efficiently ( without wasting time) and effectively (getting a grade A).It is a fact of life that some students are quick learners and some are slow learners. It is also a fact that this assignment and the MBA course is run in English and English may not be the student’s first language. It is also a fact that some students have very high aspirations and want to pursue Operations Management as a career, yet some students may have lower aspirations and are just studying this subject as a means to an end to get their MBA.
3. All these factors are reasonable and valid. Therefore there is no fixed time on how long a student should schedule to complete an assignment. An expert (tutor) should take only 10 hours to complete Assignment 1 because he/she has the experience, the knowledge, the skills, the application rigour and confidence to work more efficiently and effectively that a novice to the subject. Being a novice is a term, which is not derogatory, but a term which describes somebody new to the subject. A novice/student could take between 20 and 40+ hours to complete this assignment, depending on many factors, some of which are mentioned above.
4. **Focus**. There is saying “when you are up to your neck in alligators, it is easy to forget that your task was to drain the swamp”. In other words it is very easy to get buried in a mess if the focus is not established, maintained and directed towards the objectives and tasks of the assignment. To this end it is imperative to not only read the assignment brief in detail, but to keep reading it and checking on it at regular intervals. In fact the assignment brief can be adapted as achecklist for the student to self- assess. See Appendix 2 for an example.

**4. Luck.** The definition of luck or chance varies by the philosophical, religious, mystical, and emotional context of the one interpreting it. According to the classic Noah Webster’s dictionary, luck is "apurposeless, unpredictable and uncontrollable force that shapes events favourably or unfavourably for an individual, group or cause". The author Max Gunther defines luck it as "events that influence one's life and are seemingly beyond one's control".

Using the 4Vs framework tool concept to compare and contrast 2 organisational operations in terms of Volume, Variety, Variation and Visibility, a framework can be established using Martin Lewis’s 4 “tick boxes” for student and an expert as follows:

Student Expert

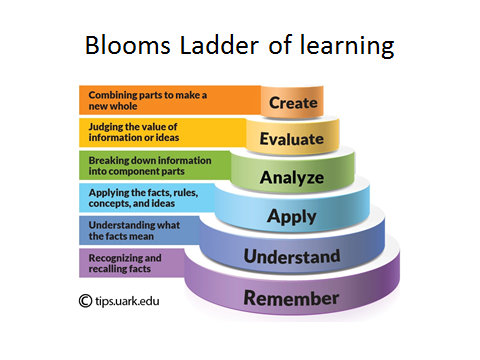
LOW TALENT/SKILLS HIGH

HIGH WORK ETHIC LOW

BAD? LUCK GOOD?

HIGH FOCUS LOW

**Blooms Ladder of Learning**

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The Tutor will mark and grade the final assignment based on many factors of the speciality, the presentation and the balancing of some important key factors. Some of these factors include the Blooms Taxonomy of Learning. The following questions need answering and rating (P = poor; F = fair; A = average; G = good and E = excellent) by the student before final submission.

1. Has the student shown a sound knowledge of the subject of TQM? No/Yes P- F-A-G- E
2. Has the student demonstrated an understanding of the issues of TQM? No/Yes P- F-A-G- E
3. Has the student applied effectively some of the concepts of TQM? No/Yes P- F-A-G- E
4. Has the student used tools with a focused objective and clear results? No/Yes P- F-A-G- E
5. Has the student evaluated the subject with some critical thinking? No/Yes P- F-A-G- E

Honesty is needed here to self-assess. Using a “no” as 0 marks, poor as 1, fair as 2, average as 3, good as 4 and excellent as 5, a mark out of 25 is established.The aim score should be a minimum of 20 with no individual score line less than 3. Any score line less than 3 should be worked to rectify

**Garvin’s Dimension of Quality**

Finally, Garvin’s Dimension of Quality can be used as a basis for some more checks.

1. **Performance.** Has the assignment achieved all the requirements in the written assignment brief? Have all the steps in the assignment brief been attempted and completed without exception? Clearly a good performance will result in a good grade.
2. **Features.** Does the writing flow well and contain some original and new ideas and comments from the student? Is it easy to read and follow?
3. **Reliability.** Can the content be relied on to work in the selected organisation? Is there a fit between theory and practice? Has the “talk the talk” been demonstrated in the “walk the walk”?
4. **Durability.** Are the recommendations and ideas sustainable? Will the solutions presented have a limited life or can be modified over time?
5. **Conformance.** Has the student written to assignment according to the UoN rules of plagiarism? Have reference to other authors of similar work been acknowledged and listed? Is the work the student’s own work?
6. **Serviceability.** Can this assignment be extended further and stand the test of time? Is it easy to apply without difficulty?
7. **Aesthetics.** Do is look good? Is it presented in a format of consistent type and size fonts? Is there a Table of Contents, page numbers, standard gutter widths, sub headings, completed front sheet, and would the CEO of the organisation chosen offer the student a job?
8. **Perceived Quality.** Different tutors can see different angles within a piece of work. Knowing your tutor and his/her style will help you hit the right “buttons” so the tutor perceives that the work is good or bad.

Good luck and if you follow the above guidelines, you will increase your chances of a good pass.