

A seven-point procedure for writing assignments

Until you develop your own method of writing essays and other assignments, you may find this seven-point procedure helpful.

1 Clarify the task

Before you start research, make sure you know what you are looking for.



- Examine the title and course notes very carefully (page 178). What exactly is required? Ask your tutor early on if you are unsure.
- Write one line to sum up your basic opinion or argument. Adapt it as you proceed.
- Brainstorm or make pattern notes to record what you know already.
- What do you need to read or find out?

3 Organise and plan

Organise your work as you go along (see page 183).

- Make a big chart to link ideas and details.
- Make a rough outline plan early on – you can refine it as you go along.

Planning

Keep checking what you are doing. Careful planning:

- helps to prevent repetition
- clarifies your thinking
- helps you organise your material.

2 Collect and record information

Get the information you need, but be focused.

- Be selective – you can't use everything.
- Write a set of questions to guide your research – and look for the answers.
- Check the word limit to see how much information you can use for each point.
- Keep a notebook nearby to jot down ideas.

Types of material

You can use any relevant material:

- factual information
- ideas, theories, opinions
- experience.

Sources

Many sources of information are available to you, including:

- books, articles, official reports, surveys
- lecture notes, data from laboratory work and projects, the internet, interviews
- television, radio, newspapers, videos.

Method

Keep asking yourself:

- 'Do I need the information?'
- 'How will I use this information?'

Recording

Record information as you go along (see page 127):

- where you found information and ideas – for your references list (see page 132)
- notes of themes, theories, dates, names, data, explanations, examples, details, evidence, page numbers (see page 122).



4 Engage, reflect, evaluate

When you have gathered the information, think about where you have got to.

- What have you discovered?
- Has your viewpoint changed?
- Have you clarified your argument?
- Have you enough evidence/examples?
- What arguments or evidence oppose your point of view? Are they valid?
- Is it clearer to you why this task was set?

6 Work on your first draft

Develop your first draft. You may need to do this several times, improving the assignment with each version. Leave time between drafts for your ideas to simmer.

- Rewrite your early draft (see page 191). Adapt the structure (pages 184, 264) and organise the writing into paragraphs.
- Make sure your argument is clear to readers.
- Check that you have included evidence and examples to support your points.
- Write out your references (or bibliography).

5 Write an outline plan and first draft

Now structure your writing.

- Refine your plan. Work out the order to introduce your ideas, using pattern notes or headings and points.
- Work out how many words you can write on each point. What must you leave out?
- Write a first draft. Write quickly: it is only a draft. You may find it easier to type headings onto the computer first.
- Start with whatever seems easiest.
- Keep going: don't worry about style.
- To begin with, state things clearly and simply in short sentences.

- 1 Title
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Main argument – notes Q (red)
evidence for – notes Q, p. 3–4
evidence against: Q, p. 5 (orange)
evaluation of evidence
- 4 Alternative theory: notes R (yellow)
example of application
evidence for
evidence against (lemon)
why not convincing
- 5 Alternative theory 2: notes S (green)
evaluation of evidence
why not convincing
- 6 Underlying issues – notes T (blue)
- 7 Conclusions
 - a
 - b
 - c

7 Final draft

Edit and check your final draft (see page 197).

- Enjoy 'fine-tuning' your writing.
- Read it aloud to check that it is clearly written.
- Keep redrafting until you are happy with the text.

