

Preparing for assignments

Prepare

- start to work on your assignment as soon as possible
- have a folder/file for each assignment – you can put any relevant notes, jot down ideas on the assignment into the file/folder
- brainstorm the topic
- group themes together – these will form your paragraphs
- look at the aims and learning outcomes in the Module Guide – shape your essay/assignment so that it demonstrates you have met the learning outcomes
- action plan – when is the assignment hand-in date? How many weeks ahead? Plan what you will do each week

Actively research and read

- read actively - SQ3R technique – and purposefully
- as you read – keep your reference list up to date – ensure it is accurate and in alphabetical order - this will save you a lot of time later

Review notes

- from lectures/seminars/tutorials/reading
- think about what will go into each paragraph

Plan the structure

- consider the order of your assignment – plan what you want to put in the body of your essay
- one main idea per paragraph – are the paragraphs in a logical order?
- you could use an essay template or put the ideas onto separate pieces of paper which you can move around to work out the best structure

Write the first draft

- try to make the first draft flow so don't worry if it's not perfect at this stage
- you could write a 'favourite' paragraph first
- leave the introduction and conclusion until later
- if, when you have started writing, you are stuck for an idea you could put(dot, dot, dot)... then carry on writing – go back and fill the gaps later

Leave it

- once you have written the first draft, put your assignment aside for a while – this will give you time to reflect on your writing and let your mind wander over the topic

Review, revise and edit

- then go back and re-read what you have written and change it
- allow plenty of time for this
- you may need to write more than one draft before you are happy with your writing
- think about writing in an academic style (e.g. it could be argued that..... this suggests that.....)
- remember – you have to make the point – it's not up to your reader to work out what you meant to say
- if some of your sentences are very long, consider shortening them
- look at your paragraph structure
- have you answered the assignment question?

Write the final draft

Proof-read

- check - spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - check that you have 'flagged' **all** references in the text
- tips:** read the assignment aloud
proof read from the bottom of the page to the top
proof read several times

hand it in on time – remember to keep a copy of your assignment

Feedback

- when your assignment is returned to you, don't just file it.....look at the feedback your tutor has given you and use the comments to help you write a better assignment next time
- book a tutorial with a Study Skills Tutor to action plan to help you improve your written skills

References

Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2008), *Essential Study Skills. The Complete Guide to Success at University*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Northedge, A. (2005), *The Good Study Guide*. 2 rev. ed. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Pritchard, A. (2008), *Studying and Learning at University. Vital Skills for Success in Your Degree*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

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