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HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

Analysing & Planning Assignments

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Workshop objectives

- To understand & appreciate the academic **writing process**
- To approach academic writing from a **methodical, systematic and analytical** perspective
- To highlight the importance of **analysing assignment questions, planning, time management and research skills**

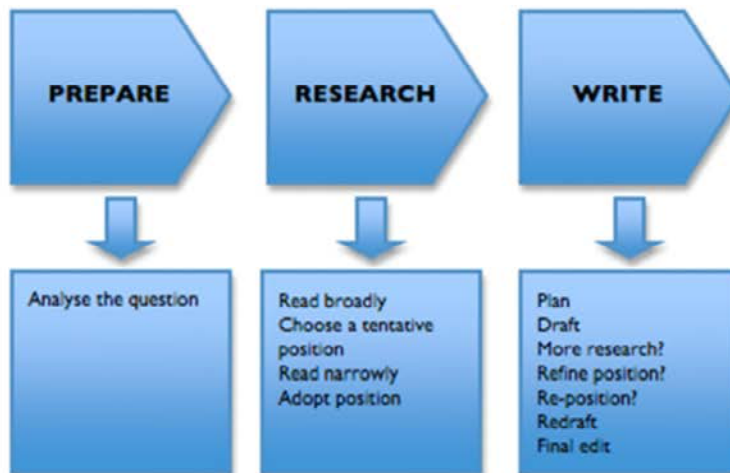
Let's Discuss!

- How soon do you start your assignments? Are you an early starter or leave things to the last minute?
- Do you always fully clarify the assignment task with the lecturer? If not, why not? What type of assignments are you working on now?
- How do you plan before writing? Do you have a good strategy? If so, please describe it.
- How do you select information for your assignment?

Types of Assignments:

- Essays – discuss / contrast / compare / argue
- Case Studies
- Reports
- Technical Reviews
- Literature reviews
- Journals/Personal Experience (Reflective)
- Critical Reviews
- Theses

Academic Writing Process



What lecturers really want ...

If you are not sure where to start, take a look at:

UTS Guide to Writing Assignments

<http://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/business-writing-guide-2014.pdf>

Academic Writing (UTS Library)

<https://www.lib.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/attachments/page/Academic%20Writing%20Guide%20Part%201%20-%20Academic%20Writing.pdf>



Academic Writing
UTS LIBRARY

February 2013



Why should you analyse + plan assignment questions?

- **It gives you confidence**
- **It saves time**
- **It increases your chance of a better result or grade**

Assignment writing process

For every assignment you **need** to allow sufficient time to:

- **Understand**
- **Brainstorm**
- **Read & research**
- **Structure**
- **Present**
- **Edit**
- **Proofread**

- **Understand** the question
- **Brainstorm** ideas
- **Read & research** enough relevant, reliable information to answer the question properly
- **Structure** your assignment
- **Present** your main ideas or arguments and **support** your main ideas or arguments
- **Edit** your writing for coherence and unity
- **Proofread** for grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes

Analysing & planning an assignment

David Taplin
UTS Counselling

Time Management Matrix (Covey)

		URGENT	NOT URGENT		
I M P O R T A N T	I Quadrant of Necessity (MANAGE) Activities -Crises, pressing Deadlines & Problems. Mechanical thinking. Result –Stress, Burnout, Putting out fires, Crisis Managers.			II Quadrant of Quality & Personal Leadership (FOCUS) Activities –Planning long-term goals and crisis prevention, relationship building, recreation, creating new ideas, preparation, relaxation, exercise. Result –Perspective, Vision, balance, control, few crises	I M P O R T A N T
	III Quadrant of Deception (AVOID) Activities –Interruptions, popular activities, some phone calls email meetings. Other people’s agendas! Result –Short term focus; feel out of control, crisis management.			IV Quadrant of Waste (AVOID) Activities -Trivia, some pleasant activities, time wasters, some calls, email. Result –Nothing achieved, dependent on others for direction, don’t meet commitments.	
N O T I M P O R T A N T				N O T I M P O R T A N T	

Urgency and Importance are related but they are not the same thing. The thing one often responds to is urgency, we think we are doing what is useful but sometime this is not actually the case.

IN DEPTH NOTES

Let’s have a quick look at the handout-and then try and understand its practical applications

Quad 1 fire fighter corner-if a house is on fire put it out

URGENT AND IMPORTANT: “I must do this now or the house will burn down”-Fire fighter trap

QUADRANT OF NECESSITY

MANAGE

Examples: cramming for tests, last minute essay writing-deadline tomorrow, friend in crisis needs to talk, need to arrange for accommodations on exams, bill needs to be paid , medical emergencies, last minute preparation for scheduled activities, etc

Activities that fit in here tend to be: Crises, pressing deadlines and problems

Consequences: If you live in here, it can overtake you: You’ll experience: Stress, burnout, crisis management, always putting out fires.

How do you end up here? You could be procrastinating too much, stressing too much or do not yet have strong time management skills.

Quad 2-calm corner

NOT URGENT AND IMPORTANT

QUADRANT OF QUALITY AND PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

FOCUS-“This is what it is all about”. Requires planning and initiative but also time to reflect. They are easily put on hold due to lack of urgency

Activities that fit here are planning goals (med-long term), crisis prevention, relationship building, creating new ideas or recognising new opportunities, preparation and planning, true recreation and exercise, values clarification

Consequences Vision and perspective, balance, discipline, control, few crisis

Covey found that highly effective people spend some of their time in Quad B. I.e. they are not crisis managers but time managers. B's can easily become A's-try to avoid this

QUADRANT 3-distraction

URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT

Quadrant of Deception

Avoid: "I can't say no trap", I don't consider this important or satisfying but I have a hard time getting away from it and it prevents me from accomplishing the important stuff" or "poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part".

Activities that fit here are: Interruptions, many popular activities, many pressing matters, some phone calls, and some email meetings. Other peoples agendas

Consequences: short term focussed Crisis management;; Controlled by other peoples priorities, see goals and plans as worthless

Feel victimised or out of control... Be careful, these activities may appear urgent but in relation to your goals are not

QUADRANT 4-procrastination

NOT URGENT NOT IMPORTANT

QUADRANT OF WASTE

AVOID, "PROCRASTINATOR TRAP". I'll just do this because it is easy, mindless and helps me avoid the hard stuff activities.

Activities that fit here:

Trivia, some pleasant activities (some pleasant activities are also not urgent but important – it is important to have a balanced life), time waster, some calls, junk and low value, mindless web or channel surfing, some emails, some MSN, viewing mindless TV or playing games, reading lots of random RSS feeds

Result: Nothing achieved, dependent on others for direction, don't meet commitments.

Also total irresponsibility, fired from jobs, dependent on others for basics

Avoid this quadrant as much as possible. The more time you spend here the fewer goals you achieve. Minimise or eliminate

BRIEF NOTES – (Covey)

Ask questions of participation's. Ie what quadrant should you ideally spend most of the time in? Quadrant I can overtake us – may find escape in Quadrant IV.

- Quadrant I can overtake us – may find escape in Quadrant IV.
- II – not urgent but important. Building relationships, long range planning, Creative ideas, balance, preventative maintenance.
- No Attention to II and III. Eg Manage Life by Crises.
- III appears urgent but usually based on the priorities and expectations of others. Learn to say No.
- Effective people stay out of quadrant 3 & 4 and shrink Quad 1 down to size by spending more time in Quadrant 2.

Weekly Study Schedule

Week No. _____ Start _____ End _____	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	WORK	WORK	Study Cycle 1
Tuesday	UNI	UNI	Study Cycle 2
Wednesday	Study Cycle 3	Assessment work	Assessment work
Thursday	UNI	UNI	UNI
Friday	UNI	UNI	WORK
Saturday	sleep	Study Cycle 4	socialise
Sunday	sleep	Assessment work	Assessment work

www.ssu.uts.edu.au/counselling/workshops/WEEKSCHED_0208.pdf

Here's a hypothetical one.

If you're lucky to have a neat timetable 4 subjects will probably fit into 6 blocks of uni in the week. Add in a bit of part time work. Have a Saturday sleep in. Have Saturday night outing. Where is your exercise, household chores, shopping etc? Very quickly you can see 10 blocks of study and uni work time will shrink.

The message. Be organised and plan. You will have low volume weeks. Use these to get ahead to make the inevitable high volume weeks manageable.

In the counselling service we see lots of students that have got overwhelmed by nightmare weeks of multiple major tasks. The 'secret' is to identify these times from the start and plan for them – ie get some of the work done earlier.

Chores, exercise, catching up w friends and family

Weekly plan

- **Study cycle** – review and prepare
- **Assessment work:**
 - What is your plan for the task
 - What goes into the ‘to-do’ list for this session?

 - What is the ideal session length for you?
 - What’s on your ‘menu’ of short breaks
 - What are your ‘resistance’ strategies

WHEN IS ALL THIS GOING TO GET DONE?

Writing & editing
Warm up analogy

Future self continuity

- Future self is more organised more together more everything we're not now
 - McGonnigil

Procrastination Group

- Tuesday 14th August for 4 Tuesdays, 2-3:30pm
- Reduce your procrastinating behaviours through discussion, mindfulness exercises, practical exercises and group support.
- Information about groups is available from the Counselling Service
- Register online through the Counselling website

Self Management 'Hacks'

- To do list
- Do one thing at a time – with focus
- Allocate yourself specific tasks to do at specific times (know your 'work block' length)
- Set a deadline
- Make choices conscious
- Think what your future self will say
- Have a break 'menu'

*Mythical future self: more patient, more organised, more everything we're not now...'
(McGonigal 2012)*

Be a Master of Time Management!

Activity

Try these assignment planning calculators for **your current topic**
➔

<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/form/24614/assignment-calculator>

<http://www1.rmit.edu.au/library/assignment-planner>

<http://www.student.uwa.edu.au/learning/studysmarter/getsmart/assignment-calculator>



Source: <http://www1.rmit.edu.au/library/assignment-planner>

Stage 1: Prepare to write

- Analyse the task for key words
- Rephrasing the assignment question
- Break down the assignment question
- Use the assessment criteria as a checklist
- Seek clarification if necessary
- Make an informed choice on the material you need to research

- Analyse the task for **key words** – words that identify the topic or issue.
- Try **rephrasing** the assignment question to ensure that you fully understand it.
- Try to **break down the assignment question** into a series of questions.
- **Use the assessment criteria as a checklist:**
 - The marks allocated for each criterion give an indication of how much time should be spent (and therefore how much should be written) on each part of the question, and
 - ensure that no parts of the question are left unanswered.
- **Seek clarification if necessary** – discuss the interpretation with your classmates, and ask your lecturer/tutor if unsure.
- Knowing precisely what content is required will help you **make an informed choice on the material you need to**

read about or research.

Stage 2: Research

- **Read broadly**
- **Formulate a tentative position**
- **Focus your reading**
- **Commit to a position**

• **Read broadly** to get an overall picture of the topic in question, starting with your lecture notes, subject learning guide, introductory and general texts. Keep the assignment question in mind while you read.

• **Formulate a tentative position** once you have an overall understanding of the topic, then focus on more detailed texts and your 'possible line of argument'.

• **Focus your reading** to validate your adopted tentative position. Search for texts that detail the issues you have identified as part of the overall picture by referring to the reading list in your subject outline, the reference lists in the introductory/general texts and relevant journal articles, and the library catalogue and databases.

• **Commit to a position** to keep your writing focused, logical and coherent.

Stage 3: Writing

1. Plan
2. Draft and redraft
3. Edit

1. Plan → **organise your argument and evidence**, and **establish connections between your points**. You may not need a detailed plan prior to writing a draft (a list of headings and sub-headings may suffice). It is essential to have a plan prior to writing as it provides an **overview of what your assignment will cover**, guides you along the way, and ensures that nothing is left uncovered.

2. Draft and redraft → start **writing the first draft**. You will probably find that you need to **redraft** your writing several times. In the process of drafting and redrafting, you may find that you need to do more research or reading in a particular area in order to strengthen an argument or evidence in your assignment.

3. Edit → after you have completed the final draft, leave it for at least a day before you **do the final editing**. Check for structural, grammatical and technical aspects.

Activity: What do these task words really mean?

- **justify**
- **contrast**
- **evaluate**
- **analyse**
- **prove**
- **discuss**
- **criticise**
- **define**
- **summarise**
- **describe**
- **explain**
- **compare**

What do these task words really mean? ANSWERS

- Justify:** Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, probably including the need to 'argue' a case.
- Criticise:** Spell out your judgement as to the value or truth of something, indicating the criteria on which you base your judgement and citing specific instances of how the criteria apply in this case.
- Contrast:** Point out the difference between two things (but probably point out their similarities as well).
- Define:** Make a statement as to the meaning or interpretation of something, giving sufficient detail as to allow it to be distinguished from similar things.
- Evaluate:** Make an appraisal or the worth of something, in the light of its apparent truth; include your personal opinion.
- Summarise:** 'State' the main features of an argument, omitting all superfluous detail and side-issues.

Source: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/glossary-task-words>

What do these task words really mean? ANSWERS

- Analyse:** Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them and show how they interrelate.
- Describe:** Spell out the main aspects of an idea or topic or the sequence in which a series of things happened.
- Prove:** Demonstrate the truth of something by offering irrefutable evidence and/or logical sequence of statements leading from evidence to conclusion.
- Explain:** Tell how things work or how they came to be the way they are, including perhaps some need to 'describe' and to 'analyse'.
- Discuss:** Investigate or examine by argument. Examine key points and possible interpretations, sift and debate, giving reasons for and against. Draw a conclusion.
- Compare:** Identify the characteristics or qualities two or more things have in common (but probably pointing out their differences as well).

Source: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/glossary-task-words>

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VIDEO

<https://www.powtoon.com/onlinepresentation/b5xbp3Mq9Rd/?mode=movie#/>

Clarify the Assignment Type

Differences between Essays, Reports and Journals

Essays, reports and reflective journal writing are the most common forms of writing you're likely to experience as a student, so it's useful to see how each differs.

In the tables, there are comparisons between each type of writing in the areas of:

- Purpose
- Topic
- Audience
- Format
- Style
- Assessment

Purpose

Essay	Report	Journal
To write a well argued response to the question or proposition. An essay establishes a proposition (thesis).	To investigate, present and analyse information thoroughly and logically. Often to recommend action to solve a problem. A report usually makes proposals.	To record the development of your ideas and insights; reflect on the content of the subject and on your own learning process; and analyse and discuss key issues covered by classwork and/or readings.

Conducting Research

UTS Library Website

→ How to find books

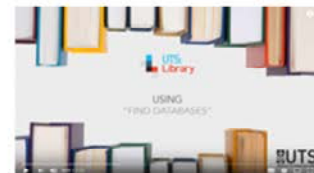
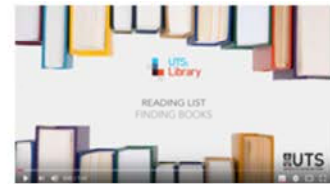
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WQUwi4Rkeg>

→ How to find scholarly journal articles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1dMi5WO-w0>

→ How to find the right database

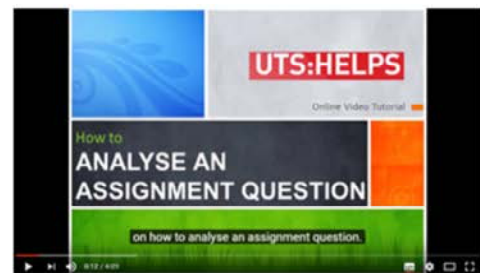
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOUNs-FhyAw>



Easy Steps to Writing an Assignment

Let's take a look at some useful advice and watch a screencast.....

<http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/self-help-resources/academic-writing/easy-steps-writing-essay>



Planning your Research

- Focus on the relevant information you need
- Be selective
- Be a critical reader. Use these 5 criteria:
authority, accuracy, currency, coverage & objectivity
- Use only relevant & reliable information
- Ask yourself ‘how will I use this information?’

Reflect on Your Research

Once you have the **relevant** information:

- What have you discovered and learnt?
- How does your new knowledge help your understanding?
- What arguments or evidence have you discovered?
- How have your ideas/opinions been influenced?
- Do you now have a clearer understanding of the task ahead?
- Could it help to form your central argument?
- Can you use it as evidence?
- Will it help you locate other information?

Planning

- Use planning diagrams, lists, charts, sheets and/or mind maps to help you brainstorm and construct the 'skeleton' of your essay/assignment
- Ensure you read the marking criteria carefully, as this is your 'content' checklist



Source: <https://media.mit.edu.au/learninglab/content/jan>

HELPS Planning Sheet

Question: _____

Question analysis _____

Introduction:

- Background to topic/Link to assignment question
- Outline structure of assignment: (Idea 1, 2, 3 etc.....)
- Thesis statement? (your main argument)

Ideas/Key points

Conclusion:

- Summarise each idea
- Re-state thesis?
- Further implications?

Planning Sheet

(freely available at HELPS!)

What can you do if you don't understand what the assignment question is asking you?

- Ask in class
- Go see your lecturer personally (take a draft)
- Go see another member of faculty
- Ask peers/classmates
- Email your lecturer for help
- See a HELPS advisor (drop-in consultation)
- **ALWAYS seek help if you need it!!**

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- Conversations@UTS
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