

Higher Education Language & Presentation Support

Analysing Assignment Questions & Planning for an Assignment

HELPS

(Higher Education Language & Presentation Support)

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Contact us

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- 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

Learning Objectives

- 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?
- 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?

Discussion Questions

- Do you always fully clarify the assignment task with the lecturer? If not, why not?
- What type of assignments are you doing this semester?

Analysing an assignment question

Student:

I wasn't really sure what the question was asking me to do, so I just wrote everything I knew on that topic.

Lecturer:

This is a well-written piece but it does not address the question that was set – it is full of lots of interesting pieces of information but much of it is not relevant to the topic.

UTS Business Guide to Writing
<http://www.business.uts.edu.au/teaching/guide/>

What lecturers want

Why should you analyse assignment questions?

It gives you confidence

It saves time

It increases your chance of a good grade

Why?

For every assignment you need to:

- Understand the question
- **Brainstorm** ideas
- **Read** 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
- **Allow enough time** for each of these ...!

Analysing an assignment question

- <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/assignment-planning-calculator.php>

Assignment Planning Calendar

1. **What factors contribute** to *depression amongst adolescent middle-class females*?
2. *Depression amongst adolescent middle-class females* can be addressed by mood altering medication. **To what extent do you agree?**
3. **Describe the main factors** contributing to *depression amongst adolescent middle-class females*. **Evaluate** three common approaches to this condition, then **explain and justify** an alternative technique.

Different question types

In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.

Monash University, 2012, *Language and Learning Online*, Sydney, viewed 23 January 2012, <http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/index.xml>

Advice from UTS Library on understanding the above essay question: <http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/help/study-skills/assignment-survival-kit>

Sample question - essay

How should you do it?

- Stage 1: Understand what you are being asked
- * Ask questions
 - * re-write the question in **your own words (paraphrase)**
- Stage 2: Break the question down into **meaningful pieces.**

How?

- **BENEFIT 1.** It forces you to engage with and reflect on the topic, thus stimulating the unconscious mind to solve the problem and sparking your own **interest in the topic** (after doing this, you will find that you have sudden brainwaves about the question)
- **BENEFIT 2.** It clarifies **how well you understand the question** and will tell you whether you need to check some vocabulary, facts and concepts, or if you should ask your lecturer some further clarifying questions.
- **BENEFIT 3.** By writing the question in your own words, you have made a contract with yourself about something **you are committed** to, and are therefore more likely to follow through with it.

Step 1: Paraphrase

- **PARAPHRASE**
- **ORIGINAL VERSION**
- Environmentally friendly cars hybrid automobiles
- cover the extra expenses subsidise
- can be produced as cheaply allows for cheaper production
- Do you believe that governments must cover the extra expense of environmentally friendly cars until they can be produced as cheaply as regular vehicles? Choose a position and support it using six or more sources.

Step 1: Paraphrase

PARAPHRASE

Businesses with between
100 and 1000 staff

Many different reasons
(a range of reasons)

demonstrate how

enhance and damage
Advantages/disadvantages
pros and cons? (formal enough?)

ORIGINAL VERSION

small to medium companies

a variety of purposes

explain

drawbacks and benefits

A large proportion of business organizations with between 100 and 1000 staff exploit communications technologies such as Blogging and Instant Messaging for many different reasons. In a report of 2000 words, demonstrate how such technologies can enhance and damage a professional organization.

Step 1: Paraphrase

The requirements :

Format (e.g. essay, report, case study etc); word length, layout conventions; due date

The content/topic:

a noun phrase (e.g. 'depression amongst adolescent middle-class females').

The instructions/purpose: What do you have to do with the topic?

Step 2: Deconstruct

- Justify
- Contrast
- Evaluate
- Analyse
- Prove
- Discuss

Criticise
Define
Summarise
Describe
Explain
compare

Use of question verbs

Planning Assignment by paragraphs

Assuming an average paragraph length of 150 words, the essay below should have approximately ? paragraphs.

Essay: 2,000 words

Due: April 9

Governments should subsidise the difference in price between hybrid automobiles and non-hybrids until the technology allows for cheaper production of such vehicles. Do you agree? Include at least 6 different sources to justify your argument.

Planning assignment from the question

- Introduction
- Paragraph 2: Definition of hybrid cars
- Paragraph 3-5: Counter arguments
- Paragraph 6: First benefit of hybrid subsidisation
- Paragraph 7: Second benefit
- Paragraph 8: Third benefit
- Paragraph 9: Fourth benefit
- Paragraph 10: Re-cap of paragraphs 6-9
- Paragraph 11: Why hybrid subsidisation is affordable
- Conclusion

Planning assignment from the question

- **BENEFIT 1.** You now have **definite research objectives** for your essay (as you read, you will notice useful information for inclusion in each paragraph).
- **BENEFIT 2.** Your **study sessions** can be based on specific objectives (e.g. "Tonight I will spend two hours researching")
- **BENEFIT 3.** You will not get sidetracked by **irrelevant detail**, and will thereby assure yourself of answering the question.

Planning assignment from the question

- Faculty
 - Subject tutor, lecturer and coordinator – refer to subject outlines
 - Course coordinator – refer to subject outlines
 - Academic Advisers: <http://www.sau.uts.edu.au/managing/advisers.html>
 - Academic Liaison Officers and Responsible Academic Officers: <http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/sneeds/services/assessment/alo.html>
 - Learning Support Coordinator
 - Student Centre
- Student Services Unit: <http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/>
- UTS Library: <http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/>
- Students' Association: <http://www.sa.uts.edu.au/>
- Student Ombuds: <http://www.ombuds.uts.edu.au/>
- International Student Advisers: <http://www.uts.edu.au/international/study/services.html>
- Mathematics Study Centre: <http://www.science.uts.edu.au/facilities/centre/maths.html>

Where and how to seek help

- In order to decide how best to answer an assignment question you need to identify what the question requires in terms of **content** and **genre**.
- You need to thoroughly examine and ‘break down’ the assignment question.
- You also need to work through a **step-by-step** process of **planning** and writing.

In the beginning.....

Types of Assignments:

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

1. Clarify the Type

Clarify the Type

- Look at ‘key’ words
- Look at the task words
(*analyse, describe, discuss, explain, suggest etc.*)
- Search for defining or limiting words (that will clarify / limit what is required).
- Clarify any uncertain terms / unfamiliar vocabulary
- Write down in your own words what you think the question means

2. Analyse the Question

UTS Library Website

Finding books

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNJhiOTRgdQ&list=UUJWLPmdu5cKJhREPjTEfmrQ&index=13&feature=plpp_video

Finding a journal article

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp_TE9SLX1E&list=UUJWLPmdu5cKJhREPjTEfmrQ&index=12&feature=plpp_video

Finding the right database

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1QeMDxP1Dw&list=UUJWLPmdu5cKJhREPjTEfmrQ&index=10&feature=plpp_video

3. Conduct 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 info?’

3. Conduct your Research

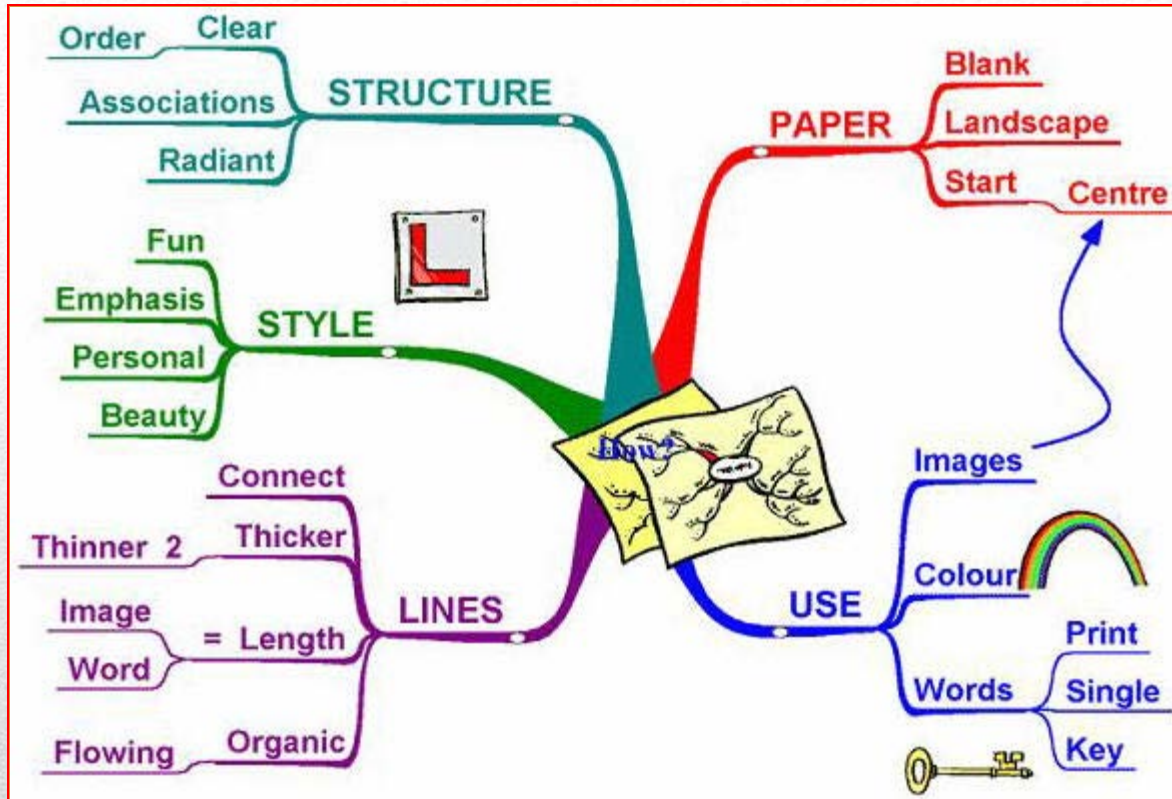
Once you have the **relevant** information:

- 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?

4. Reflect on your Research

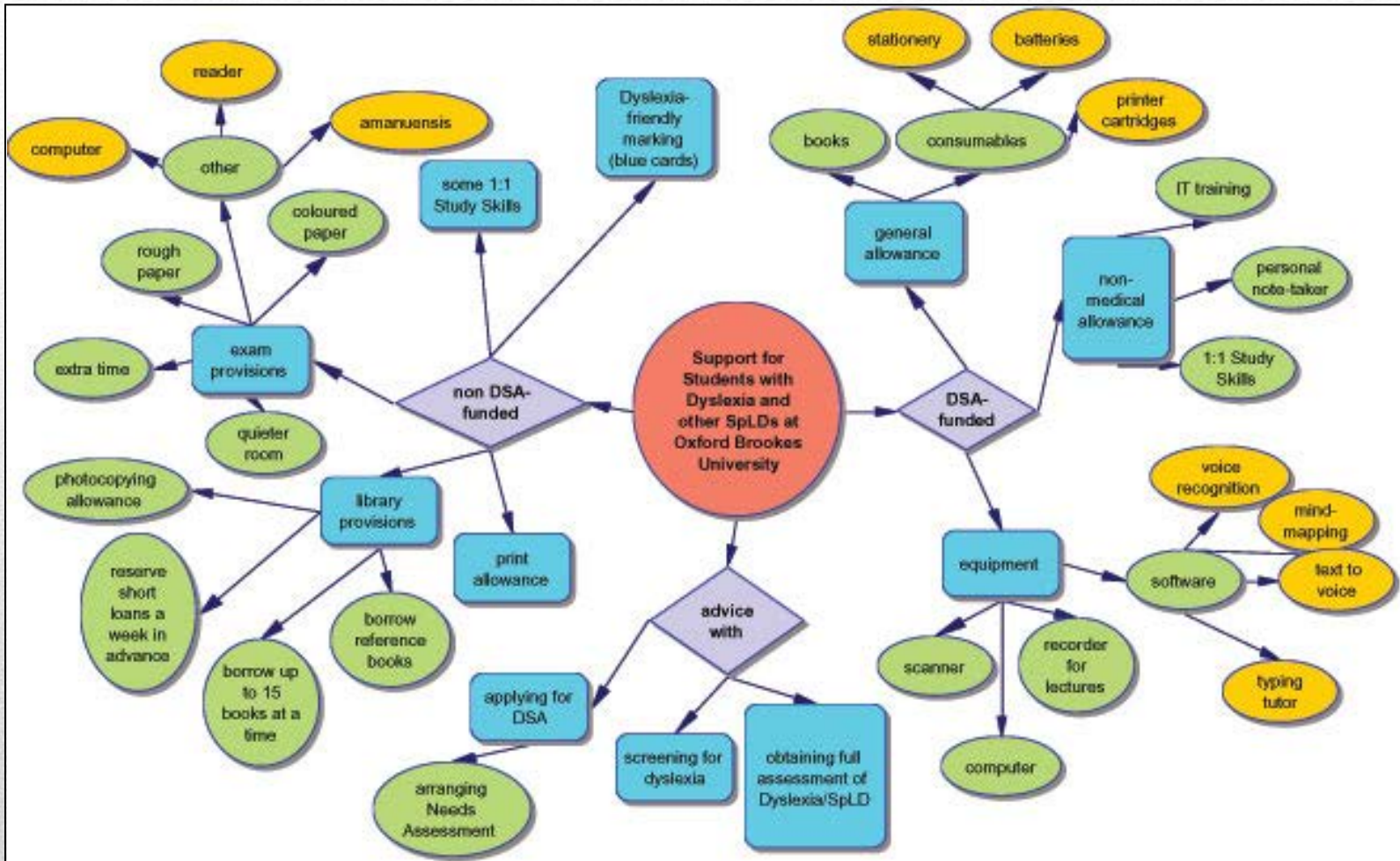
- Use planning diagrams and maps to help you brainstorm
- Organise your work as you go along
(construct lists/charts/flow diagrams)
- Check you are making progress
- Ensure you have an organised plan for your writing/assignment

5. Organise & Plan



Source: studyskills.com

Example: Mind Map



Example: Bubble Plan

- Use a planning sheet to help you ‘map out’ your intended essay/assignment
- Using a planning sheet – put the plan of the essay onto it.
- Always keep in mind the original question being asked and ensure your arguments/examples are relevant!
- Ensure you read the marking criteria carefully, as this is your ‘content’ checklist.

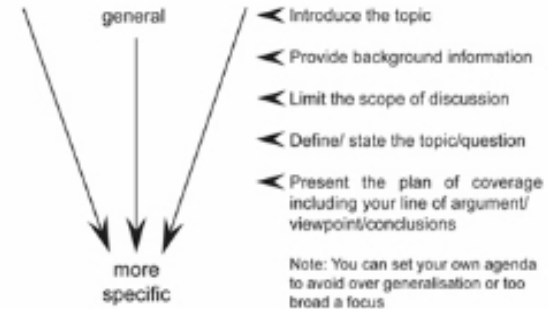
6. Planning

Planning Sheet

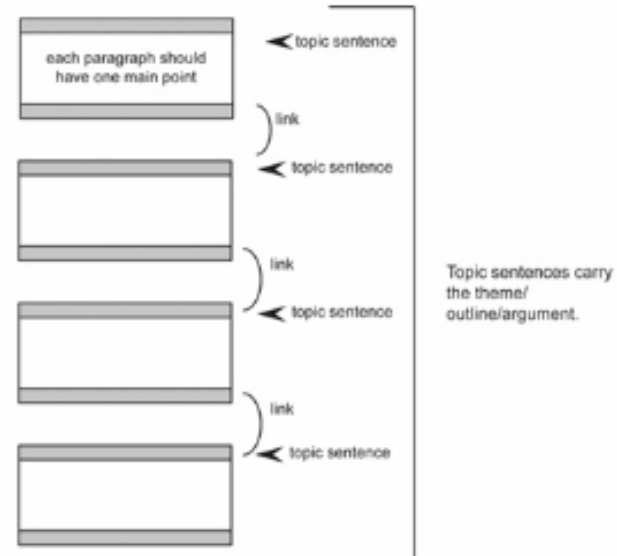
The Structure of an Essay

Introduction

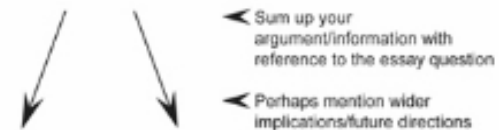
(Approximately 10% of the total length. May be one paragraph or several, depending on essay length)



Body



Conclusion



Planning Sheet

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?

- You must plan first before your 1st draft
- Structure your writing into paragraphs
- Use an outline plan
- Write your first draft early

Write Outline Plan

1. Will this information be useful?

- Is it relevant to my task?
- Does it relate to my topic?
- Does it help me answer a question or solve a problem?

2. Will this information add to my knowledge?

- Does it help me learn more about the topic?
- Does it fill in background information?
- Does it provide specific information?

7. Research: Selecting Information

3. What will I use this information for?

- Could it help to form my central argument?
- Will it help focus my thoughts?
- Can I use it as evidence?
- Will it help me locate other information?

4. How recent is this information?

- Is it out-of-date, or is it still useful?
- Is it the most up-to-date? Does it need to be?

Research: Selecting Information

5. How reliable is this information?

- Does this material come from a reputable and unbiased source?
- Is the author an acknowledged expert in the field?

6. How understandable is this information?

- If I find it difficult to understand, do I have to use it?
- Can I choose other information that I do understand?

Research: Selecting Information

7. How will I use this information?

- Does it provide evidence or support for my ideas?
- Does it provide a good example?
- Where could I put it in my assignment?

Research: Selecting Information

8. Do I really need to use this information?

- How does it help me answer the task?
- Is it essential information?
- Is it new information or am I just restating what I have already said?
- Is it the best example or most relevant piece of evidence? Do I have better material?
- What does it add to my work? Would my assignment be just as good without it?
- Is it too technical or too simple?
- Have I already supported my argument or point of view well enough?
- Do I have enough information to begin my task?

Research: Selecting Information

- Develop your first draft
- Leave it for 24 hours – then come back to it
- Re-read > edit > change > improve
- Ensure clarity, cohesion and logical flow of ideas in your writing
- Move on to develop 2nd/ 3rd drafts
- Recheck marking criteria. Stay within the word limit set by your lecturer. ‘More’ is not always better, and can sometimes **be worse!**

8. Work on First Draft

- Edit and check your final draft (use the HELPS checklist) for:
- Grammar
- Errors
- Correct referencing /quote styles
- Cohesion, flow and unity / structure
- Presentation / layout / formatting
- Submit **on-time!**

9. Final Version

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!!

Having Trouble?

If you wanted to drive from Sydney to Perth.....

1. You'd need to know the direction to travel in
2. You'd need to plan your journey
3. You'd need a reliable 'up to date' map/plan
4. You'd need to start your journey early
5. You'd need to ask for help if you didn't know how to get there
6. You'd need to take breaks – to relax and refresh yourself
7. You'd need to ask for help if you got lost or lose direction
8. You'd need to drive long and hard to get to your destination of 4000+ kilometres
9. You'd need to check that you 'had' finally arrived at your destination



- This is the same for writing an assignment!

Imagine ...

- “Well Begun is Half Done!”

Philosophy

HELPS

- Weekly workshops
- Drop-in consultations
- Individual consultations by referral
- Writing clinics
- Conversations@UTS
- Intensive academic English programs
- Self-help learning resources

Programs and Services

UTS:HELPS

helps.uts.edu.au