



Swansea University  
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# STAR

**STUDY TIPS TO ACHIEVE RESULTS**

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**“You cannot open  
a book without  
learning something”**

Confucius

# *Welcome to Studying*

**Welcome to STAR - ‘Study Tips to Achieve Results’,  
the Study Skills Handbook that will support your university learning.**

There will be many reasons why you have decided to enrol on a university course: maybe you want to update your skills, develop your qualifications or improve your career opportunities. Whatever the reason, beginning any course of study is a way to broaden your knowledge, achieve new understanding and invest time and effort in your personal development.

The STAR Handbook provides advice on how to develop effective strategies for studying and how to make the most of your learning experience. It has been designed to identify and develop the specific academic skills you will need to succeed, such as: essay and report writing, preparing a presentation, time management, grammar and punctuation and referencing.

*“That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood all your life, but in a new way”* **Doris Lessing**

University standards for essay writing and referencing can be confusing for new students, and you are certainly not alone if you feel like this. However, your work will develop through practice and it can be surprising just how much your critical thinking and writing skills will improve over the period of your study. Your academic tutors and other members of staff will also advise you about the skills you are expected to acquire and demonstrate during your course.

We hope you find the STAR Handbook useful and we wish you well with your studies.

**EDUCATION IS A PERSONAL INVESTMENT IN YOUR FUTURE.**

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# 1 Planning your Learning

Effective planning is essential for effective learning. Planning is something you will do throughout your studies as you plan for a variety of different tasks. General time management and timetabling is important and essentially you need to create the time and space that are conducive to learning. Take time to prepare and plan for your studies but do not waste time as it is important to 'get going'.

Effective learners are motivated to learn, can manage their own time and take time to critically reflect on their learning.

## Motivated students:

- Think positively and develop strategies to achieve success
- Take responsibility for their learning
- Set challenging and attainable goals
- Recognise and deal with procrastination

## Students who manage their time effectively:

- Identify what is important when planning their studies; they prioritise
- Balance studies, social and family life
- Know how to access resources easily and efficiently
- Understand how and when they are able to apply themselves to work

## Students who regularly reflect on their learning and progress:

- Keep a learning journal
- Record how their skills, knowledge and understanding are developing
- Carefully consider tutor feedback
- Use feedback in order to improve and develop their academic skills
- Develop self awareness

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## MOTIVATION

Most change occurs incrementally with repetition and the practice of new patterns and you need to remain motivated throughout your studies. Regularly revisiting the reasons why you are studying is important. There may be one overriding reason or there may be many reasons; whatever they are, keep your goals and aspirations at the forefront of your mind and especially when you are struggling. Enlisting the help and support of others is essential, so ask your tutor for any help or guidance you may need. Studying is not easy, it takes a great deal of intellectual, physical

and emotional energy; do not forget to give yourself credit for your efforts.

Strategies to help maintain motivation can include talking to other students regularly and developing a support network. Avoid taking long breaks from your work, try doing something related to your studies such as filing, reading or sorting through notes. Over time you will begin to notice the progress you are making and there is no better motivator than success.

# TIME MANAGEMENT

Many of us feel that there are not enough hours in the day to do everything. Ineffective time management can lead to deadlines being missed, producing sub-standard work and feelings of frustration. However, it is possible to develop strategies that will help you take control of your time and your studies.

We can all benefit from questioning and perhaps reviewing our attitudes and deep-seated habits related to our use of time. Some habits are linked to personal traits and bad habits can significantly affect our well-being and ability to succeed. Some people always feel rushed and guilty for example, whilst others feel frustrated because they never seem to be doing what they know they should be doing. The list below can help you to identify issues and put strategies into place that will allow you to manage your time more effectively.

## Reflect and focus on why you waste time or become distracted:

- Do you always seem to leave things until the last minute?
- Do you find activities to distract you such as watching the television or washing the car?
- Is there always something more pressing or enjoyable to do?

Once you recognise your personal traits, you can start putting strategies in place to help you overcome future stumbling blocks:

- Identify areas of your work/life where you manage your time effectively
- Identify your existing time management skills
- Identify areas of your work/life where you would like to better manage your time
- Consider the results of not managing your time more effectively

## Using time effectively

If you find that you waste time or you are easily distracted the following techniques might be useful:

- Divide a large task up into small manageable chunks and tackle each of these separately
- Start with small tasks and work up to the more demanding ones
- Make 'to do' lists - for the day, the week, the month, the term
- Set yourself deadlines and achievable goals
- If you become stuck, tackle something else for a short while to take your mind off the task and then come back to it when you are refreshed
- Prioritise. Some tasks are more important than others. Avoid spending too much time on things that do not really matter
- Write a list of tasks that are essential, important and not important and tackle them in that order
- Write a timetable or keep a diary, setting aside time each day for your learning
- Note all the demands on your time such as family commitments and social engagements and plan your work accordingly, finding arrangements that best suit you
- In order to work productively, consider the maximum amount of time you are able to concentrate

During your academic studies it is important that you mark out periods of time in your timetable for specific tasks such as: planning your essay, researching, drafting, writing and rewriting.

Part of using your time effectively involves working to your own body clock. You might have more energy and are able to focus better at particular times of day. Become sensitive to this. Do you work better early in the morning or late at night?

## Monitor your progress

Keep reviewing your progress in relation to your goals in order to make sure they are realistic. If you feel you are not making much progress, consider working with a friend or with a group of other students to share ideas and discuss topics. If you are still struggling after a long period, it is important that you contact your tutor and honestly share your concerns.



**MAKE SURE YOUR  
TIMETABLE IS REALISTIC  
OR YOU WILL BECOME  
STRESSED.**

## REFLECTION

There are two aspects to reflection: reflecting on yourself and your studies and secondly thinking critically, which is a skill developed through reflection.

Reflecting on how your skills are developing and how you are becoming a more independent/self-directed learner is important. The reflective learning cycle does not stop. You apply what you learn and then continue to reflect and develop further; you Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect.

### Plan

Use your previous learning experience and understanding to develop, modify, change, adapt and then formulate an action plan.

### Act

Apply the plan and maintain self awareness as you do so. Be prepared to creatively adapt and change as you progress.

### Observe

As soon as possible review your learning in a wider context. Think about and describe the learning/situation objectively.

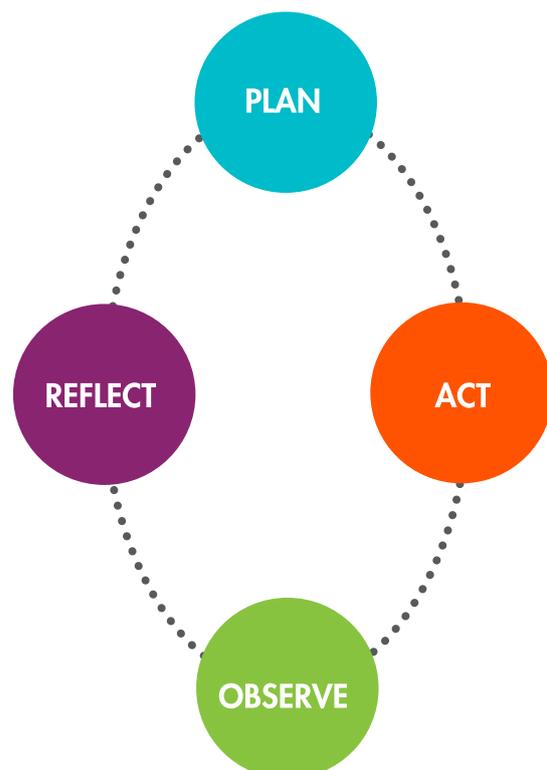
### Reflect

Reflect upon and evaluate your learning. Analyse how you approached the task and the strengths and weaknesses of your actions. This will help you identify and develop your insights.

There is no right or wrong way to do this, it is an ongoing process.

Standing back and observing yourself is key, notice how and when you are doing well, and when you are not doing so well. Pay attention to your strengths and to areas you need to develop. Notice when you are focusing well and to those factors that aid concentration. As a rule we consistently learn better when we are enjoying our work and are calm; just reflect for a short while each day on how you are doing and you will reap the benefits.

Critical thinking skills are essential and will develop organically as you progress with your studies.



The Reflective Learning Cycle

By the three methods we may learn wisdom:  
First by reflection, which is noblest;  
Second by imitation, which is easiest;  
Third by experience, which is the bitterest.

*Confucius*

## TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LEARNING

### Physical health and well being

How you feel physically can have a dramatic influence on your studies. Obviously you will not work as well if you are tired, hungry, thirsty, stressed or anxious. It is important to ensure, especially around assignment time, that you have a healthy and balanced diet. Too much sugar will give you a quick burst of energy, but will soon leave you feeling sluggish. Alcohol also decreases the ability of your short term memory to function for at least 24 hours. The human concentration span is usually 45 minutes, so after this you will need to take a break otherwise you will not be working efficiently; go for a walk/walk the dog, have lunch/a snack, do a practical task.

Breathing deeply so that you have a good amount of oxygen in your blood is important and your posture can also affect your mood and energy levels. Ensure you have a supportive and comfortable chair and well positioned desk.

### Environment

Decide where you actually work best and which place is most conducive to learning. This might be in the library or a quiet room in your house. You need to think about what distracts you: are you prone to gazing out of the window? If this is the case then move your table and chair around. Throw away rough

notes and anything that is no longer relevant, avoiding messy piles of papers. A light, airy and uncluttered space will enable you to work in a far more positive way.

### Emotions

Emotions, whether positive or negative, can affect your learning and it is important to maintain a positive attitude towards your learning. However, we do have to acknowledge the way we feel and if you are feeling tired or anxious pay attention to this; take a break and then resume with a clear mind. We all experience difficult times now and again, do not feel bad about this, it will pass.

If you still cannot settle, it can help if you reflect and record your feelings, you can review them again and notice patterns. Keeping a list of your goals can be helpful and positive affirmations and thoughts can change your mood and outlook quickly. By repeating positive affirmations, revisiting goals and reviewing your thoughts and actions frequently you maintain and build upon your progress.

### Psychological factors and your support network

Personal problems and demands on your time and emotions outside your academic life can have a significant impact on you and as a result you might not be able to produce work

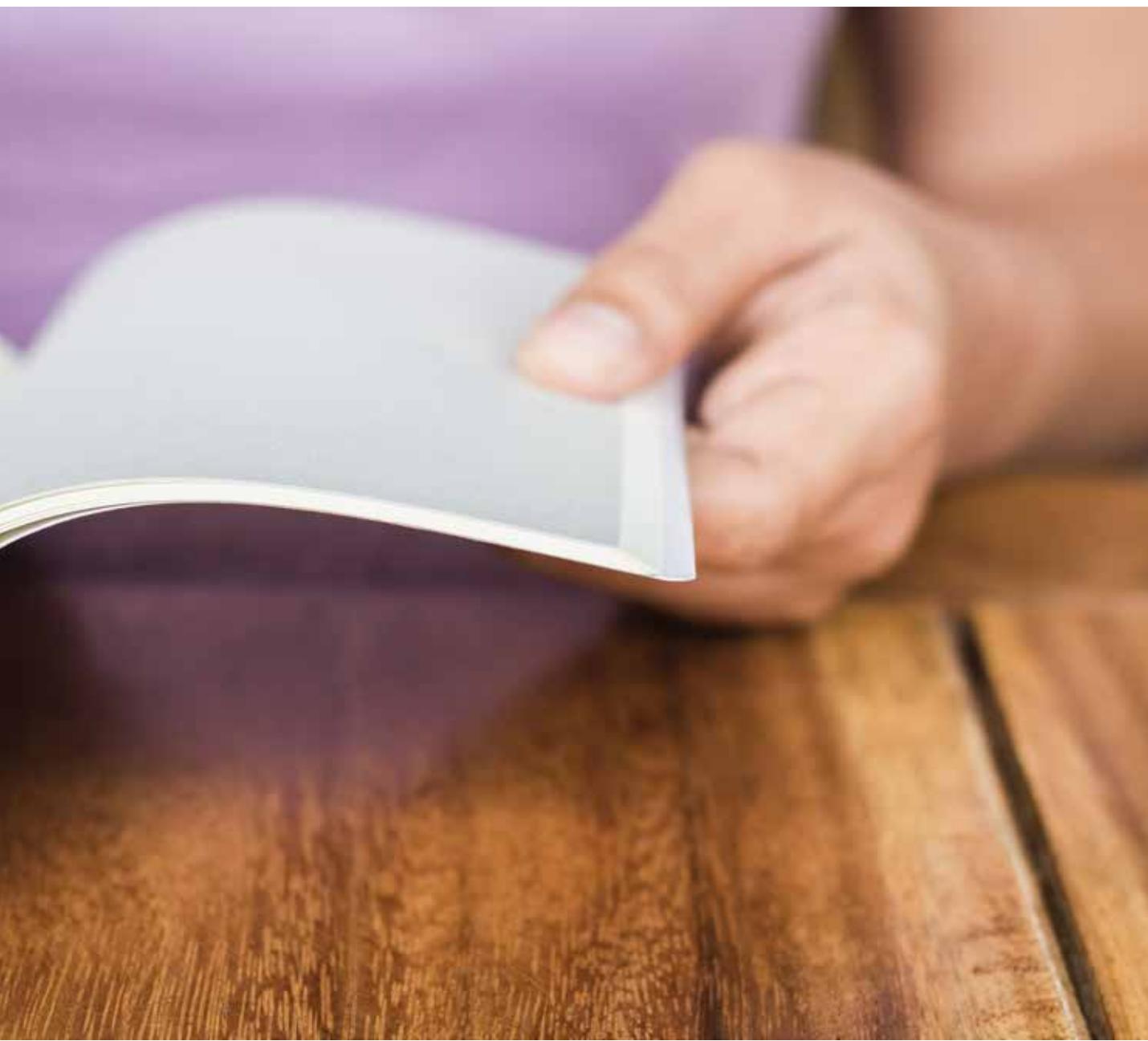
to the best of your ability. Student life can be both challenging and demanding and therefore it is important to acknowledge and seek help with issues such as stress, family commitments, motivation and concentration. There are ways in which some of the pressures can be alleviated, for example, talking to a friend, your tutor or to a counsellor or adviser.

There are many services available to students and your tutor will be able to put you in contact with the relevant support services or support groups which will be able to offer advice and practical help. The university will also have

links with other organisations which will be able to offer constructive, professional advice on a range of issues from assignments to funding to emotional support.



**REMEMBER, NEW  
CHALLENGES PROMOTE  
SELF ESTEEM AND  
POSITIVE THINKING.**



## TIME TO GET STARTED!

Make a list at the end of every study session outlining the tasks for next time. That way you will be able to get started and work quicker at the beginning of the next session. You may find it helps to tackle a short, easy activity first in order to 'warm-up' and then proceed to the main/most difficult task later. Many people find adopting rituals as a prelude to a study session can be helpful, such as tidying the desk, collating papers and notes or switching off your mobile telephone.

### Example 'To-do' List

Task	Priority (High, Med, Low)	Deadline
Research assignment	High	1 Week
Prepare for study group meeting	Med	2 Weeks

### Example Assignment Timetable - Student 1

	WK1	WK2	WK3	WK4
Monday	Decide essay title	Library	Check essay guidelines	Read through essay and check word count
Tuesday	Reading and research	Essay planning	Write main body of essay	Review structure and plan
Wednesday	Library	Write notes and mind mapping	Redraft main body	Check references and spelling etc
Thursday	Go through lecture notes	Start draft introduction	Write conclusion	Final proof reading
Friday	Reading and research	Meet study group	Review introduction	Submit assignment

### Example Assignment Timetable - Student 2

	AM	PM	EVENING
Monday	Part-time work	Picking up children from school	Yoga class 1 hour reading
Tuesday	Choose essay questions - make notes	Meet study group	Swimming - children 1 hour reading
Wednesday	Part-time work	Housework - reading and notes	Football practice and dance classes - children
Thursday	Essay planning	Picking up children from school	Go through lecture notes
Friday	Library	Essay writing	Night off
Saturday	Out with children	Out with children - Cinema	Night off
Sunday	Essay writing	Lunch with grandparents	Reading



#### USEFUL LINKS

[www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)  
<http://lisweb.swan.ac.uk/ask>  
[www.palgrave.com/skills4study/index.asp](http://www.palgrave.com/skills4study/index.asp)  
[www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills)

# 2 Learning Styles

If you think about and are aware of how you learn, you can begin to identify learning approaches or strategies that work best for you. This also means that you can select an approach which is the most appropriate for the essay, report or presentation that you are asked to write.

It is important to reflect on your past learning experiences. Think about how you prefer to work and consider instances when you have enjoyed learning and found it rewarding; also think about the areas upon which you could improve. For example, think about the way you read, the way you take notes and the way you contribute to class discussions. This will enable you to monitor your progress, and adjust your learning approaches where necessary.

There are many theories about how people learn and various websites where you can

assess your own natural learning style. Some students like a 'hands on' approach while some might learn from observing others. As a student you will need to make the most of your strengths and develop approaches that help you identify and improve weaker areas. You will also need to adopt learning strategies that are most appropriate for a particular task.



**PEOPLE PREFER TO LEARN IN DIFFERENT WAYS. UNDERSTANDING LEARNING STYLES CAN HELP YOU ADAPT TO A WIDE RANGE OF LEARNING SITUATIONS.**

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## THE VARK SYSTEM

The VARK system (Fleming, 2006) assesses how much people rely on:

- Visual (sight)
- Auditory (hearing)
- Reading and Writing
- Kinaesthetic (includes touch, temperature and movement)

### ADVICE FOR DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

#### Visual Learners

- Use pictures, charts and maps
- Use colour to highlight texts and notes
- Take notes or use handouts; look carefully at headings and patterns of topics
- Use illustrations, mind maps and models

- Study in a quiet place away from visual disturbances
- Visualise information as a picture

#### Auditory Learners

- Participate frequently in discussions and debates
- Make speeches and presentations
- Use a dictaphone if possible as well as making notes
- Read text aloud
- Discuss ideas verbally
- Speak into an audio tape and listen to ideas played back
- Create mnemonics\* to aid memory

## Reading and Writing Learners

- Rewrite theories and principles into their own words
- Make lists to help access information
- Reorganise maps and diagrams into words
- Work with past exam papers
- Use multiple choice question papers

## Kinaesthetic Learners

- Use a physical style: touch, action, movement and hands-on learning activities
- Work with case studies and applications to help with particular theories
- Use pictures and photographs
- Participate in discussions
- Write practice papers
- Use bright colours to highlight notes

### \*USEFUL MNEMONICS FOR SPELLING:

**ARITHMETIC:** A Rat In The House May Eat The Ice Cream

**GEOGRAPHY:** General Eisenhower's Oldest Girl Rode A Pony Home Yesterday

**RHYTHM:** Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move

**NECESSARY:** Never Eat Cakes Eat Salmon Sandwiches And Remain Young

### \*USEFUL MNEMONICS FOR LISTS:

**Order of colours in the rainbow:** Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet

**Richard Of York Gained Battle In Vain**

**Order of planets from the Sun:** Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto

**My Very Easy Method: Just Set Up Nine Planets**

\*Source: [www.fun-with-words.com/mnemonics.html](http://www.fun-with-words.com/mnemonics.html)

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## ACTIVISTS, REFLECTORS, THEORISTS, PRAGMATISTS

Identifying learning styles and applying these to your studies enable you to gain insights and understanding and to become a more self-aware and adaptable student, with the result that you are better able to access, process and present information from your lectures/seminars/workshops and your research.

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (2000) built on the work of David A. Kolb (1984), who

identified two main ways of experiencing the world: through concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation. According to Kolb's model there are two ways of transforming experiences, through reflective observation and active experimentation. Honey and Mumford identified four main learning style preferences: Activists, Reflectors and Theorists and Pragmatists.

## Activists

Activists like to be involved in new experiences and are very enthusiastic about new ideas. They get bored with detailed work and routine tasks; they tend to act quickly and consider implications and reflect later.

Activists learn best when	Activists learn less when
Involved in new experiences and problems	Reading, writing or thinking on their own
Working with others and collecting ideas	Absorbing and understanding data
Being thrown in at the deep end with a difficult task	Listening to lectures or long explanations
Chairing meetings, leading discussions	Following precise instructions to the letter

## Reflectors

Reflectors prefer to work to their own timetable and not be rushed into any quick decision making. They carefully analyse theories before applying them and are particularly good at gathering materials for research.

Reflectors learn best when	Reflectors learn less when
Observing individuals or groups at work	Acting as leader
They can review activities and think about what they have learned	Having to do tasks spontaneously
Not working to deadlines	Working with no time to prepare

## Theorists

Theorists like to think about problems in a thorough step by step way. They tend to be perfectionists who like to fit things into a rational scheme. They also tend to be detached and analytical rather than subjective or emotive in their thinking.

Theorists learn best when	Theorists learn less when
In complex situations where they are required to use their skills/knowledge	In situations which emphasise emotion and feelings
In structured situations with clear purposes	In unstructured situations and the briefing is poor
They are offered interesting ideas or concepts	Asked to act without knowing the principle of the concepts involved
They have the chance to question and probe ideas and opinions	They feel they are out of tune with the other participants

## Pragmatists

Pragmatists are always ready to try new things. They are usually very practical people who prefer doing rather than discussing things.

Pragmatists learn best when	Pragmatists learn less when
They are shown a model of something	The learning is all theory with no discussion
They are shown ways to save time	There are no guidelines on how to do something
They are given practical tasks	There is no obvious outcome to the learning

When you are deciding which learning style best suits you, it may help you to reflect on your past and current learning experiences.

### Reflecting on your learning:

- Why have you chosen this course?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What did you find difficult when you last studied?
- What did you find enjoyable when you last studied?
- Are there any current circumstances that will impact on your studies?
- Are there aspects of the course with which you will need help?
- Which parts of the course do you anticipate enjoying?

### Reflecting on managing information:

- Consider how you receive information
- Think about how you perceive information
- How do you process information?
- How do you organise your work?
- Decide how you are going to present your information



### USEFUL LINKS

[www.vark-learn.com](http://www.vark-learn.com)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GX7s1sHPwM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GX7s1sHPwM)

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# 3 Researching and Managing Information

Researching information is an essential skill that you will need to develop throughout your studies. Effective research enables you to:

- Gain an understanding of the subject
- Find out what experts have written about the subject
- Support your ideas
- Gain more marks for your assignment by providing evidence that you have researched the subject

## Establishing a research strategy

Before you start your research be clear about the information you need based on the title of your assignment. Start with your reading list which will contain details of recommended textbooks/resources for your studies.

Remember to include information from a wide variety of sources. Identify the significant words or phrases that will help you find the relevant information. These words and phrases are called 'keywords'.

### Examples:

English Literature essay - Discuss the influence of Raymond Chandler on 'hardboiled' American crime fiction. Your key words would be 'hardboiled crime fiction', 'crime fiction', 'American crime fiction' and 'Raymond Chandler'.

History essay - Why did the Reformation happen in England, and what affects did it have on English society and government? Your key words would be 'Reformation', 'English society' and 'English government'.

## Types of information to consider:

- Primary and/or secondary
- Scholarly and/or general interest
- Current and/or historical
- Narrative and/or statistical information
- Organisational websites, government websites, online encyclopaedias

## Where to find information:

The best place to browse resources is via iFind Research. This is the main university database and the recommended starting point when looking for information. Begin to explore your topic by trying out some of your keywords in tools such as:

- iFind Research - Research portal, subject databases
- iFind Discover - Library catalogue
- Search engines
- Subject gateways

**Primary sources** could be considered as 'original' or 'first-hand' sources. Journal articles, reports and conference papers which present the results of original research are called primary literature whether they are in print or electronic format. Sets of data such as statistics and lab results are also primary sources, as are documents produced at the time of an event such as diaries, photographs, court records and newspaper reports.

**Secondary sources** interpret, analyse or repackage primary material. Textbooks and review articles are secondary sources and aim to summarise and explain previously published work rather than present the results of original work. Abstracts, indexes and databases are also secondary sources and can be used to identify relevant primary and secondary literature.

**Text books** help you build on your existing knowledge. They contain in depth information to fill any gaps in your understanding and provide expert opinions to quote in your work. Choosing appropriate resources is an essential aspect of your research strategy. Resources are available, both in the library and online. The library holds information regarding all textbooks available for loan and e-books. iFind Discover is the library book catalogue.

In addition to books, library catalogues contain details of various other types of resources, such as journals, e-journals and e-books. It is very important that you familiarise yourself with your library catalogues and how to use them.

Your tutor will provide you with a comprehensive reading list, however you will come across books that are not included and that look useful. Asking the following questions will help you decide if a resource is relevant and worth including:

- Is it the latest edition?
- When was it published?
- Has my tutor mentioned the author or title in lectures or tutorials?
- Does the title give me a clue as to what the book is about?
- Is it an introduction or guide to the topic?

**Journal articles** are an effective source of ideas to develop your arguments or to illustrate points in your assignment. Journals can cover

broad subject areas, whilst others deal with very specific topics; some are scholarly and others cater to a more general audience. Research portals also contain details of conference papers and book chapters.

In order to access further information on finding books, journals and library support see Blackboard (<https://blackboard.swan.ac.uk/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>) which is the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Alternatively click on this link: [www.swansea.ac.uk/iss/libraries/subjectinformation](http://www.swansea.ac.uk/iss/libraries/subjectinformation)

For each journal article you will need to note the following:

- Author name(s)
- Article title
- Journal title
- Year of publication
- Volume number
- Part number
- Page numbers
- Sometimes an abstract or summary

Your searches will produce lists of articles, some of which will have the full text version available online; others will be available in the library. If the abstract is available it can be useful to read it to help you decide if the article is relevant or not.

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## SEARCHING THE WEB



**JUST BECAUSE IT IS ON THE WEB, IT DOES NOT MEAN IT IS TRUE.**

Information from internet websites can be useful, however be mindful that anyone can write a web page. Therefore it is down to you

to assess its quality and integrity. Advice on searching the web is given on Blackboard.

### What to look for when evaluating a website

#### 1. Authority

Authority reveals that the person, institution or agency responsible for a site has the appropriate qualifications and knowledge. It should be clear who developed the site and

contact information should be clearly provided. The author should state qualifications, credentials or the personal background that gives them authority to present information.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of the information presented in the site should be clear. Some sites are meant to inform, persuade, state an opinion, entertain, or parody something or someone. The content should support the purpose of the site and consider who the targeted audience might be.

## 3. Coverage

It is difficult to assess the extent of coverage since depth in a site, through the use of links, can be infinite. One author may claim comprehensive coverage of a topic while another may cover just one aspect of a topic.

## 4. Currency

Currency of the site refers to: 1) how current the information is, and 2) how often the site is

updated or maintained. It is important to know when a site was created, when it was last updated and if all of the links are current.

## 5. Objectivity

Objectivity of the site should be clear. Beware of sites that contain bias or do not admit bias. Objective sites present information with a minimum of bias.

## 6. Accuracy

There are few standards to verify the accuracy of information on the web. It is the responsibility of the reader to assess the information presented. If the author is affiliated with a known, respectable institution, it is likely to be reliable. Similarly if statistics and other factual information are properly referenced and your previous reading verifies the information then you can assume it is reliable and accurate.

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# PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is defined as using the words, thoughts or ideas from someone else and presenting them as your own. Throughout your research and academic studies you need to provide a clear indication when you have referred to someone else's work, whether it is from a book, journal, the internet or a radio/television programme. If you do not accurately reference the work of others you will be guilty of plagiarism.

### Examples of plagiarism to avoid:

- Copying directly from a text word for word

- Copying out phrases from books, journals or the internet
- Very closely paraphrasing the words of a text
- Downloading or copying images and pictures

To avoid being accused of plagiarism you must make sure you are familiar with the reference system you are expected to use in your subject. Your tutor will advise you of the appropriate system and will spend time showing you how to implement it.



### USEFUL LINKS

[www.open.ac.uk/safari](http://www.open.ac.uk/safari)  
[www.mantex.co.uk](http://www.mantex.co.uk)

# 4 Effective Reading

Reading for academic and research purposes is very different from reading for leisure. Developing selective and efficient reading techniques are necessary to underpin all types of academic work. You will need to vary your reading style and speed according to the material you are reading. Remember that reading improves with practice, and the more familiar you are with advanced reading texts the more quickly you will be able to access the information.

Gathering information efficiently from reading materials is important, as is learning to interact creatively and critically with it. Reading critically means considering what you are reading and comparing it with other material.

It is essential for you to become a disciplined reader who forms and maintains good reading practice. Use your time efficiently to research and evaluate reading materials before you begin actively reading the text.

## To improve your reading skills you need to:

- Have clear reading goals
- Choose the right texts
- Use the right reading method/style
- Use note taking techniques

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## BEFORE YOU START READING

You need to be discerning when you read because you will not have the time or need to read everything on your reading list. To discover what texts are relevant to your subject or if you need to clarify lecture notes, start by using the table of contents or index in a book. You can also read the introduction and concluding chapters and this can help you decide whether the text book is worth reading. A bibliography is also a good indication of the type of information given in the book/article and its worth. A more general text such as an internet article or report will also have an introduction and/or a summary and a conclusion.

Journal articles often have a list of key words so that you are able to see immediately what general areas are covered in the text. Articles also have abstracts, a short précis of the content and this will indicate clearly to you whether it is worth reading.

Anticipate questions based on the information you are seeking. Ask yourself: "Is this section



**SEEK ADVICE FROM YOUR DEPARTMENT, TUTORS, POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS ABOUT STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR READING AND FOR SUITABLE TEXTS.**

relevant to the assignment? Will I find useful information here? Will I find answers and relevant arguments?" These will help you to read actively and critically.

If you are reading to prepare for an essay, you will probably want to read chapters or sections of a book. Scan through a section, looking at headings and sub-headings to get an overall perspective and then read in more detail.

Select material based on your skim reading, making sure that you only read material that is relevant to your needs. Do not attempt to read

the entire reading list; you will not have the time.

### Is this text suitable for me?

Suitability of text is not just about choosing the right book for the assignment; it is also about choosing the right book *for you* at your stage in the learning process or your conceptualisation of ideas. One of the elements of successful reading is the knack of matching your level of understanding with the relevant resources for the activity in which you are involved.

Some students become disheartened when they cannot understand a text on the book list. This may be because they are still at an early stage of understanding, both of the new concepts and the new terminology. If this applies to you, you should begin with a text which gives you more help and briefer, broader explanations. If the subject is new to you try reading the Beginners Guides.

### Is this text suitable for my studies?

The question you need to ask yourself is 'Does this book, chapter or article contain the information or evidence I need for my assignment or task?' If it does then it is worth using. If some of it is useful, use those sections in particular. If not, then it may be useful only for background information or interest or developing your concepts.

Remember the books or chapters or articles have not been written especially so that you can answer the question posed by your tutor. They may go into a lot of complicated depth which is not relevant to your current needs.

### Is it credible?

You should consider the date when the book or article was written and ask yourself if this is the latest information and research or is it now out-of-date. That said, books published many years ago can still be extremely valuable. Ultimately, it is the content not the date of publication which is crucial.

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## DIFFERENT READING METHODS

### Active Reading

The reading process involves more than simply the act of reading; it involves five distinct yet complementary areas of activity.

### Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review (SQ3R)

1	Survey	Skim over the text, noting the sub headings and key words Decide if you want to read it or parts of it in more detail
2	Question	Write down questions you want answered, so that you are clear about what you are looking for
3	Read	There are different ways to read materials depending on the purpose and the text Read quickly to ascertain the main points Read thoroughly and critically to consider all the information and meaning of the text
4	Recall	Make sure you understand the text by going over it
5	Review	As you read make notes, summarise and record relevant information



**Skimming** is the process of speedy reading for general meaning. Begin skim-reading by looking at the section headings and sub-headings in the books and journal articles in order to establish whether they are worth reading or not. Then skim a piece of text looking for key words, read the first sentences of paragraphs and look at conclusions. Skimming is a visual activity and is used for getting the impression of a chapter/section of text. You are not reading the whole page and your eyes do not move from left to right along the line as they do when reading a whole text. Concentrate on identifying the central or main points. Use this technique to preview a selection of text prior to detailed reading and to refresh your understanding of a selection of text following detailed reading.

**Scanning** involves looking for particular information. You do this, for example, when you are looking for a name of an author on a page, a date, a topic in an index, disregarding the rest of the text. You pass your vision speedily over a section of text in order to find

particular words or phrases that are relevant to your current task.

**You can scan:**

- The introduction or preface of a text
- The first or last paragraphs of chapters
- The concluding or summarising chapter of a text
- The book index



**IF IT IS A PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING TEXT, READ IT IN CHUNKS, TAKING A PARAGRAPH OR A SHORT SECTION AT A TIME.**

## NOTE TAKING

Effective note taking as you read is an essential study skill. Taking notes will help you extend your attention span and helps prevent your mind from wandering. Taking notes helps keep you focussed on your reading and on the task at hand.

**Note taking techniques provide a useful aid to reading:**

- Underline and highlight text to pick out the most central or important words and phrases. Do this in your own copy of texts or on photocopies - never on borrowed texts
- Use keywords to record the main headings as you read. Use one or two keywords for each main point. Keywords can be used when you do not want to mark the text
- Consider questions to encourage you to take an active approach to your reading. Record your questions as you read. They can also be used as prompts for follow up work
- Summarise to check you have understood what you have read. Pause after a section of text and put what you have read in your own words. Skim over the text to check the accuracy of your summary, filling in any significant gaps

These techniques encourage an active engagement with the text as well as providing you with a useful record of your reading. Avoid passively reading large amounts of text, it does not make effective use of your time. Always use a note taking technique to increase your levels of concentration and understanding. Notes will help you remember what you have read and the process will help you organise the ideas you are learning about. Good note taking gives you a permanent record of relevant points that you can integrate with your own writing and it reduces the risk of plagiarism by helping you distinguish where your ideas came from.

**Effective note taking requires you to:**

- Recognise the main ideas
- Identify what information is relevant to your task
- Develop a system of note taking that works for you
- Reduce the information to note and diagram format
- Where possible write the information in your own words
- Record the source of the information

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## CRITICAL READING

Critical reading involves reading for understanding and meaning, analysing and questioning the text and challenging the assumptions made. If you are satisfied that the text you have identified is the right material for your research, then read it more slowly for maximum comprehension. Keep in mind the questions you are trying to answer and question what you are reading. Anticipate questions based on the information you are seeking.

When you have finished reading, review the material. This is the time to compare what you have read with the questions you formulated at the beginning. Did you find answers? Did you find appropriate and useful information? How does it compare with the other material you have read? Do you agree with the points or arguments? Will you be able to use the material in your assignment?



### USEFUL LINKS

[www.open.ac.uk/safari](http://www.open.ac.uk/safari)  
[www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)  
[www.mindtools.com/rdstratg.html](http://www.mindtools.com/rdstratg.html)  
[www.langcent.manchester.ac.uk/elplinks/academic/studyskills/reading](http://www.langcent.manchester.ac.uk/elplinks/academic/studyskills/reading)  
<https://student.unsw.edu.au/effective-reading>

# 5 Critical Thinking

Critical thinkers are reflective; they do not jump to conclusions. Developing critical thinking skills is essential in all forms of academic study.

Critical thinkers are inquisitive, constantly asking questions and rarely take anything at face value. They are open-minded, flexible and fair-minded when evaluating the work of others. They are honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments and willing to reconsider. Critical thinkers clarify and prioritise issues and complex matters. They are diligent in seeking relevant information and use reasoned arguments.

Thinking critically means you are not simply receiving information and ideas from someone else, you consider issues carefully. This is a purposeful and active process; you make reasoned judgements which result in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference. You are therefore able to be clear about the basis of your judgements. Persistent effort is called for and as you read critically, clarity, relevance and cohesion will be apparent in your subsequent writing.



**CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS ARE TRANSFERABLE. YOU CAN USE THEM IN A WIDE RANGE OF CONTEXTS FROM ACADEMIC WORK TO EVERYDAY LIFE SITUATIONS.**

## **Critical thinking involves:**

- Taking an investigative approach
- Being objective and standing back from the information
- Confirming the validity of information and evidence
- Checking whether a statement or argument is logical and sequential

- Looking for flaws in the reasoning, the evidence and in the way that conclusions are drawn
- Comparing the same issue from the point of view of other theorists and writers
- Recognising and explaining why different people arrive at different conclusions
- Recognising the value of a text and setting it in context
- Being able to argue why one set of opinions or conclusions is preferable to another
- Checking for hidden assumptions
- Not making assumptions
- Asking many questions: Who? What? Where? When? How?

## **Critical thinking when reading involves:**

- Identifying the line of reasoning in the text
- Critically probing the line of reasoning
- Identifying and evaluating the evidence
- Asking if the argument is supported by sufficient and robust information and evidence
- Identifying the author's/authors' conclusions
- Checking the evidence supports the conclusions
- Challenging the presuppositions of the author's/authors' arguments
- Being aware of any emotive arguments
- Consistency
- The chronological development of arguments

## **Critical thinking when writing involves:**

- Demonstrating a clear and well reasoned argument

- Demonstrating evidence to support your argument
- Viewing the subject or issue from a variety of perspectives
- Writing in a critical style rather than a descriptive one
- Reading your own writing critically
- Ensuring accurate and relevant referencing

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## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Almost every intellectual activity begins with some form of analysis to make clear what is being tackled. Unfortunately, it is assumed that everyone knows how to analyse; this however, is far from the case.

Analysis means taking things apart to consider the components and how they fit. In practice there is not much difference between the terms 'analysis' and 'critical analysis'. Critical is sometimes added to the term analysis because it emphasises that you should question the validity of the information, research findings and theories you include in your assignment. You should not simply accept the information or arguments of the authors you read; you need to constantly question their legitimacy.

Critical thinking and critical analysis involve comparing the alternative views proposed by authors and the conclusion you arrive at will be your informed opinion supported by evidence gathered in the research. A good assignment contains evidence from different perspectives that support a well argued and clear case; this is the difference between biased opinion and informed opinion.

### Critical analysis:

- Breaks information down into different ideas and concepts
- Makes careful judgements and assesses the value and relevance of the ideas presented
- Asks questions about the evidence or reasoning that is presented

- Draws conclusions from the reading and research which are relevant and help answer the assignment questions

### Critical analysis does not:

- Make assumptions without confirming the evidence
- Make unsupported generalisations
- Accept information without questioning it
- Provide a simple description
- Simply restate what different writers say without offering any perspectives or opinions on the similarities or differences on the arguments
- Take a negative position; it provides a balanced point of view

Cottrell (2013) suggests it is helpful to develop a detective-like mind when attempting any form of critical analysis, whether this is reading, writing or listening.

### The following types of questioning will help you develop your critical thinking skills:

- What are the key features of...?
- What is the main assumption underlying...?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of ...?
- What do I already know about...?

- In what ways are x and y similar...?
- What do I think would happen if...?
- What is the evidence to support...?
- What is a good example of ...?
- What is the key idea...?
- Can I trace the development of ideas?
- What worked and what did not?
- Are there any unsupported assertions?
- What has been omitted?
- How was the conclusion reached?



### USEFUL LINKS

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[www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)  
[www.palgrave.com/studentstudyskills/page/critical-and-analytical-thinking-skills/](http://www.palgrave.com/studentstudyskills/page/critical-and-analytical-thinking-skills/)  
[www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reading/critical\\_thinking.html](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reading/critical_thinking.html)  
<https://studentlearning.tcd.ie/undergraduate/topics/study-skills/thinking/>  
[www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=87](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=87)

### REFERENCES

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Cottrell, S. (2013). *The Study Skills Handbook*. 4th Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.  
 Ennis, R. H. (1996). *Critical Thinking*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

# 6 Note Taking

## NOTE TAKING FROM A LECTURE

Many students attempt to write copious notes in a teaching session, but it is virtually impossible to keep up with the speed of a lecturer. Concentrating on note taking detracts from your ability to listen and understand. In order for you to get as much as possible from a teaching session it is necessary to put some note taking strategies into practice. Writing accurate notes takes time and you will get better at doing this with practice.

### Preparing for the lecture

- Check the title of the session beforehand, and do any of the recommended reading
- The more you know about a topic beforehand the easier it will be to take notes, this is simply because the material will be more familiar to you
- Think about the subject matter in advance - how might it relate to what you have already learnt?
- Consider some questions that you would like to answer

### Note taking during the lecture

- Write down the date and title of the session
- Number every sheet to keep them in order
- If you are given handouts, it can be easier to make notes on these

### Listen for keywords and recurring ideas from the lecturer, such as:

- 'I'll give you an example...'
- 'There are three points supporting this...'
- 'In conclusion...'

### Listen for signposts such as:

- 'Today we are going to look at...'
- 'I'm going to discuss four main aspects of...'
- 'I must emphasise that...'

Do not write full sentences; instead write down key words or abbreviations. These are much quicker to write and will enable you to listen. The important thing is to listen and record the key points, the main themes and arguments. Any words you use regularly can be shortened to a key letter or symbol, however, it is important that you are not over elaborate and that you are consistent in order that you will remember what your abbreviations stand for.



### USEFUL ABBREVIATIONS

These can be symbols or standard abbreviations.

- = equals, the same as
- + and, also
- not, without
- < less than
- > more than
- i.e. that is
- e.g. for example
- n.b. note well
- c. circa, approx, about
- Esp. - Especially
- Info. - Information
- Prob. - Probably
- Viz. - namely
- s/t - something
- s/o - someone

## Note taking following a lecture

- Go back to your notes within 24 hours to fill in any gaps, rewrite unclear words, or add any thoughts you have about the subject matter
- While the notes are still fresh in your mind check through for understanding
- Make sure that the structure is clear: add headings and/or colours etc. so that you will be able to understand them at a later date
- Use colour to highlight important points but not too many colours as this can be confusing
- Date and file your notes so that you can find them easily

As soon as possible after attending a class, seminar or lecture it is often a good idea to reinforce your learning by summarising the key elements. Try to identify some major points with supporting detail or evidence. Do this from memory to begin with and then compare your recollections and ideas with those mentioned in any handouts or notes from the tutor. How well do they compare? Are there any gaps in knowledge that you need to follow up?



# READY - RECORD - REDUCE - RECALL - REFLECT - REVIEW

## Stage 1: Ready

Prepare by doing some background reading, consider some questions and gather your resources.

Divide a page as shown below:

Main Ideas	Details
Summary	

## Stage 2: Record

During the lecture, record important points and use bullet points and abbreviations. You might also want to use mind maps.

## Stage 3: Reduce

As soon as possible after the lecture, go through your notes and reduce the information using key words and phrases. Finally, summarise the lecture in your own words.

## Stage 4: Recall

Recite the key themes from the session and try to recall as much information and detail as possible. Repeat this process until you are able to recall most of the information in the session.

## Stage 5: Reflect

Think about what you have learnt. Ask yourself how it relates to information you already know and how it reinforces or changes your prior understanding.

Try to make the information personally relevant to you.

## Stage 6: Review

Spend a few minutes each week looking through your lecture notes. This will keep the ideas current in your memory and will be a huge benefit when you are writing your assignment.

# NOTE TAKING FROM READING

**Be selective and systematic** as you take notes from a written source, keep in mind that not all parts of a text may be relevant to your needs. Think about your purpose for reading. Are you reading for a general understanding of a topic or concept? Are you reading for some specific information or to answer a question related to your assignment? You do not have to take notes on everything - it is important not to waste time note taking from texts that are not relevant.

**Before you start to take notes** identify the purpose and function of a text then skim the text and mark the main points and any relevant information you may need. Then carefully read the relevant sections of the text making separate notes.

**Make a note of the big ideas** and consider the main ideas reflected in the introduction, conclusion, abstract and section titles? Record all relevant details of the big ideas in the text.

**Make a note of chapter headings and section titles.** Texts will be broken down by content or theme; make note of these. Build more elaborate notes on these while you read the piece.

**Include your thoughts.** When taking notes for an assignment it is helpful to record your thoughts at the time. Record your thoughts in a separate column or margin or in a different colour to the notes in the text.

## Tips for organising notes:

- Set out your notebooks so that you have a similar format each time you take notes

- Date your notes and provide a heading that describes the piece's overall content
- Include bibliographic reference details of the sources of information including page numbers and secondary referencing
- Columns that distinguish the source information and your thoughts can be helpful
- The use of colour to highlight major sections, main points and diagrams makes notes easier to understand later
- Paraphrase and use consistent abbreviations, except where you want to remember a specific date or fact
- Develop an ideal format for you, it could be a mind map or a table depending on your preference and on content
- Type your notes up later; they can then be incorporated into your writing more easily
- Some people prefer to make notes on a laptop/PC/iPad as they read



**USE A PENCIL TO WRITE IN BOOKS. IF THEY ARE YOUR OWN BOOKS, THEN USE A HIGHLIGHTER OR A PEN.**

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# VISUAL MAPPING

Some students find it helpful to take their notes as mind maps or concept maps.

**Mind maps** usually have the title of the lecture in the centre of the paper with all the ideas radiating outwards and subsidiary sections radiating off them.

**Concept maps** enable you to see things at a glance and you can personalise your own note taking, but you have to be very sure of your subject area before you attempt one, as they can result in a confusing set of words and arrows if not carefully planned.

## Tips for creating mind maps

- Write the main theme in the centre of a piece of paper
- Write down all the ideas and keywords related to your topic starting from the centre and branching out along lines of connecting ideas
- Each idea can be circled or linked by lines as appropriate
- When you have finished, highlight any related ideas and then sort into topics
- Some ideas will form main headings, and others will be sub-sections under these headings
- You should then be able to see a pattern emerging and be able to arrange your main headings in a logical order
- Writing the main ideas and concepts on pieces of paper so you can move them around can also be useful

## Tips for creating concepts maps

- Make a list of what you consider to be the key terms
- Find the broadest (most general) term and write it at the top of the page - this is the topic of your map

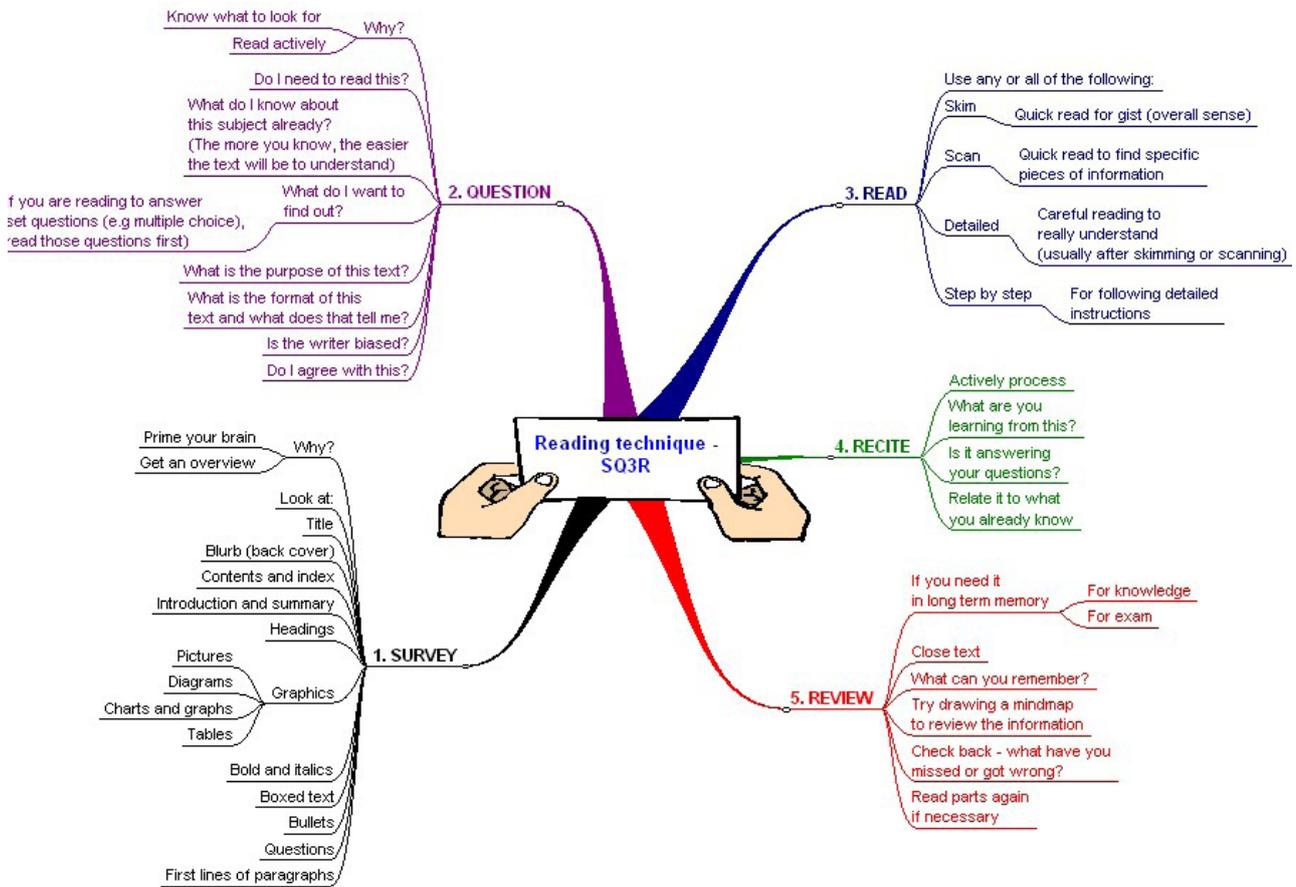
- Organise the rest of your concepts into a smaller number of groups
- For each of these groups, choose the most general term or create a general term/phrase that describes each group. Place these group headings in a row under your general heading
- Pencil in a linking line between the top concept and each of the group headings
- Label each linking line with a linking (connecting) word, such as: Definition; Is a characteristic of; Predicts; Depends on; Is the opposite of
- Return to your groups of terms. Arrange each group of terms from general to specific. Place them on your map so that it looks like a tree upside down
- Pencil in top-down linking lines and label each line. Make sure that the linking words express the relationship between the two concepts
- Look for cross links between concepts on different branches of your map. Indicate connections between concepts with a dotted line. Label the cross links
- Where appropriate, add specific examples at the end of a branch



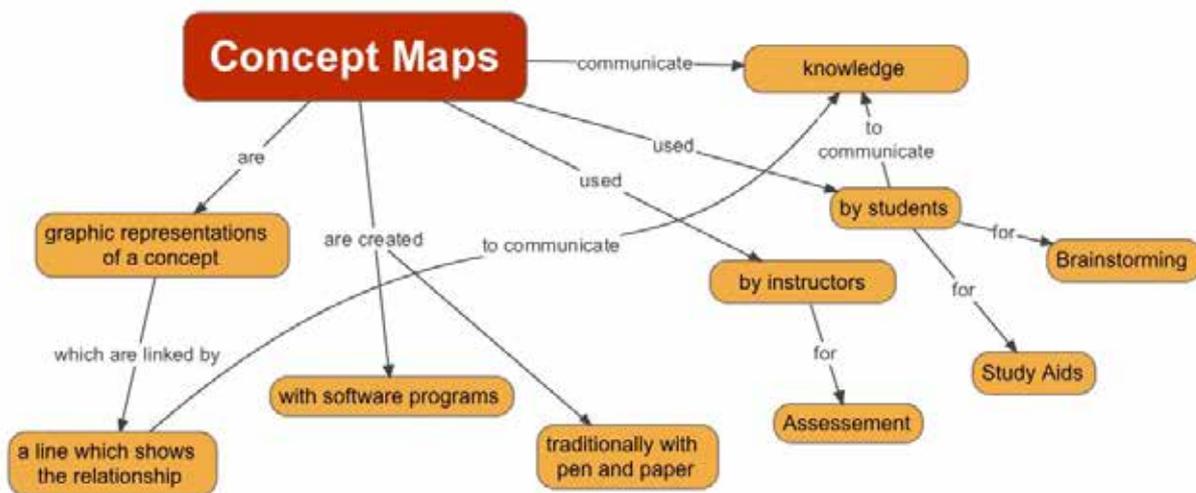
### USEFUL LINKS

[www.chompchomp.com](http://www.chompchomp.com) – good for writing skills  
[www.mindtools.com/index.html](http://www.mindtools.com/index.html)  
<https://bubbl.us/>  
[www.bbc.co.uk/keyskills/extra/module4/1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/keyskills/extra/module4/1.shtml)  
<http://drichard.org/mindmaps/>  
[www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn)

## EXAMPLE OF A MIND MAP:



## EXAMPLE OF A CONCEPT MAP:



# 7 Skills for Online Study

At some point during your studies you will be using digital tools to support your learning. You may be learning using any number of devices such as a laptop, tablet or smart phone. Your course may include face to face, distance or online interactivity and this flexibility is invaluable as it offers more choice and learning opportunities in our increasingly complex lives. There are many tools available to support you and your learning as you become digitally literate.

## VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS - VLE

A VLE provides an environment where resources and services are shared and digital collaboration tools enable learners to work together. It also allows students to access support and may help students and tutors track progress. Blackboard (<https://blackboard.swan.ac.uk/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>) is a web based VLE system that provides a range of functions. You can access documents including course content, updates, resources, reading lists and handouts. It can also be used for assignments and assessment repos.

Virtual learning can take place synchronously or asynchronously. In synchronous systems, participants meet in "real time" and tutors conduct live classes in virtual classrooms. Students can communicate through a microphone, text chat or by writing on the board. In asynchronous learning, which is sometimes called "self-paced" learning, students are expected to complete lessons and assignments independently through the system.

Asynchronous courses have deadlines just as synchronous courses do, but each student is learning at their own pace.

A virtual learning environment can also include students and tutors "meeting" online through a synchronous web-based application. The tutor is able to present lessons through video, PowerPoint or chatting. The students are able to talk with other students and the tutor, as well as collaborate with each other, answer questions, or pose questions. They can use the tools available through the application to virtually raise their hand, send messages or answer questions on the screen given by the tutor or student presenter.

Digital Literacy is about using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for a range of purposes such as research, accessing information, sharing information and resources and conducting conversations. It is powerful and we all need to be digitally literate in both academic and everyday life.

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## VIRTUAL LEARNING TOOLS

Talking and discussions are important in learning and social media tools facilitate this.

### Social Media

Social media is becoming more and more important in teaching and learning. Social media allows ideas to be shared. You can share resources, information and knowledge at

all levels. A number of social media are useful in learning.

**YouTube** allows you to access resources that have been made by others: films, lectures, documentaries, TV clips, discussions, interviews, music. These can be contemporary and you can also access videos showing notable academics, scholars and thinkers

speaking. TED Talks are short (approximately 15 minutes) talks by notable experts in a wide range of disciplines. [www.ted.com/talks](http://www.ted.com/talks)

You can make your own resource such as a film, an instruction video, a documentary, a talk or an interview and post it onto YouTube. Tutors can also make films for students to access.

**Vimeo** is another platform for sharing films and video.

**Podcasts** are sound files. There are many readymade ones such as those from the BBC ([www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts](http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts)) on a range of subjects from ancient history to ethics to sport or language learning. Tutors can make podcasts for learners and learners can also make them to share with the class. Podcasts are also available from iTunes and most are free.

**Twitter** is a useful digital tool in e-learning and can be used as a dissemination tool and a conversation tool. Dissemination and conversation can take place between learners and tutors and also between learners and learners.

On Twitter you can follow people and organisations and also people can follow you. Make sure you follow individuals and organisations you trust so as to ensure the information sent out is useful, valid, reliable and of course of interest. Tweets involve using key words followed by # - these allow you to participate in conversations around particular themes or subject areas. Twitter is a powerful teaching and learning tool. It is good for engagement; you can organise your Twitter account using tools such as a 'tweet deck' or 'hoot suite'. These allow you to classify and file your tweets for easy access.



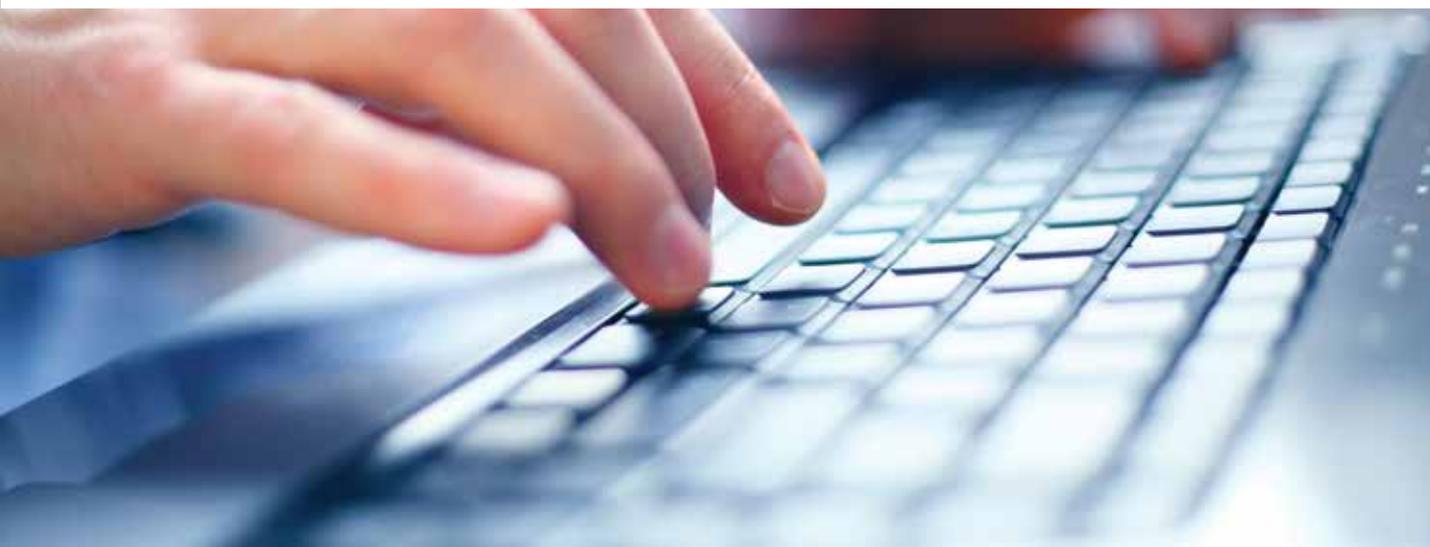
## THERE ARE TWO IMPORTANT THINGS TO CONSIDER: TRUST AND CONVERSATIONS.

You can tweet at events so that there is ongoing participation and discussion.

**Facebook** is a popular social media tool where you link with organisations, institutions and groups in a learning context. It enables you to participate in conversations with them, to develop relationships, to share information. You can easily set up a group, a closed group or an open group. You can set up a group for learners from a course or class and this provides a space or an environment for learners to share ideas, post information, to communicate and collaborate and to support each other.

**Blogging** can be public or private. There are many free tools to enable you to set up your own blog, see Tumblr, Blogger and WordPress. It is useful for reflective practice and for learning; you can post and share information and ideas and people can respond to your blogs. You can follow trusted blogs and receive feeds into your home page. Again, this is a sharing and collaborating tool.

Remember that university regulations clearly state that it is a disciplinary offence to engage in behaviour which could bring the university, its staff and/or students into disrepute - this includes opinions expressed via social media. Do not post comments using language that may offend.



## Collaborative Tools

The collaborative tools used in teaching and learning allow learners to work together, to share. The benefits of using these tools include saving time and resources, including money as there are no travel expenses or paper costs. This means you can work together without having to meet face to face and you can support each other in the same way that you do in a tutorial group. It is just like an online tutorial group. This can facilitate learning across a range of areas, for example working on a project together, sharing research findings, resources and ideas.

**Skype** is used for conducting conversations between two individuals or groups. Skype can also be used to send instant messages. Virtual online tutorials can be conducted using Skype and learners can use it to keep in touch with each other to discuss their studies.

**Google Hangout** is similar to Skype and it also uses video. It can be used for group video calls and it is free.

**Symbaloo** is a personal internet desktop which allows you to see all of your apps at a glance.

**Google Drive** offers many different applications that you can use to support your learning. You can create and share your work online and

access your documents from anywhere. You can also work collaboratively on documents in Google Drive.

New products are always coming online; it is worth keeping abreast of the latest developments and updates.

## Open Educational Resources - MOOCs

A MOOC is a Massive Open Online Course, which has open access via the web and unlimited participation. Videos, readings and other resources can be used and MOOCs also provide interactive user fora that help build a community for tutors and learners.

MOOCs enable distance education; learners can be situated anywhere in the world. Most MOOCs are structured similarly to traditional online university courses in which students watch lectures, read assigned material, participate in online discussions and forums and complete quizzes and tests on the course material. The online activities can be augmented by local meet-ups among students who live near one another. MOOCs are typically provided by universities, often in partnership with “organisers” such as Coursera, edX, and Udacity.



### USEFUL LINKS

<https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7097.pdf>

# 8 Essay Writing

It is essential to plan and structure your essay before you start reading vast amounts of material. The criteria for a good essay is sound structure, equally weighted paragraphs that demonstrate you are in control of the material, good content, correct grammar and punctuation, all supported by accurate referencing.

It is very unwise to discover the route of your essay as you write it; it is more productive to have the shape of your essay planned before you begin writing. The following good practice guide will work for most subjects at university and help you plan and structure your essay effectively.

## This section includes information on:

- Planning your Essay
- Answering the Question
- Getting Started
- Developing an Argument
- Structuring your Essay
  - Introduction
  - Main body of the essay
  - Paragraphs
  - Conclusion
- Using 'I'
- Writing Drafts
- Proofreading
- Essay Presentation Checklist

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## PLANNING YOUR ESSAY

It is not recommended that you rush into writing an essay straight away without first doing some planning in order to help clarify your thinking, organise your material and prevent repetition. Planning also shows you if there are gaps in your knowledge.

Here are several ways of organising your thoughts:

- Make a list of all the ideas/concepts/themes you want to explore
- Draw a mind map that includes the ideas/concepts/themes you want to discuss and which illustrates the direction in which you may wish to go
- Write the ideas/concepts/themes you want to discuss on separate pieces of paper/post-it notes. Then put the notes on an empty desk/



**IF YOU ARE UNSURE THAT YOUR PLAN IS GOOD, TALK TO YOUR TUTOR.**

on the floor and move them around until you are happy with the direction in which your argument is going

- You can also download mind mapping, storyboard and other apps.

It is important to write down the ideas/concepts/themes you want to discuss in your assignment in your own words. This often means paraphrasing ideas/concepts/themes

from your study material. If you are unable to put them into your own words, this may be a sign that you have not understood the material. Make a note of the sources for your ideas/concepts/themes. Ensure references are accurate. If you miss this step, you might find yourself wasting a great deal of time searching for the references at a later stage.

Put your ideas/concepts/themes into a sensible order. Check carefully that they contribute to answering the essay question. If you find that

some of your ideas do not answer the question, discard them. Make as many plans as you need. You may wish to record each version (by writing them out, by taking photographs of your post it notes, by saving different versions on your electronic device) to make sure that you do not lose good plans.

## ANSWERING THE QUESTION

The key to a good assignment is answering the question meaningfully. In a sense this is obvious, but it is very easy to forget the question while you are reading source materials and even while writing. Therefore, you need to:

- Keep checking the exact wording of the question
- Test all the ideas/concepts/themes you want to include in your plan by examining if and how they contribute to answering the question
- Periodically remind yourself of the question as you are writing
- Rigorously test the arguments put forward in your assignment against the essay question when you are proofreading

### Open and closed questions:

**Open question example** 'Comment on the major developments in the history of science in the 18th century.' Here the task is to decide on a few major developments and discuss them in detail, not forgetting to 'comment' on them. If you are given an open question, it is impossible to tackle it in any detail within the word limit of an undergraduate assignment. Do



not attempt a whistle stop tour of all possible things that might be addressed. You are being tested on depth of argument, not mere breadth of information provided. Talk to your tutor and narrow the question down by focusing on a few salient concepts/themes.

**Closed question example 1** 'Discuss the use of assonance and rhyme in Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"'. Here the question only asks you to examine assonance and rhyme. You are to 'discuss' not merely to 'summarise' or 'describe' these stylistic features.

**Closed question example 2** 'Comment on the positive impact of recent equality legislation on the lives of disabled people in the last 20 years.' Here your argument is prescribed in the question.

**As you start planning your essay, consider the assignment question carefully. Underline key words in the question and determine:**

- The approach you are meant to take ('critically discuss' vs. 'describe' etc.)
- The subject matter
- The scope of your research and assignment

**Here is a list of key words to look out for:**

- **Analyse:** examine in close detail; identify important points and chief features
- **Compare:** look for similarities/differences and indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities
- **Contrast:** set two or more items or arguments in opposition in order to bring out differences. Indicate whether/why those differences are significant. If appropriate,

give reasons why one item/argument is preferable to others

- **Critically evaluate:** weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides. Support your reasoning by referring to secondary material and discussing it
- **Define:** give the exact meaning. Sometimes you need to show why a standard definition can be problematic
- **Describe:** give the main characteristics or features of something, or outline main events
- **Discuss:** write about the most important aspects of something (including criticism), perhaps by giving arguments for and against or by arguing a case; consider implications
- **Evaluate:** appraise the worth of something using evidence
- **Examine:** put the subject 'under the microscope', looking at it in detail
- **Explain:** make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is; give reasons
- **Illustrate:** make clear by the use of concrete examples
- **Interpret:** give the meaning and relevance of data or other material
- **Outline:** give the main points, showing the main structure
- **Summarise:** draw out the main points only, omitting examples or details
- **To what extent:** consider how far something is true, or contributes to the final outcome. Also consider how far something is not true.



## GETTING STARTED

Once you have completed your reading and have made an essay plan you are ready to begin writing. The blank piece of paper or the empty computer screen can appear daunting - do not despair. Try some of the following tricks to overcome writer's block:

- Begin writing, it does not need to be the introduction, just start writing
- Think of your assignment as something that will develop through several drafts. This is not the final version it is only a draft
- If you normally type your work, try handwriting, it might inspire ideas
- Bring your ideas into focus by speaking aloud and/or recording yourself
- Abandon your desk and formulate your first paragraph while walking up and down the

room. Alternatively take a recording device on your walk: most mobile phones have a voice recorder

- If your mind just goes blank, you might be stressed or tired. Take a break

If you get stressed at the mere thought of writing, talk to your tutor. It might be a good idea to keep a reflective learning journal in which you jot down your observations about the writing process and what your difficulties are in getting started.



**WRITING IS A SKILL  
THAT CAN BE LEARNT  
WITH PRACTICE.**

# DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT

An argument in an essay is not a confrontation. In this context, 'argument' means that you have a definite point of view, which you are going to present to the reader. It needs to be consistently adhered to throughout the essay. That does not mean that you cannot include other viewpoints in your discussion. Nevertheless, you should make clear why your interpretation is valid in the context of your essay. Remember to support your arguments by evidence from primary and/or secondary sources and to reference all quotations.

## Developing your argument:

State your point of view early in the essay and present a clear rationale to support it.



Offer reliable evidence or examples to support your argument. Reliable evidence is evidence that you have read reputable and authoritative texts, articles, newspapers, internet sites etc.



Show where this evidence has come from by citing your sources and listing all your sources in the reference or bibliography section at the end of your essay.



Show that you are aware of, and have considered arguments that are counter to your own. You will need to summarise counter arguments in a clear, accurate and undistorted way in your essay.



Show why you have decided that the arguments you have chosen to put forward are more convincing for you than other arguments.

# STRUCTURING YOUR ESSAY

Essays have three main elements: introduction, main body and conclusion. Each have different functions.

## Introduction

Here you introduce the subject or topic; it is an opportunity to outline your perspective and state what you are going to discuss or explore. In a 2,000 word essay, a paragraph of approximately 150 words should suffice.

Consider the following:

- Begin with a general sentence that introduces the subject
- The role of the introduction is to tell the reader exactly what to expect. You name the areas you will be examining in the body of the essay
- State what you will explore/discuss within the essay e.g. 'This essay will explore the following three issues', or 'This assignment will specifically identify the following three key themes'
- Do not introduce quotations unless they are used anecdotally and do not begin your discussion here
- The introduction shows the scope of your essay. Sometimes, your essay changes direction slightly during the writing process (despite your plan) and for this reason, it might be a good idea to write your introduction at the end
- Do not begin to answer the question at this stage

## Examples of opening sentences

**Essay question:** 'The Victorian Age is often called the Age of Reform. Discuss.'

The Victorian Age was a time of unparalleled social reform and this essay will consider three areas in which Victorian reformers made a difference: political enfranchisement, the

abolition of slavery and primary education for all.

**Essay question:** 'Discuss the postmodern writing strategies employed by Jeanette Winterson in *Sexing the Cherry*.'

Jeanette Winterson employs postmodern writing strategies to great effect and this essay will focus on the role of storytelling and on the use of magic realism in her novel.

## The main body of the essay

After setting out the direction of your essay in the introduction, the main body consists of paragraphs that argue your case. You need to be highly disciplined and not stray off the path. Remember that your task is not to mention everything noteworthy or interesting about your subject, but to stick to the argument. Presenting an effective argument is at the heart of good essay writing. You should aim to make an overall point in response to some issue or debate.

Consider the following:

- Identify the issue or conflict
- Make an assertion and state it clearly
- Give quotes, opinions/theories to support your argument
- Provide evidence and explain why it should be believed
- Use examples to illustrate
- Use logical and rational arguments
- Anticipate objections: what are the arguments against
- Modify your argument if the counter arguments are strong
- Order your points to make your argument most believable
- Be precise and consistent in what you say

- Avoid making personal criticisms and personal opinions not supported by analysis/evidence
- To conclude, restate your assertion, summarising key points

### Paragraphs

The body of the essay is made up of several paragraphs which should consist of:

- A topic sentence in which you present an argument
- Discussion of the topic sentence
- Presentation and discussion of supporting evidence. Introduce direct and indirect quotations and remember that you need to reference both

Remember to:

- Only make one point in each paragraph
- Come to a conclusion regarding the problem posed in your topic sentence
- Link to the next paragraph

If you discuss more than one idea your paragraph is likely to become unclear and

confusing. Collect all of your ideas on a piece of paper and group them under three or four headings which should represent your paragraphs.

Not all of your points/arguments will be equally strong and you will need to discard all weak ones. Start and end with strong arguments or points.

### Conclusion

The purpose of a conclusion is to show the reader that you have done what you set out to do and it is where you review your ideas, arguments and findings. In a 2,000 word essay, one paragraph of approximately 150 words will be enough.

Consider the following:

- Restate your main arguments and relate them to the main question to show that you have remained focused
- Summarise the key points of your essay
- Do not introduce new ideas. All of your ideas should have been discussed in the main body
- Do not use quotations



## LAC

**Locate** - the first sentence clearly presents the topic

**Analyse** - here you expand/discuss your topic

**Conclude** - this sums up your discussion and links to your next paragraph

## USING 'I'

As a general rule, avoid using 'I' in an academic essay. Using or not using 'I' is largely a matter of convention and style. Check with your tutor to see what they prefer. Similarly, avoid phrases like 'in my opinion'. You are presenting your argument based on evidence you have chosen. The whole essay is 'your opinion', based on reliable evidence. Also avoid using 'we' and use neutral or passive constructions instead.

## Guidelines for structuring your essay:

### 1,000 - 1,500 words

Think of your essay in terms of three key points that are then slotted into 8 paragraphs. Each paragraph, apart from the introduction and conclusion, should have approximately the same number of words.

Introduction	1 paragraph	(150 words)
Point 1	2 paragraphs	
Point 2	2 paragraphs	
Point 3	2 paragraphs	
Conclusion	1 paragraph	(200 words)

### 3,000 words

Think of your essay in terms of three key points that are then slotted into 11 paragraphs, apart from the introduction and conclusion. Each paragraph should have approximately the same number of words.

Introduction	1 paragraph	(200 words)
Point 1	3 paragraphs	
Point 2	3 paragraphs	
Point 3	3 paragraphs	
Conclusion	1 paragraph	(200 words)

### 5,000 words

Think of your essay in terms of three key points that are then slotted into 20 paragraphs, apart from the introduction and conclusion. Each paragraph should have approximately the same number of words.

Introduction	1 paragraph	(200 words)
Point 1	6 paragraphs	
Point 2	6 paragraphs	
Point 3	6 paragraphs	
Conclusion	1 paragraph	(200 words)

## How long does it take to write an essay?

It always takes longer than you think to write an essay. Use the checklist below to help you plan your work:

- Time for 'reading around'
- Focussed reading
- Essay planning
- Getting started
- First draft
- Second draft
- Subsequent drafts (if necessary)
- Final draft
- Proofreading
- 'Sleeping on it'
- Final read-through
- Submission process e.g. through Turnitin or emailing it to tutor

## WRITING DRAFTS

The first draft of your essay is unlikely to be the final version. In fact, it is unrealistic to expect this. Writing several drafts enables you to refine your ideas and the language you use to express them.

You might find it difficult to make changes if you remain too close to your work. Introduce some distance between you and the text, for example print the essay, set it aside for a day or two, and then read it again annotating it for changes. Alternatively print the essay and cut out the different paragraphs. Rearrange them and decide whether the essay flows better.

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## PROOFREADING

You should reserve at least one day for proofreading. You may not be the best proof-reader of your work because people often become blind to their mistakes, whether they are grammatical errors or logical errors. So, if you can, enlist the help of a 'critical friend' to give you friendly but firm advice.



**WHY NOT EXCHANGE ESSAYS WITH ANOTHER STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS? YOU MIGHT BENEFIT ENORMOUSLY FROM READING OTHER WORK.**

If you do not have a critical friend, distance yourself from the essay and consider the following questions objectively:

- Does my essay answer the question?
- Do I clearly point out in the introduction what I address in the body of the essay?
- Do my paragraphs contain only one idea?
- Are my paragraphs structured logically?
- Does the essay 'flow' logically from paragraph to paragraph?
- Have I covered the main ideas in enough depth?

- Have I referenced all direct and indirect quotations?
- Does the conclusion summarise the points made in my paragraphs?
- Does the conclusion summarise the main arguments of the essay?
- Have I made sure that the text is error-free (e.g. grammar, punctuation)?
- Have I followed the correct referencing system?
- Is my text presented correctly according to the guidelines (double-spaced throughout, long quotes indented etc.)?
- Does the essay meet the word count in the guidelines?
- Have I included my student number and page numbers in header/footer?

### What tutors look for in a good essay

Tutors use guidelines to assess essays and other written work and will be looking for the following:

#### Content

- Background reading
- Understanding of topic
- Understanding of theoretical issues

- Relevance of answer to question
- Strong introduction
- Clear argument
- Use of appropriate evidence
- Analysis and evaluation
- Appropriate conclusion
- Strengths of this piece of work
- Weaknesses of this piece of work
- How this essay could be improved

#### Presentation

- Legible, neat and well presented
- Well structured

- Accurate spelling
- Cohesive (flow, links between stages of argument)
- Paragraph structure (length, organisation)
- Appropriate use of terminology
- Author's/authors' names spelt correctly
- References and bibliography



**YOUR TUTOR IS  
LOOKING FOR  
COHERENCE,  
UNDERSTANDING,  
INSIGHT, ACCURACY,  
CLARITY AND A TIGHT  
ARGUMENT.**

ed for breakfast, sitting under the huge gr  
 had been set up outside the café on the upp  
 rly in the morning, the sun already blazing  
 as spiced with the scent of riv life, but th  
 i: h aroma of freshly ground co

Examples of words and phrases to help with the flow of your essay:

<p><b>TO ADD INFORMATION</b></p> <p>additionally again along with in addition to together with as well as further/furthermore besides likewise equally moreover for example</p>	<p><b>TO CONCLUDE OR SUMMARISE</b></p> <p>accordingly due to in summary all in all finally therefore as a result in conclusion to sum up consequently in short</p>	<p><b>TO CONTRAST TWO THINGS OR SHOW A DIFFERENCE</b></p> <p>alternatively however on the contrary as opposed to nevertheless otherwise but conversely yet</p>	<p><b>TO EMPHASISE A POINT</b></p> <p>again clearly in fact as demonstrated for this reason specifically as highlighted in addition to emphasise as shown indeed</p>
<p><b>TO SHOW SIMILARITIES</b></p> <p>again in the same way similarly comparatively likewise in parallel in the same manner</p>	<p><b>TO CLARIFY</b></p> <p>defined as likewise to restate put another way viewed differently in other words to clarify as</p>	<p><b>TO SEQUENCE YOUR ARGUMENT</b></p> <p>before initially in the same manner finally in parallel secondly firstly later subsequently immediately prior to to conclude with</p>	

# ESSAY PRESENTATION CHECKLIST:

**Make sure that your essay is presented in the following way:**

- Double-spaced throughout
- Legible font, preferably a font like Arial (11pt) or Times New Roman (12pt)
- All long quotes (more than 3 lines of your text) are indented on the left by at least 1 cm
- Leave a margin of approx. 3 cm on the right side of the paper
- Short quotes are integrated into your text using quotation marks
- Your student number should go in the header
- Page numbers should go in header or footer
- There is no need for a title page
- Italics are used for titles of books, non-English words (*vis-à-vis*, *joie de vivre*, *et al.*, *inter alia* etc.) and, occasionally, for words you intend to emphasise



## USEFUL LINKS

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[www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/writing/essays.html](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/writing/essays.html)  
[www.uea.ac.uk/documents/2801465/3701900/UG+%26+PG+LDC+generic+HUM+Skills+Handbook+2013-2014.pdf/3fd35a3d-b3c4-4efb-992c-e2afb20b115f](http://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/2801465/3701900/UG+%26+PG+LDC+generic+HUM+Skills+Handbook+2013-2014.pdf/3fd35a3d-b3c4-4efb-992c-e2afb20b115f)

## REFERENCES

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Greetham, B. (2008). *How to Write Better Essays*. 2nd Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

# 9 Referencing

Referencing your assignment is essential in order to acknowledge the work of others; this is a crucial aspect of academic study and is a skill that takes time to develop and will need practice. You need to reference direct quotations, information, statistics or when you have summarised someone else's ideas or writing in your own words. Referencing is important because it adds credibility to your own work and is a necessary academic convention. If you read something and you want to include it in your assignment, you must reference it.

Accurate referencing allows the tutor to identify your ideas and understand how you have interpreted and analysed the material. This enables the tutor to monitor your progress and comment on your understanding. As a university student it is important that you provide full and accurate references in your work and this will help you identify and remember particular points in your reading. Referencing will be taken into account when marking your assignment.

When you find a source that you want to use in your assignment, note the information you need immediately. Not doing this will result in you having to find the source again in future and this can be extremely time-consuming. You will be penalised if you submit incomplete references in your assignment. This section will clarify what information you need to record and how to record different types of source material.

## Why do I need to reference?

Although citing sources and references is often a tedious task, it is a vital one. It is the means by which you communicate the origin of the material you have used in your written work.

### You need to reference in order to:

- Enable your tutor to follow up the references and find the book or journal article in a library and to check for accuracy
- Demonstrate to your tutor that you have read a wide range of opinions and to indicate from where your ideas originate
- Acknowledge someone else's intellectual contribution to your writing
- Enable your tutor to identify your work and the work of others
- Demonstrate that the arguments you are making are supported by others

### If you accurately reference you are:

- Avoiding possible charges of plagiarism
- Demonstrating what you have studied
- Enabling your tutor to assess your understanding, analysis and ideas

### If you do not accurately reference you are:

- Implicitly claiming work is your own when it is not - this is plagiarism
- Failing to demonstrate the extent of your own reading and studying
- Failing to identify your own work to your tutor

## What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is defined as using someone else's words or ideas and passing them off as your own, without acknowledging your source. Good referencing will assist in avoiding accusations of plagiarism and you will lose marks if you do not acknowledge sources. If you do not correctly reference your sources you are implicitly claiming (whether you mean to or not) that the ideas in your work are entirely your own. This is plagiarism and is extremely serious.



## A GUIDE TO REFERENCING

Humanities students are required to use the APA (American Psychological Association) referencing style apart from history students who are required to use MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association).

**For further information on:**

**APA Referencing**

**MHRA Referencing**

**access the guidelines on the library subject support page:**

**[www.swansea.ac.uk/iss/libraries/subjectinformation](http://www.swansea.ac.uk/iss/libraries/subjectinformation)**

# 10 Report Writing

Reports are a highly structured form of writing, often following a common format which provide an account of a particular topic. Structure and convention in written reports includes the process by which the information is gathered as well as the information itself. Reports vary in their purpose, but all of them will require a formal structure and careful planning, presenting the material in a logical manner using clear and concise language.

## ESSAY OR REPORT?

The difference between an essay and a report lies mainly in the style and structure. An essay is a reflection of how much you know about a particular aspect of a subject. Unlike an essay, a report's purpose is not to argue but to present information and/or facts, however the content of a report may be used to form the basis of an argument. Most reports are used to

analyse a situation (usually a problem) through describing an investigation or action, outlining findings and recommending a course of action. Unlike an essay, a report can present some information in the form of bullet points, charts, diagrams and graphics.

During your studies you may be asked to write different types of reports, depending on the



subject area you have chosen. These could include evaluation reports, research reports, laboratory reports, technical reports and reports on a work placement or field trip.

Reports vary in their purpose, but all of them will require a formal structure and careful planning. Material needs to be presented

in a logical manner using accurate, clear and concise language. The following section outlines the stages in the development of a report, and makes recommendations regarding structure and technique.

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## STAGES IN REPORT WRITING

- Clarify the terms of reference
  - Plan your work
  - Collect information
  - Organise and structure your information
  - Draft, check and re-draft
- What information do you need?
  - Where do you find it?
  - How much do you need?
  - How will you collect it?
  - In what order will you arrange it?

### Clarify the terms of reference

The terms of reference are a guiding statement that help you define the scope of your investigation. From the start you must be clear about the purpose of the report. Knowing the purpose of the report will help you communicate your information clearly and help you be more selective when collecting your information.

### Plan your work

Careful planning is essential. This will help you write a clear, concise and effective report. Consider the report as a whole, its audience and its purpose. Draw up an outline structure, think about how much time you have to write it and break the report down into manageable sections. Set yourself deadlines for the various stages.

The most time-consuming parts of the process are collecting and selecting your information, and checking and revising your report.

### Collect information

There are a number of questions you need to ask yourself at this stage:

You may have much of the information you need already. However you may need additional material such as information on other research studies or literature reviews. You may need to carry out interviews or visit the university library to collect the information you need. List what information you need and make an action plan stating how and when you are going to gather it.

### Organise and structure your information

One helpful way of organising your information is to collect your ideas into a mind map or a concept map.

### Draft, check and re-draft

It is important to develop the habit of drafting and redrafting your work as it progresses. This will ensure that it has a coherent and logical order and that you have a thorough understanding of the material. Once you have written the first draft of your report you will need to read it through thoroughly. It is probably sensible to leave it for a day or so if possible as this will allow you to view/read your work more objectively.

# STRUCTURING YOUR REPORT

As there are different types of reports always check with your tutor precisely what your report should include and how it should be presented.

**The following common elements can be found in many different reports:**

- Title Page
- Acknowledgements
- Contents
- Summary
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Results or Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- References
- Appendices

## Title Page

This should include the title of the report (giving a precise indication of the subject matter), the author's name, module, course and the date.

## Acknowledgements

You should acknowledge any help you have received in collecting the information for the report. This may be from librarians or technicians.

## Contents

You should list all the main sections of the report in sequence with page numbers. If there are charts, diagrams or tables included in your report, these should be listed separately under 'List of Illustrations' together with the page numbers on which they appear.

## Summary

This should be a short paragraph summarising the main contents of the report. It should include a short statement of the main task, the methods used, conclusions reached and any

recommendations to be made. The abstract or summary should be concise, informative and independent of the report. Write this section after you have written the report.

## Introduction

This should give the context and scope of the report and should include your terms of reference. State your objectives clearly, define the limits of the report, outline the method of enquiry, give a brief general background to the subject of the report and indicate any proposed development.

## Methodology

In this section you should state how you carried out your enquiry and why you chose these methods. Did you carry out interviews or questionnaires? Did you do any desk research? How did you collect your data? What measurements did you make? How did you choose the subjects for your interviews? This section presents information logically and concisely.

## Results or Findings

Present your findings in as simple a way as possible. The more complicated the information looks, the more difficult it will be to interpret. There are a number of ways in which results can be presented, including tables, graphs, pie charts, bar charts, diagrams.

Checklist for tables, diagrams and charts:

- Are all of your diagrams/illustrations clearly labelled?
- Do they all have titles?
- Is the link between the text and the diagram clear?
- Are the headings precise?
- Are the axes of graphs clearly labelled?
- Can tables be easily interpreted?
- Have you abided by any copyright laws when including illustrations/tables from published documents?

When presenting qualitative findings such as interviews, meeting notes, views or opinions use sub headings. This helps to divide the section into topics, issues or themes or categories of respondents. Use quotes to illustrate the main findings where appropriate.

### **Discussion**

This is the section where you analyse and interpret your results drawing from the information you have collected, explaining its significance. Here you need to identify important issues and suggest explanations for your findings. You should also outline any problems encountered and present a balanced view.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The conclusion draws together the main issues; do not attempt to cover every item. It should be expressed clearly and should not present any new information. The recommendations

are based on the facts in the report and your evaluation of them. They are prescriptive, brief and presented as a list. You may assume that the reader has at least studied the conclusions. There is no need to repeat your arguments or justify the recommendations.

### **References**

It is important that you accurately reference your report if you have included the work of others.

### **Appendices**

An appendix contains additional information related to the report but which is not essential to the main findings. This provides additional information for the reader and could include details of interview questions, questionnaires, statistical data, a glossary of terms, maps or additional charts.

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## **STYLE OF WRITING**

There are several points that you will need to consider when you are writing your report and your tutor will advise whether it should be written in the 'active' or 'passive' voice.

- The active voice reads as follows: 'I recommend ...'
- The passive voice reads: 'It is recommended that ...'

The passive appears more formal and considered. Be aware of these differences and avoid mixing the two voices.

Simplicity and clarity are key to a good reporting style. Try to avoid using overly complicated language. If a report is to persuade, provide a brief or justify an

argument its message must be precise and clear. Furthermore, do not swamp the factual presentation of data with complicated, lengthy sentences. Also try to avoid using unnecessary jargon and ensure that any abbreviations are standardised and clearly explained.

Generally reports provide an objective account and avoid the use of subjective language. For example, to report on a change in colouration from a "stunning green to a beautiful blue" is to project your own opinions. Such subjective or personal language commonly has no place in the field of report writing.

# LAYOUT AND PRESENTATION

Some formal reports have a progressive numbering system. The most common system is the decimal notation system. The main sections are given single Arabic numbers - 1, 2, 3 and so on. Sub-sections are given a decimal number - 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and so on. Sub-sections can be further divided into - 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3 and so on.

An example structure would look as follows;

## 1. Introduction

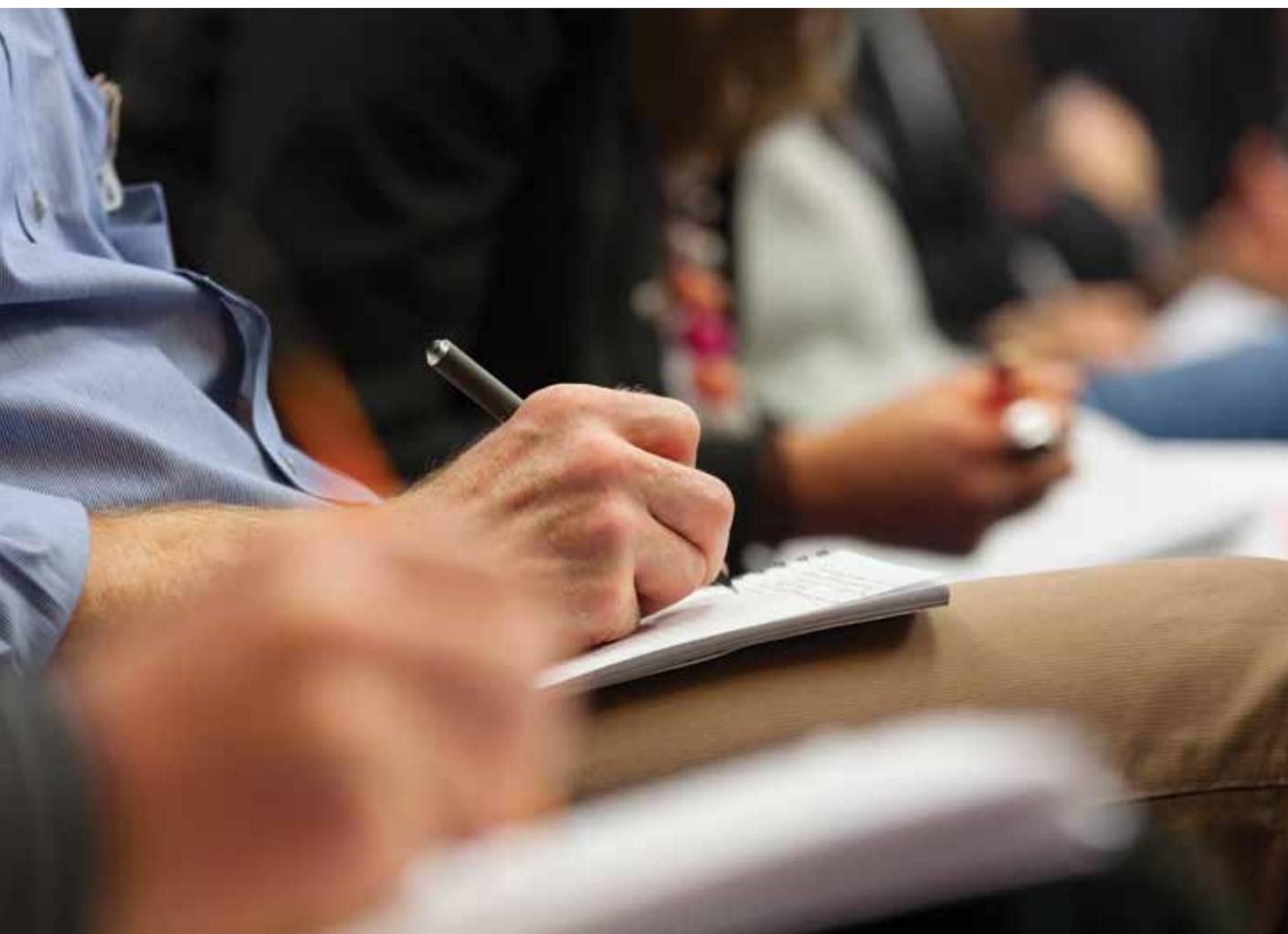
- 1.1.....
- 1.2.....
  - 1.2.1.....
  - 1.2.2.....
- 1.3.....
- 1.4.....

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1.....
- 2.2.....
- 2.3.....

In terms of layout, reports should be clear and easy to read with wide margins for binding and feedback from your tutor. Paragraphs should be short and concise and headings and sub headings should be clear - highlighted in bold or underlined. All diagrams and illustrations should be labelled and numbered. Technical terminology should be listed in a glossary of terms at the end of your report.

The ability to express yourself clearly and succinctly is an important academic skill which will help you summarise and present information and draw objective findings from detailed data.



# REPORT WRITING CHECKLIST

- Title page should include: title, name, module/course, date and any other necessary details
- Acknowledge all sources of help
- Include a contents page and list the main sections in sequence
- Include a list of illustrations, tables or charts
- Include a summary, describing the main task, methods, conclusions reached, recommendations made
- Ensure your introduction includes terms of reference, scope of the report, context, an outline of the method, a brief background to the subject matter
- Include a section on methodology showing the form your enquiry took and the way you collected data
- Ensure diagrams are clear and simple, clearly labelled and related closely to the text
- The main discussion should identify key issues, suggest explanations for your findings and outline any problems encountered
- Have you presented a balanced view?
- Sequence and group together issues/topics/findings under clear and appropriate sub headings
- Draw together your main findings and avoid any new information in the conclusion
- Are the recommendations succinct and realistic?
- Ensure references are accurate, complete and listed alphabetically
- Include only supporting information in the appendices
- Use clear and concise language with short sentences which are jargon free
- Focus your paragraphs, and use objective language
- Clearly label each section, ensuring consistency throughout
- Leave sufficient margin space for binding and tutor feedback
- Check your spelling



## USEFUL LINKS

[www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/reportwr.pdf](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/reportwr.pdf)

[www.bristol.ac.uk/enhs/aw.pdf](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/enhs/aw.pdf)

<http://library.leeds.ac.uk/tutorials/activities/writing/report-writing/>

# 11 Writing a Review

You may be asked to write a review as part of your academic assessment. A review is a critical evaluation of a text, film, television programme, event, object or phenomenon. Reviews can consider books, articles, entire genres or fields of literature, architecture, art, fashion, restaurants, policies, exhibitions, performances and many other forms. A review identifies, summarises and succinctly evaluates ideas and information objectively; it can follow the same structure as an essay.

It is important to recognise that a review is a commentary, not merely a summary; typically, reviews are brief. You should make a few key points about the book/film/article, you do not need to discuss everything.

Firstly, a review gives the reader a concise summary of the content including a relevant description of the topic as well as its overall perspective, argument or purpose.

Secondly, a review offers a critical assessment of the content. This involves your reactions to the work: what strikes you as noteworthy, whether or not it was effective or persuasive, its strengths and weaknesses and how it enhanced your understanding of the issues at hand.

Finally, in addition to analysing the work, which requires separating the content and concepts into their main components and then understanding how these interrelate and connect, a review often includes your opinion and perspective on the work.

If you are asked to review a text, it must be read a number of times. If the study concerns a film, play or piece of music, it must be watched or listened to more than once.

A critical review must examine, question and evaluate the text/film. You should state what you are reviewing and whether it achieves its aims, that is, to entertain, inform, educate or instruct. You will formulate an argument for its merits in the same way as you would approach a critical essay, not merely accepting the opinions of others but questioning, analysing and proposing alternative views, opinions and attitudes.

# 12 Building a Portfolio

Most students devise a system of storing their work, notes, research and assignments in one place; this can be on a laptop, a PC, a memory stick or online. It is a small step from this to building a portfolio.

## What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of work systematically selected to represent activities and

achievements in a particular course of study or over a specific period of time. It can function as a record of activity, a work in progress, as well as a showcase of accomplishment. In addition to the work itself, a portfolio could include evidence of student reflection, self evaluation and tutor evaluation. Often the student and tutor work together to decide on the content of a portfolio.

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## TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS

In general, portfolios can be divided into two types: a product portfolio and a process portfolio.

### Product Portfolio

This is a summative collection of a student's best work completed throughout a course of study. It aims to highlight mastery of certain skills or concepts as well as achievement of learning objectives.

### Process Portfolio

This contains work that demonstrates evidence of the various stages of the student's journey.

At any one time it may contain a collection of work in progress and/or drafts illustrating the development and steps taken to create the final product. A common and very good example of this might include the initial ideas, development of concepts, research, drafting and revision that a student goes through in order to complete an assignment.

Portfolios have become more popular as student-centred approaches have developed. They are often included as a tool in the overall assessment strategy. They can provide insights into the whole learning experience, particularly for the purposes of formative or continuous assessment.

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## BENEFITS OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Portfolio building can be a very useful component of learning and the benefits include:

- The opportunity for tutors and students to collaborate and set learning goals in order to evaluate progress
- Providing students with opportunities to present their work for assessment other than essay writing and formal exams
- Recognising that learning is a process, a series of stages; the focus is on the process and not just the final product
- Providing students with opportunities for self-evaluation, critical analysis of their work and reflection

# 13 Reflective Learning Journals

A reflective learning journal is an accumulative document or record of your learning based on your experiences, reflections and observations. It is a personal record and as such you may wish to keep the contents private.

The key element of a journal is its reflective nature which will assist your development as an active and engaged learner; it is more than a record of dates, events and activities. Setting time aside to think about your feelings and experiences of learning is just as important as the journal itself.

## Reflective learning journals can take two forms:

1. A personal record maintained by a student for their own use (i.e. a private account)
2. A documented record of a student's learning experience submitted as a requirement of a course. This form of journal is often assessed and can take the form of a blog or weblog

## Reflective learning journals can include:

- Thoughts and notes on issues arising from reading or seminar discussions
- Activities that you wish to explore further
- Issues with which you are struggling
- Opinions you feel you could not express in class
- Specific questions arising from your reading
- Notes and thoughts based on wider reading - how does this enhance, through agreement or deviation, what you have covered in class?

- Your feelings and impressions on your progression:
  - Are things going well?
  - Are you having problems in certain areas?
  - How can problems be dealt with?
  - Do you need to seek help from your tutor?
  - How useful and effective was that support?
- Your reflections on the course itself including the teaching and learning methods used:
  - Do they meet your needs?
  - Are you making the most of your learning experience?
  - Do you need to make changes or adaptations to suit your learning style?

If a reflective learning journal is part of your course requirement, any personal thoughts you do not wish your tutor to see should be maintained in a separate version.

A learning journal need not consist solely of text and notes but could also include diagrams, drawings, mind maps and anything else that assists you in maintaining a useful record.

Always remember that the fundamental purpose of a reflective learning journal is that you, the student, should be the one to benefit from this process.



**THERE IS NO BETTER WAY OF CLARIFYING YOUR THOUGHTS AND STRAIGHTENING OUT AREAS OF CONFUSION THAN BY WRITING IT ALL DOWN.**

## When journals are assessed

Journals can often form part of your overall course assessment. Tutors look for evidence of wide reading and the way students identify issues and reflect on possible solutions. Journals can be a way for your tutor to see how you feel about the course, how you are developing your critical thinking skills and identifying areas of weakness so that they can offer support.

## Using blogs as reflective journals

**There are 2 easy ways of setting up a basic blog:**

1. Go directly to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) where there are 3 easy steps for creating a blog. Simply follow the instructions on the homepage
- You will need to create a Google account using an email address you already have

- Give your blog an initial title (this can be changed later)
  - Try logging in and out again to ensure that it works. You are now ready to start blogging
2. Alternatively you can go to [www.gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com) and set up a new email account there. It is important to verify your new Gmail account by accessing a message delivered to your existing email that contains a link.

Once verified go to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and set up the account with your new Gmail username and password.

Your reflective blog need not be confined to text, it can include pictures, links to other blogs, web pages and/or animations.



### USEFUL LINKS

- [www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reflective\\_learning/reflective\\_learning.html](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/essentials/reflective_learning/reflective_learning.html)
- [www.peicpt.com/sitefiles/File/Portfolio/LearningJournal.pdf](http://www.peicpt.com/sitefiles/File/Portfolio/LearningJournal.pdf)
- [www.tru.ca/\\_\\_shared/assets/reflective\\_learner19767.pdf](http://www.tru.ca/__shared/assets/reflective_learner19767.pdf)

# 14 Presentations

Presentations are increasingly used as part of learning at undergraduate level. Making presentations can be daunting but the skills needed to make a good presentation can be learnt and continually improved through practice. Essentially presentations are about effective communication.

Generally, making a presentation involves you speaking, either alone or in a group situation to make a point, convey messages and/or share information. It is advisable to use supporting visual aids such as PowerPoint, whiteboards or flip charts.

**If you are asked to prepare and deliver a presentation your tutor will look for:**

- A well structured presentation: introduction, a main section with your key points and a conclusion
- Appropriate visual aids

- Evidence of having practiced the talk
- Appropriate timing/length
- A clear argument or message in the content
- Appropriate breadth and depth in the content
- A comprehensive understanding of the topic



Tell the audience what you are going to tell them

Tell them

Tell the audience what you have told them

## PLANNING YOUR PRESENTATION

Begin by structuring your presentation and understanding your objectives. Thorough planning is essential; it means you will have done everything you can to ensure a successful presentation and it will give you the confidence to stand up in front of a group of people.

The following three aspects are important to consider when planning a presentation: **Purpose, Audience and Location (PAL).**



### PAL

**Purpose** - why and what?  
**Audience** - who?  
**Location** - where?

### Purpose - why and what?

Consider the purpose of the presentation: what is the objective, what outcome(s) do you and the audience expect? It is useful to write down the reason you have been asked to present so you can use this as a constant reminder while you prepare. Try not to lose sight of your objective and remain focused. Consider which of the following you want to achieve:

- To educate and inform
- To present an argument
- To inspire, to generate interest and/or persuade
- To entertain

### Audience - who?

The type of audience might well influence the format of your presentation and its content.

For example, a theoretical presentation to a specialist audience might be more formal than one to your fellow students.

Consider the following:

- Who is your audience?
- What are their reasons for attending?
- What are their expectations?
- How many are likely to be present?

The answers to these questions will affect both the style and the content of your talk.

### Location - where?

An important aspect of planning concerns the location of your presentation. This can have significant implications with regard to planning your content and the logistics and practicalities.

If you have access to the venue, it might help to visit it beforehand to check:

- Type and size of room
- Seating arrangements - fixed or movable
- Lighting - artificial or natural?
- Acoustics
- Equipment availability e.g. whiteboard, projector, flip chart, laptop, WiFi
- Location of power points
- Position of speaker (you)
- Microphones
- Facilities for people with special needs, e.g. a hearing loop
- Likelihood of outside distractions, e.g. noise from another room
- Availability of parking facilities

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## STRUCTURING YOUR PRESENTATION

Just like an essay, the content of any presentation needs to have a clear structure. This will allow the audience to understand the main themes and leave the presentation feeling that it has been a worthwhile experience. Break your presentation down into three sections: the introduction, main body and conclusion.

### Introduction

It is important to be very clear and set the scene for the audience. State the purpose, scope and main message. Outline what you hope to achieve and aim to identify three objectives. Your introduction should create an immediate impression and gain the attention of the audience. Do not forget to introduce yourself and state the reasons for the presentation.

### Main body

Ensure your key points are highlighted and present them incrementally, concisely and in logical order; signpost between each key point and do not be afraid to recap on each section. Illustrate each point with clear examples and appropriate and relevant use of visual aids.

### Conclusion

The conclusion should not be rushed, it is as important as the introduction. If a speaker runs out of time and rushes the conclusion, the audience will only remember an incomplete presentation. The conclusion must be clear: it must summarise all of your main points and end strongly. Reinforce the main message and emphasise its significance and relevance. It is important to have a well-rehearsed close to your presentation.

- Try not to wander around the subject
- Do not introduce any new ideas
- Avoid repeating points over and over again
- Remember to ask if there are any questions at the end
- Thank the audience for listening

### Visual aids

Visual aids will help to illustrate your presentation. Effective use of visual aids requires careful planning and preparation; you need to be selective so as not to overwhelm your audience. Visual aids should help the audience recall a concept and must complement what you say.

- Keep it simple, do not overcomplicate your slides
- Check that everyone can see your presentation/screen
- Always check your spelling

### PowerPoint

Effective use of PowerPoint can look very professional and enhance your presentation. Consider using a slide at the beginning to show the structure of the presentation. Try not to use too many slides and keep text to a minimum focusing on key points. Space the text well and use clear headings and sub headings.

Pay attention to your choice of colour and design, a little is interesting but too much can be overwhelming. Consider using images, charts, illustrations, video or audio to replace text, but only use short clips. Do not present detailed diagrams, tables or photocopied pages as slides.



## DELIVERY

Once you have prepared your presentation you will need to effectively communicate this to your audience. It is important to gain their attention immediately, so be creative, pose questions or challenge them. Remaining relaxed is crucial; experienced presenters learn to deal with their nervousness and turn it to their advantage.

### Body language

- Consider whether sitting or standing is most appropriate - sitting might restrict your ability to project your voice
- Do not fold your arms or put your hands in your pocket
- Try to avoid using too many gestures
- Do not fidget e.g. with notes, hair, glasses, equipment or furniture

- Avoid walking about too much whilst talking
- Do not walk in front of the screen while it is being used
- Smile

### Speech

- Avoid repeating certain words or phrases e.g. 'you know', 'and so on and so forth'
- Do not get too excited about what you are saying and start going off the subject
- Speak slowly - but not too slow
- Speak clearly - do not mumble
- Do not rush

- Do not shout; consider the appropriate volume for your voice
- Use cue cards

### Interaction

- Look at the audience, make eye contact wherever possible
- Avoid turning your back to the audience
- Do not simply read the text from the slides - remember that the audience can read
- Do not get diverted into a discussion with a single member of the audience during the presentation

### Practice

Practicing beforehand is essential; it will improve your presentation significantly. Practice develops confidence and a polished delivery which can then allow for some spontaneity. Rehearse your presentation at least twice, preferably more. Do not practice at the expense of the planning, make sure the content and structure are good and your key messages

are clear. It is also important to ensure that the equipment works properly and you are confident using it.

- Practice giving your talk aloud so that you become familiar with your voice
- Practice your talk with others, a friend or classmate and ask for honest feedback in order that you can improve
- Try to conduct your practice in a situation similar to the presentation venue
- Use your visual aids so that you become familiar with them
- Practice from beginning to end without stopping. Even if you stumble, keep going, this will give you a better impression of the flow and structure
- Discover awkward phrases or points you need to highlight
- Time yourself. Ensure that your presentation is timed correctly
- Take note of when to pause
- Once you are happy with it, go through it one more time

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## DEALING WITH NERVES

It is entirely natural to feel nervous before making a presentation. You are not alone, even the most practiced presenter will suffer from nervousness. You can channel your nervous energy wisely so that it is not a problem. However being over-confident could equally affect your presentation.

There are some tried and tested strategies and techniques to manage your nerves so that you can concentrate on delivering an effective and engaging presentation. These will not get rid of your nerves; instead they will help you to use your nerves to your advantage so that you can communicate enthusiastically, convincingly and passionately.

### Practice deep breathing

Adrenalin causes your breathing to be shallow. By deliberately breathing deeply your brain will get the oxygen it needs and you will become calmer. This also helps with voice quivers, which can occur when your breathing is shallow and irregular.

### Drink water

Adrenalin can cause a dry mouth so have a glass or bottle of water handy and take sips occasionally, especially when you wish to pause or emphasise a point.

## Smile

Smiling is a natural relaxant that sends positive chemical messages through your body. Smiling and maintaining eye contact also help you build rapport with your audience.

## Use visualisation techniques

Imagine that you are delivering your presentation to an audience that is interested, enthused, smiling and reacting positively. Cement this positive image in your mind and recall it just before you are ready to start.

## Pause

Just before you start talking, pause, make eye contact and smile. This moment can be relaxing and gives you time to adjust to being the centre of attention.

## Slow down

Speak a little slower than you would in conversation and leave longer pauses between sentences. This slower pace will calm you down and will make you easier to hear, especially at the back of a large room.

## Move around

Move around a little during your presentation as this will expend some of your nervous energy. However, try not to pace backwards and forwards as this can be distracting.

## Think of your audience

Remember that the audience is there to listen to you, try to put your nerves aside and think about communicating your message as effectively as possible.

## Question and answer session

Confirm if you are required to conduct a question and answer session after your presentation. You will need to allow time for this.

Remember to:

- Formally introduce the question and answer session
- Clearly state how long this will take
- Not allow one question to sidetrack you - select a range of questions
- Not rush your answers

## Handouts

Handouts can provide a clear structure of your presentation. Restrict your handouts to the most important points. A short seminar presentation will rarely need a handout longer than one page.

Remember to include:

- The title of the presentation, your name and the date
- Information in bullet points. No paragraphs of prose
- Sub headings for different levels of information (main points, examples)
- Any sources where appropriate. Give a bibliography of works cited at the end of the handout, using a standard bibliographical style
- Any specific materials such as tables, illustrations, etc
- Enough copies for everyone. Bring them stapled, hole-punched and ready to use

# PRESENTATION CHECKLIST

## Points to remember:

- Prepare a well structured presentation
- Tell the audience what you are going to do, do it and tell them what you have done
- A slide with the outline of the presentation can be useful
- Use short words, short phrases and clear explanations
- Use clear, simple and engaging visuals which can be seen from the back of the room.
- Show your enthusiasm
- Address the whole audience, not just one group or the tutor
- Appropriate use of humour can make you and your audience feel at ease
- Speak slowly
- Speak clearly - loud enough for all to hear
- Pause from time to time - for natural breaks
- Place your notes/cue cards face down in a neat pile as you finish using each one.
- Position yourself so that the audience can see you easily and so that you can see them
- Always have a duplicate of your presentation with you just in case your memory stick does not work
- Rehearse your presentation adequately

## Do not:

- Read your visuals/handout as your presentation. It may be necessary to read out details if some of the audience cannot see your presentation, but that is all
- Sit. It restricts your ability to project your voice
- Speak too softly
- Walk about too much while talking
- Walk in front of the screen while it is being used
- Turn your back to the audience (e.g. when pointing at visuals)
- Gaze out of the window or over the audience's head
- Fidget (with pens, notes, hair) while talking
- Get diverted into a discussion with a single member of the audience - during or after the presentation
- Present detailed diagrams, tables or photocopied pages on screen
- Try to include too much material
- Be too serious
- Rush



## USEFUL LINKS

[www.skillsyouneed.com/presentation-skills.html](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/presentation-skills.html)

<http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/>

[www.kent.ac.uk/careers/presentationskills.htm](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/presentationskills.htm)

[www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=63](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=63)

[www.eitforum.com/4765.php](http://www.eitforum.com/4765.php)

### YouTube

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI\\_FJAOcFgQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI_FJAOcFgQ)

PechaKucha - [www.youtube.com/user/PechaKuchaGlobal](http://www.youtube.com/user/PechaKuchaGlobal)

# 15 Grammar and Punctuation

## Writing sentences

Academic writing can place extra demands on your use of grammar and punctuation because you need to communicate complex and subtle meanings clearly. This section will help you address frequent problem areas and provide basic examples to help refresh your understanding of basic grammar.

## What is a sentence?

A simple sentence is a grammatically complete unit, a group of words that makes sense. Sentences may be made up of different components but all sentences must have a **subject** and a **verb**. They often, but not always, have an **object**.

**The subject** is the person or thing performing the action.

**The verb** describes actions.

**The object** or noun is the person, place or thing, to which the verb refers.

**Example:** The assistant writes the report.

The subject is **the assistant**.

The verb is **writes**.

The object is **the report**.

**Example:** She ran along the racetrack.

The subject is **she**.

The verb is **ran**.

The object is **the racetrack**.

**Pronouns** are used to substitute nouns.

## Examples:

**They** are on the desk.

**She** stared at **him**.

Take **it** away.

**Adjectives** are describing words.

## Examples:

She was **tall**.

He is **noisy**.

They were **still**.

**Adverbs** describe the way something happens.

## Examples:

She **always** wore black.

The boat bobbed **gently** on the water.

The party was **yesterday**.

## Compound sentences

To make sentences interesting, we add information to the basic facts and change the structure to make sentences more meaningful. This can be done by using **conjunctions**, or words that connect two or more sentences to create one **compound** (or **complex**) sentence, for example 'and', 'or', 'but' and 'so'.

## Example:

He went on holiday to France. He bought a house on the coast.

These two sentences can be rewritten as one by using the conjunction 'and'.

He went on holiday to France **and** bought a house on the coast.

## Complex Sentences

Complex sentences are called that because of their structure, not because they contain more complicated ideas. Using complex sentences improves the quality of your writing. A complex sentence contains one **independent clause** to which one or more **dependent clauses** are joined by a **subordinating conjunction**.

### Example:

We had to go inside when it started to rain even though the party had only just started.

A dependent clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb that cannot stand alone. A dependent clause always starts with a subordinating conjunction. This example has two subordinating conjunctions 'when' and 'even though'.

### The most commonly used subordinating conjunctions are:

after

soon

that

even

though

as

before

because

just as

as long as

rather than

provided

if

although

as though

whenever

even though

when

as soon as

that

since

what

which

## Commas

The comma is one of the most overused punctuation marks and many writers tend to insert commas too freely throughout their work. This can lead to a confused piece of writing. If you can stop yourself inserting too many commas where they are not needed and learn the six most common uses of the comma your writing skills will improve. This will convince the reader that you can write confidently and present a controlled piece of writing.

### 1. Appositives/adding extra information

If you want to add extra information to a sentence commas commonly enclose it.

#### Example:

Val D'isere, **a popular ski resort**, has not had any snow this winter.

## 2. Adverbials of manner, place and time.

Simple sentences can include information about where, when and how an action happened. This information is usually placed at the end of the sentence.

### Examples:

They went to the market **before they had breakfast** (adverbial of time).

They booked a holiday **in France** (adverbial of place).

He read the book **quickly** (adverbial of manner).

If you want to construct sentences including all adverbials, the order in which they occur is fixed: manner, place, time.

### Examples:

She read the book quickly at home yesterday.

He stayed quietly at home for a whole week.

A comma is required if you want to move one or more adverbials to the beginning of the sentence. This may be done for emphasis to draw attention to when, how or where an action occurred. Thus:

### Normal word order:

The children came down with a virus just before the Christmas holidays.

### Emphasis:

Just before the Christmas holidays, the children came down with a virus.

### Normal word order:

They went to the market before they had breakfast.

### Emphasis:

Before they had breakfast, they went to the market.

## 3. Comma before 'and', 'but', 'or', 'so'

Conjunctions like 'and', 'but', 'or' and 'so' are preceded by a comma when you join two independent clauses together:

We went to the cinema. Then we had dinner.

We went to the cinema, and then we had dinner.

No comma is used if you join a dependent clause to an independent sentence.

We went to the cinema and had dinner afterwards.

## 4. Lists

One of the most common uses of the comma is in lists. A comma is used to separate each item in the list, except the last two parts which are normally separated with **and** or **or**. You can insert a comma before **and** or **or** (Oxford comma).

### Examples:

Her shoes were uncomfortable, too tight (,) and impossible to wear.

The film was slow, boring (,) and unrealistic.

## 5. Additional clauses

An **additional** or **subordinate** clause is a dependent clause, which provides additional information about the independent clause and is separated from it by a comma. It might be useful to remind yourself of clauses in the sentence section.

### Example:

He wanted to go to Italy, she refused.

The independent clause is 'He wanted to go to Italy' and additional or subordinate clause is 'she refused'.

She likes sci-fi films, he does not.

## 6. Parenthetical elements of a sentence

Parenthetical elements in a sentence are words such as **however, therefore, of course, in fact** and **nevertheless**. It is not advised to use these elements to join two independent clauses, as a grammatical error is likely to result. Begin a new sentence and insert a comma after the parenthetical element.

### Examples:

The course was exceptionally hard.  
Nevertheless, it was worth the struggle.

They decided to go on holiday in February.  
However, this proved impossible.

### Incomplete sentences

An incomplete sentence is an independent sentence that misses its subject or verb. Sometimes, it is simply a dependent clause gone astray. Incomplete sentences will be marked as incorrect even though they may be used in fictional texts or sometimes in journalistic texts as a special feature of an author's style.

### Examples:

He went to the cinema. In the dark.

She didn't think they knew. What she thought about them.

### The Apostrophe

The apostrophe has two main functions: it indicates if one or more letters have been omitted and it indicates when something or someone belongs to something or someone else.

### Contractions

When an apostrophe is used to show something has been missed out, this is called a contraction. Some of these include: doesn't, wouldn't, shouldn't, couldn't, isn't, haven't. Please do not use these in your essays.



**CONTRACTIONS  
SHOULD NOT BE  
USED IN ACADEMIC  
WRITING.**

### Indicating possession

If you are not sure if you need to use an apostrophe, it is helpful to turn the phrase around and make it '...of the...' phrase. If it still makes sense, then you must use an apostrophe.

### Examples:

The dog's food = the food of the dog

The child's toy = the toy of the child

The car's wheel = the wheel of the car

The bike's chain = the chain on the bike

If a word ends in an 's', you simply add the apostrophe to the word. If it is a name you more commonly add 's:

### Examples:

The dogs' food.

Watkins's book.

### Plural possession

It is important to remember that apostrophes are never used to indicate the plural form of a word, for example: the chair's in the room. It should always read: the chairs in the room. If you want to indicate possession when using a plural word, you simply add the apostrophe to the word.

### Examples:

The girl's books = the books belong to one girl

The girls' books = the books belong to more than one girl

The pharmacist's tablets = the tablets belong to only one pharmacist

The pharmacists' tablets = the tablets belong to more than one pharmacist

It is important to remember that possessive pronouns such as his, hers, ours, yours and theirs do not require an apostrophe.

Words that form the plural in a different way - i.e. not by adding an 's' - use the apostrophe in the normal way:

### Examples:

Children's

Men's

Women's

### It's or its

If you use a pronoun instead of a subject to indicate possession, you do not use an apostrophe:

### Examples:

The cat's food = its food

My father's coat = his coat

The students' work = their work

Its and it's are often confused. Remember that:

- It's = contraction of it is
- Its = indicates possession

### Examples:

It's going to be a long holiday.

(It is going to be a long holiday.)

The cat wanted its food.

(The food belongs to the cat.)

### They're, their and there

There is often confusion between 'they're', 'their' and 'there'. They all have very different meanings.

### Examples:

They're late for the meeting = contraction of they are

Their drinks = indicates possession

He lived there for years = adverbial of place

### Could've

Similarly there is often confusion between 'could have' and 'could of'. Could've is an abbreviation of could have. Do not confuse it with 'could of' which is incorrect and meaningless.

### Example:

I could've gone to Cyprus = I could have gone to Cyprus

### You're and your

You're is an abbreviation of 'you are' and 'your' indicates possession.

### Examples:

You are working in the library = you're working in the library

Your books are in my room = there are books in my room belonging to you

## The colon and semi-colon

The colon introduces a list of items.

### Example:

To make the perfect jam sandwich you need three things: bread, butter and strawberry jam.

Three items are listed in the sentence above. The first part of the sentence informs the reader that there will be three things; the colon tells the reader what they are.

A colon can also be used to introduce a definition, statement or explanation.

### Example:

I know how I'm going to handle this: I'm going to hide!

Penguin (noun): an aquatic, flightless bird found almost exclusively in the Antarctic.

The semicolon joins together two clauses that could each be separate sentences - creating a longer sentence.

### Example:

John calls it football; Sam calls it soccer.

This could be written as two sentences without the semicolon. However, the relationship between the two clauses is made more clear through the use of a semicolon.

The semicolon is also commonly used to join two clauses, changing the sentence in combination with words like 'however', 'in addition', 'otherwise' and 'therefore'.

### Examples:

Sian is Welsh; however, she lives in Canada.

He likes to play video games; in addition, he likes to read classical literature.

You should stop drinking too much alcohol; otherwise, you are going to get into trouble.

Hundreds of people came to the party; therefore, it was not possible to say hello to everyone individually.

# 16 Revision Techniques

The most important thing about exam preparation is to start your revision in good time. Draw up your revision plan and be self-disciplined in carrying it out. There is nothing more stressful or less effective than leaving it all to the last minute.

There are numerous ways of revising for exams and the most effective ones involve a degree of active engagement with the material. Simply reading notes or chapters from textbooks over and over does not work. A good starting point is to look carefully at past exam papers and seek advice from experienced tutors who are likely to know the subject areas upon which you need to concentrate.

Consider the core or key subject areas which are covered in the exam every year and start looking at trends or patterns in question types. Are these likely to continue? It is also worth considering the breadth or choice of questions/subject areas that might be asked.

Identify the elements of the course with which you are more/less confident. Often you will be better at subjects you enjoy studying. Noting your strengths and weaknesses around subject areas will help you to decide on the amount of attention you need to give to certain aspects, and how much time to set aside for your revision.

Think about your preferred learning style when you approach exam revision and consider whether you would benefit from revising with a friend, within a small group or alone.

A revision plan is essential and needs to be drawn up well in advance. Decide how much time you will need to devote to various subject areas. It is important to break your revision plan into small, manageable tasks and set yourself realistic targets for each session. It is crucial that you initiate and maintain a degree of self-discipline when preparing and revising for exams:

- Identify a key revision task for a topic area you enjoy. Focus on these first and deal with your weaker subjects later
- Decide on a time when you are regularly free and able to concentrate fully on the task in hand
- Start revising when you are alert and fresh; avoid revising when you are tired
- Remove all possible distractions, such as mobiles, television and internet
- Begin by allocating approximately 30 minutes to your revision and build up to 40-45 minute sessions divided by a short break
- Try to focus on the task uninterrupted for the full duration of the period allocated
- You need to develop a revision routine or habit
- Focus on time allocation rather than completing a specific task and maintain this routine throughout the revision period
- Remember to track/record your own progress, this will help you stay motivated
- Gradually adapt the time you allocate to your revision depending on how effectively you feel you are progressing
- Begin to allocate more time to your weaker subjects

Inevitably, you may not be able to keep to a strict, daily regime. A degree of flexibility is required which will allow you to have some free time and also, as the exam approaches to focus on specific questions.



**SUCCESSFUL REVISION  
REQUIRES BOTH YOUR  
ACTIVE AND CRITICAL  
STUDY SKILLS.**



## GETTING STARTED

**Preview** the text you are about to read. Skim the headings, sub-headings, introduction and conclusion. Does it look likely to serve your needs or is there a more appropriate chapter, article or book to focus on?

**Highlight key information** whilst you read; this can be done by marking or underlining important areas of the photocopied text. Visual learners often devise a colour code using marker pens. This could include using different colours for factual information, the author's opinions or claims, plausible and dubious reasoning, references, etc. Auditory learners might read text aloud or revise with other students.

**Summarise the key points** separately, highlighting patterns and linking main and supporting ideas drawn from different sources.

Kinaesthetic learners might choose to write notes and pin them on the wall in order to see patterns and make links.

**Test yourself** or have a friend test you on key points listed in your summaries. This is an opportunity to identify your weaker subject areas. If you have been organised and thorough with your revision you will feel more confident about the exam and less likely to panic.



**TRY TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PREFERRED LEARNING STYLE WHEN REVISING AND BE ACTIVE.**

# TAKING THE EXAM

Once the exam is underway it is important not to panic.

- Read the question paper through carefully, underlining key words and noting any instruction. If you have a choice of questions highlight your stronger topic areas
- There may be questions overleaf, remember to turn over the page
- Once you decide to answer a specific question analyse the way in which it has been broken down and consider what it requires you to do
- Read it carefully and underline key vocabulary, especially action or task words such as: analyse, compare, contrast, describe, discuss, evaluate, identify
- Make a brief plan for each question in order to cover the key aspects
- Make sure that you allocate enough time to answer all of the required questions. Spending precious time answering some questions well and not allowing time for the remaining questions is not a good exam strategy

- When you have completed a question allow time to ensure that you have covered the points outlined in your brief plan. Make any necessary corrections or adjustments
- If required, ensure that you make appropriate references in your text



**TRUST THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS YOU HAVE ACQUIRED DURING YOUR REVISION.**

**AVOID GETTING INTO CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER STUDENTS IMMEDIATELY BEFORE OR AFTER THE EXAM.**



## USEFUL LINKS

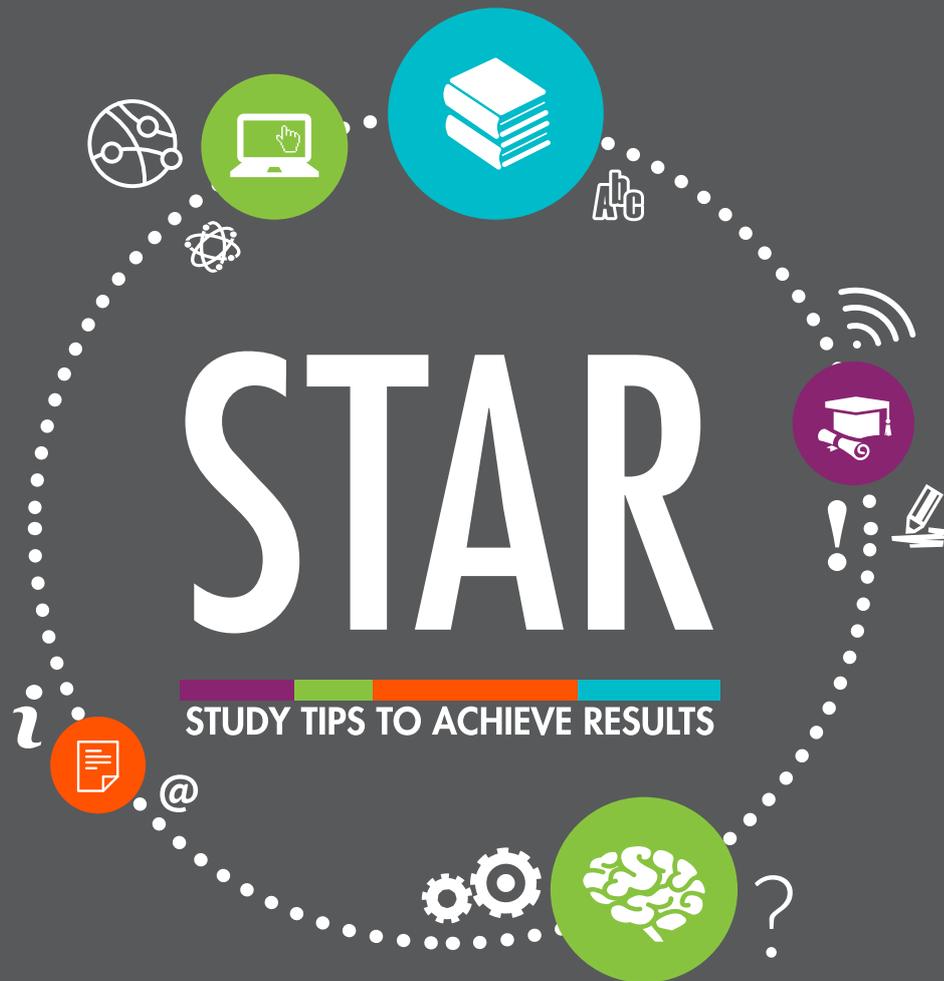
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