

Skills for Learning

Guide to Academic Writing

What is Academic Writing?

Academic writing is a clear, formal and concise way of writing that:

- ✓ Answers the assignment question.
- ✓ Demonstrates understanding of a subject.
- ✓ Provides evidence to support claims, ideas or arguments made within an assignment.
- ✓ Has a logical and clear structure.
- ✓ Contains citations within the assignment and a reference list at the end of the work.

Planning an Assignment

Planning your assignment can help in several ways. Firstly, it focuses you on what the assignment is really asking for. It then helps you create a structure for your assignment, and then guides you through populating that structure. It gives you a timescale to work to which, if followed, will help avoid any last-minute rush. By creating and following an assignment plan, your work will be better prepared, written and presented.

It is a good idea to start planning your assignment as soon as you get it. Do not forget, you may have more than one assignment to complete at any one time, so start them as soon as you can to avoid even higher workloads.

Steps for Planning and Completing Your Assignment

- 1. Consult the assignment brief and marking criteria.** This will give you details on how you are going to be marked and more thorough information about the assignment to help you better plan, research and write your assignment.
- 2. Analyse the question.** To ensure you are covering the question set and not the one you think has been set, consider what it is you are being asked to do - is it an essay, presentation or report? Look for the type of activity you are being asked to carry out - are you being asked to evaluate, discuss or compare? Each of these will result in a different final piece of work. Are there multiple sections to the question? If so, make sure you

answer each part fully.

3. **What do you already know?** Try making a list of everything you already know about the assignment subject. Can you identify any areas that you need to work on?
4. **Start your research.** Have a look at the module reading list within your module guide on Canvas which contains items such as books and journals that are directly relevant to your assignment question. This will help you to find relevant sources of information and provide clues about what kind of theories, ideas or models your lecturer may want you to draw on within your answer. In addition to the reading list, conduct your own research via the [library catalogue](#) and [subject databases](#).
5. **Read.** Be strategic with your reading for example, you will not be expected to read a book from cover to cover but seek out the chapters most relevant to your assignment question. Further, read with a purpose, always bearing in mind your assignment question as you read. Make notes and identify which parts are important. Try and spot recurring themes and separate your search results into these themes. This can then form the basis of your assignment.
6. **Structure.** An essay will usually have an introduction, main section and conclusion. Both the introduction and conclusion are usually each worth 10% of your overall word count, with the remaining 80% of your word count left for the main body. The introduction is usually where you set the scene, define any key terms and outline the areas you intend to cover in the main section. The main section is where you answer the question, drawing on the relevant theories, ideas or issues that you have identified from your reading. You will also need to think about your paragraphs, ensuring that each paragraph contains only one main argument or point – this will hopefully make your work easier to read and understand. The conclusion should be a summary of the main points contained within the main section and therefore you should not be introducing anything new into this section.
7. **Develop a first draft.** You now have a quantity of information about different themes, all relevant to your assignment. You can now write a first draft using the information you have gathered to answer the question set. At this point, it is just a first draft so it does not need to be perfect.
8. **Second draft.** Read through your first draft. Think how it can be improved. Does it fully answer the question set? Do you need to add more or do you need to cut anything? How does it compare to the word limit set?
9. **The final draft.** Check your work against the assignment brief. Have you answered everything you need to answer? How is the word limit? Is everything referenced? Have you conformed to the standards of academic writing for example, is your writing formal and objective? Check your assignment brief for any specific requirements – if specific formats have been set i.e. for line-spacing or font, then you must adhere to them.

- 10. Ensure all information is correctly referenced.** Any ideas you have taken from others, whether quoted directly, paraphrased or summarised, must be referenced.
- 11. Proofread.** It is essential that you proofread your work. Use the spelling and grammar check function in Word but do not rely on it. Proofreading is easier if you print your work off first. It is often useful to proofread more than once, checking for one issue at a time. For example, the first time you reread your assignment, you may want to check that everything is spelt correct. The second time, you may want to check your citations are in the reference list at the end and so on. You may ask someone else to proofread your work but it is not advisable to ask someone who is also doing the same assignment as you or a fellow student on your course.
- 12. Print the final copy.** Correct all the issues and typos you may have found when you proofread your work, print it off and hand it in. Check your assignment brief for how you are expected to submit your work.

Help and Advice

For help and advice on any aspect of academic writing, please see the Skills for Learning website at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.

Further Resources

For more information on academic writing, please see our [Skills for Learning](#) course on Canvas.

We have an array of print and electronic resources about academic writing including:

Bailey, S. (2022) *Academic writing for university students*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/8bamsd/alma991003020737504901

Cottrell, S. (2024) *The study skills handbook*. London: Bloomsbury:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/13ndfb5/alma991003182027104901

Day, T. (2023) *Success in academic writing*. London: Bloomsbury:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/13ndfb5/alma991003108022504901

Lia, P. (2020) *Simplify your study*. London: Bloomsbury:
https://librarysearch.wlv.ac.uk/permalink/44UOWO_INST/1575ou6/cdi_proquest_ebookcent



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