IN-DEPTH

Your assignment needs to be in-depth. You should consider your questions and criteria thoroughly, thinking about all possible aspects, and including the argument both for and against different viewpoints.

Identify topic areas
In order to begin this process, you should try to identify all the different topics that might come under your criteria. The aim at this stage is to have as many ideas as possible. It’s worth trying different methods so that you can find out what works best for you.

- Go back to your lectures and note down the key points within each lecture.
- Create a mind map for your ideas.
  - Software can help you do this, e.g. Mindmup (https://www.mindmup.com)
- Find a way of noting down your good ideas whenever or wherever you have them.
  - Carry a small notepad with you.
  - Use software such as Evernote (https://evernote.com) which can be linked up to your phone and your PC

The next stage is to group your ideas into themes, which become keywords for your research and sections within your assignment.

Research
Your assignment will be based on research. Research provides:
- evidence for the ideas that you have already identified.
- new ideas that you may not have thought of
- new terms for your ideas, so that you can find additional results

Research is needed so that you can get different views, recognising that there might not be a right answer. Researchers may have different opinions on best practice or on what something is. It’s good to show these differing opinions in your work.

Your research should be based on books, articles or government reports. As your assignment should be in-depth, your research needs to be from sources that go into detail, not summaries. Often websites or guidance leaflets won’t give you enough theory to underpin practice. The reading list for your module should be a good first step in identifying relevant resources.
For help to carry out your research, see the libguide for your subject area (http://libguides.tees.ac.uk), especially the section on how to find journal articles.

**Reading**

When you’re reading academic research, you don’t need to read everything you find from beginning to end. There are strategies you can use to help you to decide if something is useful, before you go on to read it in detail. For help on reading quickly, see the handout at http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=14149970

**Plan your assignment**

When you’ve finished identifying your themes or topic areas, you can then plan your assignment. A plan is useful because it:
- ensures that you cover all criteria
- allows you to keep track of where you are
- reduces repetition

Don’t feel that you have to wait until you’ve finished reading before you start to write. You might find it easier to work with smaller sections, writing them up as you go along.

We’ve included a couple of sample plans to give you an idea of what they could look like. But it’s even better if you devise your own style that works well for you.

**Visual plan**

This plan comes from Anna Barker, a previous Royal Literary Fellow at Teesside. You could have a large version on a noticeboard and add post-its in different colours to each section. As it makes use of colour-coding, it may be helpful if you’re a visual learner.
**Linear plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Key points</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 3 etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dividing up the word count enables you to give all criteria equal weight.
- You could include a ‘Key points’ column to remind you how this theme fits in with the overall argument of your assignment.
- You could use the ‘Notes’ column to provide a link to key resources, or to give yourself ‘to do’ instructions, or to comment on how far you are with writing this section.

**Your conclusion**

Your conclusion should leave the reader with the feeling that you have explored all the issues around the assignment questions and criteria, and that you have come to a decision as to the most appropriate answer. A good conclusion should:

- be about 5-10% of the final word count. If your conclusion is only one or two sentences, then the end will be too abrupt.
- set out a summary of what you’ve discussed.
- present your overall argument or findings, explaining why your viewpoint is important. This argument should not come as a surprise to anyone reading your assignment, as all your writing should be leading up to it.
- include the implications of your findings, for example in practice
- refer back to the assignment question - this makes a good final sentence.
- NOT contain any new material whether that is new evidence or new ideas.
- NOT head in a different direction from the way you’ve been arguing your points through your assignment.

You can use phrases such as 'In conclusion..' or 'To sum up..' to introduce your findings.
Your introduction

Although you can think about your introduction at the planning stage, it’s actually best to write it last, when you’ve finished the rest of the assignment. An introduction needs to provide a kind of ‘menu’ for the assignment, to say what it contains. You’ll find it much easier to write the menu when you’ve written the assignment. The simplest way to do this is quite directly - by saying ‘This assignment will discuss such-and-such a subject’. Then you can set out the steps which the assignment takes.

A good introduction should:

- be about 5-10% of the final word count
- frame the subject, setting out the boundaries for your assignment. If you’ve decided to focus on one particular aspect, it’s good to let your lecturer know that in the introduction
- put the subject in context, for example giving definitions. This shows that you understand the topic that you’re going to discuss. Make sure that you use the terms from the criteria but don’t just repeat the criteria
- say what you are going to argue
- guide the reader, giving signposts as to what the assignment contains. This means that if you say you’re going to cover A, B and C, your assignment should talk about them in that order, so that the lecturer knows what to expect

Godwin (2014) recommends that you see the introduction and conclusion as two mirrors – everything you say that you are going to cover in your introduction should be followed up in your conclusion.

Reference