Structuring your assignment

Student & Library Services
Learning and Research Support
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this workshop you should be able to:
• Identify what the assessment criteria is asking you to do
• Plan your argument
• Structure paragraphs, conclusions and introductions
What this workshop is like

• Introduction to planning an assignment
• Practical workshop
• Not discipline-specific
• Based on working through an example question
TIME

- Targeted
- In-depth
- Measured
- Evidence-based
Unpick assignment title

Targeted

• What are you being asked to do?
• Check assignment criteria
• Look for clue words
• Define subject

• This forms our draft introduction
Assessment criteria

• At Teesside, you’ll find your assessment criteria in your Module Handbook.
• If it’s not in the criteria, it doesn’t belong – you won’t have the word count – you won’t get extra marks
  • Criteria are there to guide you. They will let you know what you should put into your assignment
  • You usually need to cover all the criteria to pass an assignment
  • Use the words from the criteria in your assignment to make it clear when you are covering them
## Some clue words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Pick out the key points of a topic. Consider those key points in depth, including how they relate to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Transfer evidence from your reading to real life, or to a case study. How would the theory work in practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Look at the similarities and differences between two aspects. Say if any are more important than others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Look at the similarities and differences between two aspects, but focus on the differences between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define</td>
<td>Give the exact meaning of a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate</td>
<td>Show how, with examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Give a detailed explanation of a topic or issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Write about both sides of a topic in depth, pointing out advantages and disadvantages. Come to a conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Consider the strength of an idea, looking for both positives and negatives. Come to a conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>Point out what a topic covers</td>
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</table>
Example

Title
Discuss why some confectionary products are getting smaller

Assessment Criteria
• Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the economic and health issues affecting the confectionary industry
• Explain the reasoning behind your opinion on confectionary products and relative sizes
• Adhere to the School guidelines for presentation and referencing
Generate ideas

**IN-DEPTH**

- Possible ways of looking at the criteria
- What do you know about this subject already?
- Be as creative as you can
  - Mind mapping?
Exercise 1

• Generate ideas for the assignment title “Discuss why some confectionary products are getting smaller”

• Identify initial areas or aspects you would want to explore
1st draft organising ideas

- Organise ideas into themes
- Divide each idea into a section on your plan
  - Separate document?
  - Section on pie chart?
- Each section will become one or more paragraphs
- Keywords for research
Example plan

• Anna Barker’s idea
  • Royal Literary Fellow
• Separate topics
• Visual prompt
• Colour-coded

Assignment

Intro – 5-10% (pink)

Theme 1 (green)

Theme 2 (red)

Theme 3 (purple)

Theme 4 (orange)

Conclusion – 5-10% (blue)
## Linear plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wordcount</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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 3 etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Organising your points

• Put each point on PowerPoint slide
• Drag and drop them to reorder them until you find a logical order
• Each slide represents a paragraph

(Cooper and Shoolbred, 2016)
1st draft conclusion

- Argument – what you are trying to say in your essay
- Your key point or message
- First guess at what you think – might change after you have researched
- First draft of conclusion so you know where you are heading
Exploring possible conclusions
STEP 0: Write down your title or question
STEP 1: Make your question into a statement
STEP 2: Reverse or negate the statement
STEP 3: Explore variations on the statement by making it more or less certain, more or less specific.

(from Queen Mary, University of London. Thinking Writing: Unpacking an Essay Question - making a claim

http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/srb.htm)
Exercise 2

• What argument are you going to make for the assignment title “Discuss why some confectionary products are getting smaller”

• What is your initial conclusion?
Research

• Start with Discovery and LibGuide
• Aim for academic literature
• Support available
• Research will:
  • Confirm your argument
  • Provide evidence for your ideas
  • May suggest new ideas
Exercise 3

• Read the short article on the topic
• Identify evidence for any of our ideas
• Are there any new ideas to be added to our plan?
Reality

• You will need to read more than 1 paper!
• Academic papers are long
• Your ideas may change as you do your research
• There may be aspects that you don’t understand initially
Paragraphs

• How to structure a paragraph
  • Topic sentence
  • Examples and evidence
  • Sum up and link to next paragraph
  • Use WEED model (Godwin, 2014)
Putting it together

• How well does it flow?

• Paragraphs should follow on – logical order for your argument

• This could be the order of the criteria
Your conclusion

• Should be about 5-10% of the final word count

• Final version
  • Recap
  • Summary of main findings
  • Your general conclusions and why they are important
  • Last sentence – sum it all up and link back to title
  • NO new material
Introduction

• Written last
• Should be about 5-10% of the final word count
• It is an introduction to your assignment, not the whole topic
• Frame the subject – any boundaries?
• Putting the subject in context e.g. definitions
• Say what you will argue
• Guiding the reader – signposts to what the assignment contains
Checking your work

• Proof read - for structure and errors
• May need to re-write or revise parts
• Check your references
  • Do you have all the details?
  • Are they in the correct style?
• All this takes time!
Support Available

• Learning Hub
  • Website – http://tees.libguides.com/learning_hub
  • One-to-one tutorials

• Royal Literary Fellows
  • https://www.facebook.com/rlfteesside
Other workshops for writing

• Academic Writing – for writing style
• Critical Writing
• How to Use References
• Different styles of writing
  • Report Writing
  • Reflective Writing
  • Writing a Literature Review
• How to Read an Academic Article
• Online tutorial for how to proofread:
  http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/proofreading
Resources

