Structuring your assignment: planning

Student & Library Services
Content

• Planning your argument
• This information is:
  • an introduction to planning and structuring an assignment
  • not discipline-specific
  • based on working through an example question
Example assignment

Title
Discuss whether the British high street is dying

Assessment Criteria
• Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the economic issues affecting the British high street
• Explain the reasoning behind your opinion on the British high street
• 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?
    - What has been covered in your lectures and seminars?
    - Have you read or seen anything on the topic?
Possible ideas for the example assignment

• Online threat
• Out of town shopping centres
• Car park fees
• Business rates
• Rents
• Brexit
• Competition from charity shops and cheaper retailers (on high street)
• Economy
• Unemployment
First draft - organising ideas

The next step is organise your 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
• Identifies keywords for research
Example plan

- Adapted from Ask Alex
- Identifies topics into themes
- Colour-coded for each theme and you can colour code your evidence as well
Example plan for the assignment

Introduction (5-10%)

Theme 1:
• Online threat

Theme 2:
• Business rates
• Rents

Death of the High street

Theme 3:
• Out of town centre
• Car parking fees

Theme 4:
• Economy
• Brexit

Conclusion (5-10%)
An alternative linear plan

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wordcount</th>
<th>Key points</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Theme 1</td>
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<td>Theme 2</td>
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<td>Theme 3 etc.</td>
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<td>Conclusion</td>
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Organising your points into a logical order

This is a good way of working out the best order for your themes/points:

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

(Cooper and Shoolbred, 2016)
Before you start writing your assignment, you should draft a conclusion as it’s important to know where your assignment is heading.

For our sample assignment, we need to know if we think the high street is dying - this will affect how we write the assignment.

• Think of your argument – what are you trying to say in your assignment. What is your key point or message?
• It will be a first guess at what you think – this might change after you have researched
Research

• Use Discovery and subject LibGuides
• Aim for academic literature
• Support is available
• Research will:
  • confirm your argument
  • provide evidence for your ideas (your ideas may change as you do your research)
  • may suggest new ideas
• You will need to read more than one piece of research
• Give yourself time to research – some academic papers are long and there may be aspects that you don’t understand initially
