Structuring your assignment

Student & Library Services
Content

• Identifying what the assessment criteria is asking you to do
• Planning your argument
• Structuring paragraphs, conclusions and introductions
This information is:

- an introduction to planning and structuring an assignment
- not discipline-specific
- based on working through an example question
The **TIME Model**

- **TARGETED**
  Your assignment should be focused on the questions and criteria, make a decision and follow an argument.

- **IN-DEPTH**
  You should consider your topics thoroughly, thinking about all possible aspects, and including the argument for and against different viewpoints.

**This guide will concentrate on Targeted and In-Depth**

- **MEASURED**
  Your work needs to be cautious, emotionally neutral and formal – written in the third person and in full sentences.

- **EVIDENCE-BASED**
  You should reference all the ideas in your work, and apply critical thinking to your evidence.
Unpick assignment title

• What are you being asked to do?
• Check assignment criteria
• Look for clue words
• Define subject – it is important to define your subjects as this can limit your assignment
• This forms your draft introduction
Assessment criteria

• You’ll find your assessment criteria in your Module Handbook (You may also have lectures which explain the criteria in more detail)
• 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
## Look for 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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Assignment

- Theme 1 (green)
- Theme 2 (red)
- Theme 3 (purple)
- Theme 4 (orange)
- Intro – 5-10% (pink)
- Conclusion – 5-10% (blue)
Example plan for the assignment

**Introduction (5-10%)**

**Theme 1:**
- Online threat

**Theme 2:**
- Business rates
- Rents

**Theme 3:**
- Out of town shopping centres
- Car parking fees

**Theme 4:**
- Economy
- Brexit

**Conclusion (5-10%)**

**Death of the High street**
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.
Organising your points into a logical order

This is 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)
1st draft conclusion

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
Use the WEED model for paragraphs

One point per paragraph, incorporating evidence

- **What** - topic sentence
- **Evidence** - references
- **Examples** – expanding on evidence
- **Do** - sum up – so what?

(Godwin, 2019)
**WEED model for paragraphs**

- **What:** You should begin your paragraph with the topic or point that you’re making, so that it’s clear to your lecturer. Everything in the paragraph should fit in with this opening sentence.

- **Evidence:** The middle of your paragraph should be full of evidence – this is where all your references should be incorporated.

- **Example:** Sometimes it’s useful to expand on your evidence. If you’re talking about a case study, the example might be how your point relates to the particular scenario being discussed.

- **Do:** You should conclude your paragraph with the implications of your discussion. This gives you the opportunity to add your commentary, which is very important in assignments which require you to use critical analysis.
Putting it together

• Think about the order of your assignment.
  • Sometimes it’s possible to write the assignment in the order of the criteria.

• How well does it flow?
  • Think of your paragraphs as a flight of stairs, guiding your reader towards your conclusion. They should be able to see where you are going with your assignment.

• Paragraphs should follow a logical order for your argument
Your conclusion

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

• Final version should:
  • recap
  • summarise your main findings
  • highlight your general conclusions and why they are important

• The last sentence should sum it all up and link back to title.

• Your conclusion should contain **NO** new material (no references)
Your introduction

• This should be finalised last
• This should be about 5-10% of the final word count
• It is an introduction to your assignment, not the whole topic
• It is important to:
  • frame the subject. Think if there are there any boundaries? e.g. have you limited it to a specific country or time period.
  • put the subject in context. You may want to provide definitions.
  • say what you will argue.
  • guide the reader. It signposts to what the assignment contains (the order of your signposting should be the order it’s written in).
Checking your work

• **Proof read** – for structure and content as well grammatical and spelling errors
• You 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 includes lots of support for all aspects of assignment writing:  
    http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/learning_hub
  • One-to-one tutorials
    http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/lrs/tutorials
Resources


Found this useful? Why not look at:

• 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
• How to Proofread
• Available from the Learning Hub LibGuide