

# A step-by-step guide to planning your assignments and putting them together



## Academic Skills Quick Guide

### Your assignment step-by-step

#### Planning your assignment

When you are studying at university you are expected to be an independent learner. Nobody is going to tell you when to study or when you should sit down and start working on your assignments. You are given information about what you have to do and when it is due. The rest is up to you.

The information in this guide is intended to help you at least have at your fingertips **what** you have to do and **when**. This information then helps you map out a **plan** for what you have to do over a whole session.

This guide also takes you step-by-step through the process of planning, writing and reviewing an assignment.

#### Thinking ahead and managing your time

Planning for the assignments you have to do in a session should start on the first day you have access to the Unit Information Guide for a unit, which has all the important information you need for your unit. Most students look immediately for information about what assignments they have to do. Don't just **look** at what assignments you have to do, use the Session Planner at the end of this guide so that you have a chart of what assignment is due when for each unit you are studying, which will help you organise your time. Remember that often you will have several big assignments due at around the same time so you need to plan carefully for when to start each one. You will get better at this once you have done a few assignments. Until you get used to doing assignments, be realistic. Don't think that you can research and write a 2000 word essay in one day and do a decent job. If you think it will take you a week to do a good job of researching and writing a 2000 word essay, double that time and you will be getting close.

Make sure you keep up with the weekly readings for the topics in each unit as this will save you time later because you will already have a good store of background knowledge. This will help you refine your research and organise your ideas.

Start working straight away! Don't put things off!

#### Writing your assignment

When you are ready to start working on an assignment follow these steps:

##### Step 1: Read ,analyse and brainstorm the assignment task.

You need to read the assignment question very carefully. Then analyse the assignment task (see [Analysing assignment tasks Quick Guide](#)). Work out what the task requires and then brainstorm the topic for some key ideas to develop in your answer. These ideas will help you with the next step: your research on the topic.

##### Step 2: Research, read and take notes.

Start finding information, reading and thinking about the assignment. Start with the textbook, the assigned readings and the lecture/tutorial material, which might help you to answer the assignment task. Use sources that give you good background information (like your textbook) and then move to more specific sources (like journal articles) as you refine your research. (see [Taking Notes Quick Guide](#))

**Step 3: Map out a plan for your assignment.**

Now that you have found enough information, plan how you will organise that information to best answer the assignment question (see [Organising information for your assignments Quick Guide](#)). Your main points should be fairly abstract but then move to more concrete information as you develop these points. As you organise your information, keep in mind what is expected of you in the assignment task and stick to that. Read again and think again, and continue to do this until you can begin writing. Try to allocate half of your time to research and half to writing for each assignment.

**Step 4: Write your introduction.**

When you have organised your information into a chart, use this as a plan for writing your essay. First, write your introduction, restating the question, stating your thesis (or position) on the question, identifying the main points you are going to develop and defining any key terms. Your first paragraph is the most important paragraph in your essay. It should give a clear map for the reader of what they can expect in the rest of the essay.

**Step 5: Now start drafting the paragraphs in the body.**

Develop each main point in the same order as you have introduced it in the introduction (see [How to write a good introduction Quick Guide](#)). Make sure each main point is developed in at least one paragraph (see [Writing paragraphs Quick Guide](#)) and that each paragraph begins with a topic sentence and goes on to develop or give examples of the information in the topic sentence. Make sure you have correctly cited all the evidence you have used from your research.

**Step 6: Finally, write the conclusion.**

Ensure your conclusion follows logically from the arguments and evidence you have presented and does not introduce any new information. Just sum up what you have presented and make a final statement.

You have now finished a draft of your assignment but you aren't finished yet. There is still a bit of work to do.

**Reviewing and editing your assignment**

Do not submit a first draft. A first draft is **never** 100% right. Before you submit an assignment check through your assignment to make sure that:

- you have correctly cited all your sources of information and your referencing is done according to the relevant referencing system (typically APA 6th or Harvard)
- your reference list is on a separate page, in alphabetical order
- each reference in your reference list has been cited at least once in your assignment
- you have either followed formatting instructions (if given) or you have formatted your assignment so that it looks professional
- you have filled out a cover sheet (if required) correctly
- you have checked through the assignment thoroughly for typos and spelling mistakes
- you have checked your assignment against any checklist or assessment criteria in the Unit Information Guide to make sure you addressed everything that is required
- you have given your assignment a final read-through just to confirm that it is ready to submit.

## Assignments step-by-step table

The table below is a summary of the information from the sections above.

Assignments step-by-step	
1. Read, analyse and brainstorm the task	<p>Look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content words,</li> <li>• Instruction words.</li> </ul> <p>Use these to work out how you will approach the question.</p>
2. Research, read and take notes	<p>Research the topic. Start broad and then sharpen your focus. e.g. textbook, book chapters, journal articles, websites.</p> <p>Brainstorm and start to refine your ideas.</p>
3. Organise your information and map out a plan	<p>Organise your information into a chart that shows the main points you are going to develop.</p>
4. Draft your introduction	<p>Draft your Intro. Make sure that you have a thesis and have identified all your main points.</p> <p>List your main points in order under the draft Intro.</p>
5. Draft your body paragraphs and conclusion	<p>Use your Intro as a plan, and develop each main point in turn.</p> <p>Write in paragraphs. Make sure each paragraph has a topic sentence and uses evidence from the sources you have used. Make sure you have correctly cited each source.</p> <p>Remember to paraphrase instead of using a lot of quotes.</p> <p>Draft your conclusion.</p>
6. Edit your draft	<p>Go over your draft to make sure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you have answered the question</li> <li>• your Intro clearly predicts what follows</li> <li>• your argument is logical</li> <li>• you have enough evidence to support your points</li> <li>• your evidence is cited correctly</li> <li>• you have a proper reference list on a new page at the end of your assignment</li> <li>• your assignment is properly formatted.</li> </ul>
7. Fine tune	<p>Do Step 6 again. If assessment criteria are available, check your assignment against the criteria as a final check to make sure you have ticked all the boxes.</p>

## Session planner

### How to use the Session planner

On the next page you will find a Session planner. This will help you plan for what you have to do and by when. Do Steps 1, 2 and 3 well before you have any assignments due, preferably early in the first week of the session.

**Step 1:** Note the unit title or code at the top of the column and then write in the due date, word limit and weighting for each assessment task for that unit in the appropriate box using the session weeks as a guide.

**Step 2:** Repeat Step One for all units you are studying this session.

**Step 3:** Now go back and note when you will need to START each assessment task. Estimate how long it will take to complete each task and then note the start date and draw a line down to the submission date.

Session Planner				
	Unit	Unit	Unit	Unit
<b>Week 1</b>				
<b>Week 2</b>				
<b>Week 3</b>				
<b>Week 4</b>				
<b>Week 5</b>				
<b>Week 6</b>				
<b>Week 7</b> Study Week*				
<b>Week 8</b>				
<b>Week 9</b>				
<b>Week 10</b>				
<b>Week 11</b>				
<b>Week 12</b>				
<b>Week 13</b>				
<b>Week 14</b> Study Week/Exams				
<b>Week 15</b> Exams				

\*This is subject to change - see the course UIG and always check with your lecturer.

## Related Quick Guides

[Analysing assignment tasks](#), [Organising information for your assignments](#), [How to write a good introduction](#), [Writing paragraphs](#)