

## Study skills

- Reading skills
- Note taking
- Planning an assignment
- Book reviews
- Using library resources

The aim of this overview is to introduce the processes and skills involved in writing a good assignment.

For a selection of useful library resources, type in *study skills* as a General Search on the library catalogue.

### **Stages in preparing and writing an assignment**

- **Analyse the essay title and identify command words**
- **Note down your initial ideas**
- **Note down your 'second thoughts'**
- **Focus your research**
- **Select your sources**
- **Decide on your order of reading**

It is important to read the title carefully in order to discover the focus, approach and boundaries of the question.

Concentrate on words such as *account for*, *evaluate* or *assess*.

Decide what information should be included or excluded.

Decide which sources you will consult (books, journal articles, websites). Make sure you check the authenticity of your source – especially websites.

Start with general introductions to the subject and then move to more complex texts. Don't attempt to read the whole book.

## **Approaches to reading**

- **Aims of reading**
- **'Skimming' and 'Scanning'**
- **Critical Reading**

### 'Skimming'

Identify key ideas

Select relevant information

### Critical reading

Have I read this information elsewhere?

Is the information accurate and up to date?

Do I agree with the writer?

Are there any flaws in the writer's arguments?

What is the writer's approach?

How does this material relate to practical situations?

## **Approaches to reading**

- **SQ3R: five steps to effective reading:**

**Survey**

**Question**

**Read**

**Recall**

**Review**

### SQ3R

**Survey:** Read the title, introduction/summary and headings. Look at any graphics and study questions. This step helps you to gather the information to focus on the chapter and should take no longer than 5-10 minutes.

**Question:** Begin to question what you are reading and allow your mind to become engaged in the learning process.

**Read:** Fill in the information around the structures you have built. Read one section at a time and look for the answers to your questions. Don't get too bogged down with the details.

**Recall:** At the end of each section, recall what you have read. This helps to train your mind to concentrate and learn. If you can't recall what you have read, go back and re-read it.

**Review:** This step gives another opportunity for repetition and helps memory and recall.

## **Writing and using notes**

- **Why make notes?**
- **Main objectives of note-taking**
- **Remember to note down bibliographic details**
- **Summarising and paraphrasing**
- **Organising your notes**

Find a way of making notes that suits you (diagrams, flow charts or mind maps, bullet points).

It is important to note the exact details of your sources so they can be included in your bibliography.

Avoid copying text out word for word as this could constitute plagiarism.

Organise your notes using lettering, numbering, colour coding, index cards etc. This will help you to organise and structure your ideas.

## **Effective note-taking**

- **Only note essential details**
- **Use headings and sub-headings**
- **Use abbreviations**
- **Leave space**
- **Add colour**
- **Divide your paper**

Effective notes should be concise, accurate, easy to read and easy to understand (even months later)

Divide your paper into 3 sections:

- Left hand column for notes, questions and comments that come to your mind as you are making your notes.
- Centre section for your notes, leaving space for corrections and additions
- Right hand section to record reference details and topics for further reading.

## **Note-taking in lectures**

- **Aims of a lecture**
- **Preliminary reading**
- **Listen for the lecture outline at the start**
- **Take the minimum of notes**
- **Use the question time**
- **Note sharing**
- **Revise your notes**

It is helpful to have a basic knowledge of the subject before the lecture.

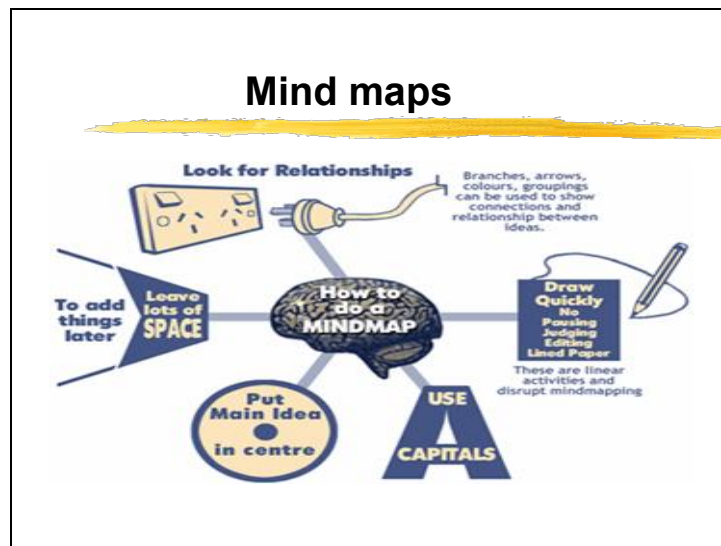
Most lecturers will give an outline of the lecture at the beginning, so arrive early.

Concentrate on key words and references.

Ask questions if you are not sure.

Note sharing is a good idea – but make sure you can understand the other person's notes.

Difference between revising and rewriting your notes.



Write down a central idea, and think of new and related ideas that radiate out from the centre.

By writing in your own words, and examining connections between ideas, you remember and understand new information.

- Look for relationships
- Personalise the diagram
- Draw on unlined paper
- Use capitals
- Put the main idea in the centre
- Leave lots of space

## **Preparing to write up**

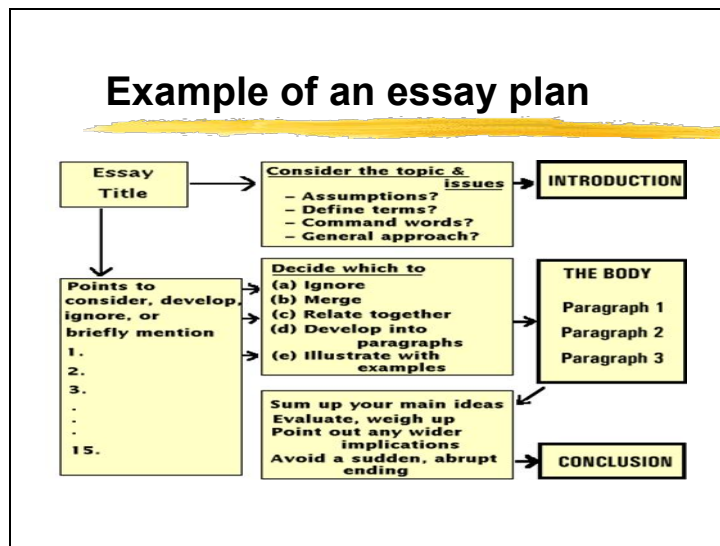
- **Allow plenty of time**
- **Ensure you have a clear essay plan**
- **Write a first draft**
- **Distance yourself**
- **Using the online discussion list**

Your essay plan could be divided into introduction, body and conclusion. Decide on the order in which you will present your information.

The first draft will be for your own personal reading.

Give yourself a break.

## Example of an essay plan



Joint Information Systems Council

*Biz/ed* [online] [www.bized.co.uk/reference/studyskills/essay.htm](http://www.bized.co.uk/reference/studyskills/essay.htm)

(accessed 23/08/07)

## **Essay checklist**

- **Does the essay answer the question that has been set?**
- **Does it cover all the main points?**
- **Does it include sufficient detail?**
- **Are there any weak areas?**
- **Is the flow of ideas clear and logical to the reader?**
- **Is it accurately referenced?**

## **Essay checklist**

- **Does it include any copied/plagiarised material?**
- **Does it include critical comment?**
- **Does it include any irrelevant information?**
- **Has it got an introduction, body and conclusion?**
- **Is the bibliography correct?**
- **Have I acted on feedback from previous assignments?**

## **Plagiarism**

- **“The theft or use of someone else’s work without proper acknowledgement, presenting the work as if it were one’s own”**
- **Read the guidelines in the Handbook and Guide for Submitting Assessed Work**
- **Be especially careful with web-based material**
- **Penalties are severe**

If you plagiarise material (intentionally or unintentionally) you will be caught out and punished.

Good note taking and reference keeping can help protect you.

Mistakes often happen when you are rushing to meet deadlines.

You must reference all web based material as well as printed sources.

## **Book reviews**

- **A good book review does not provide a summary of the book**
- **Provides information on the contents**
- **Critical analysis**
- **Puts the book in context**
- **Takes readership into account**
- **Critical reflection**

A good book review will aim to:

Provide enough information to give a clear picture of the contents of the book

Critically analyse some of the arguments supported in the book

Put the book in context of other thinking and writing around similar themes

Remember the needs and competencies of the reader

Include some of your own reflections and give details of how you responded to the book

Be interesting and creative

## **Presentation skills**

- **Attractive title page if needed**
- **Good layout**
- **Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation**
- **Accurate referencing**
- **Check the 'Guidelines for Submitting Assessed Work'**

Good presentation skills will show the reader that you value your work.

If in doubt ask for help.

## **Tips for managing your work**

- **Overcoming writer's block**
- **Remove distractions**
- **Limit the length of your sessions**
- **Promise yourself a reward**
- **Set achievable goals**
- **Warm up**
- **Take regular breaks**

Writing is a skill that takes time to develop. Be prepared to make several drafts of your work before you are happy with the final result.