Planning your studies

Follow these steps to ensure you submit an effective assignment in a timely fashion.

(1) Read the assignment brief and assessment criteria
- ➢ Assignment briefs are not always easy to understand.
- ➢ Highlight the key words, and think carefully about what your tutor wants to see.
- ➢ Review any additional instructions and guidance that have been provided.
- ➢ You could book an appointment with the **Learning Enhancement Team** to discuss your brief and how you plan to approach it.

(2) Plan your study time
- ➢ You need to ensure that you have enough time in your personal schedule to complete your assignments.
- ➢ Making a study plan can be an effective way of ensuring that you manage your time effectively.
- ➢ Start with the deadline and work backwards. Think about how much time you have, and your other personal and professional commitments.
- ➢ You may find that things do not go as you expected them to, in which case you can adjust your plan.

Planning your studies

(3) Locate possible sources (books, journal articles, reports etc.)

➢ Research is absolutely vital as your writing must be evidence-based.

➢ You will probably have been provided with a Reading List to get you started.

(4) Skim read sources; select or reject

➢ You shouldn't waste time reading sources that might not be suitable for your assessment; you need to be selective.

➢ Skim the array of possible sources your library search throws up, in order to select the ones that are most useful and relevant.

➢ This requires time and focus; students often underestimate the time needed.

➢ Your **subject librarian** will be able to help if you have any questions or problems.

(5) Read selected source material and take notes

➢ The key to good writing is strong understanding; and this comes through reading widely and deeply.

➢ This stage of the process will take a lot of time, so factor that into your study plan.

➢ Use a note-taking system that works for you: hand-written or electronic; linear notes, spider-gram, reading grid …

➢ Take care to only select and make notes on information that is relevant to your assignment.

➢ You may need to read some sources several times to fully understand them.

Planning your studies

(6) Take referencing details of the source material

➢ Take down all the referencing details for every source you read – this will save you time in the end.

➢ It's a good idea to start compiling your Reference List as you go along. Don't worry if it looks messy – you can tidy it up later on.

➢ You can delete items later if you don't use them – it is easier to delete something you don't need, than go back and find information about a source you didn't take the details of.

(7) Take time to review your notes, and consider your response to the question

➢ One aspect of studying at university is developing depth of analysis and critical thinking, so your response will need to be deeply considered.

➢ Remember the tutor (who is marking the assignment) wants your work to respond to the question and instructions given.

➢ *Thinking* is part of the writing process; you may find yourself thinking about your assignment when you are doing something else, like taking a shower, or going for a walk.

(8) Organise your ideas and plan your assignment

➢ As you take notes from the sources, you will find that corresponding and opposing ideas emerge.

➢ You should categorise this information – by using colour-coding for example, or if your notes are on a word-processor you can move the information around

➢ Thus, drafting your assignment has begun, and bear in mind it is an evolving process.

Planning your studies

(9) Begin writing

➢ Some students start their assignment draft as soon as they start the research.

➢ Others prefer to wait until the research and note-taking is complete before starting their draft.

➢ Either way, you need to make sure you begin in plenty of time to allow for later editing and rewriting.

(10) Continue to develop, revise and edit your writing

➢ Structure, organisation and clarity are important to good communication, and are areas that are assessed.

➢ To achieve a strong structure and clear expression, your writing needs to evolve as your understanding evolves.

➢ During the writing process, you may need to re-organise your ideas, or alter your response to the task.

➢ You can work on different sections at different times. It's normal to get stuck - in which case give yourself a break from that section and work on another one.

(11) Proofread the assignment for clarity and accuracy

➢ You should do this multiple times, looking out for errors and inconsistencies.

➢ If you can, ask a friend or family member to proofread your assignment for you (but only after you've checked it thoroughly yourself).

➢ Reading your assignment aloud can be an effective way of identifying if something doesn't sound right, or if you are repeating yourself for example.

➢ For reading aloud, many students find the 'Read Aloud' function in Microsoft Word (or similar) helpful.

Planning your studies

(12) Check that the in-text referencing complies with the guidelines for your faculty

➢ You should leave plenty of time to check and double-check your in-text references.

➢ Again, if you have any questions or difficulties, your **subject librarian** will be able to assist.

(13) Tidy up your Reference List

➢ As mentioned in Step 6, it is best to draft your Reference List during the research process.

➢ Leave plenty of time to check it and make sure that each entry includes the correct elements, correctly presented, in the correct order.

(14) Check presentation

➢ Check the formatting instructions you have been given – font, font size, line spacing etc.

➢ Are page numbers required? Contents page?

➢ What should you include on the cover page?

(15) Check submission procedures and regulations

➢ You will probably have to submit via Turnitin.

➢ If you have to include additional documents (e.g. consent forms), you will probably have to include them as appendices as Turnitin only tolerates the submission of one document. Check.

(16) Submit your assignment in advance of the deadline

➢ Turnitin can be slow, so ensure you upload well in advance of the deadline.

➢ Late submissions are not accepted.