

Assignment Writing: Getting Started

Written assignments are one of the main ways of assessing the growth in students' academic knowledge, understanding, and skills. Learning how to plan, draft, and edit assignments will help you develop your written communication skills and successfully complete these types of assessment tasks.

Unit outline

Make sure you read the unit outline carefully to find out exactly what is required. It is important to know the following:

- Due date for the assignment – there are penalties if you miss the date for submissions
- Word limit – the lecturer will specify the approximate length for the assignment
- Structure and style for a particular writing task, for example, a business report, a laboratory report, a discussion essay, a case study, a literature review
- Marking criteria – specific information about how the assignment will be assessed
- Referencing requirements – whether you need to refer to your readings in the assignment and if so, the appropriate referencing style to use
- Requirements for presentation, for example, line spacing, font size, margin size, and cover sheet.

The lecturer will probably give additional information about assignments in lectures or tutorials. It's a good idea to write this information down. Ask for further explanation if you are unsure about anything.

Question analysis

To gain a clear understanding of what the question requires, read the question along with the marking criteria a number of times. Identify direction words (for example, *evaluate*, *discuss*, *explain*) and make sure you understand what these words mean. Content and limiting words (for example, *in Australian hospitals*) will also help you to analyse the question.

Type of text

If you are unsure of the structure and style required for a particular writing task, ask your lecturers for assistance. They may be able to show you examples.

Get an early start

Many assignments will require you to write a response of 1500 words or more. If you have not had practice writing in English in an extended form, it will take you longer to research and complete assignments. Mark the due date for an assignment on your semester calendar and note if more than one assessment task is due about the same time. Usually you will be working on more than one assignment at once. You will also need to spend more time on assessment tasks with a higher weighting.

To produce a good assignment you need enough time to find resources, read, think, write, and rewrite. Often this process will take a number of weeks depending on the complexity and length of the assignment.

Since writing an assignment is a complex task, it can be useful to view the process as a number of stages. However, keep in mind that essay writing is a creative process and individuals differ in the way they work and that in practice the stages are interconnected and overlap.

Suggested stages in assignment writing

Stage 1

Analyse the question, brainstorm, and explore the topic; make a preliminary plan; survey texts for suitability; start searching the library databases and catalogues for relevant information; read and make notes.

Discussing the task with your tutor may help you clarify your own point of view

Stage 2

Continue reading and note making; construct an outline; commence drafting the body, introduction, and conclusion.

Stage 3

Expand and refine this rough first draft by further thinking, reading, and writing; write second and further drafts, take a break; review your draft (focus on logic, structure, and coherence); review your draft again (focus on spelling, punctuation, and grammar).

Stage 4

Type your final draft; complete the reference list; take a short break; proofread and hand in your completed assignment; remember to keep a copy.

Reading for assignments

Reading on the topic will help you develop your ideas and answer the question. You will not have time to read everything in detail, so ask your lecturers to indicate the most important texts. You must read a variety of recent texts, including your set text if there is one, other library texts, journal articles and online sources. See a librarian if you need help locating texts or using the library databases.

Your assignment must show that you have read what a number of experts have to say on a topic and that you understand the issues. This will require a great deal of reading, discussing, and thinking. It will not be enough if you write about what you learnt in the lecture or what one writer has to say on an issue. You need to paraphrase or summarise information from many relevant writers, compare their views, and critically comment on what they say.

Record your references

Record all your sources as you read and take notes, including the page numbers. This will save time later.

Referencing style

You will need to become skilled at citing sources using an appropriate referencing style. Check your unit outline for the required method or ask your lecturer. It is important not to mix referencing styles and ensure you are using the method that is appropriate for your area of study.



For further information:

- Contact the Academic Skills Adviser on your campus
- Visit our web pages on myACU.

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