

Academic Writing Student Worksheet

How to start writing

Links to: Planning your Work, How to Structure a Paragraph, Approaching the Question

Introduction:

Once you have broken down the question and worked out what you are being asked to do, it is important to read widely around the subject so that you can construct your argument, or state your case. This worksheet will help you to start writing once the material has been found and the thinking been done.

Overview:

Use this worksheet to break the task down into manageable chunks:

Assignment brief:

Write your assignment title in the box and highlight key words:

- What do you have to do?
- What is the main topic?
- What are the limiting factors?

Write a plan:

Having conducted your research now you can start to jot down some ideas. Remember that these are just ideas at this stage and will probably change by the time you have finished your assignment.

Try using some of the following to record your initial ideas, depending on your personal preference:

- Table
- Mind map
- Flipchart and coloured pens
- Post-it notes
- PowerPoint slides

Try numbering your points to give a sense of logical structure, or draw arrows to indicate what comes next.

Development:

Now choose one of the points that you feel confident about and set yourself 5 minutes to write as much as you know about it. This does not need to be full sentences or grammatically correct; just write all the things that come into your head (see Information Sheet for an example of freewriting).

Adding evidence:

Use some points from your reading to further develop your point. It is never too late to read more; use reference lists to gain a broader perspective. Remember, if writing an essay, to provide a counter-point. This can actually serve to strengthen your argument.

Reference for later:

Remember to reference this evidence using the style as specified within your module handbook.

Paragraphs made easy:

The next step is to write these notes up into a piece of academic writing. Remember when writing a paragraph that there are a number of stages you need to go through. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is this paragraph about?
- Where is my evidence?
- How can I develop the point to strengthen my case?
- How does this relate back to the question?

What next:

Now think about where the argument/ information in this paragraph is leading and link to another of your points. Repeat the process as above remembering to keep referring back to the question.

Top tips:

1. The purpose of setting assignments is to encourage you to find information. The more you read, the more you will be able to write; the more you write, the more you will want to read and the more you will learn. It is an on-going process.
2. It is difficult to write an introduction to an essay that you haven't yet written; this should probably be left to the end. However, planning your introduction can help you to navigate your way through the essay question. Be prepared to alter and review this as your ideas develop.

Common Mistakes:

Students often think they are being asked to write everything they know about a subject. This is rarely the case in Higher Education. Remember to read the question, identify what you are being asked to do and think critically.

Further Information:

Need additional support? In the first instance speak to your course tutor about any issues you have with specific assignments.

Burns, T., and Sinfield, S., 2004. *Teaching, Learning and Study Skills*. London: Sage Study Skills

For further advice and guidance, have a look at the *Starting to write* information sheet.