



Writing an assignment

This guide gives some hints and tips on the process of writing for your college work.

Prepare

Before you start writing

Check what you have been asked to do. Research a topic? Answer a question? Have you been given any particular instructions, e.g. length; headings; things you must include, such as examples?

Gather your information. (For help with finding information, take a look at the Library guide for your subject.)

Put things in a logical order. You may find it helpful to group things under headings (even if you don't use them in the final assignment).

Write a draft

Start writing. Don't worry if you haven't got everything completely laid out in your mind before you start writing. Try to write something. Focus on getting your ideas written down. You may find that the structure develops as you write and you think of other ideas or connections.

Some people find it easier to write on paper first, where they can see all their alterations. Others prefer to write on a computer, where they can easily cut and paste sections to move things around.

Use paragraphs to structure your writing. They usually consist of about 5 to 10 sentences which focus on a single topic. This will help the reader follow the logic of your assignment and find specific information quickly.

It's useful to put your draft to one side for a while and come back to it later, say the next day. Often a gap like this can help you improve a piece of work – you are likely to notice things that you didn't see before.

Improve

Editing is all about looking at your writing from the viewpoint of the reader and seeing how to improve it. Is it appropriate and readable for the audience?

Here are some things to consider when editing your work...

- Most importantly – check that it answers the assignment you were set and follows any instructions you were given.
- Check that the structure is logical and easy to follow. Does it flow, or are there inconsistencies? It can be confusing if it jumps erratically from one idea to another. You may need to change the order of different sections.
- Do you need to cut down the length or detail in some areas? Add more in others? Be concise. Does this sentence add something useful or is it just padding? Shorter sentences are usually easier to read than longer ones. Are there any long sentences that would be better split into two?
- Have you expressed things in the best way? If you are not sure of the spelling or meaning of a word, check it in a dictionary. If you are trying to think of a suitable word to write, look up a similar word in a thesaurus – it will give you some alternatives. If you use technical words or industry jargon make sure you use them correctly.
- Where you have used **but** try substituting **and** where it does not change the meaning, it makes the sentence sound much more positive.
- Is it physically easy to read? Consider the size and style of text. Use headings and spacing to break up a long piece of text and make it look attractive.

Polish – Proof reading

Writing is all about communication. If your writing is untidy and full of silly mistakes, the reader will find it harder to follow your argument and take your work seriously. So you want it to look professional.

Let's start with the basics: have you included a title, your name, any references, page numbers etc? It's amazing how many people forget these things!

Read through your work and check for spelling errors, typing mistakes, bits that don't make sense or sound weak. Don't just rely on your computer spell checker – it won't spot everything! (Many people find it easier to proofread on paper rather than on screen.)

Proofreading needs concentration. Do it when you are fresh, away from distractions and take regular breaks. Read slowly and carefully, line by line. Read out loud, so you can hear how well it flows. If possible get someone else to take a look at your work – it is generally easier to spot errors in someone else's work.