Flinders University

SLSS

GETTING STARTED

WITH ACADEMIC WRITING

In order to write successfully at university level, it is important to complete a range of tasks which include:

- Understanding your question
- Researching relevant information
- Writing an essay outline
- Writing an introduction, body, and conclusion
- Connecting paragraphs to each other in a logical order
- Editing/Proofreading

ANALYSING THE TASK

Analysing the task or question is something we often think we do, but sometimes don't do properly. Spending time focusing on the assignment requirements can save you a lot of time and effort in the long run. A few questions to ask yourself include:

- What course outcomes am I satisfying?
  - Is this about demonstrating understanding of a topic? Are you demonstrating your critical thinking or argumentation skills?
- Who is my audience?
  - This might not be your actual audience, who in most cases is your tutor, but an imagined audience. Are you writing for your peers? An industry professional? An academic reader?
- What is the length and weighting of the task?
  - How much is expected of me? What is appropriate?
- What are the research expectations?
  - What types of resources are required? How many?
- What can the assessment rubric tell me?
  - Are any key areas weighted strongly? What should you pay attention to?

UNPACKING THE QUESTION

It's important to pay attention to all parts of the question, including the key concept and key task words, as well as the scope and limitations, and any formatting and submission requirements. You can find a table of common assignment instruction words at the end of this guide.

Content Words: relate to the topic and main discussion points of your assignment. These might include main ideas, theories, or arguments.

Instructional words: tell you how to do the assignment. For example, 'discuss', 'analyse', or 'summarise'. These words might seem similar on the surface, but often have distinct meanings. This also includes the differences between the words 'how', 'why', and 'what'.

Scope and limitations: narrow the topic and make it more specific. This might include limiting your discussion to a particular theory, group, time period, location, or extent.

Content words also function as search terms when researching for your assignment!

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THE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Below is a chart showing some of the elements involved at each stage of the assignment writing process. Note: This is not always a linear process. Sometimes you may need to return to an earlier stage to successfully complete your assignment.

- **PLAN YOUR TIME:** mark the due date in your diary and the word length.
- **ANALYSE THE QUESTION:** do you understand the content and instructional words? Consider limitations and scope.

- **BRAINSTORM:** what are the main points/sections?
- **RESEARCH:** use the key words from your brainstorming to scope a library search. Keep track of your references and refer frequently to the question.
- **CREATE AN ESSAY OUTLINE:** what order will your ideas go on? What evidence might support it?
- **WRITE A DRAFT:** Keep in mind the structure of your assignment. Insert references using the correct referencing style. Clearly identify the introduction/body/conclusion.

- **EDIT YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** Have you answered the question? Does the structure make sense? Have you missed anything or included irrelevant points?
- **PROOFREAD:** Are your sentences clear? Is your grammar and punctuation correct?
- **CHECK YOUR REFERENCES:** Have you referenced according to your topic's preferred style? Is the formatting correct? Check your paraphrasing.
- **SUBMIT:** Have you run your assignment through Turnitin?
- **NOTE FEEDBACK:** Take note of feedback and implement it in your next assignment.

The SLSS have guides that expand on each of these steps in the writing process.

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COMMON INSTRUCTIONAL WORDS

ANALYSE	Pull apart to look at in detail. Look for important aspects of key features
ARGUE	Present your reasons for or against something, with supporting evidence
COMMENT ON	Give your informed reaction to, based on your reading/lectures etc.
CRITICALLY EVALUATE	Assess the strengths and weaknesses of something, particularly based on other models, theories, or opinions
DEFINE	Make clear what is meant by a word or term.
DESCRIBE	Give the main characteristics or features of something
DISCUSS	Write about the pros and cons, all main aspects of a topic and its implications
DISTINGUISH	Make clear the differences between multiple things
ELABORATE	Answer fully with reasons and examples
EVALUATE	Make judgements about the merits, usefulness, or success of something, using evidence. Should include the good and bad if there are both
EXAMINE	Look at in detail. Usually implies evaluation as well
EXPLAIN	Tell why something happens or is the way it is
ILLUSTRATE	Make clear by giving an example or evidence
INDICATE	Show, explain
JUSTIFY	Give reasons or provide evidence for something
OUTLINE	Give only the main points, to show the structure
REVIEW	Re-examine, analyse and comment briefly on
STATE	Express a position very clearly
SUMMARISE	Write a more concise version covering the main points only, with details and examples left out
TO WHAT EXTENT	To what degree something is true or not true
WITH/IN REFERENCE TO 'X'	Ensure you link your topic to 'x'

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