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3rd Edition

Research and Study Skills: Academic Writing Student Pack



THOUGHT

Think. Rethink





Overview

This pack will help you develop the key skills that are needed for successful academic writing. Covering time management, plagiarism, referencing, paraphrasing as well as planning, structuring and writing an essay, this pack is a good starting point if you want to know more about academic writing or how to undertake an essay.

This pack is one of two packs on Research and Study Skills available from the University of Birmingham. The other, complementary pack focuses on research and evaluation skills.

Further Support Online – Academic Skills Gateway

<http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/>

Throughout this pack you will see links through to the **Academic Skills Gateway** for further online support.

Library Services has developed the Academic Skills Gateway, a collection of online resources, to support a wide array of study skills. The topics covered range from writing, research and referencing skills through to maths support, time management and presentation skills.

All activities featured in this pack can be further supported by the Academic Skills Gateway. Please note, there are many additional topics covered by the Gateway which you may also wish to explore independently.

The Library Academic Engagement Team

Library Services, University of Birmingham. 2017





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1 Time management



Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of time management as an essential life skill
- Recognise 'time stealers'
- Consider a number of time management techniques and strategies including prioritisation and SMART goals

Further help

For further guidance on time management please visit the

Academic Skills Gateway: <http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/learn>



Background

Time management is an essential skill. Good time management allows you to keep control of all of your work and social activities. It allows you to prioritise and complete activities to deadlines, for example handing in essays on time or revising for exams. Managing time effectively results in you feeling less stressed and consequently more able to plan your studies and achieve good grades.

Prioritise

Someone who works hard and is well organised but spends all their time on unimportant tasks may be efficient but not effective. To be effective, you need to decide which tasks are important and focus on these, starting with the most urgent. This is called **prioritisation**.

Consider using 'to do' lists as an easy way of keeping track of what you have to do. Once you have listed your tasks, use 'The Four Ds' to help prioritise them.

The Four Ds

- Do** – these are the tasks that you really need to do within the short-term future. For example hand in an assessed essay on time.
- Delete** – these are the tasks that you do not need to do, for example baking cakes.
- Delay** – these are the tasks that do need to be completed at some point, but do not have a deadline in the short-term future and so could be left to be completed a week or two later, for example booking train tickets for a journey that you will be taking later on in the year.
- Delegate** – these are the tasks that you could ask others to do instead, for example walking the family dog.



1 Time management continued



Activity

Your tutor will put you into small groups and give each group a list of tasks that need to be completed within the next 24 hours using the following scenario:

Tomorrow you start your first day on a work experience placement at an accountancy firm, based in Birmingham city centre. You need to arrive there by 8.45am. Your school is closed today because of a local election but open for a teacher training day. The time is now 11.45am and you and your brother are at home and have only a little money on you.

Consider all of the tasks you need to complete before you start the work experience at 8.45am tomorrow and allocate them under the Do, Delete, Delay and Delegate headings as you think most appropriate. For the items you put under the 'Do' heading, arrange them in a timeline order of how you would complete them.

When you have completed the activity, you should be prepared, in your small group, to feedback to the rest of the class.

DO	DELETE
DELAY	DELEGATE



1 Time management continued



Time Stealers

Be aware of the things that can steal your time and ensure that you manage these, so that you make time for them within your schedule (as friends and family are important).

- **Friends** – depending on your schedule you may not always be able to go to every social activity they invite you to. Learn how to prioritise the important events in your life and how to delay the other ones for a time when you have less work to complete.
- **Family** – ensure you have a quiet or private study space where you can focus, for example a library, without interruptions from family members.
- **Romance** – schedule in time for romantic partners and they should understand and give you space if you have important work commitments.
- **Jobs** – think about how many hours per week you can work for and still leave enough time for study and social commitments – consider this when applying for jobs or when accepting additional hours.
- **Social Media** – it is easy to think you will only spend a moment or two checking your Facebook and Twitter updates. In reality, you will often spend much longer than you think especially if replying to or commenting on those updates. Try checking your Facebook/Twitter/emails at specified times during the day or when you have accomplished a certain task. For example, once I have written 500 words of the essay I can then look at social media.
- **Box set bingeing** – don't let addictive TV programmes eat up all of your time! Again, use leisure activities such as watching your favourite shows as a reward for meeting your weekly targets, or as a way to relax when you need to.





1 Time management continued



Create SMART Goals

- **Specific** – you need to be specific eg, instead of 'I'm going to revise this afternoon', you should say exactly what you are going to revise, for example 'I'm going to revise the first two acts of *Hamlet* this afternoon'.
- **Measurable** – you need to ensure it is something you can measure, for example 'I'm going to write 500 words this morning for my politics essay'.
- **Achievable** – it has to be something you can achieve; do you have the correct resources, time and equipment to achieve the goal?
- **Realistic** – you should not say 'I'm going to write 12,000 words today' (which is unrealistic), you should say 'I'm going to write 1,000 words of my essay today' (which is a more realistic goal).
- **Timely** – is the task you're planning to work on a priority? You have to keep on top of the tasks that need doing in the near future, rather than just the ones you want to do, or feel like doing.

The key is to:

- Work SMARTer – set SMART goals.
- Prioritise tasks – what is most important and when is the deadline?
- Schedule time – perhaps draw up a timetable – very useful for planning revision.
- Manage your time stealers – don't allow family, friends, social media, computer games, television programmes etc, to steal all of your time.
- Manage interruptions – find a quiet work space eg, a library where it is harder to be interrupted. Ensure the person interrupting you knows that you have a task to complete. Turn off mobile phones and Facebook/Twitter alerts whilst you are focussing on the task.
- Avoid procrastination – stop worrying about what pen or notebook you want to use and just get on with the task in hand. It will be less stressful in the end.
- Organise and manage your work space – if you keep your work in order it will be easier for you to focus on the task rather than waste time looking for documents that you need in order to do it.





2 Plagiarism and when to reference



Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Recall what is meant by plagiarism
- Consider different scenarios and judge in each case whether or not they would be classed as plagiarism
- Consider different scenarios and judge in each case whether or not a reference would be required



Further help

For further guidance on plagiarism please visit the **Academic Skills**

Gateway: <http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/research>



Background

Plagiarism is taken very seriously at university level, be it intentional or unintentional plagiarism. In essence, plagiarism is a form of cheating because the plagiariser is effectively taking credit for someone else's work. Students can sometimes fall into the trap of unintentionally plagiarising and this section aims to highlight all the different forms of plagiarism to help you avoid this. At best plagiarism can lead to assignments needing to be re-written and/or marks deducted. At worst, plagiarism can lead to expulsion from the university.

The following are two useful definitions of plagiarism:

- '*Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally as your own*' Carroll, J. (2002) *A Handbook for Deterring Plagiarism in Higher Education*. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.
- '*The action or practice of taking someone else's work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one's own; literary theft.*' Oxford English Dictionary (2006) 3rd ed. Available at: www.oed.com/view/Entry/144939 (Accessed: 28 June 2017)



2 Plagiarism and when to reference continued



Activity

This activity gets you thinking about plagiarism and when you need to reference.

You will be asked to complete the following quiz. For each question tick the appropriate box to indicate your answer.

Answer the following questions:

- 1. It is the day before your assignment is due to be submitted. You contact an online essay writing service, who later that day (for a fee) emails you an essay that meets your requirements. The next day you submit this essay.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

- 2. You have been asked to submit an essay on *Romeo and Juliet* and your cousin emails you her old essay on that topic for which she received a high mark. You make a few alterations and add a few new ideas. You submit this essay.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

- 3. In your essay you discuss your own thoughts on banking bonuses.

Do you need to reference?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

- 4. You are writing an assignment about the British Constitution and you state that the Queen is the Head of State of the UK.

Do you need to reference?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	



2 Plagiarism and when to reference continued

Answer the following questions:

5. You include a table of data or a picture from another source.

Do you need to reference?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

6. You paraphrase in your essay Richard Dawkins' views on natural selection from one of his popular books. Because you are not directly quoting, you don't put quotation marks.

Do you need to reference?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

7. You and a friend are taking the same module and therefore have the same essay to write. The essay is not to be done as group work. You and your friend write your essays in the library together and end up with very similar essays.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

8. You find a quotation in a textbook which has been taken from another book. You reference the textbook you are using without making reference to the book where the quote was originally made.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

9. You find a paragraph in a book that supports an argument that you are making in your assignment. You copy this paragraph into your assignment, putting quotations marks at the start and finish and provide a citation.

Is this plagiarism?

Yes	
No	
Unsure	

Further information on plagiarism and how to reference can be found at: <http://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/icite>



3 Referencing



Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Recall why referencing is important
- Use the Harvard (Cite them Right) system to reference a book, a journal article and a website

Further help

For further guidance on referencing please visit the **Academic Skills Gateway**: <http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/research>



Background

Referencing is an essential part of academic scholarship. There are numerous reasons why referencing the material which you have found, and go onto use in your assignments is vital. These can be summarised as:

- To acknowledge an intellectual debt to another author
- To avoid plagiarism
- To give supporting evidence to specific facts or claims you make in the text
- To enable a reader to find the sources that have been quoted



There are many different ways of referencing. Examples of referencing styles include: the *Harvard* system (also known as the *author-date* system) and its many variations, as well as the *Vancouver* system (also known as the *Numbering* system). At the University of Birmingham the Harvard (Cite them Right) system is the official style which has been adopted, although some Schools prefer to use other systems (for example the Birmingham Law School use: *The Oxford Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA)*).

You should always check with your tutor(s) which style they are expecting you to use for your assignments.



3 Referencing continued



Activity

This activity will teach you how to include indicative references (citations) in the body of your assignment as well as how to construct a full reference list at the end. Your tutor will demonstrate how to include the indicative references and you will be asked to create the full reference list.

Imagine that you have been asked to write an essay on *The Chinese and Indian Economies*. In order to research this topic you have used the five following works: you can find these items via the URLs below:

<http://bit.ly/1xzevZF>

<http://bit.ly/1zv2JCc>

<http://bit.ly/1nlhi1l>

<http://bit.ly/1rGcrx6>

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

You will be assigned one or more of these items to reference. For the purposes of this activity, we are asking you to reference:

- Books as if they were printed books (in fact if an electronic version of a book is identical to the print version then it should be referenced as for the print format)
- Journal articles as if they were electronic (the majority of journals articles that you are likely to read will be in electronic format)

Your tutor will provide instruction on how to complete this activity and how they will require you to feedback.



3 Referencing continued



Referencing books

Recipe:

1. Name(s) of author(s)/editor(s)
2. Year of publication in brackets; if no year put no date in brackets (no date)
3. Title of book *italics*
4. Edition, if not the first
5. Number of volumes, if more than one
6. Place of publication
7. Name of publisher

Example:

Parker, C.C. and Turley, R.V. (1986) *Information sources in science and technology: a practical guide to traditional and online use*.
2nd edn. London: Butterworths.

Works produced under editorial direction:

These are items produced under the general editorial control of one or more editors. Individual chapters, however, may each be written by different authors. The abbreviation (ed.) or (eds.) is used to denote an edited collection.

Example:

Seidman, S. and Wagner, D.G. (eds.) (1992) *Postmodernism and social theory: the debate over general theory*.
Cambridge (MA): Blackwell



3 Referencing continued



Referencing journal articles

Recipe:

1. Names(s) of author(s)
2. (Date)
3. Title of article (in single quotation marks)
4. Title of periodical (*in italics*)
5. Volume number
6. Part number (if used by the journal) in brackets
7. Page numbers in full
8. Digital Object Identifier (if the article you are referencing is in electronic format and the DOI is available)

Example:

Broida, T.J. and Chellappa, R. (1991) 'Estimating the kinematics and structure of a rigid object from a sequence of monocular images', *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence*, 13 (6), pp. 497-513. doi: 10.1109/34.87338.

Note:

The example above is for an electronic journal article. If the article being referenced is in printed format, the reference would look identical but would finish after the page numbers (ie, would not include doi: 10.1109/34.87338). If the article is in electronic format and a DOI cannot be found the reference would also omit the DOI.



3 Referencing continued



Referencing web pages

Recipe:

1. Names(s) of author(s)
2. Year of publication in brackets; if no year put no date in brackets (no date)
3. Title of web page (*in italics*)
4. Available at:
5. The web address
6. (Accessed: date the web page was accessed)

Example:

Blakeman, K. (2017) *Business Information Resources*. Available at:
www.rba.co.uk/sources/index.htm (Accessed: 5 April 2017).

For corporate authors:

These items have no named personal author, but are issued by a professional body, society, government department or other similar corporate body. In such cases the organisation is named as if it were the author (the following examples are for books):

Swedish Trade Council. (1991) *Swedish export directory*. 72nd edn.
Stockholm: Swedish Trade Council.

British Medical Association. (1981) *The handbook of medical ethics*.
London: BMA.

If there is no publication date:

Replace the bracketed year eg, (2017) to (no date).

If two works by the same author(s) published in the same year:

Put a lowercase 'a' after the year of the work cited first and 'b' after the year of work cited second, eg, (2017a) and (2017b).



3 Referencing continued

Supplementary information

This activity deals with referencing a book, journal article and website. A fuller guide to referencing these types of material is given over the page. This has been adapted from:

University of Birmingham (2015) *Quick Guide to Harvard (Author-Date)*. Available from: www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/harvard-referencing-quick-guide (Accessed: 6 April 2017).

There are many other types of information that you may wish to reference during your studies. A fuller handbook on how to reference different types of materials can be found at: www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/harvard-referencing.





3 Quick Guide to Harvard (Author-Date) Referencing

This is a very basic guide to citing and referencing using the Harvard (author-date) system of referencing. For more detailed examples go to intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/harvard-referencing.



CITING IN TEXT

A citation is an abbreviated indication of the source(s) you have used in text, use the author(s) or editor(s) family name and date of publication. Example, (Smith, 2010).

Examples of citing in text

One Author/Editor: (Stevens, 2013)

Two Authors/Editors: (Banerjee and Watson, 2011)

Three Authors/Editors: (Smith, Jones and Thomas, 2015)

Four or more Authors/Editors: Cite the first name listed in the source followed by et al. For example, This was proved by Dym *et al.* (2009)...

No Author/Editor: Use the title in italics; do NOT use 'anonymous' or anything similar, for example, It is maintained that medicine has greatly improved (*Medicine in old age*, 1985, p. 74)...

No Author and No Date: Use the title and 'no date'. For example, Thunderstorms have become increasingly common (*Trends in atmospheric pressure*, no date)...

Citing multiple sources

If you want to refer to two or more sources at the same time separate them with semi-colons and order them chronologically. If more than one work is published in the same year, then they should be listed alphabetically by author/editor.

A number of different studies (Jamieson, 2011; Hollingworth, 2012; Ha-ield, 2013; Rogers, 2015) suggested that ...

Citing sources published in the same year by the same author

If you wish to cite an author who has published more than one item in the same year, use a lower case letter to distinguish between them. The letters should also be included in the reference list.

For example,

Peate (2014a) discusses changes to the Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC) Code of Conduct and the implications this has for nurses and midwives. In a later article Peate (2014b) criticises the NMC's decision to increase the registration fee.



3 Quick Guide to Harvard (Author-Date) Referencing continued



REFERENCES

A reference gives the full details of the brief citation you have referred to in text and is shown at the end of your essay. A reference will include authors, titles, editions, publisher details or journal details.

Examples of references

Authors/Editors: All authors'/editors' names should be listed in your reference list (no matter how many there are).

BOOKS

- Author/Editor, initial(s). Year of publication (in round brackets) *Title in italics*.
- Edition (if not the first edition). Place of publication: Publisher. Series and volume number (where relevant).

One author

Guy, J. (2001) *The view across the river: Harriett Colenso and the Zulu struggle against imperialism*. Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia.

Two authors

Banerjee, A. and Watson, T.F. (2011) *Pickard's manual of operative dentistry*. 9th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Three or more authors

List all the authors (no matter how many there are) and always separate the final two authors with and as shown below.

Dym, C.L., Little, P., Orwin, E.J., and Spjut, R.E. (2009) *Engineering design: a project-based introduction*. 3rd edn. Hoboken, N.J: Wiley.

Edited book

Collinge, C., Gibney, J. and Mabey, C. (eds.) (2011) *Leadership and Place*. London: Routledge.

Chapter in a book

Sparkes, V. (2010) 'Function of the spine', in Everett, T. and Kell, C. (eds.) *Human movement: an introductory text*. 6th edn. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, pp. 191-209.

E-Book

If you are viewing the e-book online and it looks the same as a printed book, then reference as above. If the book looks different, for example it has been downloaded onto an ebook reader:

Author/Editor, initial(s) Year of publication (in brackets) *Title of book* (in italics) Available at: URL (Downloaded: date)

Hislop, V. (2014) *The sunrise*. Available at www.amazon.co.uk/kindlestore (Downloaded: 17 June 2015).



3 Quick Guide to Harvard (Author-Date) Referencing continued

JOURNALS

Journal (Print), Author, Initial(s). (Year) Title of article (in single quotation marks), *Title of Journal* (in italics), Volume (unbracketed) and, where applicable, Number Issue/part number (in brackets), page numbers

Knapik, J. J., Cosio-Lima, L. M., and Reynolds, K. L. (2015) 'E-cacy of functional movement screening for predicting injuries in coast guard cadets', *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, 29 (5), pp. 1157-1162.

Journal (Electronic)

Same information as above, but if doi available include at the end of the reference.

Wildman, S. (2009) 'Nursing and the issue of 'party' in the Church of England: the case of the Lichfield Diocesan Nursing Association', *Nursing Inquiry*, 16, pp. 94-102. doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1800.2009.00441.x.

WEB PAGES

Web page with an author

Snow, D. (2015) *How did so many soldiers survive the trenches?* Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3kgjxs (Accessed: 18 July 2015).

Web page – author as an organisation

BBC News (2014) *'Lights out' ends day of WW1 centenary commemorations.* Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28632223 (Accessed: 17 October 2012).

Web page – no dates

BBC History (no date) *Duke of Wellington (1769-1852).* Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/wellington_duke_of.shtml (Accessed: 18 June 2015).





4 Paraphrasing



Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Understand what paraphrasing is and why it is a useful academic skill
- Understand the importance of effective paraphrasing as opposed to just substituting words
- Identify good academic practice and poor academic practice in a paraphrasing context
- Paraphrase a short section of text



Background

When writing academic essays, you will often need to strengthen your arguments by referring to (and evaluating) the ideas of other writers and scholars in the field. Sometimes you might choose to cite exactly what they have said, using quotation marks, but more often you will want to express their ideas in your own words to show you have understood them. Doing this effectively and respectfully is an important part of good academic practice.





4 Paraphrasing continued



Activity 1

Discuss in your groups:

- What are the differences between paraphrasing and directly quoting?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of each?



Activity 2

This introductory activity will help you to identify what paraphrasing does and does not involve. Please read the following statements in your groups and decide whether they are true or false.

True or False...?

1. If you have read something and then expressed it in your own words, you do not need to reference where the original idea came from.
 True False
2. You should paraphrase a section of text by using a thesaurus to change some of the words.
 True False
3. You should paraphrase a section of text by expressing it in a different way, highlighting key ideas and getting to the heart of what the writer is saying.
 True False
4. Good paraphrasing shows that you understand another writer's point of view.
 True False

Please be prepared to discuss your answers.





4 Paraphrasing continued



Tips for paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is often defined as putting a passage from an author into your own words. But what are your own words? How different must your paraphrase be from the original?

The answer is it should be considerably different. The whole point of paraphrasing is to show you have read and understood another person's ideas, and can summarise them in your own writing style rather than borrowing their phrases. If you just change a few words, or add some bits of your own to an otherwise reproduced passage, you will probably be penalised for plagiarism.

You should aim to condense and simplify a writer's ideas, and describe them using different sentence structures and expressions. It is also important to credit the original writer by referencing. You may wish to introduce your summary of their ideas with a phrase such as 'According to Smith (2017)...'

In order to paraphrase well, you must understand the essence of a writer's argument. Here are some reading strategies that may help you to do that:

- First gain an overview of the article or chapter by reading the introduction and conclusion.
- Then read the document through quickly, to get a general 'feel' for it, scanning for the central points.
- When you read through again, focus on things that are relevant to your essay or discussion.
- Ask yourself questions as you read – do you understand the points being made? If not, what is holding you back? Consider the writer's argument. What are they saying? Do you agree or disagree?
- Then turn the article over or put it to one side, and try to sum up the writer's argument in one sentence or short paragraph. Do this without looking at the words the writer has used. This will force you to use your own words and will test your understanding of what you have read. You can then check the original text to ensure that you have produced a fair summary of their ideas.





4 Paraphrasing continued



Activity 3

This activity enables you to consider examples of effective and ineffective paraphrasing.

Please read this piece of text, taken from the University of Birmingham's website (2017). Then consider the two examples of paraphrasing below it. Which do you think is the most appropriate and effective example of paraphrasing?

Original Text

The new, technology-rich Library houses a variety of learning spaces to cater for different modes of study. With over 2.1 million printed books and journals, the Library boasts 40 miles of shelving, which would stretch from Birmingham to Cheltenham. Students also have access to an array of learning areas including informal seating, group study spaces and individual desks; there are over 1,800 seats in total. Alongside traditional learning resources, the Library teems with innovative tools and enhanced accessibility for learning in the 21st century and beyond including, wireless mobile charging, media rooms and video editing booths.

University of Birmingham. (2017) *Library*. Available at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/building/library/index.aspx (Accessed: 30 March 2017).

Paraphrase 1

The University of Birmingham's new, technology-rich Library holds a variety of learning spaces to provide for different methods of study. With over 2.1 million printed books and periodicals, the Library has 40 miles of shelving. Students also have access to informal seating, group study spaces and individual desks. There are over 1,800 chairs overall. Alongside traditional learning resources, the Library is packed with innovative tools and enhanced convenience for learning in the 21st Century and beyond, including wireless mobile charging, media rooms and video editing facilities.



4 Paraphrasing continued

Paraphrase 2

The University of Birmingham's website (2017) describes the benefits of its 'new, technology-rich Library.' Alongside a large amount of books and journals, and different types of spaces for students to study in, the new building provides resources for 'learning in the 21st century and beyond' (University of Birmingham, 2017). There is a focus on technology and accessibility, as well as the more traditional library facilities. This seems to indicate the changing nature of academic libraries.

Your thoughts



4 Paraphrasing continued



Activity 4

This activity gives you the opportunity to practise paraphrasing a piece of text.

Please read this extract from the University of Birmingham's (2014) website and then attempt to express the key ideas in your own words. When you are reading, remember to consider what the main message of the text seems to be. You can then emphasise this in your paraphrased version.

Original Text

The University grew out of the radical vision of our first Chancellor, Joseph Chamberlain. Founded in 1900, Birmingham represented a new model for higher education. This was England's first civic university, where students from all religions and backgrounds were accepted on an equal basis.

Birmingham has continued to be a university unafraid to do things a little differently, and in response to the challenges of the day. It was a founder member of the National Union of Students and the first university in the country to:

- Be built on a campus model
- Establish a faculty of commerce
- Incorporate a medical school
- Offer degrees in dentistry
- Create a women's hall of residence
- Have a purpose-built students' union building

University of Birmingham. (2017) *A Brief History*. Available at: www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/about/history/index.aspx (Accessed: 6 May 2017).

Paraphrased version



4 Paraphrasing continued



Paraphrased version continued



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay



Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Understand the stages of planning an essay
- Follow a basic essay structure
- Consider the key elements within the introduction, main body and conclusion of the essay



Further help

For further guidance on planning, structuring and writing an essay please visit the **Academic Skills Gateway**:

<http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/writing>



Background

The main purpose of writing an essay is to demonstrate ideas and arguments that answer a particular question. The writing of essays forms part of a range of academic assessment activities used at university. The activities contained in this section will help you gain a better understanding of how to plan, research and structure your writing.



Activity 1

Please discuss the following questions with the person next to you:

- What is the first thing you normally do when you receive an essay question or assignment title?
- How do you normally go about planning a structure for your essays or assignments?
- For you, what is the most challenging part of planning and writing an assignment?



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued

Suggested stages of planning

Break down the different parts of your assignment question. Figure out what the task word means (eg, discuss, argue, describe) and identify specifically what you need to write about. If the question is very broad and general, you will need to decide which aspects to focus your answer around.

Mind map everything you already know about the topic. Try to identify what your instinctive response to the essay question is. Identify some key research questions to guide your further reading.

Be sure to keep track of where you have obtained information from as you research. Take effective notes and engage with what you are reading, asking questions and challenging points of view. Be sure to only note down things that are relevant to the essay question. You don't need to include everything you know about the topic.

From your research, identify key points that will help you to answer the essay question. You could bring these together in a mind map, or on a large piece of paper, or a typed document. Then you need to start organising the points. Which points are closely related? Which are counter-arguments? Which follow on from one other? Begin to group your ideas. At this point, you should also decide what the main, overall argument of your essay is going to be, based on the evidence that you have been gathering.

Now you need to decide on a logical order for your points. You could write a summary of each point on a separate card or sticky note and physically move them around until you have figured out the best order. You will find your own method, but the key thing is to be aware of the progression of your argument and the unfolding of your line of reasoning. How does each point link to the one before it and the one after it? How will your paragraphs build up your argument?



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued

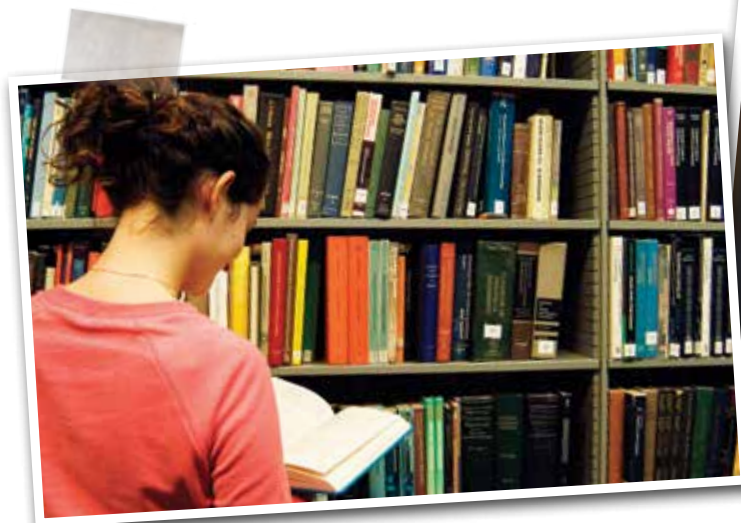


As you start thinking about planning your essay, you may find it useful to ask yourself the following questions and make notes accordingly:

1. Do I understand what my assignment question is asking?
2. What is my instinctive response to the question?
3. What do I already know that is of relevance to the question?
4. What else do I need to find out?
5. What have other scholars written on this topic and do I agree with them?
6. What is the main point I want to argue or get across in this essay?

Structuring an Essay

Once you have finished researching your essay, you need to start thinking about how to structure it. What should your overall structure look like? What main headings/bullet points would you use in order to organise your essay into an appropriate and logical flow of ideas? The **Essay Structure Checklist**, starting on page 30, provides some guidance.





5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued



Essay Structure Checklist

	Notes
Title	<input type="checkbox"/> Have you included the title of your essay?
Introduction	<input type="checkbox"/> Does your essay have a suitable introduction which identifies your approach to the essay question? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the introduction give the reader a plan of the main themes/concepts that you are going to examine in the essay? This plan should not be mere description, but give some indication of analysis. These themes should be mentioned in the introduction in the same order that they are mentioned in the actual essay. It is worth looking back over your draft introduction once you have finished the essay so that you can edit it to match the actual structure of the finished document. <input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion: Your introduction should be approximately 10% of the word count.
Main Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Is there evidence that you have read widely on the topic? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you put each main point in a separate paragraph (points may take up more than just one paragraph but try not to roll points together; keep a clear focus to each section of your argument)? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the paragraphs linked in a logical manner (ie, does your essay flow from one point to another)? <input type="checkbox"/> When you make a point or argument in the essay, or give a factual statement, do you provide evidence that supports it? This evidence will normally be research that has been done by others eg. books, journal articles, websites. This is why it is important to read widely on your topic. <input type="checkbox"/> Do you reference clearly, using a consistent referencing style, where you have used the ideas or work of other people? <input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion: Your main body should be approximately 80% of the word count.



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued

Essay Structure Checklist continued

	Notes
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does your conclusion address the essay question?<input type="checkbox"/> Is your conclusion supported by the work and evidence you have produced in the main body of the text? If the answer you give here contradicts the evidence you give in the main body of the essay, then you need to either reconsider your conclusion or the evidence you have used in the main body.<input type="checkbox"/> Does it summarise the main points? Your conclusion should not introduce new points or evidence which you haven't mentioned elsewhere in your essay but should be a short reminder of the points you have made.<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion: Your conclusion should be approximately 10% of the word count.
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Have you used a variety of sources (eg, books, journal articles, websites)?<input type="checkbox"/> Have you provided references for all of your sources at the point in your essay where you have used them (references in the body of your essay are called in-text citations)?<input type="checkbox"/> Are all of the references that you use in your essay shown in the reference list at the end?<input type="checkbox"/> Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?<input type="checkbox"/> Is the reference list constructed in alphabetical order?<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion: Your references may count towards your word count. Check with your tutor before starting your essay. You may be awarded marks for your referencing – if so, these are easy marks to obtain!
Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Is your essay neat and well presented?<input type="checkbox"/> Is it in the correct word font and size? You will normally be told what to use at either the start of the course or when given the assignment. Ask your tutor if you are unsure.<input type="checkbox"/> Has it been edited, proof-read and written within the word limit?<input type="checkbox"/> Have you included your details? Check with your tutor what personal details you need to include, eg, full name or just an ID number to allow for anonymised marking.
Assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does it meet the assessment criteria?<input type="checkbox"/> Tutors are marking your essays against a set marking criteria. The marking criteria will normally be given to you either at the start of the course or when you are set an assignment. If you are not given a copy ask your tutor for one. It is vital that you know what criteria you need to meet in order to gain a high mark.



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued



Activity 2

Please look at the essay extract on the next page and complete the following two tasks:

1. Work in pairs to highlight any words or phrases that the essay writer has used to help guide their reader through their essay. How are the phrases helpful? How do they make the essay clearer?

2. Look at the third paragraph and see if you can write down:
 - a. The point that the essay writer is making in this paragraph
 - b. At least one piece of evidence they have used to support the point
 - c. How their point relates to the essay question





5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued

Essay Extract

How far was the spread of religious ideas in the sixteenth century indebted to the printing press?

The sixteenth century was a period of great religious conflict. In 1517, Martin Luther, a German theologian, published his 95 theses which criticised the Mediaeval Church, and sparked what is now known as the Reformation. But what made Luther's ideas have such a widespread impact in Europe? This essay will support the position of MacCulloch (2003), who argues that it was the invention of the printing press. The essay will show how Luther was able to reach both literate and illiterate people, through the use of printed text and images. It will also explore how printing enabled the spread of religious ideas through oral communication, and resulted in many different interpretations of religious texts.

The simplest way in which the printing press enabled the spread of religious ideas was by making them easily and cheaply accessible to large numbers of people. Luther's messages, as well as those of many other reformers, were able to reach even the furthest parts of Scotland and Scandinavia (Thompson, 2005). Even Luther himself wrote, in 1517, 'They are printed and circulated far beyond my expectation.' There had been earlier reforms in the Church in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, but none of them had the impact that the Protestant Reformation had, simply because in the sixteenth century the ideas could be put into print. The technology of printing had been revolutionised in the 1450s, and by 1500 over 250 cities had their own publishing works (Johnson, 1976). Luther utilised this innovation extremely effectively, as the next part of the essay will demonstrate.

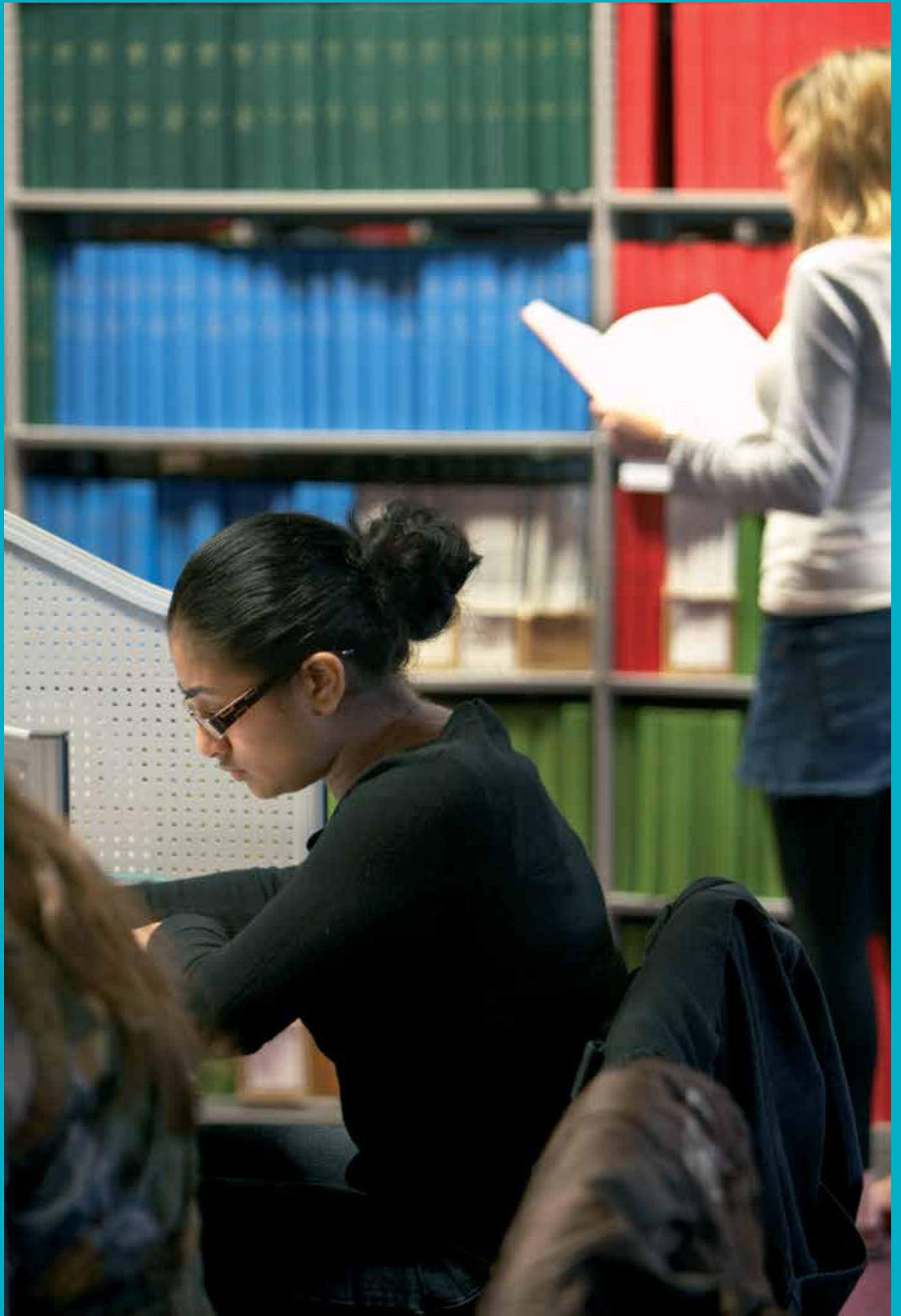
When Luther published his 95 theses, they caused a stir amongst the elite literate classes (MacCulloch, 2003). But it is notable that, at this time, ninety per cent of the population of Europe was illiterate (Marr, 2010). Therefore it is clear to see how Luther was indebted to the printing press: he was able to use printed, duplicated images to spread his message, rather than just words. In the decade after the publication of his theses, Luther released numerous pamphlets (Kingston, 2002). Two examples were 'Two Types of Preaching' and 'The Depiction of the Papacy'. In 'Preaching', Luther includes pictures of contrasting sermons, one Protestant and one Catholic, depicting the Catholic Pope as the Anti-Christ and the Protestants as being blessed by God. Although this use of images was inflammatory, the symbolism used was still complex. Thus, Luther later released 'Depiction', with much simpler, cruder pictures. This shows that Luther was reaching out to the uneducated classes, and was able to do this with the help of the printing press.



5 Planning, structuring and writing an essay continued

Another way in which printing enabled the spread of religious ideas was through the use of oral communication. Often, authors would instruct the reader to share the content of a book aloud to others (Nguin, 2011). This meant that ideas could be spread to communities where there were only a handful of literate readers. Again, it is clear why Luther used a simple and limited vocabulary for much of his work – even if only one person could read what was written, countless others could hear and understand it. Other religious movements also relied on this sort of communication. The Zaringlists and Calvinists each printed their ideas in simple terms for the wider population (Johnson, 1976). In fact, if it were not for print, many of the religious factions that appeared in the sixteenth century would not have had any basis, since the main discrepancy between their ideas was interpretation of the Scripture (MacCulloch, 2003). If fewer people were able to read the Bible, it stands to reason that there would have been less religious variation. Therefore, as the second half of this essay will further explore, the printing press also led to greater religious conflict.

Your thoughts





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