HOW TO WRITE ASSIGNMENTS

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HOW TO WRITE ASSIGNMENTS

This guide will help you develop your short essay and general writing skills.

We'll show you how to write and present a good assignment, one that shows you've understood the question.

We want you to enjoy writing your assignments and expressing your opinions. This guide will help you do that in a clear and concise way.

HOW ASSIGNMENTS WORK

At the end of most modules there is an assignment for you to do. You should send this to your tutor for marking.

Some modules don't have assignments. At the end of the module we will tell you if there is no assignment, and you should continue to the next module.

Assignments often use case studies based on real events. They will familiarise you with a typical situation that you'll meet as a professional.

And typically we ask you to write an essay or report. The skills and methods discussed in this guide can be applied to most of your assignments.

WRITING A GOOD ASSIGNMENT

You don't need to be a creative writer to write a good essay. Each assignment is designed to test your knowledge of what you've learnt in the module you've just studied. You don't have to be a creative writer. You just need to present your ideas clearly and professionally to your tutor.

A confident and competent professional knows how to express themselves well. They are able to put their ideas on paper in a logical and informative manner. If you're not a confident writer, this guide will help you do that. If you're used to writing essays we hope you'll pick up some tips that will help you improve your essay writing skills.

BEFORE YOU START AN ASSIGNMENT

■ **Read the question and analyse it.** Reading the question is very important. Read it several times and make notes on what information should be included in your assignment. It's a good idea to read the question, leave it for a while, and then go back to it. You are likely to have more ideas when you revisit the assignment.

You can emphasise different bits of the question, using different marks, like this:

<u>Read</u> it several times and <u>make notes on</u> what information should be <mark>included</mark> in your assignment.

- **Understand what the tutor wants to see in your work**. Your tutor is looking for you to demonstrate that you have understood what you've studied in the module. We also want to see your thoughts and ideas on the subject and a clear and balanced argument.

  It is important to **follow the brief** in the assignment. This shows you can follow instructions and interpret them.

- **Apply what you've learnt in the module to the question.** Ask yourself what the purpose of the assignment is. What do you need to show that you've learnt?

- **Brainstorm before you start writing.** Brainstorming is a good way to come up with ideas for your assignment. Never start to write from start to finish with no planning. You should spend as much time brainstorming and researching as doing the actual writing, because your thoughts and interpretation of the subject are vital in producing a good assignment.

  Set yourself a time period for brainstorming, for example half an hour. Then do something else. You'll find other ideas come to you as you're going about your daily life. Always carry a notebook with you, so you can jot down your ideas as they come.

- **Plan your answer**. Think before you put pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard. Plan your answer carefully. The mind-map method shown in the guide 'How to Succeed in your Distance Learning Course' is useful for planning an assignment.

  When planning an answer, you should consider:

  1. What is the assignment question?
  2. What is your tutor looking for? See above?
  3. What research will you need to do?
  4. What should the main heading and sub-headings be?
  5. What thoughts come immediately to mind? Write them down before you forget them.

FINDING OUT THE ANSWERS

Most of the information is contained in the module. In many cases, if you've read the module thoroughly, and done the self-assessment exercises, you should be able to do much of the assignment straightaway.

But sometimes you need to do further research. Here are some guidelines to help you.

- **Research the topic.** You'll get higher grades for good research. The question usually relates to what you've read in the module, but often encourages you to do some research. This will help you practise your research skills. It will also give you some valuable resources that you can use in the future.

  Your tutor will award extra marks for doing research.

  Always list your sources of research at the end of the assignment.

- **Don't copy from the internet.** It's called plagiarism and is a serious offence. Tutors usually recognise plagiarism. If they suspect your work is copied they will check, and your work will not be marked if it is not your own.

- **Use the internet to research and find answers, but be cautious.** Websites aren't always right. It's better to use a well-known website for any research you do. Wikipedia is a useful source of information, but the information is not always written by professionals. Check whether the information you use has been validated elsewhere.

  Forums are a useful source of information and a good way to chat with other people interested in the same subject as you. However, be aware that forums often contain people's personal opinions on a subject, which may be different from your own.

HOW TO WRITE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

- **Write a sensible amount.** Your assignment should not be too long or too short. Typically we expect no more than 500 words. Your assignment should contain:

  1. A heading
  2. An introduction
  3. Body content (using sub-headings)
  4. A conclusion

  When complete, send your assignment to your tutor with the covering sheet included in the course materials.

Most assignments requiring an essay give the number of required words. Don't write more or less – this won't impress your tutor, just as it won't impress a client in the real world. If you are asked for 600-750 words, that is what you should write.

If an assignment doesn't indicate the number of words, 2 or 3 pages of A4 is usually enough. Contact your tutor if you are unsure of the number of words to write.

- **Include diagrams, photos or charts, when appropriate.** If your work would benefit from an image, you should add it. Try taking photos, taking a screenshot, or using Microsoft Word's Drawing toolbar.

HOW TO WRITE BETTER ENGLISH

- **Communicate your ideas in plain English.** Your assignment should flow logically and be easy to understand. You should present a balanced argument if writing an essay or giving your opinion, and present facts if you are doing a more structured assignment.

  Don't use big unnecessary words (known as circumlocution – that's a big word itself!). Think about what you want to say and the easiest way to say it.

- **Get your English right.** A well worded assignment with good English presents a professional image. We acknowledge that English isn't every learner's first language, and tutors will take this into account if you let them know.

- **Avoid long sentences.** Keep your words simple, and use punctuation to break up your sentences. Don't write in long chunks of text: it will be difficult to read. Use the following:

  - Headings
  - Sub-headings
  - Bullet points
  - Short paragraphs

  Look at a website you find easy to read. It is likely to use simple words, and have short sentences, well spaced paragraphs and facts the reader is looking for.

- **Use paragraphs effectively.** Paragraphs exist to make text easy to read. They split the text into different categories or ideas, and they help hold the interest of the reader. Short paragraphs keep things simple.

- **Add bullet points to help make reading text easier.** Your assignment will be easier to read if you use bullet points under some headings.

- **When you've written the assignment, add an introduction at the beginning.** It should be three or four sentences outlining what you propose to discuss.

- **Write a conclusion, summarising what you have written.** Again, this should be three or four sentences and bring the assignment to a logical finish.

QUOTES, REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

You don't have to include references, quotes or a bibliography in your assignments, though you may get extra marks for doing so.

If you use someone else's words, state where you sourced them from.

If you add references, Microsoft Word will organise them neatly for you. To insert a citation, click the References Tab on the Ribbon.

Use a recognised style such as the Harvard referencing system. Type 'Harvard referencing system' into Google to find a simple guide.

BEFORE YOU EMAIL YOUR ASSIGNMENT

- **Check your work.** Once you have completed your assignment, spell check it, leave it for a while (ideally a day) and then go back to it. You may see simple errors and possible improvements.

- **Have you answered the question?** Review the question and check you've made all the relevant points.

- **Put effort into your presentation.** Your assignment should be well laid out, readable and clear. We advise you to use a Word document for your assignments. Some students write their assignments in an email, which is alright for simple assignments but less effective for more complex ones.

HOW TO GET BETTER MARKS

Learners' answers range from *simple* (just regurgitating the information in the module) to *complex* (creating something completely new). You can see this in the Bloom's Taxonomy figure on page 8.

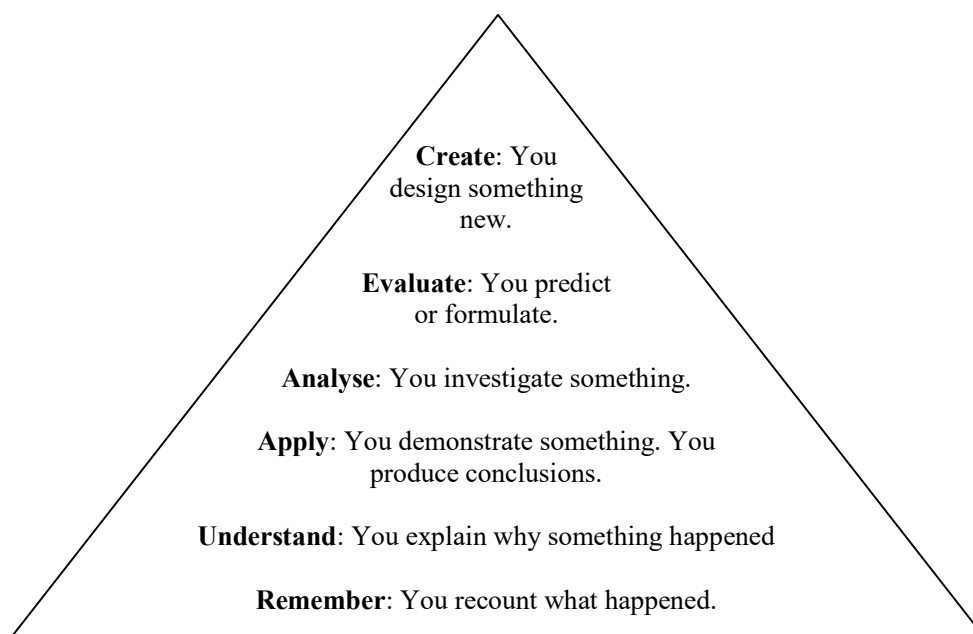The more thoughtful your assignment, the higher marks you'll get.

Create: You
design something
new.

Evaluate: You predict
or formulate.

Analyse: You investigate something.

Apply: You demonstrate something. You
produce conclusions.

Understand: You explain why something happened

Remember: You recount what happened.

Figure 1: Adapted from Bloom's Taxonomy
(Source: www.pps.k12.or.us/schools/forestpark/files/school-forestpark/BloomsPoster.pdf)

WHEN YOU GET YOUR ASSIGNMENT BACK

When you get your work back, learn from your tutor's comments. The feedback you receive in your Tutor Response is invaluable. Before moving on to the next assignment, take time to read the comments and see where you could make improvements.

If you have any queries don't hesitate to contact your tutor.

RECAP

1. Plan your assignment before writing it.
2. Do any relevant research.
3. Write clearly in simple language.
4. Keep to the point. Don't waffle.
5. Use headings, short paragraphs and bullet points.
6. Do a spell and grammar check.
7. Put your assignment to one side when it's complete and go back to it later.

Good luck from us at The Blackford Centre!