

# ASSIGNMENT WRITING

Even though you may have read a lot about your assignment topic, it is hard to know where to begin. Here are five simple steps to help you get started.

## 1 ANALYSE

Understanding the question is the first step to writing an assignment successfully. Follow these steps to make sure you understand the question:

- Read the question through carefully – at least twice.
- Look for instruction words (verbs) and make sure you understand exactly what they mean.
- Look for topic words. They tell you exactly what to write about.
- Look for restricting words that narrow the topic down and make it more specific.
- Try to rewrite the question in your own words starting with 'This question is asking me to ...'

## 2 PLAN

You can't build a bridge, design a dress, give a presentation or write an assignment without proper planning. Once you've analysed the question and understand exactly what is expected of you, you can structure your assignment. You should now create a framework that you can use to build your argument. For example, you will need an introduction, a body and a conclusion. In the body you will have to address the relevant themes you identify in the question. You will have to support your statements with references.



## 3 FIND, READ, OBSERVE, QUESTION

When you have a proper plan and you've identified relevant themes, you're ready to start reading. Start with the required reading, extra references, and other relevant material that you come across in your research.

No assignment requires that you simply write down everything you know about a subject. Select the relevant themes carefully, and compare the opinions of various authors. Try to think about their opinions from your own point of view. Do you agree or disagree with what they are saying?

Worried about your referencing? Check out what happens when Lloyd visits Prof Bloom with that very problem.

## 4 WRITE

When you begin to formulate your argument, you must keep the assignment verb in mind. Knowing whether to 'compare', 'discuss' or 'illustrate' will help you formulate a logical argument. To 'discuss' a topic, for example, you may start by making a statement, explaining why you believe the statement to be true, and then back the statement up with references.

## 5 EDIT

The final, and perhaps the most important, phase of assignment writing is editing your work. Using a good spell checker is a first step, but it shouldn't be the last. If you have time, set your assignment aside for a day or two and then read it through with fresh eyes. Ask someone else to read through your work – maybe they'll pick up something you missed.



# INSTRUCTION WORDS AND THEIR MEANING

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Account for</b>    | Explain something or give reasons for something.  |
| <b>Analyse</b>        | Examine something very closely to identify the main points. Focus on the 'how' and 'why'.   |
| <b>Compare</b>        | Show the similarities or differences between two or more objects, ideas, events or theories. Indicate why the similarities or differences are relevant.   |
| <b>Contrast</b>       | Similar to compare, but you should emphasise differences.   |
| <b>Criticise</b>      | Consider both good points and bad points of a topic and give the results of your analysis. It is important to give a balanced answer.                     |
| <b>Define</b>         | Give precise meanings with key details. Examples may be useful. You may find this information in a dictionary or from an academic authority on the topic. |
| <b>Describe</b>       | Give the main characteristics or features of something. Say what the event or process is like.  |
| <b>Discuss</b>        | Present a point of view after considering both sides of an issue or question. Explore implications and support your opinion by arguments and evidence.    |
| <b>Evaluate</b>       | Consider both strengths and weaknesses and decide how important, useful and valuable something is.  |
| <b>Explain</b>        | Describe how something happens in the order in which it occurs, and provide reasons for an idea, attitude or situation.                                   |
| <b>Illustrate</b>     | Use examples or evidence to explain something.  |
| <b>Interpret</b>      | Examine the evidence or data and express it in your own words. Examples may be useful.  |
| <b>List</b>           | Write your answer as an itemised series. Your answer should be concise and may be in point form.  |
| <b>Outline</b>        | Provide main points and leave out minor details.  |
| <b>Prove</b>          | Give factual evidence for or against a point, or clear logical reasons which demonstrate the validity of a statement or idea.                             |
| <b>Relate</b>         | Tell the story in clear sequence. Emphasise the links and associations between parts.   |
| <b>Review</b>         | Examine a subject critically in a logical sequence, analysing and commenting on the main points.  |
| <b>State</b>          | Give the relevant points briefly in the relevant sequence.  |
| <b>Summarise</b>      | Just focus on the main points and leave out the details.  |
| <b>To what extent</b> | Consider how far or how much something is true. Similar to evaluate or discuss.   |
| <b>Trace</b>          | Follow the event through different stages and describe its development or progress.   |

