

Tips for Written Assignments

Throughout your time at university you will be asked to prepare many written assignments. Communication is an important transferable skill and writing is one way in which you can communicate and deliver your work. Writing does not come easily to everyone, yet it is a skill that can be practised and improved. The following list gives some tips and advice for when you are preparing your written assignments.

Preparation

- Consider the purpose of your report and your research. What is it you are trying to communicate to the audience and how are you going to collect your data?
- Consider your audience - who will be reading your report? This will help determine the level and depth of the content. How much do they already know on the topic? What will they get from the report?
- Brainstorm the subject. Note down all the information and ideas you have on the topic.
- Think about the time you have to complete your report and set targets for preparation and completion.
- Research the topic thoroughly. Utilise the relevant sources available to you, these could include:
 - Books
 - Internet
 - Journals
 - Lecture notes
 - Newspapers
 - Data collected from experiments you carry out
 - TV
 - Interviews or surveys which you carry out
- Take notes from your reading and research ensuring that you record where you obtained the information

Organisation and Writing

- Consider the structure of your report. There are a number of different styles of report. Click for guidance on writing up case studies and scientific project reports.
- Once you've determined the structure of your report, organise your notes, literature, results and any other information into a skeleton structure. Group together relevant items under each heading or subheading. A plan helps you to develop your arguments/discussion in an orderly and logical fashion.
- Check the organisation of the paper and make sure that it is consistent with the requested format.
- Once you have written your first draft, revise, edit and proofread to ensure clarity, conciseness, completeness and accuracy. Check spelling and grammar.
- Make sure that any diagrams, images or graphs are labelled, and that keys/legends are provided where appropriate.
- Reference any material, including diagrams and figures, which is not your own. When referring to a publication in the main body of your report, reference by giving the last name of the author(s) and the year of the publication.
- All references to original sources should be listed at the back of your report. These should be arranged in alphabetical order according to the last name of the author, or the last name of the first-named author for articles with more than one author. Reference to journal articles and papers should include the year of publication, the full title of the article, the title of the publication/journal in which it appeared, the volume number and the inclusive page numbers of the cited article. References to textbooks should include the year of publication, the title, the publisher, the city of publication, and inclusive page numbers for the work being cited. Here are examples of how to reference both a book and a journal:

Piconi, C. and Maccauro, G. (1999) Zirconia as a ceramic biomaterial, *Biomaterials*, Vol. 20 (1), pp 1-25.

Bolton, W. (1996) *Materials and their Uses*, Butterworth Heinemann, London, pp188.

For further information on how to reference sources visit the Information Service guide to citing: <http://www.i-cite.bham.ac.uk/> (<http://www.i-cite.bham.ac.uk/>)

- Be sure to include the names of everyone that worked on your report and the date of completion.