Research and Study Skills
Information for Tutors

Think. Rethink
Overview

This pack has been designed for tutors of further education students, as well as tutors of students who have recently begun in higher education. Although the activities contained within this pack are primarily intended for students in the further and higher education sectors, it is envisaged that they can also be of benefit to anyone who has an interest in improving their research and study skills.

This third edition of 'Research and Study Skills' builds on the successful first and second editions, published in 2011 and 2014 respectively, which have received international interest.

The second edition built on the first edition by incorporating new activities from Library Services’ Academic Skills Centre including: note taking, critical thinking, time management, paraphrasing and planning and structuring an essay. These complemented 'tried and tested' activities on getting to know an academic library, Google, searching electronic resources, website evaluation, plagiarism and referencing. In this third edition the critical thinking and planning and structuring an essay sections have been re-worked whilst the referencing section has seen the adoption of a more widely used referencing style – Harvard (Cite them Right). More minor changes have been applied elsewhere including: some simplification, new examples, repairing of broken links and bringing activities up-to-date.

Further information about our Research and Study Skills training programme and how it has evolved can be found in an open access article co-written by Anderson and Bull (2014).

We hope this information pack for tutors and librarians, which is intended to be used in conjunction with the revised student packs, provides all of the information required to successfully deliver training on a wide range of essential research and study skills, both within the UK and abroad.

The Library Academic Engagement Team
Library Services, University of Birmingham. 2017

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Research and Study Skills: Research and Evaluation

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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.
Research and Study Skills: Research and Evaluation
Getting to know an academic library

Timescale for the activity

20 minutes (ten minutes for students to complete the quiz, and ten minutes to go through the answers).

Learning outcomes

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

- Recognise that an academic library is very different from a school or college library
- Understand the range of resources, services and facilities that an academic library offers

Background

Students are often overwhelmed by the scale of an academic library and can find it daunting to begin with. They should not feel daunted as there is always lots of help available with using the resources and facilities.

Activity

In order to help acclimatise students to academic libraries the following quiz aims to test their current perceptions against the reality of Library Services at the University of Birmingham.

There are numerous ways in which you can teach this, but the simplest is to ask the students to answer the questions in the space provided within the Student Pack (pages 4–6).

When the students have completed the questions you should then go through the correct answers with them.

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Quiz answers:

1. How many libraries are there at the University of Birmingham?
The University of Birmingham has six libraries plus a separate library for Special Collections (The Cadbury Research Library). Details of all of these libraries can be found at: [www.birmingham.ac.uk/libraries/info/index.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/libraries/info/index.aspx)

2. How many books does the University of Birmingham Library own?
2 – 3 million. At the time of writing the actual figure is approximately 2.8 million books. This figure includes traditional printed books as well as electronic books which are available to all of our students 24/7 anywhere in the world. These books cover a wide range of subjects and support all the taught courses and research programmes offered by the University. Due to the size of the collection it is essential for students to make use of the Library Catalogue to be able to discover and then locate items.
Quiz answers:

3. Which of the following does the University of Birmingham Library have?

Answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to each.

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4. How many electronic journal (academic magazines) articles are downloaded every year at the University of Birmingham?

*Over 4.5 million.* The actual figure increases every year.

**Note:** You can also expand at this point on what a journal article is and why they are so important to academic research.

5. Over 300 members of full-time and part-time staff work for Library Services at the University of Birmingham. Which of the following do they do?

Answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to each.

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2 Note taking

Timescale for the activity
20 minutes (ten minutes for Activity 1 and ten minutes afterwards to discuss effective note taking).

Further help
For further guidance on note taking please visit the Academic Skills Gateway: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/learn

Learning outcomes
By the end of this section students should be able to:
- Identify clear and concise note taking
- Understand that good note taking should concisely summarise the key points and should demonstrate how related ideas are linked
- Appreciate that the approach used in taking notes is a personal preference

Background
Making notes is an important skill in academia. There are many instances of when students would make notes, for example: during lectures, classes or when reading. We make notes for a variety of reasons. These include:
- To help us to concentrate
- To remember important information
- To allow us to process information and clarify ideas
- To keep active through multi-tasking
- To collect material for assignments
- To help revise and prepare for exams
Activity

This activity is designed to allow students to reflect on their current note taking skills.

Ask students to read the text on 'Inclusive Education' which is included in their packs (on page 8). It is also included in this pack on page 9. Students should imagine that they are Education students who need to read the text in preparation for an exam. They should not be given any guidance but simply told that they should ‘read the passage and make notes’. You may like to put some pens, highlighter pens, pencils and paper on the students’ desks (although students should be given the choice of which materials they wish to use).

Students should be given a maximum of ten minutes to do this part of the activity and should be advised to stop (even if they haven’t finished) once the time has elapsed.

Note: It is the style of note taking that students currently use which this activity is seeking and not whether the students can write notes for the entire passage.

Once students have finished the activity, you should discuss with them the different note taking methods that they have used. You may like to ask students to volunteer examples, or you may wish to look at the three examples on the PowerPoint slides to illustrate three ways that students may have made notes. With the PowerPoint slides, you may like to ask students to comment on the style of notes. They may come up with some of the following:

- **Handwritten notes** (PowerPoint slide Handwritten Notes)
  - Notes have been taken on each sentence as it was read without seeing if it was important or not;
  - Equal emphasis was put on all items of information – ie no critical reflection on the aspects that were more/less important;
  - No abbreviations were used (if the notes are for the student’s personal use then abbreviations can save time);
  - Same linear format as the original passage – no linking together of facts and ideas.

- **Highlighted text** (PowerPoint slide Highlighted Text)
  - No thought has been given to the importance of the content. Everything which might be important has been highlighted;
  - The highlighting has kept the note maker busy, but there is no evidence of thought or engagement with the subject;
  - These notes demonstrate a lack of own thoughts, ideas or opinions.

- **Handwritten notes and highlighted text** (PowerPoint slide Notes and Highlights)
  - Highlighted text: highlighting has been used effectively to clearly divide the text into different sections, with the key focus of each section identified. Questions have also been asked by the note taker;
Note taking continued

- Written notes: The key ideas within each of the themes identified have been summarised succinctly. Linkage between the themes has been made;
- These notes reflect key ideas from this passage and suggest that the reader has a clear understanding of the topic and how the concepts relate to each other.
- It is worth remembering that many students now take notes on laptops or tablets. There are many free apps that can help them to organise their electronic notes, such as Evernote. The benefits of electronic notes are that they can easily be edited, tagged and filed.

Activity

Inclusive education – widening participation

Widening participation is a higher education policy introduced by the Labour Government in its 2001 election manifesto. At its simplest, the policy was and is concerned with encouraging and enabling non-traditional groups of students to access higher education institutions through a programme of expansion. Non-traditional students can be defined for example as those who have little or no experience of universities, those from poorer and/or working class backgrounds, black minority ethnic groups, women, older applicants and those with a disability.

The policy’s main driver was its attempts to a) increase the numbers of non-traditional entrants into university – the target then was for 50% of young people aged 18–30 to have experienced higher education by 2010, and b) through a range of activities and interventions to meet society’s economic and social needs. To widen participation, those activities and interventions have been undertaken in collaborative partnerships with schools and colleges. The first of these was the Aimhigher initiative established in 2002. Aimhigher was the national outreach programme for widening participation and it specifically targeted schools, colleges and universities to work collaboratively on raising aspirations and attainment amongst young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Aimhigher delivered a number of programmes including summer schools and masterclasses. Although funding for the Aimhigher programme ceased in 2011, universities continue to provide a range of initiatives that raise aspirations and encourage learners with potential to enter higher education.

The corresponding student pack also contains a template for note taking, which students may wish to try in the future. It contains space for notes, space for responses and questions, and a summary box at the bottom of the page, encouraging students to sum up what they have read at regular intervals.
3 Google

Timescale for the activity
35 minutes.

Learning outcomes
By the end of this section students should be able to:
- Recall that there are three types of Google (Google, Google Scholar and Google Books) which can be useful in finding information for an academic essay.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each type of Google.

Further help
For further guidance on using Google please visit the Academic Skills Gateway: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/research

Background
Students will probably already be familiar with Google and are likely to use it for finding information on a regular basis. Google was founded in 1998 by two university research students, and it processes over a billion search requests a day. In addition to Google there are also two other Google search engines which can be useful if/when finding information for an academic essay: Google Scholar and Google Books.

Google (www.google.co.uk) – this is a search engine which searches over a billion websites.

Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.co.uk) – this is the academic arm of Google. Google has deals with a number of academic publishers and Google Scholar allows users to search across their content. The results can be a mix of citation details, abstracts and entire journal articles. It also searches across journal articles that university academic staff have written and made freely available.

Google Books (http://books.google.co.uk) – this allows you to search across a number of books that have been made available electronically. Google has worked with a number of large research libraries to scan their books and make them freely available to the world. For some books you will find basic publication details, whilst for others you will discover some or all of the entire book.
Activity

This activity will demonstrate the differences between Google, Google Scholar and Google Books.

Give the students an example of your choice or ask them to consider the keyword: Olympics. Ask the students to enter the keyword into each type of Google in turn and execute the search. For each type of Google they should look at how many results are returned, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of the type of information that is found.

Students should enter their findings into the table provided in their packs (page 13). Students should try to think about this from the point of view of finding information for their essays.

When students have completed this, gain feedback from them on what they have discovered. The table on the following page gives an indication of some of the observations that they are likely to have made.
Google

We have filled in the table below as if we had asked the students to search for the word "Olympics" but the benefits and drawbacks will apply to the majority of search topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Google</th>
<th>Number of results</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
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<td>Google</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.google.co.uk">www.google.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Approx: 199,000,000</td>
<td>○ Returns the most results.</td>
<td>○ Hard to find the most useful results amongst the millions that are returned.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>○ Searches across a wide range of materials – a range of websites (eg, news, corporate, government, academic), blogs, videos, images etc.</td>
<td>○ No quality control – posts by anybody in the world can be found and many may contain material of a low academic quality.</td>
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<td>○ Mostly get through to the entire text of the result.</td>
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<td>Google Scholar</td>
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<td><a href="http://scholar.google.co.uk">http://scholar.google.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Approx: 274,000</td>
<td>○ The majority of results are of a good academic standard.</td>
<td>○ Brings back some book results but not all of them (see the number of results for how many books are found via Google Books).</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>○ Provides easy access to academic research that would otherwise be difficult to freely locate.</td>
<td>○ Not always clear if the full item is available.</td>
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<td><a href="http://books.google.co.uk">http://books.google.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Approx: 975,000</td>
<td>○ Provides access to a large number of books electronically.</td>
<td>○ Does not always provide the full item.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>○ Has some useful refining functionality on the left-hand side.</td>
<td>○ Sometimes provides most of the item but with some pages missing.</td>
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<td>○ Books have been through an editorial process which websites may not have been.</td>
<td>○ The books are of varying academic quality.</td>
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Traditional Google returns significantly more results than either Books or Scholar. Please note that these figures are correct as of March 2017 and are likely to increase in the run-up to the next Olympic Games.

Note: We have interrogated the different versions of Google using the basic search box in each instance. However each form of Google has an Advanced Search – by using this you can find even more relevant results. If you have time, demonstrate the Advanced Search options to students for the three forms of Google that have been considered. For more information on how to get the most out of Google look at our online course: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/websearch
Searching electronic resources

Timescale for the activity

40 minutes (ten minutes to brief students on the ideas of keywords and Boolean logic, ten minutes for Activity 1 and 20 minutes for Activity 2).

Learning outcomes

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

- Understand what Boolean logic is and explain how to use it
- Identify keywords in an essay title and think of alternative keywords (synonyms)
- Combine keywords using Boolean logic
- Combine keywords using the Google version of Boolean logic

Further help

For further guidance on searching electronic resources please visit the Academic Skills Gateway: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/research

Background

Very few resources (such as Google, Google Scholar and Google Books) allow you to do a natural language search, such as ‘is there a link between violence in the media and crime?’ Students need to pick out the keywords for their topic and then link them with Boolean operators, such as AND or OR.

Keywords

The keywords in the topic are: violence, media and crime. As well as searching for these keywords, you should also think of synonyms (words with the same meaning). The following table illustrates the idea of keywords and synonyms.

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<th>Synonyms</th>
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<td>fury</td>
<td>television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cruelty</td>
<td>film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggression</td>
<td>press</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students should also consider alternative spellings, for example American spellings, such as color for colour, acronyms such as TV for television, as well as alternative words, such as automobile for car.
Searching electronic resources continued

Boolean Logic

Boolean logic was devised by English mathematician George Boole and can be used to combine keywords to effectively search the web: returning relevant results whilst eliminating insignificant results.

There are three main Boolean operators: AND, OR and NOT.

In Google, a space is used for AND, OR is used for OR and – is used for NOT. To search for a phrase put “ at the start of the first word and ” at the end of the last word (this method of phrase searching also works in Boolean searching). Google will automatically search for synonyms: if you would like Google to search for the exact word you have typed then include a + sign (followed by no space) ahead of the word, eg, +car.

AND is used to join search terms when you want both terms to be present in a record, so it is used to combine the different concepts in your search. This can be illustrated as follows:

Eg, media AND crime (when searching Google you could use: media crime. Alternatively if you wanted media and crime as exact words you would type +media +crime when searching Google).

The shaded area represents the articles requested, with both the word media and the word crime in them.

OR is used to combine synonyms, i.e., words with the same or similar meanings. It will find articles containing either or both words.

Eg, media OR television (when doing this search on Google you would use media OR television).

Thus this search finds articles with the word media, or with the word television, or with both words (in the intersection in the middle).
NOT is used to eliminate concepts from a search. The term following NOT must be absent from the item in order for the record to be returned.

Eg, CFCs NOT HCFCs (when doing this search on Google you would use CFCs –HCFCs or if you wanted CFCs as an exact word you would type +CFCs –HCFCs).

Therefore, this search will retrieve all documents with the term CFCs, but will eliminate any which also have the term HCFCs.

NB: the NOT search should be used with caution as it may eliminate articles which would otherwise have been useful. For example, the above search would eliminate an article comparing the effects of CFCs and HCFCs which may have contained some useful information about CFCs.
Searching electronic resources continued

Activity 1: Boolean Logic Card Game

This activity will help students appreciate the significance of Boolean logic.

Show slides called ‘Boolean Logic’ of the Tutor’s PowerPoint.

Each student is given one randomly selected playing card ensuring that all of the number 7 playing cards (ie, 7 of Clubs, 7 of Hearts, 7 of Spades and 7 of Diamonds) are distributed. It does not matter if the whole pack is not used or if two packs are used – the number of cards distributed will depend on the size the group.

The tutor will tell the students that each playing card is a web page and that the tutor is now going to perform a number of Boolean searches to see which websites (playing cards) will be found. At the start of the activity all students should be seated and they should stand if they believe that their website (playing card) would have been found by performing that search.

The searches to perform and the results that you should see are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search criteria</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can all students with the following cards stand up...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... number 7</td>
<td>Four students should be standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... number 7 AND black</td>
<td>The two students with the black number 7 cards should be standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... number 7 OR black</td>
<td>All four of the students with the number 7 cards should be standing as well as approx. half the class that had a black card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... black OR red</td>
<td>All students should now be standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... red NOT picture (Jack, Queen, King)</td>
<td>Students should not be standing if they have a picture card or a black card. Approx. just under half of the class should be standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... black AND red</td>
<td>No student should be standing as no card is both black and red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 2: Identifying keywords and combining them using Boolean logic

This activity will help students identify keywords, think of synonyms and combine words using Boolean logic.

Show slides called ‘Keywords and Combining’ of the Tutor’s Powerpoint.

Students will be assigned one essay title: these can be taken from the following list of example titles or can be ones of your own choosing.

1. Is there a link between playing video games and aggressive behaviour in children?

2. How has the use of robots affected the car industry?

3. Do greenhouse gases contribute to climate change?

4. How realistic are hospital dramas on television?

For the essay title assigned, students should write on separate post-it notes the answers to the following points (a)-(d). These should then be affixed to the appropriate places on the template on the following page (which can be printed – and enlarged if required – and stuck to the wall in advance).

(a) Identify the keywords you might use if you wanted to find information to write the essay that you have been assigned.

(b) For each keyword that you have identified in part (a), try to think of at least one other alternative word meaning the same thing (synonym).

(c) How would you combine the keywords to get the best results using Boolean logic?

(d) How would you combine the keywords to get the best results using the Google form of Boolean logic?
## Essay Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Boolean Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synonyms</th>
<th>Google Form of Boolean Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Searching electronic resources continued**

**Searching Activity: Example answers**

Possible answers to the Searching Activity. Please note the Boolean logic and Google Boolean logic parts are only suggestions and not an exhaustive list of answers which students may come up with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords Synonyms</th>
<th>Boolean Logic</th>
<th>Google Form of Boolean Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Is there a link between playing video games and aggressive behaviour in children?</strong></td>
<td>□ video games □ aggressive □ children</td>
<td>□ “video games” AND aggressive AND children □ “video games” OR “computer games” OR “arcade games”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ computer games, arcade games □ violent, hostile □ boys, girls, teenagers</td>
<td>□ “video games” OR “computer games” OR “arcade games”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. How has the use of robots affected the car industry?</strong></td>
<td>□ robots □ car □ industry</td>
<td>□ robots AND car AND manufacture □ robots AND car AND manufacture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ automated machines □ vehicle, automobile □ manufacture, business</td>
<td>□ robots AND car AND manufacture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Do greenhouse gases contribute to climate change?</strong></td>
<td>□ greenhouse gases □ climate change</td>
<td>□ greenhouse AND gases AND “climate change” □ “global warming” AND CFCs NOT HCFCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ emissions, aerosols, CFCs □ global warming</td>
<td>□ “global warming” AND CFCs NOT HCFCs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. How realistic are hospital dramas on television?</strong></td>
<td>□ hospital dramas □ television</td>
<td>□ “hospital dramas” OR “medical dramas” □ “medical drama” AND TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ medical dramas, Casualty □ TV, media</td>
<td>□ “medical drama” AND TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** In Google, a space is used for AND, OR is used for OR and – is used for NOT. To search for a phrase put “at the start of the first word and” at the end of the last word. Google will automatically search for synonyms: if you would like Google to search for the exact word you have typed then include a + sign (followed by no space) ahead of the word, eg, +car.
5 Website evaluation

Timescale for the activity

30–40 minutes (five minutes to introduce the topic, 15–20 minutes for the students to evaluate the websites and 10–15 for feedback/discussion).

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section students should be able to:
- Understand the difference between primary and secondary resources
- Recall some of the key questions that need to be asked in order to evaluate a website for academic use
- Critically evaluate websites
- Work as a small team
- Feedback key ideas to a larger group of peers

Further help

For further guidance on website evaluation please visit the Academic Skills Gateway: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/research

Background

Students will often use the internet to do their research for academic essays. It is an important skill for students to be discerning and able to identify whether a website is suitable, as a source of information, for use in an academic assignment.
Activity

This activity allows students to compare and contrast and ultimately evaluate four different websites on nuclear power. The principles of this activity can, of course, be applied to other topics besides nuclear power. Therefore if you would prefer to use this activity as a template, but to use a different topic that is more relevant to your students, then please feel free. We will, however, remain with nuclear power for the remainder of this activity.

This activity will require the students to work in groups of four to five around a PC.

Ask the students to imagine that they have an essay due in on the topic of nuclear power the following day. It is now late at night and the only resource they have access to is the internet. They find the following four websites on the topic:

- World Nuclear Association – www.world-nuclear.org/
- World Information Service on Energy (WISE) – www.wiseinternational.org
- Culham Centre for Fusion Energy – www.ccfe.ac.uk/
- Wikipedia – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_power

The students need to spend five minutes looking at each website in turn. The students should use the questions on the Website Evaluation Checklist, which is included in the Student Pack (as well as on page 24 of this pack), to help them to decide the plus and negative points of each website. They should record their findings in the Website Evaluation Table (also found in the Student Pack).

Note: Students can sometimes spend a disproportionate amount of time looking at the first website listed; it is useful at five-minute intervals to ask them to move onto the next website. You may want to point out to students that they are to evaluate the quality of the information on the website and not how aesthetically pleasing it is!

It is useful to speak to each group as they are working on this activity to keep them on track and to ask them searching questions to probe their thinking eg, Do you think the website is biased, and if yes, why? Do you think the people that produce this website are experts on the topic? Do you think the website is up-to-date enough?

When the students have looked at all four websites and have a few plus and negative points for each one it is then time for the small groups to report back to the whole class. There are a number of ways in which this can be done, but one way which works well is as follows. Start with group one and ask them to feedback on the plus points of website one. When they have done this ask the rest of the class if they have anything further to add on the plus points of that website. Then ask group two to feedback on the negative points of website one, again opening the discussion to the rest of the class when they
have finished. Repeat this process until you have looked at the plus and negative points of all of the websites. A list of some of the possible answers can be found below:

**World Nuclear Association** – [www.world-nuclear.org](http://www.world-nuclear.org)

**Plus Points:**
- Regularly updated.
- Easy to read basic section for when new to the topic but with more in-depth information available too.
- Useful facts and figures and further information can be found in the 'Information Library'.

**Negative Points:**
- The mission of the organisation is to promote nuclear energy and support companies that promote nuclear energy. Clear evidence of a positive bias for nuclear energy.
- They do not always reference where they get their facts from: so how do we know that it is reliable?
- Membership of the World Nuclear Association is mainly made up of energy providers who may want to sell us nuclear energy in the future which could cause a bias in their content.

**World Information Service on Energy (WISE)** – [www.wiseinternational.org](http://www.wiseinternational.org)

**Plus Points:**
- Very biased – its main agenda is as a campaign website (look at the language that is used and how the topic is represented). The mission statement clearly states that the aim of the organisation is for a world without nuclear power.
- Some of the information is very simplistic and not of a suitable quality for an academic assignment.
- Not all of the claims that are made are supported with evidence (so how do we know they are right?).
- Not scientific experts in the field.

**Culham Centre for Fusion Energy** – [www.ccfe.ac.uk](http://www.ccfe.ac.uk)

**Plus Points:**
- Written by scientific scholars (see the About us section of the website) – therefore the information should be unbiased and is backed up by scientific evidence and theories.
- Links to useful journal articles and other reports on the topic fully referenced and written by experts under the ‘Resources’ button.
- Also includes a nice introduction to nuclear energy under the ‘Fusion Energy’ button for someone that is new to the topic.
- Information spans back over a number of years.
Website evaluation continued

**Negative Points:**
- A limited number of documents are published every year (this is because they spend time on carrying out research ensuring that the information is as accurate as possible before publication).
- Students need to understand that nuclear fusion relates to nuclear energy which may not be clear to a new person to the subject.

Wikipedia – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_power

**Plus Points:**
- Regularly updated – click on the ‘View History’ tab to see when the article was last edited.
- Provides an easy to understand overview of the topic.
- Provides a useful list of notes, references and suggestions for further reading. A good Wikipedia article should have links to references throughout the text providing details of where they got their source material from.
- The ‘Talk’ tab shows the discussion that Wikipedia editors have when creating the entry – can help to highlight areas for debate on the topic.
- This article does not have an ‘Edit’ button. This means that only those that have proven themselves as being good Wikipedia editors can make changes to this article. It is unusual for a Wikipedia article to not have an ‘Edit’ option but this is sometimes the case for controversial topics to stop those with extreme views on the topic from constantly editing the article to reflect their view point.

**Negative Points:**
- Encyclopedic level of entry – in academia references to encyclopedias such as Wikipedia are frowned upon. They are considered to be acceptable starting points for finding information on a topic but if students need to reference them in their essays it indicates that they have not read widely enough on the topic as they should be able to reference more in-depth items on the topic (books, journal articles, primary sources etc) in order to support the points they make in their essays.
- Notice how some of the references link back to some of the other websites that we have just covered. Does this influence what we think of this Wikipedia article?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ When you search the web you will get thousands of results. Stick to the ones that are directly related to your essay topic and do not get distracted!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Consider the country/countries that this information refers to and only use if it is appropriate to your topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Anybody can post material onto the web. It is important to identify the author or organisation and check their credentials. The ‘About Us’ section of a website can be useful for checking these details.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Check to see if the website gives a balanced viewpoint. Websites are created by individuals or organisations that wish to promote their own point of view. This may (intentionally or unintentionally) lead to bias. Consider why the web page has been written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Look at the way the material has been written and the language that has been used. For example is the language sensationalist? Check to make sure that all claims are backed up with appropriate primary/secondary material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ It is good practice to use a variety of sources of information so that you can see (and assess for yourself) all points of view on a topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Primary material – is first-hand information produced by the author/organisation eg, data from their experiments, photographs, maps etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Secondary material – uses, interprets, evaluates, criticises and/or comments on primary material eg, a newspaper article that comments on the results of an experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Example – The novel Harry Potter is a primary source as it was created from the mind of its author – J.K. Rowling. The book <em>Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter</em> by Elizabeth Heilman is a secondary source as it analyses the Harry Potter novels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Secondary material cannot exist without the primary material and involves third party interpretation (which could be inaccurate). A good secondary source will always take you to the primary material which allows you to check the interpretation and come to your own conclusions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Check when the web page was last updated (you can often find this information near the bottom of the page or look for clues within the text). It is not uncommon for people to publish material on the web and then not remove/update it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Some topic areas change more rapidly than others, for example the law changes daily as new legislation is released so a website that has not been updated since 2014 may be very out-of-date!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Critical thinking – arguments

Timescale for the activity

35 minutes (ten minutes for Activity 1, ten minutes for Activity 2 and 15 minutes for Activity 3)

Learning outcomes

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

- Understand what arguments are
- Analyse simple arguments and identify the premises and conclusions
- Understand why good arguments are required in academic writing, and how they relate to essays

Further help

For further guidance on critical thinking please visit the Academic Skills Gateway: http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/learn

Background

These activities will help students to gain a better understanding of arguments and how to break them down into their constituent parts. By doing so, it becomes easier to see the logic behind the conclusions offered, and to identify and critically analyse the evidence offered in support.
Activity 1

Definitions

This activity will help students to think what is meant by 'argument' in academic terms as opposed to its everyday meaning. Split the students into small groups or pairs and ask them to write down in their student packs the different meanings of the term 'argument'. Give them four minutes to do this and then ask them to feedback to the rest of the group.

Students will come up with their own definitions of what constitutes an argument – a row, a disagreement, a misunderstanding, a fight etc. Some will uncover a more accurate definition and should be encouraged to share with the group, others honing the definition still further until a consensus is reached.

Suggest to students that they note down in their packs how an academic argument differs from the ideas that they thought of. Go through the basic definition of an argument with the students.

The basic definition of an argument is as follows:

- A set of CLAIMS, or STATEMENTS (that which can be true or false)
- One of the claims is called the CONCLUSION, the remaining are called the PREMISES
- The premises are intended as offering REASONS to believe or accept the conclusion
- That’s it!
Activity 2

Identifying claims

This activity helps students to distinguish between claims and non-claims.

Only certain types of statements can be used in arguments – these are claims. Students should be aware of those that do not count as such.

Talk through the following characteristics and check for understanding:

☐ They are either true or false
☐ They are declarative (not questions or commands; they describe how things are, were, will be, would be, could be or should be)
☐ They are clear and unambiguous – never vague

Encourage students to look at the following list of ten would-be claims and consider which are so and which are not, based upon the above criteria. When they have considered them, elicit responses.

Which of the following are claims, and which are not?

1. All cats have four legs. (Claim – it is false, there are cats out there with three legs or none. The fact that it is false means that it is a claim.)
2. Barack Obama was the 44th president of the United States. (Claim – it is true. The fact that it is true means it is a claim.)
3. Don’t walk through the city at night. (Non-claim – this is a command/imperative. It is neither true nor false, but could be construed as good advice.)
4. Why do people always talk on their phones on the bus? (Non-claim – question: not true or false.)
5. My uncle is very tall. (Non-claim – the concept of ‘very tall’ is too vague. There is no agreed-upon method for determining this as a standard measurement. ‘Very tall’ will have different meanings in different situations and environments.)
6. There is life in outer space. (Claim – this is either true or false, even if we don’t yet know the answer.)
7. All dogs have fleas. (Claim – it is demonstrably false. The fact that it is false means it is a claim.)
8. Are you serious? (Non-claim – question: not true or false.)
9. Julius Caesar was the best. (Non-claim – vague and potentially subjective. Best at what? By whose measurement?)
10. You shouldn’t be in here. (Claim – either true or false, depending on the context.)
Activity 3

Argument structure

Now that claims have been defined, this activity enables students to identify the premises and conclusions in an argument.

Explain that, in an argument, one of the claims offered must be a conclusion that the writer (or speaker) wants the reader (or listener) to accept, while the other(s) are offered as premises, which are reasons why the conclusion should be accepted. If this doesn’t happen, it’s not an argument.

Take a look at the following example with the students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Premises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You should join your local gym.</td>
<td>Regular exercise is key to losing weight and staying healthy, and local gym memberships are cheaper than ever!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talk through the breakdown of the distinct parts:

Here, the argument is simple. The speaker is recommending that the listener join their local gym

- You should join your local gym.

This is the argument’s conclusion.

There are three reasons offered to support this:
1. Regular exercise is key to losing weight.
2. Regular exercise is key to staying healthy.
3. Local gym memberships are cheaper than ever.

These are the argument’s premises.

Notice how the first and second premises (losing weight and staying healthy) are combined in the original text. It is sometimes easy to miss combined premises like this, but listing them individually (as above) can help clarify all the claims of an argument. This is known as putting the argument into standard form.

When students have understood the concepts of premises and conclusions, ask them to complete the following task (here with answers and the arguments shown in standard form. Illustrate standard form to students, and notice how truncated premises are written in full for purposes of clarity).

Look at the following arguments.

Underline the PREMISES and circle the CONCLUSIONS.

Animals do not have a choice in whether they are used for food or not, and killing them for our own needs is selfish, so all people should be vegetarian.

Standard form:

- **Premise 1**: Animals do not have a choice in whether they are used for food or not.
- **Premise 2**: Killing animals for our own needs is selfish.
- **Conclusion**: All people should be vegetarian.
Following this, talk though the two conditions of argument analysis: logic and truth:

**Analysing arguments**

An argument should conform to two basic conditions if its conclusion is to be accepted. These are known as the truth condition and the logic condition.

You can perform checks on an argument to see whether it satisfies these:

**Truth condition**
Are the premises offered credible? That is to say, are they believable? What are their sources?

**Logic condition**
Does the conclusion make sense, given the premises stated? Does the conclusion follow, logically, or is the writer asking you to take a leap of faith?
Finally, have a brief discussion about the importance of argumentation in the essay-writing process, and university life in general. The following is included in the student pack for clarification:

**How can understanding arguments help you to be a better student?**

1. **You can critically analyse the arguments of others.**

   You will come across many arguments at university – and some will be better than others. Good critical thinking and skills in argumentation will help you to weigh-up the claims and conclusions made by scholars.

2. **You can critically analyse your own arguments.**

   Most essays you will be asked to write at university will take the form of arguments. In these, you will make a central point in order to respond to a problem and, in turn, this point will be supported by premises from your reading and research. Whether writing for a piece of assessed work, or speaking to a tutor in a seminar group, you will be routinely asked to back-up what you are saying with evidence. Learning the basics of how to present an argument is something that will help you at all stages of academic life, and testing your own assertions is a key part of this process.

Elicit from students how they may have used argumentation in their prior studies. Some may suggest activities such as debate clubs or philosophy and critical thinking A level study.

It should be pointed out that anyone who has used the common ‘Point, Evidence, Explanation’ form of paragraph and essay planning has engaged in basic argumentation, and that this provides a useful starting point for more rigorous work in higher education.
Research and Study Skills: Academic Writing
1 Time management

Timescale for the activity

25 minutes (14 minutes for Activity 1 and 11 minutes for presentation or further discussion)

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section students 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 students to keep control of all of their work and social activities. It allows them to prioritise and complete activities to deadlines, for example handing in essays on time or revising for exams. Managing time effectively results in students feeling less stressed and consequently more able to plan their studies and achieve good grades.

Time management presentation

(PowerPoint slides on time management)

For the ‘So is this you?’ slide ask the students if they recognise themselves in any of the speech bubble comments.

For the ‘Importance of time management slide’ explain to the students that time management is a skill that they need not only whilst studying but also within any future work place. Inform them that good time management will allow them to stay in control of their own diaries/lives rather than always having to react to the latest fast looming deadline. If students can stay in control of their study schedules then they should be able to leave themselves enough time to edit and proofread essays before submission. Being more in control of their assignments will also reduce anxiety and stress. This session offers tips and practical activities to improve time management skills.
Prioritise

Discuss the idea of prioritisation with the students. It is not enough to work hard and be well organised if their time is spent on non-urgent or unimportant tasks. To be effective, students need to be able to decide which tasks are important, and to focus on those. This is called **prioritisation**.

If you have more than 25 minutes to run this activity you could spend an additional five minutes here asking students how they currently prioritise their work and if they have any techniques for doing this.

A tool students could use to help them to prioritise is the ‘to do’ list. Writing a to do list involves noting down all of the tasks that need to be completed. Each task should not be too large. For example, instead of listing ‘revise for exams’, list ‘revise the seven pillars of Islam for the religious studies exam’. However, it is not enough to just list all of the tasks; students need to be able to identify an order of importance, prioritising those tasks that need to be completed by a certain date. It can be difficult sometimes knowing just what to prioritise, and using ‘The Four Ds’ might be useful.

**The Four Ds.**

- **Do** – these are the tasks that really need to be done within the short-term future. For example handing in an assessed essay on time.
- **Delete** – these are the tasks that do not need to be done, 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 others could be asked if they could help with during particularly busy times, for example walking the family dog.

Activity 1

Split the class into groups, no larger than five students per group.

The students will be able to find the following scenario in their student packs:

**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.**

In their packs, students will have details of 17 tasks which they need to consider before they start their work experience at 8.45am tomorrow. They should be asked to allocate the tasks under the Do, Delete, Delay and Delegate headings as they think most appropriate. Students should arrange the items under the ‘Do’ heading in a timeline order in which they would complete them.
Time management continued

Give the students seven minutes in which to complete this task. Then ask each group to feedback and look at which tasks they have allocated under each heading.

The packs that are given to each group should contain the Do, Delete, Delay and Delegate headings and details of the 17 tasks (the headings are given below and can be photocopied, the tasks are given on the following page).

Each heading and task needs to end up on a separate sheet of paper. There are several ways that you can reproduce these details for the student packs, including printing each out, laminating and then cutting to size. Alternatively the headings and tasks can be printed onto magnetic paper, cut to size and used on classroom whiteboards (assuming they are magnetic!).

**DO**

**DELETE**

**DELAY**

**DELEGATE**
Time management continued

Type out the following tasks using a large font size and ensure that each group will have all of the tasks in their Activity 1 pack.

1. You have just been informed by text message that your new mobile phone is ready for collection.
2. You need to go into school to drop off your project before 2.00pm. (45 minutes)
3. Your cat has an appointment at the vet for 6.00pm. (1 hour and 45 minutes)
4. You need to buy a black skirt or trousers so that you have something suitable to wear at the work experience tomorrow. (45 minutes)
5. You notice that there is a stain on the jacket you intended to wear with your skirt/trousers. Take it to the three-hour dry-cleaners which closes at 4.30pm. (25 minutes)
6. You need to get to the cashpoint. (15 minutes)
7. Your best friend has just split from their partner and plans on coming round tonight. (two hours)
8. You promised your neighbour to mow her lawn. (15 minutes)
9. Sudden email alert – The accountancy firm have given you a small task to prepare for tomorrow. (two hours)
10. You have a piano lesson at 5.30pm (45 minutes)
11. You are training for a charity half marathon. You have been told to prepare by running 45 minutes a day.
12. You promised your mum that you would tidy your bedroom and buy the ingredients for this evening’s meal. (1 hour)
13. You need to pick up two books that you ordered from your local library. (45 minutes)
14. Your dad is at home for lunch because his work meeting was cancelled. (30 minutes)
15. You have a parcel to pick up from the Royal Mail Centre. It closes at 12 noon. (ten minutes)
16. Text alert – Your sister is reminding you that you promised to help her with her GCSE maths re-sit exam paper after school. (50 minutes)
17. Your very, very hot date from last night has just text you to arrange another date…
There is no 100% right or wrong answer but here are some comments on each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. You need to go into school to drop off your project before 2.00pm. (45 minutes)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This should be on the ‘Do’ list as it is something important that has to be completed that day. This needs to be done fairly early on in the time line as it has a 2.00pm deadline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **4. You need to buy a black skirt or trousers so that you have something suitable to wear for the work experience tomorrow. (45 minutes)** |
| This should be on the ‘Do’ list as it is important to look presentable for work experience. It should perhaps have already been done by now. It would also be difficult to delegate to someone else as they may need to try on the item of clothing to ensure it fits. Needs to be done fairly early on in the time line depending on what time the shops close. If they are thinking of a late night shopping centre (for example the Bull Ring Shopping Centre in Birmingham does not close until 8.00pm) then they could possibly multi-task here and combine it with seeing their friend who has just split up with their partner. But remember they should aim for an early night to be fresh for work experience tomorrow! |

| **5. You notice that there is a stain on the jacket you intended to wear with your skirt/trousers. Take it to the three-hour dry-cleaners which closes at 4.30pm. (25 minutes)** |
| This needs to be done before 1.30pm on the ‘Do’ list as it takes three hours for the items to be cleaned. Did the students also consider setting aside time to collect the garment later on in the schedule? It could possibly also be delegated to either the dad who visits for lunch or the brother. |

| **6. You need to get to the cashpoint. (15 minutes)** |
| This needs to be on the ‘Do’ list as the scenario states that they have little money and they may need cash for buying a new skirt/trousers and paying for the dry-cleaning. They may also need bus/train fare to get to the work-experience the following day. |

| **7. Your best friend has just split from their partner and plans on coming round tonight. (two hours)** |
| Depending on how heart-broken the friend is this could possibly be delayed. They need to consider if this friend is really a time-stealer. If this is a good friend and they are genuinely distraught then the students may wish to add this to their ‘Do’ list towards the end of the day. The students will have had an active day and so relaxing with a friend at the end of the evening may not be a negative thing. They should be aiming to get a work and life balance. |
Comments continued

### DO continued

9. Sudden email alert – The accountancy firm have given you a small task to prepare for tomorrow. (two hours)
It is very important to get this done so this should be on the ‘Do’ list. We would not recommend that the students do this late on their timeline in case it is actually more involved than originally expected and also because they may wish to have a few hours away from the work so that they can review it and not be completing it when they are too tired.

14. Your dad is at home for lunch because his work meeting was cancelled. (30 minutes).
The student does need to stop for lunch at some point during this hectic day in order to give them the energy to carry on with all of these tasks. Dad may also be able to help with some of the tasks for example buying the ingredients for the evening meal.

### DELETE

10. You have a piano lesson at 5.30pm (45 minutes).
If possible it may be best to delay or delete the piano lesson for this week, but this may not be an obligation that they can get out of; for example if the piano tutor is expecting the payment for that lesson.

11. You are training for a charity half marathon. You have been told to prepare by running 45 minutes a day.
This could be on the ‘Delete’ list. In an ideal world they would do this every day but considering the number of things to be done missing just one day’s worth of training for a charity run should not be a big problem. Again they could consider multi-tasking and ask their friend who has just split from their partner to go with them.
### DELAY

1. You have just been informed by text message that your new mobile phone is ready for collection.
   To have received a text message implies that they already have a working mobile phone and so would not require the new phone urgently. We would expect to see this item in the ‘Delay’ column.

8. You promised your neighbour to mow her lawn. (15 minutes).
   This could probably be delayed or if it needed doing urgently delegated to the brother (perhaps with a promise to reciprocate) who also has the day off school.

13. You need to pick up two books that you ordered from your local library. (45 minutes).
   There is no indication that the books are needed urgently so this could be delayed to another day.

15. You have a parcel to pick up from the Royal Mail Centre. It closes at 12 noon. (ten minutes).
   There is no indication that the parcel is needed urgently, and the majority of the time you know what is contained within a parcel that you are having delivered (as you may have ordered it) so this could be delayed to another day.

16. Text alert – Your sister is reminding you that you promised to help her with her GCSE maths re-sit exam paper after school. (50 minutes).
   This depends on when the re-sit paper is due to take place and if anyone else in the family could help with this. If the task can’t be delegated and the re-sit exam is tomorrow then this would need to be done today. If the re-sit was not happening for a few weeks then this could be delayed.

17. Your very, very hot date from last night has just text you to arrange another date…
   As they only saw the date last night, another date could be delayed until later in the week when they are less busy.

### DELEGATE

3. Your cat has an appointment at the vet for 6.00pm. (1 hour and 45 minutes)
   This could potentially be ‘Delegated’ to either the brother who is also home all day or to the dad if they speak to him at lunch time.

12. You promised your mum that you would tidy your bedroom and buy the ingredients for this evening’s meal. (One hour)
   This purchasing of the ingredients does need to be done by somebody so it may be worth delegating this to the brother if he has time who is also off from school that day.
Time Management continued

Time Stealers

Tell the students that it is easy to unwittingly become the victims of time stealers. They need to be aware of the things that can steal their time and ensure that they manage these, so that they make time for them within their schedule (as friends and family are important – it is about getting the correct balance between work and social life).

- Friends – depending on their schedule they may not always be able to go to every social activity they are invited to. They need to learn how to prioritise the important events in their lives and how to delay the other ones for a time when they have less work to complete.
- Family – they need to ensure they have a quiet or private study space where they can focus, eg, a library, without interruptions.
- Romance – they may need to schedule in time for romantic partners and romantic partners should understand and give them space if they have important work commitments.
- Jobs – they need to consider when taking on part-time jobs how many hours per week they can work for and still leave enough time for study and social commitments – they need to consider this when applying for jobs or when accepting additional hours.
- Social Media – it is easy for anyone to think that they will spend just a moment or two to check Facebook and Twitter updates. In reality, they will often spend longer than anticipated especially when responding to those updates or alerts. Suggest that students check social media and emails at specified times during the day or when they have accomplished a certain task, for example once they have written 500 words of an essay.
- Box set bingeing – advise them not to let addictive TV programmes eat up all of their time! Again, suggest using leisure activities such as watching favourite shows as a reward for meeting weekly targets, or as a way to relax when needed.
Create SMART Goals
Using the SMART technique can help students consider what is involved in each task and how long it will really take to complete it.

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

The key is to:

- **Work SMARTer** – set SMART goals.
- **Prioritise tasks** – students need to work out what is most important and when the deadlines for those tasks are – consider creating a list.
- **Schedule time** – perhaps draw up a timetable – very useful for when planning revision.
- **Manage their time stealers** – especially family, friends, social media, computer games and television programmes – arrange specific times to accommodate ‘stealers’.
- **Manage interruptions** – interruptions occur when people know where you are so students should consider their work space. Libraries are good places to study because it is harder to be interrupted or use mobile phones – library protocols. Advise students to let people know they are studying and turn off mobile phones and Facebook/Twitter alerts.
- **Avoid procrastination** – They need to stop worrying about what pen or notebook they want to use and just get on with the task in hand. It will be less stressful for them in the end.
- **Organise and manage their work space** – if they keep their work in order it will be easier for them to focus on the task.
Plagiarism and when to reference

Timescale for the activity
Total time: 15–20 minutes.

Learning outcomes
By the end of this section students 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 session aims to highlight all the different forms of plagiarism to help students 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.

Universities have many ways of detecting plagiarism. As well as the expertise of the academic staff who mark the work, most universities will also use plagiarism detecting software such as Turnitin.
Plagiarism and when to reference continued

Activity

To start you may like to read out the following definitions of plagiarism:


Ask the students to complete the plagiarism quiz which they will find in the Student Packs (see page 10). When they have completed this, go through the answers with them. Some explanatory text for each answer is also provided.

Note: in the quiz we frequently refer to the word ‘credit’. In the case of academic writing this would usually translate into ‘marks’: ie, gaining credit means gaining higher marks.

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 ☐

   This is clearly plagiarism because you have paid someone to write the assignment for you. You are then submitting someone else’s work and claiming it as your own.

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 ☐

   This is plagiarism as you are effectively re-submitting your cousin’s assignment and claiming it as your own. You haven’t credited your cousin for the work that you have copied and therefore regardless of how much or how little you have copied it will still be deemed as plagiarism.
3. In your essay you discuss your own thoughts on banking bonuses. Do you need to reference?

Yes ☑️ No ☐️ Unsure ☐️

These are your own thoughts; you are not relying on the thinking of others. Therefore this isn’t plagiarism. The only time when this could be plagiarism is if the student had already used these same ideas and wording in another piece of graded work and they had not acknowledged this. This is called auto-plagiarism.

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 provide a reference for this?

Yes ☑️ No ☐️ Unsure ☐️

Strictly speaking you don’t need to reference this as it is common knowledge (ie, something that the majority of people will know). However if you do reference this you will not be penalised, but a reference in such instances is unnecessary.

5. You include a table of data or a picture from another source. Do you need to reference?

Yes ☑️ No ☐️ Unsure ☐️

Just because this is a table of data or an image, it doesn’t exclude it from the referencing process. For example, if you included a table of data in your work and didn’t reference it, the conclusion the reader would come to is that you had generated the data and created the table yourself. If you didn’t generate the data or create the table you would be taking credit for someone else’s work. The same can be said to be true for photographs, images, pictures, figures etc. Including a reference will also enable the reader to locate the primary data for themselves.

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 ☐️

You are using Richard Dawkins’ views (rather than your own) and even though you have not quoted word for word you will still need to reference to credit his views: otherwise the reader will assume they are your own views and give you unearned credit accordingly.
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 ☐️

This is called ‘collusion’ which is a low level form of plagiarism. This is a common form of unintentional plagiarism. For example there have been instances where two people have studied together, shared materials and chatted about the topic. The problem arises when the two students sit down and write their essays and discuss as they do so what they are about to write for each part of the essay. The essays are consequently likely to be very similar in both structure and opinion. Therefore the marker can no longer distinguish whose work they are marking; ie, did all of the good ideas come from student A or student B? Markers need to be able to assess students on their own work and their own merit.

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 ☐️

This is a lower form of plagiarism and may be classed as ‘bad academic practice’. Wherever possible students should visit the original source (to ensure the information used or quotation is correct) and reference that. Where this isn’t possible they will need to cite both sources in their citation (for example: Smith (2010, cited in Jones, 2017)) and provide a full reference for each in their reference list.

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 ☐️

This is precisely what students should be doing!

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

Timescale for the activity

40 minutes (ten minutes to introduce the topic and activity, 15 minutes for students to complete the activity, and 15 minutes to go through the answers).

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section students 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 students have found, and they go onto use in their 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 made 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)). Students should always check with their tutor(s) which style they are expected to use for their assignments.
Referencing continued

Activity

The following activity will teach students how to include indicative references (citations) in the body of their assignment as well as how to construct a full reference list at the end.

Imagine that the students have been asked to complete a short assignment on *The Chinese and Indian Economies*. In order to research this topic they have used the following five works:


For the purposes of this activity, we are asking that students 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 journal articles that students are likely to read will be in electronic format).

First of all we will consider how to include these references as indicative references in the body of the text. Many people like to use the Harvard system as the indicative reference allows the reader to clearly see the author and year of publication of the information that has been used.

So let’s start by showing your students how to put the indicative reference in the text. To do this, display the text on the following page which includes highlighted gaps where the indicative references need to go. The indicative references are placed immediately after where a student has directly quoted from another source (the direct quote should of course have quotation marks around it) or to show where they have got their idea, claim or facts from (in order to acknowledge the intellectual debt). The references are inserted into the text on the following page in the order that they were introduced above.

Note: in this course pack we have tried to use resources which are freely available online that you can use as examples. The items can all be found from the following URLs:


Note: you may like to project this text onto a large screen or reproduce onto a large sheet of paper.
The Chinese and Indian Economies

‘In 2007, China and India together contributed nearly as much to global growth as the United States’ (Eichengreen et al., 2010, p. xxv). Both economies have grown significantly over the past 30 years. Agrawal and Khan (2011) show how ‘Gross Domestic Product’ (also known as GDP, a measure of economic growth) has increased for both economies between 1975 and 2009. Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar (2010) explore academic research conducted on these two economies. The research considers the different ways in which China and India have developed as well as the challenges that they face to sustain growth. China and India have the two largest populations in the world (World Bank Group, 2014). In order to fully understand their recent rapid economic growth and future challenges, it is essential to look not only at the business and economic landscape of these countries but also to consider the political, social and environmental backdrops. Tomlinson (2013) takes these factors into account in his exploration of the Indian economy whilst Steinfeld (2010) does similarly for China; including painting a picture of how life in China has changed considerably during the period 1989-2009.
When completed the highlighted sections of the text should look as follows. They are in the order in which you will have filled them in on the previous page:

(Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar, 2010, p. xxv)
Agrawal and Khan (2011)
Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar (2010)
(World Bank Group, 2016)
Tomlinson (2013)
Steinfeld (2010)

Notes:
1) We have used a corporate author for the websites – students will realise later on in the activity why and so no need to draw too much attention to this at this stage.
2) Ideally, when quoting a specific part from a work, the citation should include a page number to help the reader navigate efficiently to the relevant part(s) of the work. For example: (Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar, 2010, p. xxv).
3) In the cases where the author’s surname is needed in order for the sentence to make sense, then the year of publication is the only element which needs to go in brackets (otherwise you would be repeating the author’s surname unnecessarily!).
4) Where it is unclear when the material was written/last updated, use (no date) in lieu of the year.

Obviously the indicative reference is insufficient for anyone to go away and find the quoted material for themselves. Therefore we turn our attention to the full reference list at the end of the assignment which will allow readers to find the quoted material for themselves.

There are numerous ways in which students can learn how to do this. In a 30 minute session we would recommend dividing the class up and assigning one of the five items above to each group (see page 46). If time allows you may like each group to have a go at referencing all five items. Students could also do this individually.

Pages 50–52 are in turn dedicated to give all of the information that is required to fully reference one of the three different types of material (book, journal, website) that are included in the exercise.

Notes:
1) A fuller guide is included in the Student Pack, but we have found that students stay more focussed on the exercise when they just use the information on pages 50–52 (13–15 in the Student Pack) that is relevant to the item that they are being asked to reference.
2) For the journal reference, a DOI (or ‘Digital Object Identifier’) is referred to. The DOI is the unique reference assigned to a particular article, rather like each car has a unique registration number. Most articles published in the last 10–15 years will have a DOI which can often be found on the first page of the article. Older articles with DOIs are less frequent, but certainly in existence. Students should be advised that if they can see a DOI easily it should be included in their reference; if they can’t then the reference will just finish after the page numbers.
Students need to use this information in order to create the reference(s) for the material they have been asked to reference. There are several ways students can feedback to you what they have done, but perhaps the easiest way is for them to type it up and then you project it on a big screen in the classroom. You can then go through the students’ attempts one-by-one in front of the whole class and correct, as appropriate, as you go. The fully referenced assignment can be seen on page 53. Note that the references in the full reference list are arranged in alphabetical order of author’s surname.

We have found it best to give students a photocopy of the fully referenced assignment as we are going through the students’ answers. This is so that they can clearly see what the difference is between a slightly incorrect answer and a perfect one.
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:

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:

If two works by the same author(s) published in the same year [this title should be in bold] 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)
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:

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 then also omit the DOI.
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 (*italics*)
4. Available at:
5. The web address
6. (Accessed: date the web page was accessed)

Example:

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):


If no date:
Replace the bracketed year eg, (2017) with (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).
The fully referenced essay would look as follows:

The Chinese and Indian Economies

‘In 2007, China and India together contributed nearly as much to global growth as the United States’ (Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar, 2010). Both economies have grown significantly over the past 30 years. Agrawal and Khan (2011) show how ‘Gross Domestic Product’ (also known as GDP, a measure of economic growth) has increased for both economies between 1975 and 2009. Eichengreen, Gupta and Kumar (2010) explore academic research conducted on these two economies. The research considers the different ways in which China and India have developed as well as the challenges that they face to sustain growth.

China and India have the two largest populations in the world (World Bank Group, 2016). In order to fully understand their recent rapid economic growth and future challenges, it is essential to look not only at the business and economic landscape of these countries but also to consider the political, social and environmental backdrops. Tomlinson (2013) takes these factors into account in his exploration of the Indian economy whilst Steinfeld (2010) does similarly for China; including painting a picture of how life in China has changed considerably during the period 1989–2009.

References


4 Paraphrasing

Timescale for the activity

35 minutes (five minutes to brief students on the importance of paraphrasing and good academic practice, five minutes for Activity 1, 5 minutes for Activity 2, ten minutes for Activity 3, ten minutes for Activity 4).

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section students 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

The activities contained in this section will help students to gain a better understanding of paraphrasing and good academic practice.

They will understand that effective paraphrasing helps to demonstrate their own understanding of other writers’ arguments. They will also realise that it is poor academic practice to pass off another writer’s wording as their own. Paraphrasing is about engaging with a piece of text rather than just regurgitating it.
Paraphrasing continued

Activity 1

Ask students to discuss in groups:

1. What are the differences between paraphrasing and directly quoting?
2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of each?

When the students feedback, encourage them to identify that paraphrasing is about summarising the ideas and arguments of other scholars (whilst still including a reference); whereas direct quoting involves reproducing a section of published text word for word. Paraphrasing can be more challenging, but it shows that you understand what you have read, and makes it easier to link your evidence to the points you are making in your assignment. It also often saves words, because you can condense and simplify an argument that may span pages and pages of a published book or article. Direct quoting, on the other hand, is useful for showing how a particular scholar, or organisation, has defined or described something; or for analysing their exact words. Students should aim to paraphrase what they have read wherever possible (whilst ensuring they reference the source of the ideas), and only quote when they feel their reader needs to see the precise words of their source. Whether quoting or paraphrasing, students should also remember to show their critical thinking skills by commenting on, interpreting, or evaluating the ideas that they have included.
Activity 2
This introductory activity will help students to identify what paraphrasing does and does not involve. Students will be shown some statements about paraphrasing and should decide in their groups 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. **(FALSE)**

2. You should paraphrase a section of text by using a thesaurus to change some of the words. **(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)**

4. Good paraphrasing shows that you understand another writer’s point of view. **(TRUE)**

This activity should lead into a discussion about what paraphrasing involves and why it is important. Students should be clear that whenever they paraphrase another writer’s ideas, they should use entirely their own expressions, and they still need to reference.
Encourage students to read the ‘Tips for Paraphrasing,’ which they can find on page 27 of their packs.

**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 the reader that 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 may 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, students must understand the essence of a writer’s argument. Here are some reading strategies that may help them 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 it 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.
Activity 3

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

Ask the students to read an original piece of text – an extract from the University of Birmingham’s website – and then show them two different attempts at a paraphrase. Ask them to discuss in groups which is the best example of paraphrasing and why.

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.


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.
Students should identify that **Paraphrase 2** is a better example of good academic practice, as it acknowledges the original source, summarises key points in completely different words, and gives a sense of what the original paragraph tried to convey. Whenever it needs to use exact words, it puts them in quotation marks. It also contains a critical comment from the paraphraser (the final sentence), showing engagement with the source.

The writer of **Paraphrase 1** has merely changed some of the words, and appears to be passing off some of the original writer’s phrases and sentence structures as his or her own. You can tell that they have used a thesaurus to look up synonyms, some of which don’t make sense in context – for example, ‘convenience.’
Paraphrasing continued

Activity 4

Paraphrasing Practice
Ask students to read this extract from the University of Birmingham's (2017) website and then attempt to express the key ideas in their own words. Advise them to consider what the main message of the text seems to be. They should then emphasise this in their paraphrased version.

Students may approach this in many different ways. Below is just one example of effective paraphrasing of the text. Students should have included a reference, accurately summarised key ideas, and used different words and sentence structures to the original.

The University of Birmingham (2017) emphasises what a diverse and forward-thinking university it has always been. It describes how, thanks to the vision of its first Chancellor Joseph Chamberlain, it was one of the first universities to welcome students 'from all religions and backgrounds.' Since then, it seems it has led the way in other respects. For example, it was the first university in the country to include a medical school, offer dentistry degrees, and have a female hall of residence.
Planning, researching, structuring and writing your essay

Timescale for the activity

35 minutes (five minutes to brief students on the importance of planning and structuring an essay, five minutes for Activity 1, five minutes to discuss essay planning and structuring processes, 20 minutes for Activity 2)

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section students should be able to:
- Understand the stages of planning an essay
- Follow a basic essay structure
- Consider the key elements of effective paragraphs

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](http://libguides.bham.ac.uk/asg/writing)

Background

The activities contained in this section will help students gain a better understanding of how to plan, research and structure their writing.

This is important because tutors are looking for a logical flow in students' writing, so they will need to demonstrate a clear introduction, main body and conclusion.

Student writing, in preparation for university, must follow academic conventions and include appropriate phrasing and references that are correctly cited.
Planning, researching, structuring and writing your essay continued

Activity 1

Ask the students to discuss the following questions with the person next to them:
- 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?

If there is time, ask for volunteers to feedback on what they talked about to the wider group. At this stage, there are no right or wrong answers; this is just to help them reflect on their own processes. They may have talked about how they get to grips with their assignment questions, or how they generate ideas. Some may admit that they don’t plan their essays but dive straight into writing. On the other hand, some students may be able to share planning strategies that they use.

Planning an Essay

The Suggested Stages of Planning chart (on the following page) provides some guidance on how to go about the stages involved in planning an essay. You may wish to talk your students through this process and compare it to the way they currently approach their assignments.
Planning, researching, structuring and writing your essay continued

Suggested stages of planning

1. Break down the different parts of your assignment question. Figure out what the task word means (e.g., 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.

2. 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.

3. Research! 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.

4. 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.

5. 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?
As students start thinking about planning their essays, they may find it useful to ask themselves 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 students have finished researching their essay, they would need to start thinking about how to structure it. What should the overall structure look like? What main headings/bullet points would they use in order to organise their essay into an appropriate and logical flow of ideas? The Essay Structure Checklist, starting on page 65, provides some guidance.
### Essay Structure Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>□ Have you included the title of your essay?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Introduction** | □ Does your essay have a suitable introduction which identifies your approach to the essay question?  
□ 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 merely descriptive, but give some indication of analysis. These themes should be mentioned in the introduction in the same order that they are covered 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.  
□ **Suggestion:** Your introduction should be approximately 10% of the word count. |
| **Main Body** | □ Is there evidence that you have read widely on the topic?  
□ Have you put each main point in a separate paragraph? (Points may take up more than just one paragraph but try not to roll them together; keep a clear focus to each section of your argument)  
□ Are the paragraphs linked in a logical manner (ie, does your essay flow from one point to another)?  
□ 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.  
□ Do you reference clearly, using a consistent referencing style, where you have used the ideas or work of other people?  
□ **Suggestion:** Your main body should be approximately 80% of the word count. |
### Essay Structure Checklist continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Layout</th>
<th>Assessment criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Does your conclusion address the essay question?</td>
<td>□ Does your conclusion address the essay question?</td>
<td>□ Does your conclusion address the essay question?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Is your conclusion supported by the work and evidence you have produced in the main body? 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.</td>
<td>□ Is your conclusion supported by the work and evidence you have produced in the main body? 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.</td>
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<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Does it summarise the main points? Your conclusion should not introduce new points or evidence which you haven’t mentioned elsewhere but should be a short reminder of the points you have made.</td>
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<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Suggestion: Your conclusion should be approximately 10% of the word count.</td>
<td>□ Are you using a variety of sources (e.g., books, journal articles, websites)?</td>
<td>□ Are you using a variety of sources (e.g., books, journal articles, websites)?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Are you using a variety of sources (e.g., books, journal articles, websites)?</td>
<td>□ 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)?</td>
<td>□ 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)?</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Are all of the references that you use in your essay shown in the reference list at the end?</td>
<td>□ Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?</td>
<td>□ Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 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!</td>
<td>□ Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?</td>
<td>□ Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
<td>□ Assess the criteria for your essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Are all of the references accurate, and correctly and consistently formatted?</td>
<td>□ Is your essay neat and well presented?</td>
<td>□ Is your essay neat and well presented?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 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.</td>
<td>□ Has it been edited, proof-read and written within the word limit?</td>
<td>□ Has it been edited, proof-read and written within the word limit?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
<td>□ Does it meet the assessment criteria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Have you included your details? Check with your tutor what personal details you need to include; e.g., full name or just an ID number to allow for anonymised marking.</td>
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Planning, researching, structuring and writing your essay continued

Activity 2

Ask the students to read the essay extract below and complete the following two tasks in pairs. You may wish to provide them with highlighters to help with question 1.

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

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.

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 Zwinglists 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.
Suggested Answers to Activity 2

1. The words and phrases that students may have highlighted for the first task are listed below, with brief explanations as to their function. These are known as signposts, and they help the reader to navigate successfully through the essay writer’s argument. Signposts may be large-scale or small-scale; subtle or more explicit. Students should aim to integrate them smoothly into their writing, so they are helpful but not too intrusive.

Examples of large-scale signposts in the essay extract:
But what made Luther’s ideas have such a widespread impact in Europe?

Direct questions should be used sparingly in academic essays (if at all), but sometimes they can act as effective signposts.

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.

This is an effective topic sentence at the start of a paragraph, signalling the point to be made.

Luther utilised this innovation extremely effectively, as the next part of the essay will demonstrate.

Closing the paragraph with a sentence like this can help nudge the reader towards the next stage of the argument.

Another way in which printing enabled the spread of religious ideas was through the use of oral communication.

This is another clear topic sentence, moving the essay on to a new point but retaining a connection with what has gone before.

Therefore, as the second half of this essay will further explore, the printing press also led to greater religious conflict.

This is another forward-looking signpost, preparing the reader for what is to follow.

The introduction to an essay should contain many signposts, telling the reader what to expect from the rest of the essay. The student’s argument is effectively signalled at the start of this essay, and details of what will be covered are given.
Planning, researching, structuring and writing your essay continued

Small-scale signposts in the essay extract:

This meant that...
Again....
But it is notable that...
Therefore...
Two examples were...
Thus...
This shows that...
In fact...

These words and short phrases help to make links between different ideas and sentences within the paragraphs of the essay. This can help the flow of the writing.

2. Suggested answers to the three parts of question 2 are given below. Encourage students to feedback on how they were able to identify the three elements, and emphasise that these things should be clear to a marker in every paragraph of an assignment.

a. The point that the essay writer is making in this paragraph

That Luther’s messages were able to reach both literate and illiterate people (through use of text and images), thanks to the printing press.

b. At least one piece of evidence they have used to support the point

They have used in-text references to scholars such as Marr and Kingston; but they have also referred to some primary evidence, namely Luther’s pamphlets and the images he used within two of them. The combination of historical experts and first-hand examples is effective.

c. How their point relates to the essay question

The essay writer clearly states, several times, that developments in printing enabled Luther to reproduce images and therefore reach a wider range of people, even those who couldn’t read. The final sentence of the paragraph links clearly back to the original question: This shows that Luther was reaching out to the uneducated classes, and was able to do this with the help of the printing press. Students should link back to the question throughout their assignments, showing how their points are relevant and regularly using the words from the question.