



Planning and Preparing Written Work

Session Aims

Whether your course is assessed through essays, assignments, reports or exams, the ability to plan, prepare and structure an answer is a fundamental skill. The aims of this session are to:

- Work in groups to analyse questions and discuss what is being asked
- Learn techniques to plan and structure an answer

You will need:

- Examples of essay, assignment or exam questions for your discipline that require a long written answer. Print out each on a separate piece of paper
- Large post it notes
- Whiteboard/ flip chart



Activity 1: Understanding the Task

- Divide your mentees into pairs and small groups. Give each group one example question.
- Ask them to discuss in their pairs/groups:
 - What they think the question is asking of them
 - The main points that will need to be covered in the answer and write each one on a post-it note
- Ask each pair/group to write their example question on the board/flip chart and present to the others what they think the question is asking, the main points they discussed and why.

Timings



Activity 1:
15-20 mins
(Timings are Approximate)

Activity 2: Planning & Structuring an Answer

Ask each pair/group to create a plan for their answer by placing the post-it notes in the order they would address each point, describing how they would structure their answer in note form. Then discuss in the whole group.



Activity 2:
10-15 mins

Useful Resources:

- Key Skills Moodle course (lots of useful information including key words used in essay titles and how to approach them)
- Transition Tips 'Structuring Essays', available at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/transition/study-skills-resources>
- Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) website http://www.ucl.ac.uk/keyskills/resources/Grid/communication_skills/writlink

Tips for Preparing Written Work



E **Examine the essay title very carefully**
What does it say? Exactly what is it asking you to do? Highlight the key words in the title.

S **Survey your resources.**
What research do you need to do? Do you have any notes you can use? What books do you need to consult?

S **Skeleton Outline.**
Plan your essay. How long will it be? Brainstorm relevant information for the question. Arrange the ideas logically. Plan an introductory paragraph. Plan the main body of text using supporting evidence and arguments with a clear sense of direction. Plan a concluding paragraph.

A **Actually write it**
Ensure you have all your books, notes with it. Write clearly. Write a first draft, edit critically and rewrite with clarity and precision. Read through what you have written after any breaks.

Y **You will make mistakes and can learn from them!**
Always read over what you have written. Check spelling and grammar. Ask someone else to read it and comment on legibility, presentation and understanding.

Direction Questions

This is a list of some important words which will aid in writing answers. These words provide direction on what to include in an answer, how to organise it and knowing when enough has been said. A full list of direction words can be found at the back of the PAL handbook.

Account for Explain, clarify, give reasons for

Analyse Explain, step by step or point by point. Pay attention to who, what, when and how. May include strengths, weaknesses, pros/cons, research for/against or causes/effects. A conclusion helps clarify major points in analyses.

Assess Determine the value of, weigh up (see evaluate)

Compare & Contrast Find some points of common ground between x and y and show where or how they differ

Criticise Make judgement (backed by a discussion of the evidence or reasoning involved about the merit of theories or opinions or about the truth of facts)

Define State the exact meaning of a word or phrase. In some cases it may be necessary or desirable to examine different possible or often used definitions

Describe Give a detailed account of...

Discuss Explain, giving 2 sides of the issue and any implications

Evaluate Emphasise positive/negative aspects of a topic. Include opinions and support these with evidence, information and/or examples. Don't leave opinions unsupported.

Explain Give details about how and why it is...

Illustrate Make clear and explicit, usually requires the use of carefully chose examples

Interpret Comment upon existing understanding of a topic. Paraphrase, translate, condense, simplify, and/or diagnose major situations or prominent factors

Justify Present rationale for or reasons for conclusions, recommendations, results or statements. Use proof, research, examples and/or quotations to support a justification

Outline Give the main features or general principles or a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising structure and arrangement

Review Cover important ideas, highlight major points and/or describe topics previously covered in lecture or textbook. Sometimes review means critically evaluate, give an opinion or make some sort of connection with one or more ideas.

Summarise Give a concise, clear explanation or account of...presenting the chief factors and omitting minor details and examples

Scientists and Mathematicians use process words with slightly different meanings

Write down/State/Give means "write down without justification"

Find/Determine/Calculate/Explain/Derive/Evaluate/Solve means that you are required to show your working

Prove/Deduce/Explain/Show means that you must justify each step and provide a convincing argument for explanation