

Dear Students

Studying in a different language can present many challenges but these can be overcome by improving your study skills as you work on your assignments.

You must complete your assignments by the given date. This means that you should take great care to organise your studies and work on developing and improving your time-management skills. I will see all of you in tutorials but must book your tutorial times with me as soon as possible so that we can start planning your work. In the meantime, the following notes may help you to get started with your academic work.

1. Get organised

- ✓ Find out when your assignments are due and make a note of the dates in your diary.
- ✓ Work backwards from that date and plan what you will need to do each week.
- ✓ Ask your tutor if you do not understand any part of the question.
- ✓ Make an appointment to see me so that we can plan your weekly language tutorials together in support of the work you are required to do. Remember, I will be unable to look at your work three days before the submission date; it is up to you to make sure that you plan your tutorials with me ahead of time.
- ✓ Set aside time each day when you can concentrate on your academic studies. This is often difficult to do because of performance activities but it is very important to realise that your academic work is just as important as your performance-based work.
- ✓ Make sure that your lecture notes, hand-outs, books, materials and other sources are organised on your desk so that you know what you have to do on a daily basis.

2. Visit the library

- ✓ Visit the library on a regular basis.
- ✓ Look through the catalogue and the shelving to familiarize yourself with the resources which are available.
- ✓ Ask the librarians if you are unable to find a book/recording/score which you might need.
- ✓ Make sure that you have the list of books and materials for your assignment well in advance of the assignment deadline.

3. Plan your reading

You must start reading for your assignment as soon as you can. English is not your first language so you will more time to understand and assimilate information. Developing strategies to improve your reading speed and ability to comprehend complex academic texts can be challenging at first. You should ask yourself whether the text you are reading is:

- a narrative
- a description
- an explanation
- a discussion
- a biography

When you have done this, identify what the author is trying to do in the section you are reading. The author might be:

- introducing an idea
- giving the sequence of the information in the text
- giving an example of something mentioned earlier in the text
- developing an idea
- giving the points of view of different authors
- emphasising a point
- contrasting an idea
- referring to what comes later in the text
- giving a summary of a paragraph
- linking the end of one paragraph to the next

You should also:

- identify the main points of the text
- identify parts of the text which give examples of the main point
- identify which parts are facts, the author's own opinion or the opinions of other authors

You should question what the author is saying and ask yourself whether you agree with what is being said. You should also reflect on whether the author's argument, ideas or assumptions are different from the viewpoints of other authors. You can then decide how you will use what the author says in your own essay. Make sure you write down the precise details of the sources you have used (name of author, date, title, publisher, and edition) and start to compile your own reading list. This information will be very useful when you are writing your own essay and bibliography. It is also important that you make a note of this information to avoid accidental plagiarism.

4. Start planning your essay

Think carefully about what you want to say in your essay and then make a plan of your work. Keep going back to the essay title to make sure you are answering the question correctly. Think carefully about each paragraph. You should have a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence (where necessary). A topic sentence gives the main idea of the paragraph. It limits the topic to a specific area that can be discussed in the paragraph. Supporting sentences develop the idea in the topic sentence. They clarify the topic sentence by giving more information about it. Concluding sentences summarise the most significant points of the paragraph. Look back at your reading and decide where, how and why you want to use the texts to support your argument. Always remember to acknowledge the information, theories and arguments of other authors in the proper way.

5. Writing your essay

We will talk about academic writing in your tutorials with me but here a few guidelines to get you started. An academic style is:

- clear and unambiguous
- concise
- very precise and analytical
- properly referenced throughout

In addition, an academic style:

- uses correct punctuation, grammar and syntax
- has no contractions (hasn't, can't)
- does not use idioms
- demonstrates a coherent argument throughout

Please remember to book your appointments with me well in advance of your assignment deadlines!

Best wishes,

Jean Ammar
Language Support Tutor