Preparing an academic argument

VALUE MAP 29/10/2016

Shaun Theobald
srt@kent.ac.uk

The Student Learning Advisory Service
Agenda

The essay writing process

Step 1: Analysing the question
Step 2: Reading and making notes
Step 3: Planning
Step 4: Drafting the essay
Step 5: [Referencing]
Step 6: Editing/Proof reading
Step 1: Analysing the question-Question choice

- If you have a range of questions to choose from, think carefully
- Not always the most ‘comfortable’ question?
- Look for interest/challenge
  - If you are interested, you will sustain research/writing vitality
- Think about research viability
  - Can you access the sources you need?
Check requirements

- What is the deadline?
- What is the word-limit?
- What are your other commitments?
- What is the submission process?
- What style-guide should you use?
- What referencing system is required?
Contextualise the question

- No research, reading etc. at this stage
- Map against –
  - Module outline
  - Reading lists
  - Lecture lists/topics
  - Learning outcomes
  - Your knowledge
- Make *brief* notes!
Find a quiet space

- Somewhere comfortable – but not too relaxing!
- Somewhere you don’t normally go to study?
  - The aim is to take a completely ‘fresh’ approach!
- Don’t surround yourself with books, notes, internet etc.
- Notepad/tablet etc. + the exact question alone!
Deconstruct the question

1. What is the context and background?

2. What are the key words?

3. What are the key instruction words? (implicit or explicit)

*Putting these 3 together, what is the question asking you to do? Make brief notes...*
Understand Key Instruction Verbs

- Analyse
- Compare and contrast
- Discuss
- Evaluate
- Summarise
- To what extent … \text{ and many more!}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Contrast</strong></th>
<th>Show how two or more things are <strong>different</strong>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Analyse</strong></td>
<td>Identify essential features of a subject and separate it into its component parts and examine how they relate to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Discuss</strong></td>
<td>Investigate and examine a subject by argument. Give the <strong>pros and cons</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Relate</strong></td>
<td>Show <strong>similarities and connections</strong> between two or more things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Compare</strong></td>
<td>Show how two or more things are <strong>similar</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Evaluate</strong></td>
<td>Assess the <strong>worth</strong>, importance and usefulness of something using evidence to support your view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Criticise</strong></td>
<td>Write about <strong>positive</strong> and <strong>negative aspects</strong> of a topic stating your judgement. Substantiate this with <strong>evidence</strong>.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Activity: How would you apply this to this question?

“Using an example firm of your choice, Show how firms can use the Internet to organise themselves more effectively. What are the key issues and problems that may arise and how can these be dealt with?”
Develop an initial plan

- Go back to your existing ‘study space’
- Bring together all your notes
- Add any other notes, study materials etc.
- Read, think, re-order notes
- Start the referencing process going
  - Identify key sources
  - Full bibliographical details
- Think – what do you know *now*; what do you *need* to know?
Develop an initial plan

- Possible headings for the initial plan?
  - Argument
  - Analysis
  - Evidence
  - Final judgement
Step 2: Reading and making notes
Plan your research

- Which questions do you need to find answers to?
- What is your answer (likely to be)? [anticipation]
- What kind of evidence do you need to support your argument?
- What will you need to read?
  - definitely
  - should
  - maybe, if time
What’s the time-line?

- What’s the time-line for the whole essay?
- What’s the time-line for research?
- Working backwards from a dead-line?
  - The last thing needed > the next thing…
- Be realistic!
- Use a simple planner
- Allow for emergencies
- Provide gaps, reviews and time for consolidating material
Selecting your source

- **Good/subject-appropriate variety** (types and angles)
  Books; journal articles; websites; conference papers;
  E-texts/books; podcasts, blogs, vlogs etc.; mass media;
  broadsheet press

- **Reliability**
  > Known author/publisher/source
  > Biased? Does it matter? Does this invalidate source?
  > Length of bibliography/scholarly apparatus around text
  > Match to module reading list

- **Relevance**
  > What do you need it for?
Reading

- Think before you read
- **Skim** text for key words + general meaning
  (index, headings, captions…)
- Keep question(s) in mind while reading
- **Scan + read for detail**, but…
- *Take ‘relevant’ notes only*
- Record sources
Making Notes

- A few key quotations only
  (exact wording/ bibliographical details, incl. page number)
- Otherwise in your own words
  - paraphrase, summarise
    (bibliographical details, incl. page number)
- Read critically all the collected information
- Summarise, expand, rearrange notes
- Look for connections and directions
## Template for notes from reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bibliographical details</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrase/summary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relationship between reading, research and writing

Shorter essays
- 70 – 80% of your sources located and read before writing starts
- Notes in advance
- During the writing stage, some re-visiting/re-reading and some discovery of new material
- Don’t keep switching between reading, research and writing!
- Make your essay ‘through-composed’!
The relationship between reading, research and writing

Longer/extended essays [and dissertations]

• Some reading beforehand for the *whole* topic
• Core texts that relate to the entire concept/field

Then…

• Further reading for individual sections
• Writing up/main draft of the section
• Further reading for further sections etc.
• In other words, you *interweave* reading, research and writing…
• Move through chapter/section by chapter/section
• Final ‘mega’ edit?
Further support,

www.kent.ac.uk/ueit/learning

Good luck!