Understanding Assignments
VALUE MaP 14/x/2017

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Assignments: What’s the Point?

• Mostly: about extending your own personal understanding and knowledge
  – Heuristic development
• [If you choose, pick something you enjoy!]
• To demonstrate your ability to work within the academic framework
Assignments: What’s the Point?

• Technically: to demonstrate that you have achieved the **Module Learning Outcomes**
  – Assessment to show you have earned the Credit
• So extends learning + gets the mark!!
Assignments: What’s the Point?

• THEREFORE *check* the Learning Outcomes
  – Generic skills students are required to demonstrate
  – Subject specific skills students need to demonstrate

• A crucial starting point for understanding assignments
  – Helps practical planning and preparation for assignments!
Types of Assignments

Possible types of assignment include...

• Reports (placement, research, projects, etc.)
• Literature Review (analysis of relevant material)
  – Book review (analysis of ONE book)
  – (Some) description of contents; mostly critique
• Chapter review/critical analysis
• Annotated Bibliography
Types of Assignments

- Case study (focused analysis of ONE case)
- Reflective Exercise (assessment of self)
- Briefing paper (giving ‘executive summary’)
- Traditional essay
  - An essay is an **argument** – persuasive presentation
Marks of a Good Assignment

A good assignment....

1. Focuses on the set question/topic/task
2. Has a clear structure - easy to follow [paragraphs!]
3. Is well researched - evidence based
4. Follows appropriate academic conventions
5. Is correctly referenced
6. Is well presented – word limit, page numbering, margins, line spacing, font type, spelling …
Getting Started

Check your Module Documentation for any:
• Detailed information on assignments
• Any specific instructions *for this assignment*

ALWAYS ‘do what it says on the can….’

ALSO
• Double-check the deadline and word-count

Don’t put it off – start early!
Remember the Rules

• Follow instructions for
  – Word count
  – Font size
  – Margin size
  – Title page
  – School’s ‘style guide’ for referencing
  – **Submission process**
    • Hard copies, electronic copies, both?
    • Due submission **time**
  – Rules on concessions and extensions
Understanding Assignments

• As noted, map each assignment against the module LOs

BUT ALSO

• Ask: how does this piece of work link into....
  – The lectures
  – The seminars
  – Additional reading
  – Other assignment targets/titles/exams?
  – Other modules?
Getting Started

- 90% of any good assignment or essay is what you do before you start writing
  - the last thing you do is write!
- Essence of task is ALWAYS
  - Careful planning and preparation – timeline!
  - Thorough background research
  - Good, relevant selection of research materials
Getting Started

– Readiness to challenge and probe topic
– Careful drafting
– Careful proof-reading and checking
• Focus on the question
Assignment stages

• Understanding assignments = understanding the underlying skill sets +
• The **sequence** of assignment stages
• Always move through assignments stage by stage!
• Don’t be tempted to ‘hop-about’ from stage to stage!
Assignment stages

- Step 1: Analysing the question
- Step 2: Reading and making notes
- Step 3: Planning
- Step 4: Drafting the text
- Step 5: Checking & applying referencing
- Step 6: Editing/Proof reading
- [ Step 7: Learning from feedback ]
Assignment Titles

Assignments typically have TWO main elements

1. Assignment **topic**
2. Set of **instructions**

Example:
What are the functions of ritual and specifically rites of passage?
What forms and structures might they take?

1. Topic: Ritual with particular focus on **rites of passage**
2. Instructions: implied instruction verbs – describe, evaluate, explore

*Check* anything that still feels unclear
Long and Short Questions

• Zola wrote that ‘poetry is everywhere, in everything, even more in the present and the real than in the past and the abstract. Each event at each moment has its poetic superb aspect.’ Explain in detail what Zola meant by this and why he held that view. Why did Artaud disagree? And how did he conceive of the ‘poetry’ of theatre? (Drama)

• Why is international debt a burden? (Economics)

• BUT….with every question, 3 areas to explore:
Key questions to ‘interrogate’ an assignment title

- What is the **context and background**?
- What are the **key words**?
- What are the **key instruction words**?
  - Putting these three together, in conjunction with other preliminary research etc., allows you to understand the assignment!
Example: Essay title
“Gender roles in social work have not changed significantly in 100 years”. Discuss.

• Context and background
  – Evolution of social work as a profession
  – Interest in gender/gender in society post 1970s

• Key words gender roles/ social work /changed significantly /100 years

• Instruction words Discuss
Understand Key Instructions

- Analyse
- Compare and contrast
- Discuss
- Evaluate or Assess
- Trace
- Apply
- Illustrate
- Summarise etc.
- See list/table in, “Writing and Planning Essays”
Understand Key Instructions

• Some key words in the title might be telling you to focus on the *possible relationship* between ideas – e.g. compare and contrast

• Some key words may be telling you to focus on *interpretation* of the evidence – e.g. assess, evaluate, consider

• Some key words in the title will probably be emphasising importance of *critical analysis*
Planning the Research

• Organise a do-able timetable for the work
  – How long will the reading actually take?
• Read as widely as possible: go for variety
• Prioritise your reading: must, should, nice to…..
• Plan your reading: ‘little and often’
• Set sensible objectives and reading targets
• Take notes – to concentrate as well as record
• Make sure your notes are plagiarism-proof
## Assignment Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
<th>CHECK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gather material on gender roles</td>
<td>Central topic</td>
<td>Google Notes Encyclopaedia WWW sources</td>
<td>By Friday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read: Specific texts</td>
<td>On reading list + from informal literature review</td>
<td>Library (one week loan)</td>
<td>By next week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask colleague at work</td>
<td>Experienced practitioner</td>
<td>Over phone</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Assignment ‘Product’

• Formal writing style
• Fair, accurate and precise presentation
• Backed up with sufficient and credible evidence
• Using the right language
  – subject-specific terminology
  – Avoiding pretentious and pompous/flowery language
• Designed to persuade your tutor
• Structured to build up an argument/thesis/claim
• Working systematically towards a fair conclusion
• Carefully crafted
Good luck…

• For all your assignments!

• Further questions?

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