Preparing an academic argument

VALUE MAP 27/10/2018

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Agenda

The essay/assignment writing process

Step 1: Analysing the question
Step 2: Reading and making notes
Step 3: Planning
Step 4: Drafting the essay/assignment
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 … and many more!
## Analyse, Compare, Contrast, Criticise, Evaluate, Relate, Discuss

<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 and negative aspects</strong> of a topic stating your judgement. Substantiate this with <strong>evidence</strong>.</td>
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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*. [“Discuss”] What are the key issues and problems that may arise and *how can these be dealt with*?”

Context/background – rise of the internet/internet used for business organization/ ’SWAT’analysis/ Implementation; key words; instruction words
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 in the future?
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 document?
• What’s the time-line for research?
• Working backwards from a dead-line?
  • The last thing needed > the next thing…
• Be realistic!
Organizing the time-line

- Use a simple planner
- Allow for emergencies
- Provide gaps, reviews and time for consolidating material
- Keep reviewing your plans, and change/speed-up where you need to!
- See the Assignment calculator, ASK – https://www.kent.ac.uk/ai/ask/index.php
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>Paraphrase/summary</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</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 each chapter/section systematically
- Final ‘mega edit’?
Further support, 

www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/learning

Good luck!