

A guide to essay planning - transcript

Slide 1: Welcome to this presentation on how to plan an essay. At this point you may feel a little overwhelmed and not really quite sure where to start. Making a plan can really help with these feelings. In order to actively learn, it is recommended that you take notes throughout this presentation. You can pause, rewind, fast forward and stop this presentation at any point and come back at a different time.

Slide 2: Before you start anything, you need to make sure that you understand the question that you are trying to address. First of all try to look for the command words in the questions, these are words like, evaluate, analyse, criticise and check that you understand these words. You can see the command word guide for more information on understanding these words. You may sometimes hear these words referred to as instructional words. You may then wish to break the question down to identify the topic or topics that you need to include and consider your own ideas in order to plan an answer to the question.

Slide 3: Now let's look at an example. Can you identify the command words in this question? The command words are critically and evaluate.

Slide 4: What is this question about? Let's look at the topic words in this question, revision, success and Science Degree. So you may wish to look at revision and what role it plays in education, what defines success and completion, decide whether to just include a Science Degree or could your work include Degrees in general? And then consider the wider context.

Slide 5: Here we have a similar question, can you spot the command words? Identify and discuss, do you know how to fully address these command words? If not, be sure to check out the command words information sheet for more details. Some people find creating a question grid useful, as a way of organising their thoughts and breaking down the question. In the headers for each of the columns you need to write the main topics and underneath what questions you have that arise from these topics. Take a moment to read through the example questions, can you think of any other potential questions?

Slide 6: Here are some examples of other potential questions. Asking questions is a really useful way of generating ideas for your writing and can help with effective planning.

Slide 7: So now you are ready to make your plan. Planning is very personal and there isn't really a right or wrong way. Some important things to consider when planning are; to keep each point separate to avoid confusion, for each point, provide evidence, examples and comments, ensuring that you keep a good record of the sources you have used, grab a highlighter and highlight any areas you want to focus on and gather more evidence for and remember, your plan is a working document, it doesn't really have an end, well not until you have completed your essay at least. Planning can take the form of notes written or typed, post-it notes and use of colour, mind mapping tools and many more, just have fun with it and find the method that suits you best. You can find more information on examples of planning in the download part of this section.

Slide 8: There are several important reasons for planning. It allows you to think carefully about what you are writing and avoids creating just a descriptive list of facts. It allows a logical order to avoid confusing your reader. It ensures that you correctly approach the question that you are trying to address and it will mean less editing in the long run which will ultimately save time. Prior planning prevents poor performance! If you require further support with your planning, bring your plans along to the Academic Skills Tutors who can give you some hints and tips. Remember, you will be asked what you have tried so have a go first, you may surprise yourself.