

Essay Writing 1: Stages of Writing an Essay



**Effective
Learning Service**

**Essay Writing 1:
Stages of Writing an
Essay**



ESSAY WRITING (1): STAGES OF WRITING AN ESSAY

The essay is a traditional form of assessment in higher education in Britain. Essays offer you an opportunity to learn more about a topic and to develop skills of structured writing. Essay writing will encourage you to research a subject and to analyse a range of arguments and perspectives.

However, essay writing may be an unfamiliar form of assessment to students who have come to Britain to study at undergraduate or post-graduate level. In Britain too, some students, may also lack experience of essay writing and are also unsure what is expected of them.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ESSAY AND A REPORT?

Essay	Report
<p>An essay requires you to think and write about ideas. These ideas are often presented in the form of a question or statement for you to analyse.</p> <p>Essays can allow you explore hypothetical situations and to expand on possibilities, ideas and concepts.</p>	<p>A written report is a factual and systematic account of what has happened in the past or happening in the present.</p> <p>A report will often make recommendations, but an essay will rarely do this.</p>

The English statesman, Thomas More, wrote an essay titled *Utopia*, which envisaged an ideal state or perfect world. He could not have written a report on the same topic!

WHAT THE TUTORS EXPECT OF YOU

It is essential you keep in mind what tutors expect of you. There are four main expectations of tutors:

1. You address the topic or answer the question set

Tutors expect you to answer the set question. They will want to read that you have clearly identified, addressed and dealt fully with the topics and issues implicit in the question.

2. A concern with effective use of sources

Tutors will expect you to show evidence in your essays that you have read a variety of texts concerned with the question topic, that you can

be selective which material to use in your assignment and that you keep an open mind about anything you read. The evidence presented in essays should be referenced using the **Harvard System** of referencing (see '*References & Bibliographies*' workbook).

3. A concern with reasoned argument and investigation

Tutors respect students who take an objective stance and who present valid arguments, using reliable sources to back up their points of view.. (An 'argument' is a point of view supported with reliable **evidence**, e.g. from articles, books, statistics etc.). The more advanced your level of study, e.g. final year undergraduate, or Masters level, the greater the depth of investigation, analysis and connection between subjects there should be.

4. A concern with matters of presentation

Tutors expect that you will take pride in the way you present your essay. It should look good, e.g. be word-processed, and be free of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. The essay should also be well structured: with a clear introduction, a logical development of ideas and a conclusion.

There are six main stages to writing an essay:

- 1. Managing your time**
- 2. Analysing the title**
- 3. Gathering relevant information**
- 4. Planning your structure**
- 5. Writing-rewriting**
- 6. Referencing (using the Harvard System)**

This workbook will look at each of these six stages, plus give you information on marking criteria. It also includes a sample essay to give you clearer understanding of the expected essay structure.

1. **T**IME-MANAGEMENT (PLAN YOUR TIME)



At the start of a semester, the essay submission dates seem a long way off – but they are not!

You may find that you have to write five or six assignments in any one semester, and that the submission dates for these are very close together – and also close to the dates of examinations!

If you have done little work to prepare for the essays, the result is likely to be panic, as you rush to complete the work in time.

It is advisable to have a timetable for each semester, marking in both exam dates and dates for assignments. You need to think too, in terms of stages of completion of work needed to write each essay.

You can set yourself a strict time limit for:

- Research and gathering information
- Writing first draft
- Re-writing

The research and information gathering stages take the longest, but you need to have a cut-off date for these. So you really need to start the research and information gathering early in the semester – once you have the exam titles.

There is an Effective Learning Service booklet *'Time Management'* that discusses this issue and includes an assignment timetable.

"Never leave work until the last minute (for some students this is common place). This only adds to the pressure and stress that you will face. It may also affect the quality level of your work as you cannot do the required reading around the subject to source references etc".

(John Eggleton, final year undergraduate)

2. **S**TART WITH THE QUESTION



You need to look closely at the essay topic or question and analyse significant words. You also need to think about any proposition in the essay title and think about what point of view you are going to present in your assignment in response to any such proposition.

Interpreting the Essay Question

You need to interpret what your topic or question actually means. These are some of the common academic keywords in essay questions that you are likely to encounter, and their meanings: (source: Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. Palgrave.)

- **Account for:** Give reasons for; explain why something happens.
- **Analyse:** Examine in very close detail; identify important points and chief features.
- **Classify:** Arrange into groups.
- **Comment on:** Identify and write about the main issues, giving your reactions based upon what you have read or heard in lectures. Avoid giving purely personal opinion.
- **Compare:** Show how two or more things are similar. Indicate the relevance or consequences of these similarities.
- **Contrast:** Set two or more items or arguments in opposition so as to draw out differences. Indicate whether the differences are significant. If appropriate, give reasons why one item or argument may be preferable.
- **Criticize or Critically evaluate:** Weigh arguments for and against something, assessing the strength of the evidence on both sides. Use criteria to guide your assessment of which opinions, theories, models or items are preferable.
- **Define:** Give the exact meaning of. Where relevant, show that you understand why trying to define something is problematic (e.g. 'poverty' is a term notoriously difficult to define).

- **Demonstrate:** Show clearly by providing evidence.
- **Describe:** Give the main characteristics or features of something, or outline the main events.
- **Discuss:** Write about the most important aspects of the topic in question; give arguments for and against a topic; consider the implications of (a topic).
- **Distinguish:** Bring out the differences between two items or topics.
- **Elaborate:** Discuss in detail with reasons and examples.
- **Evaluate:** Assess the worth, importance or usefulness of something, using evidence. There will probably be cases to be made both for and against.
- **Examine:** Put the subject 'under the microscope', looking at it in detail. If appropriate, 'critically evaluate' it as well.
- **Explain:** Make clear why something happens, or why something is the way it is.
- **Illustrate:** Make something clear and explicit, giving examples or evidence.
- **Interpret:** Give the meaning and relevance of data or other material presented.
- **Justify:** Give evidence that supports an argument or idea; show why a decision or conclusions were made, considering objections that others might make.
- **Narrate:** Concentrate on saying what happened, in the sequence that it happened.
- **Outline:** Give only the main points, showing the main structure.
- **Relate:** Show similarities and connections between two or more things.
- **State:** Give the main features, in very clear English (almost like a simple list but written in full sentences).
- **Summarise:** Draw out the main points only, omitting details or examples.
- **To what extent...** Consider how far something contributes to a final outcome.
- **Trace:** Follow the order of different stages in an event or process.

Get Below the Surface

It is a good idea to highlight significant words in essay titles to make sure you focus on what is expected of you. This is particularly important for any essay topics or questions that ask you to 'discuss', 'analyse', 'evaluate', or 'criticise' anything. For example:

Evaluate the impact of the Internet on practices for recruitment and selection employed by firms.

Assuming you understand what the Internet is, the significant words to think about are 'evaluate', 'impact', 'recruitment', 'selection' and 'firms'.

The question asks you particularly to **evaluate** (see earlier definition) the **impact** (a significant effect) of the Internet on both **recruitment and selection** practices.

So you need to look for evidence on the impact, both negative and positive, on *both* these aspects of human resource management in firms.

The term '**firms**' suggests too, that you need to evaluate the impact on firms of different sizes and to see if there is any variation between firms according to the nature of their business.

The question also presents you with a proposition: it proposes that the Internet **has** had an impact on recruitment and selection; it stresses the words '*the impact*', which suggests there has been one.

You need to think about whether or not you agree that this proposition is correct – you don't **have** to agree with the proposition in any essay question. For example, if you disagreed with the proposition, you could take up a position in the assignment that argued that the Internet has had little impact on recruitment and selection – assuming you could find evidence to support this position.

The point is that essay titles are often quite provocative: they provoke you to take up a position and to support this with reliable evidence.

The two main positions that you would take in this essay are:

- agreeing that the Internet has had an impact on recruitment and selection, then describing what this has been and discussing why it has happened and any limitations or problems with its impact;
- disagreeing that there has been an 'impact', or it has been very limited, and discussing why you feel this.

In both cases, evidence would be presented to support your position.

Let's take another essay topic:

"The concept of identity is central to the conceptualisation of one of the most complex and fascinating of human creations, the work organisation". Gioia (1998). Discuss.

Don't be intimidated by the language used in essay questions, e.g. 'concept', 'conceptualisation'. Think about what this statement is saying in plain terms: that identity (the elements that make a person) **is central** to the work organisation.

The important thing to note about this essay title is that it also contains a premise or proposition: that '*the concept of identity is central to the work organisation*'. The essay title is therefore inviting you to take up a position. These are likely to be that you:

1. agree generally with the premise – although you may want to raise certain exceptions to a general agreement.
2. disagree generally with the premise- although you may want to raise certain exceptions to a general disagreement.

Important: the worst thing you could do is to leave the tutor or reader feeling that you don't have a position at all! In an essay like this, many students will just talk in descriptive terms about aspects of identity and work without tackling the basic proposition in the essay: that identity **is central** to the work organisation.

It would be possible, for example, to argue that it is central, but it could be argued with equal conviction that it is not **central** to the work organisation in all contexts. There may be, for example, global cultural differences to take into account, or historical or social factors that you might want to discuss in your essay.

You need to start by identifying and analysing key words: '*concept of identity*', '*is central to...*' and '*the work organisation*'. You will need to be clear that you understand what is meant by identity **in this particular context**: the work organisation.

So you could start, for example, by thinking about the different aspects of identity **relevant to work**. These could include skills, personality, values, motivation etc. You might also want to think about the cultural dimensions of the question. For example, would the statement apply only in certain cultural/geographical contexts, or is it a statement with universal application. Only once you have analysed the question should you move on to the next stages of essay writing.

3. INFORMATION

The information gathering stage is an important one, as it builds on the work you did on analysing the essay question or topic. Selecting relevant information is an essential skill in higher education and for essay writing.



As most essays are fairly short in length, e.g. 2,000 words, you must ensure that the information you gather is **relevant** to the essay question – don't get sidetracked – keep **focused** on the essay question.

Keep asking yourself:

- *Do I really need this information?*
- *How will I use this information in the essay?*

Make sure you give yourself a deadline for collecting the information (see *previous section on 'Time Management'*). Most students enjoy this aspect of learning - but don't make information gathering a delaying tactic for writing.

Sources

There are many sources of information available to you, including:

- Books, articles, official reports, surveys
- Lecture notes
- Tutor handouts
- Television, radio, newspaper, videos
- Internet

Some Useful Internet Sites for Business Students

Bank of England (UK economic reports)

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk>

BIZED (useful site for business studies students)

www.bized.ac.uk/

BIDS (academic publications)

[ttp://www.bids.ac.uk](http://www.bids.ac.uk)

DTI Publications (UK government)
<http://www.dti.gov.uk/publications>

Economist (magazine)
www.economist.com

Emerald (academic publications)
<http://fiordiliji.emeraldinsight.com>

European Union
www.europa.eu.int

FAME (financial and other data from Companies House)
<http://fame.bvdepc.com>

Financial Times (news and annual reports service)
www.ft.com

FreePint (range of useful Market Research resources, including featured articles, archive and student 'bar' for help on tricky research questions & issues)
www.freepint.com

HMSO Publications (UK government)
<http://www.hmso.gov.uk>

HRM (links & guides for HRM in UK, USA, Canada & Australia)
www.HRMGuide.net

HSBC (Business Profiles: economic & business information for over 40 countries)
www.hsbc.com.hk/hk/bps

ICAEW (accounting publications)
<http://www.icaew.co.uk/library>

Ingenta (academic publications)
<http://www.ingentaselect.co.uk>

Institute of Fiscal Studies (UK taxation and economics)
<http://www.ifs.org.uk>

ISI Web of Science (citation index)
<http://wos.mimas.ac.uk>

JISC (academic publications)
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk>

Listed Companies (annual reports for listed companies in Europe and USA)
www.carolworld.com

National Statistics Online (UK government)

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

Mintel (market analysis)

www.mintel.co.uk

NISS (news, publications & other information & good links to academic libraries)

<http://www.niss.ac.uk>

Research Index (list of UK market research & telemarketing companies)

www.researchindex.co.uk

Small Business Portal

<http://www.smallbusinessportal.co.uk/index.php>

Small Business Service (UK government)

<http://www.sbs.gov.uk>

Social Sciences Information Gateway (including business, economics & research methods)

www.SOSIG.ac.uk

UkOnline (UK government)

<http://www.ukonline.gov.uk>

United Nations (news & publications)

<http://www.un.org>

WWW Virtual Library (useful links to business related sites)

<http://www.vlib.org>

Metalib

One of the most important resources in the university library is the **Metalib** portal, as this will give you access electronically to a wide range of journals, databases and other sources. If you visit the School home page, click onto 'Resources', then 'Library', then look for 'Metalib'.

Record Your Sources

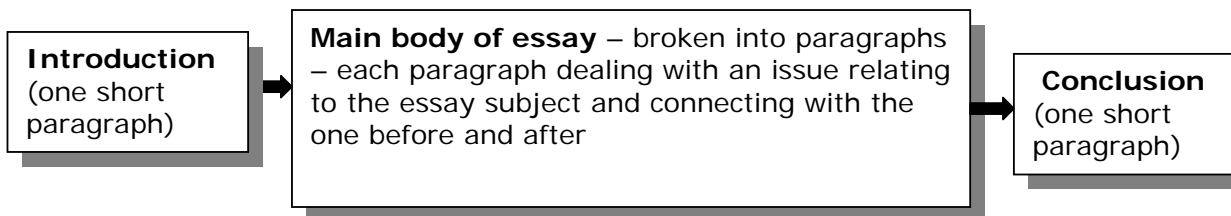


Always record your sources as you go along. Take full details of the source of the information, as you will need this information for your references and bibliography (see section 6, page 24).

4. **P**LAN YOUR STRUCTURE

There is another workbook that deals exclusively with this important topic (*Essay Writing 2: Planning & Structuring Your Essays*), so for more detail we suggest you read this. However, the basic points are these:

An essay should have a clear structure:



The Introduction

The introduction will introduce the topic and set a direction for the essay.

The introduction is a very important part of the essay, as if you start badly you can set up negative expectations in the reader. Conversely, if you start well, the reader gains a good impression of you and will look for positive reinforcement of this impression.

Quotations or definitions can be a good way to start an essay, as a well-chosen quotation can grab the reader's attention and introduce the topic in an interesting way.

The Conclusion

It is important to end an essay well.

The concluding paragraph will be fairly short and will remind the reader of the main points raised in your essay. It will leave the reader with a sense of completion and a sense that you, the writer, has explored the topic as far as was possible on this occasion.

(See example on the sample essay, page 33 onward of this workbook).

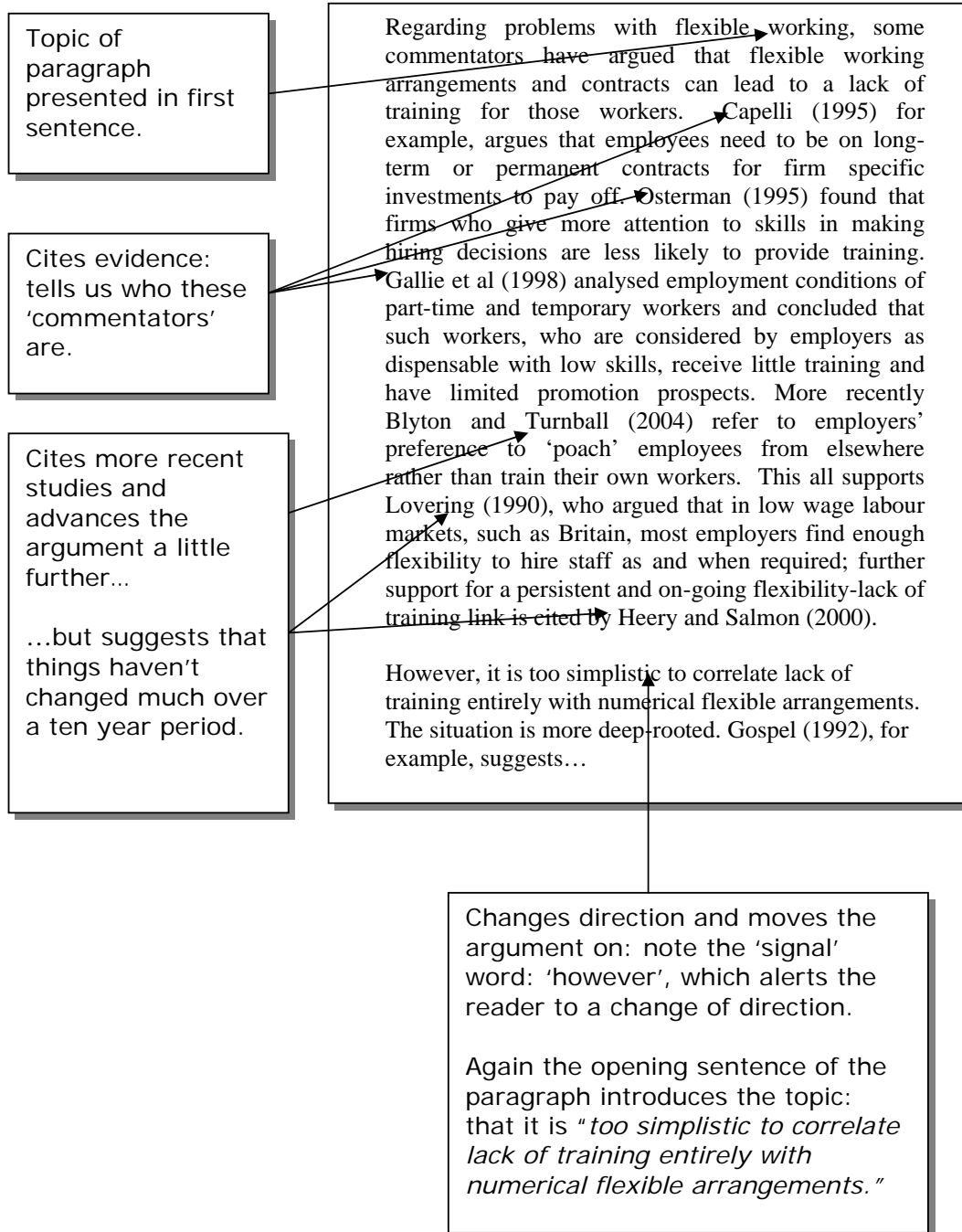
Paragraphs

- Each paragraph in the essay should contain **one** main idea, perspective or point of view.
- There is no 'golden rule' about how long a paragraph should be. However, avoid very short paragraphs of just one or two sentences.
- One consistently effective approach is to have an opening sentence in each paragraph that introduces the topic. Move on then to give examples or evidence to support this opening statement, and think about how you are going to make a link with the paragraph that follows.
- The aim is to try and ensure a coherent and sequential flow of ideas from one paragraph to the next; see example below.

Regarding problems with flexible working some commentators have argued that flexible working arrangements and contracts can lead to a lack of training for those workers. Capelli (1995) for example, argues that employees need to be on long-term or permanent contracts for firm specific investments to pay off. Osterman (1995) found that firms who give more attention to skills in making hiring decisions are less likely to provide training. Gallie et al (1998) analysed employment conditions of part-time and temporary workers and concluded that such workers, who are considered by employers as dispensable with low skills, receive little training and have limited promotion prospects. More recently Blyton and Turnball (2004) refer to employers' preference to 'poach' employees from elsewhere rather than train their own workers. This all supports Lovering (1990), who argued that in low wage labour markets, such as Britain, most employers find enough flexibility to hire staff as and when required; further support for a persistent and on-going flexibility-lack of training link is cited by Heery and Salmon (2000).

However, it is too simplistic to correlate lack of training totally with flexible work arrangements and contracts. The situation is more deep-rooted. Gospel (1992), for example, suggests...

This paragraph is analysed on the next page.



Should You Use Sub-Headings and Bullet Points In An Essay?

A traditional style essay is characterised by its continuous narrative, with ideas grouped into paragraphs and without sub-headings or bullet points. There is an example of a traditional style essay at the end of this workbook.

However, this general rule is not inflexible, and some tutors will not object if you add sub-headings or bullet points to an essay. And some essay topics, particularly on more technical subjects, are better suited to report-style writing formats.

Tutors in management schools are drawn from many different academic disciplines, with different past experiences of essay writing practice, and so may vary in their expectations of essay writing style and format.

You need therefore to check with your module tutor what style of writing is acceptable.

- Do they expect a traditional style of essay, without sub-headings and bullet points, similar in style to the example shown at the end of this booklet?
- Or would they **prefer** it if you added sub-headings and bullet points to your essay, in a report-style format?
- Or don't they mind - either is acceptable to them?

Most module handbooks will give you guidelines for writing assignments, so always read these carefully.

There is an effective learning booklet on report writing that attempts to clarify the stylistic differences between essay and report writing. However on the following pages there are illustrative examples of the differences between:

- A traditional essay
- An essay written in a report-style format
- A report

Stylistic Differences Between Essays and Reports: Examples

The phrase “commitment” is frequently used by HRM practitioners in the control of absenteeism and its contribution to business objectives. Evaluate the evidence to reinforce commitment and reduce absenteeism.

Peters and Austin (1986) suggested that an individual couldn't simply work for the organisation; they had to live for it 100% of the time. This was the level of commitment required for the company to have the best chance of success. Commitment must flow throughout the organisation; those at the top are responsible for setting the example for others. Employees must have the drive and craving to do better, or else risk building an organisation built on apathy.

According to Armstrong (1999), two schools of thought exist for commitment. The first developed by Walton (1985), concerned the “control to commitment” philosophy. Walton felt that improved performance came from the organisation re-moulding itself from a control-orientated, top-down approach, and adopting a strategy where workers are given broader responsibilities, a greater voice and empowerment to achieve a higher degree of satisfaction in their jobs, Walton's mantra was for “management hierarchies relatively flat, differences in status minimized, control and lateral co-ordination depending on shared goals” (Walton (1985).

This is an example of the opening section of an essay written in a **traditional style**.

The ideas are broken into paragraphs, but the paragraphs are not given sub-headings. Each Paragraph focuses on a particular idea and there is a 'cascade' effect of ideas – ideas flowing on from one paragraph to the next, to the conclusion.



The phrase “commitment” is frequently used by HRM practitioners in the control of absenteeism and its contribution to business objectives. Evaluate the evidence to reinforce commitment and reduce absenteeism.

Introduction

Peters and Austin (1986) suggested that an individual couldn't simply work for the organisation; they had to live for it 100% of the time. This was the level of commitment required for the company to have the best chance of success. Commitment must flow throughout the organisation; those at the top are responsible for setting the example for others. Employees must have the drive and craving to do better, or else risk building an organisation built on apathy.

The Concept of Commitment

According to Armstrong (1999), two schools of thought exist for commitment. The first developed by Walton (1985), concerned the “control to commitment” philosophy. Walton felt that improved performance came from the organisation re-moulding itself from a control-orientated, top-down approach, and adopting a strategy where workers are given broader responsibilities, a greater voice and empowerment to achieve a higher degree of satisfaction in their jobs, Walton's mantra was for “management hierarchies relatively flat, differences in status minimized, control and lateral co-ordination depending on shared goals” (Walton (1985).

This is the opening to the same essay written in a **report-style** format, which could include sub-headings to label each section of the essay.

A section of an essay would contain one or more paragraphs that dealt with the same topic area.

INTRODUCTION

This case study report examines the range of work activities in the UK that can be classed as teleworking, and in particular, work from home and work in call centres. It will summarise the age and gender profile of workers in the sector and summarise the advantages and disadvantages of teleworking generally. In recent years there has been speculation about the future of jobs in the UK call centre. A significant proportion of this report will examine the future of and the challenges facing this particular occupational area.

TYPES OF TELEWORKER

There are two types of teleworkers:

- those who work at home or use their home as a base at least one day a week using both a telephone and computer;
- those who work away from home in a call centre or other form of collective work base

EXTENT OF TELEWORKING IN THE UK

A study in the mid 1990s (Huws, 1996) attempted to discover the extent of teleworking in the UK and assess the potential for expanding work of this nature. The findings from this survey are summarised, as follows: five percent (5%) of the British workforce can be defined as teleworkers -

- of these, 68 percent (68%) are male, 32 percent (32%) female
- forty-one per cent (41%) of female teleworkers work at home, compared with only 15 per cent (15%) of men.
- teleworking is most likely in mid-career.

The ages of teleworkers:

16-24yrs:	2%
25-34yrs:	22%
35-44yrs:	32%
45-54yrs:	29%
55-64yrs:	12%
65yrs+:	3%

- seventy-seven percent (77%) of teleworkers work full-time.
- fifty-two percent (52%) of all teleworkers are employees, with 47 percent classified as self-employed; one percent (1%) are family members, paid to answer calls occasionally.
- nine percent (9%) of teleworkers have disabilities.
- the banking, finance, insurance and business service sector accounts for 34 percent (34%) of teleworkers.

This is an example of the first page of a **report**.

There are sub-headings for each section, and it includes the use of bullet-points and other ways of presenting factual information, e.g. boxed statistics.

A report presents a factual summary of a subject or topic.

For more examples of reports, read the Effective Learning Service booklet 'Report Writing'.

5. **W**RITE-REWRITE



Write

When relevant information has been gathered, the time comes to begin to plan the shape of the essay and to write a first draft.

The main points to bear in mind are these:

- The essay will need a clear structure, which will include an introduction, the main body and a conclusion.
- Some people just 'dive in' and start writing - but they usually have a rough idea about structure in their minds; the structure begins to take shape as they write.
- Others work out a rough plan of the structure then start to write the first draft. If you are relatively new to essay writing, this often proves the best approach.
- The first draft should be written quickly, not worrying too much about style, spelling or grammar at this stage.
- Once the first draft has been written, leave it to one side for a few hours or preferably longer.
- Come back to the draft at regular intervals and ask yourself '**have I really answered the question?**' The answer will probably be 'no' or 'only partially', at this stage.
- Develop your first draft – you may need to do this two or three times before you are happy with it.
- Go over it for spelling and grammatical errors and correct these.
- Be ruthless and cut out irrelevant points.
- Make sure you have included evidence and examples to support your points.



Rewrite

If you have edited your first draft on at least one occasion you should be ready to write the final draft.

- The essay should be prepared on a word processor.
- It should have a margin of at least one inch to the left to allow comments by the tutor and 1.5 spacing between lines, unless instructed otherwise by your tutor.
- You need to make sure that all the evidence you present in your essay is correctly referenced.
- Before you hand it in, you could ask someone to read it for you, particularly to check for spelling or grammatical errors and to get feedback on how convincing or persuasive it is.

Effective Writing

Effective writing is plain, clear and straightforward. There are eight steps to effective writing, including writing essays.

Brevity: aim for brevity in writing. Use short words rather than long and use plain language. As you write, ask yourself 'is there a shorter, plainer word that means the same thing?' If so, use it.

Avoid tautology. If you use another word or words meaning the same thing in a single sentence, that's tautology. Examples (in italics) include: *new* innovation, *added* bonus, *mutual* co-operation, *past* history, *going* forward (see also page 23).

Cut out superfluous words such as (in italics) *advance* planning; *concrete* proposals; *brand* new. This will help to sharpen your writing (see also page 23).

Try not to duplicate words in the same sentence or paragraph. This gives the impression of a limited vocabulary; look for alternatives in an English *Thesaurus*.

Use active verbs that convey a sense of purpose, energy and action. Try and use single syllable verbs if possible, for example, *go*, not proceed; *send*, not transmit.

Correct punctuation and good spelling is essential in any written document, but especially in an essay. Watch out for 'difficult' words, where there may be inconsistencies between British and American spelling, for example -ise or -ize verb endings; ...ise is mostly preferred in the UK (e.g. prioritise).

Watch out for grammatical errors. However, you can 'boldly go' sometimes, and split other infinitives too, if it sounds right and looks right on the page. It is better to avoid doing so, but the editor of *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, argues that 'no absolute taboo' should be placed on this practice - particularly when you want to project a natural voice to the reader.

Revise-rewrite; revise and rewrite. It is very easy to miss typing and other mistakes, so read and re-read your text until you are satisfied. Even then, it helps to let someone else look at it, as they will often spot mistakes that you missed.

The Language of Essays

There is a convention in higher education that ideas in written assignments should be discussed in a seemingly detached and objective way; 'seemingly', as the selection of evidence is often highly subjective and can reflect the student's own position and preferences.

One way to present ideas in a detached way is to remove the term 'I' from written assignments unless it proves clumsy or unnecessary. Some assignments, for example, will invite you to connect a particular theory, model or practice to your personal experiences. In these circumstances, you can use 'I' when referring to your own experiences.

The Effective Learning Service workbook '*Essay Writing 3: Finding Your Own Voice*' deals at length with this issue.

The Word Count

One of the challenges for students is to write within the maximum permitted length, typically 1500 words or 2000 words.

The reason why a maximum length is required for all written assignments is for standardisation and equity reasons: all students face the same assignment; all have to write within the same maximum permitted length.

You will be penalised if you go over the maximum permitted length. Marks can be deducted to the same percentage as you exceed the word limit: if you are ten per cent over, you can lose ten per cent of marks.

Diagrams, graphs, tables, pie-charts are not counted in the word limit, although any text explanations about these will be counted. Appendices and footnotes are not counted either, but if your tutor feels you are using appendices and footnotes deliberately to get round the word count, they can be added to it!

In an essay, you need to be **very sparing** with the use of any illustration, chart, appendices or footnotes. You should concentrate on summarising, paraphrasing and developing your arguments. Too many graphs, charts and tables **can distract the reader from your words**; it is your words that will gain you the marks, not a beauty parade of illustrations.

How to Reduce the Word Count

If you find that you have written over the word limit, you can reduce it by going back over your assignment and cutting out redundant words and phrases. This last sentence for example, can be reduced from 28 words to 19 quite easily – see below.

Before	After
If you have written over the word limit, you can reduce it by cutting out redundant words and phrases.	If you have written over the word limit, you can reduce it by cutting out redundant words and phrases.

- Deleted: find that you
- Deleted: going back over your assignment and

The meaning of the sentence is not changed; in fact, it makes it sharper and more readable.

Be Ruthless



Once you start on this process of being ruthless with your own writing, you can cut the word limit to the required length. However, it takes practice - and courage - to do it.

Look at the following sentence:

What I propose to do, therefore, is to identify the equivalent conditions in the two experiments and then go on to explain the reasons for the importance of these conditions (30 words).

This was taken from a student assignment. However, it can be reduced by over 50 per cent without loss of meaning; some words can be substituted (see below):

I propose to identify the equivalent conditions in both experiments and explain their importance. (14 words).

- Deleted: What
- Deleted:
- Deleted: do, therefore, is to
- Deleted: the two
- Deleted: then go on to
- Deleted: s
- Deleted: the reasons for
- Deleted: of these conditions

The shortened sentence says the same thing and is easier to read. This is just one sentence; imagine the change you could make to a whole essay once you start this process.

Another example taken from an essay that was over length:

Before changes:

Designers design for people’s emotions at that time and to simply complement lifestyle: T-shirts in summer, jumpers for winter, boots in the autumn, sandals for the spring. However, one thing that stays the same throughout all these colour and pattern changes is the brand. Especially the brand logo, which sits promptly and effectively on most garments whilst displayed in either the retailers or department stores. But that's much further down the chain as before the garments get to be hanging they are designed by the top prestigious companies such as Henri Lloyd, Paul and Shark, Vivienne Westwood, Burberry London and international brands such as Versace etc. First they release the product onto the catwalks ready for the award ceremonies and the top agencies to purchase the design. Also high street stores mimic the designs to create an affordable high street trend. Therefore the garment is then taken off the glamorous skinny models such as Kate Moss and redesigned for the average women who shops in the high street stores of Britain. This however, is not counterfeiting this is modification and the companies can do it because the designs are rightfully owned by themselves and protected by rights and laws, and companies certify this by having their brand - logo stitched or ironed on to the garment. (216 words)

Suggested changes:

Designers design to complement **emotions and** lifestyle: T-shirts in summer, jumpers for winter, boots in the autumn, sandals for the spring. However, one thing that stays the same is the brand, **especially the brand logo. But before the garments get to the hanging stage, top companies, such as Henri Lloyd, Paul and Shark, Vivienne Westwood and international brands such as Versace, design them**(rewritten to make this a more active sentence) . First they release the product onto the catwalks ready for the award ceremonies and the top agencies to purchase the design. **High street stores then** mimic the designs to create an affordable trend; the garment is redesigned for the average **woman** . **However, this** is not counterfeiting **but is** modification and companies can do it because designs are owned by them and protected by laws ;companies certify this by having their brand - logo **fixed** to the garment.

The aim is to cut out superfluous words or phrases, or to rephrase using fewer words, without loss of original meaning. This can make the writing sharper, more concise and result in a reduced word count. The complete shortened version is shown on the next page.

- Deleted: for people’s emotions at that time and
- Deleted: simply
- Deleted: throughout all these colour and pattern changes
- Deleted: .
- Deleted: E
- Formatted
- Deleted: .
- Deleted:
- Deleted: which sits promptly and effectively on most garments whilst displayed in either the retailers or department stores
- Deleted: But that’s much further down the chain as
- Deleted: Also h
- Deleted: high street
- Deleted: Therefore t
- Deleted: then taken off the glamorous skinny models such as Kate Moss and
- Deleted: women who shops in the high street stores of Britain
- Deleted: This h
- Deleted: this is
- Deleted: the
- Deleted: the
- Deleted: rightfully
- Deleted: selves
- Deleted: rights and
- Deleted: and
- Deleted: stitched or ironed on

Original Version	Shortened Version
<p>Designers design for people's emotions at that time and to simply complement lifestyle: T-shirts in summer, jumpers for winter, boots in the autumn, sandals for the spring. However, one thing that stays the same throughout all these colour and pattern changes is the brand. Especially the brand logo, which sits promptly and effectively on most garments whilst displayed in either the retailers or department stores. But that's much further down the chain as before the garments get to be hanging they are designed by the top prestigious companies such as Henri Lloyd, Paul and Shark, Vivienne Westwood, Burberry London and international brands such as Versace etc. First they release the product onto the catwalks ready for the award ceremonies and the top agencies to purchase the design. Also high street stores mimic the designs to create an affordable high street trend. Therefore the garment is then taken off the glamorous skinny models such as Kate Moss and redesigned for the average women who shops in the high street stores of Britain. This however, is not counterfeiting this is modification and the companies can do it because the designs are rightfully owned by themselves and protected by rights and laws, and companies certify this by having their brand - logo stitched or ironed on to the garment. (216 words)</p>	<p>Designers design to complement emotions and lifestyle: T-shirts in summer, jumpers for winter, sandals for the spring. However, one thing that stays the same is the brand, especially the brand logo. But before the garments get to the hanging stage, top companies, such as Henri Lloyd, Paul and Shark, Vivienne Westwood and international brands such as Versace, design them. First they release the product onto the catwalks ready for the award ceremonies and the top agencies to purchase the design. High street stores then mimic the designs to create an affordable trend; the garment is redesigned for the average woman. However, this is not counterfeiting but is modification and companies can do it because designs are owned by them and protected by laws; companies certify this by having their brand logo fixed to the garment. (137 words)</p>

In the shortened version, in addition to deleting redundant words, the sentence construction has been changed in parts to make the language more direct and active.

Tautology and Redundant Words

Earlier in this workbook, you were advised to '*avoid tautology*' and '*cut out superfluous words*' (page 18).

Tautology

Here are some examples of tautology (using another word or words meaning the **same thing** in a single sentence).

- Revert back
- Unite together
- Sink down
- Join together
- Follow after
- Mutual cooperation
- Advance planning
- New innovation
- Falsely fabricated
- Ascend up
- Collaborate (or cooperate) together
- Penetrate into
- Hoist up

Redundant Words

Redundant words are unnecessary ones that do not add to the meaning of a sentence. They often become clichés that people use without thinking. '*Brand new*' is a good example: why '*brand*'? It is meaningless when you think about it, and adds nothing to the main word. Other examples are shown below (unnecessary words in italics):

- *General* public
- Divide *up*; filled *up*; burn *down*; eat *up*
- Discuss *about*
- *Important* essentials
- Reduce *down*
- *More* preferable
- Sufficient *enough*
- 35 acres *of land*
- *A number of* examples
- Circular *shape*
- *True* facts
- *Universal* panacea
- Blue *coloured* (whatever)
- *A team of* twelve workers
- *Major* breakthrough
- Meet *together*
- Small *in size*

6. REFERENCES



Get into the habit of accurately recording all your sources of information. It is expected academic practice that you will state the **sources** of your ideas in your essays.

References in essays are used:

- To give the reader the source of statistics and other data
- To give support for your own arguments
- To refer the reader to the source of a quotation
- To acknowledge a writer who has clearly influenced your own thinking
- To avoid accusations of plagiarism

Plagiarism

To plagiarize means to deliberately take and use another person's invention, idea or writing and, directly or indirectly, **claim it as your own work**. In the realm of science, academic or literary ideas, plagiarism is the equivalent of fraud or theft.



There are no internationally agreed academic norms or conventions on what constitutes plagiarism, and this can cause difficulties for some international students who may have encountered different practices in their home countries.

In Britain, there is a particularly strong emphasis given to respecting authorship of ideas and honouring the hard work that goes into researching, preparing and writing academic texts. An academic text-book can take an author several years to research and to write. Consequently it is widely felt in Britain that to copy from a book without acknowledging the source is a violation against the author's ownership of

ideas and therefore morally wrong. For this reason plagiarism is treated very seriously and blatantly plagiarised work is usually disqualified.

Lecturers marking course work can recognise plagiarism easily, especially when passages are copied straight from books, or cut and pasted from the Internet, with no acknowledgement of their source. Lecturers will usually recognise the work of established writers in the subject area concerned and there will be stylistic differences in writing between the original author and a student's work that an experienced lecturer can detect. There are also electronic scanning systems that lecturers can use to highlight plagiarism in students' writing.

There are four main forms of plagiarism:

1. overt copying of another person's work, including the work of another student (with or without their consent), and claiming or pretending it to be your own;
2. presenting arguments that use a blend of your own and the actual words of the original author without acknowledging the real source;
3. paraphrasing another person's work, but not giving due acknowledgement to the original writer;
4. colluding with other students and submitting identical or near identical work.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Quoting, applying, analysing and criticising other people's work is perfectly reasonable and acceptable providing you always:

- ✓ attempt to summarize or restate in **your own words** another person's work, theories or ideas and give acknowledgement to that person. This is usually done by citing your sources and presenting a list of references;

or

- ✓ by always **using quotation marks** to distinguish between the actual words of the writer and your own words. Once again, you would cite all sources and present full details of these in your list of references.

Examples:

Summarizing

Handy (1994) argues that time structures are now less predictable for most people in contrast to thirty years ago. Only a minority of people now, for example, work a regular nine-to-five day. Handy argues that this calls for an adjustment in the way time and time structures are perceived and defined.

Using quotation marks

Handy (1994) believes that *'time is becoming unfixed...we have to rethink time and the words that we have come to attach to time'* (p.32).

In the example above the student uses italics to emphasise the fact that a quotation is being used and gives the page number of the source in question so the reader can check the accuracy of a quotation and whether or not it is being applied in its right context.

References

Citing and listing references – informing the reader of a particular source – is the main way of avoiding plagiarism.

An Example of Referencing in an Assignment

Using references in essays is the way to avoid accusations of plagiarism and is expected of students in higher education.

The School of Management requires students to use the **Harvard System**. This involves citing the source, e.g. the author, as you write.

Citing the source as you write involves giving a partial or shortened reference (last name of author(s) and year of publication) in the main body of your written assignment and then giving full details of the source in full at the end of the assignment in a 'References' section.

See example on next page.

Example:**Citations**

Although *Handy* (1994) has argued that education is the key to economic success for individuals, organisations and nations, a majority of adults in the UK have yet to be convinced or persuaded of this argument. In 1999 only forty per cent of adults had participated in any sort of formal learning in the previous three years. Of these, a significant majority was from social class groups A, B and C. Only a quarter of adults from semi-skilled or unskilled work backgrounds had involved themselves in formal education (Tuckett 1999). The consequences for people without qualifications who lose their jobs are often serious. A study of long-term unemployed people in Yorkshire found that sixty-one per cent had no educational qualifications, and a significant number of these had special learning needs. (Y&HES 1998). There would appear to be a link too, between lack of qualifications, poor health and a disengagement from participation in political or civic life, and could aggravate the situation of unemployment for the people concerned (Hagen, 2002).

At the end of the assignment the references are given in alphabetical order (by last name of the author(s)) **in full**:

REFERENCES

Hagen, J. (2002) *Basic Skills for Adults*, Birmingham: The Guidance Council.
 Handy, C. (1994) *The Empty Raincoat*, London: Hutchinson.
 Tuckett, A (1999) 'Who's Learning What?' *The Guardian* 18/5/1999, p. 13, Manchester: Observer Group Newspapers.
 Yorkshire & Humber Employment Service (1998) *Survey of Clients Aged 25+ Unemployed for Two Years or More*, London: Department for Education & Employment.

For more details of how to cite and reference sources, including electronic sources, see the Effective Learning Service workbook 'References and Bibliographies'.

What's the Difference Between 'References' and a 'Bibliography'?

A **bibliography** is a list of everything you have read for the assignment, whether or not you referred to it in your writing. **References** are the items you have read and referred to in your assignment. Some tutors like you to include both references and a bibliography; others prefer you just to include references. You will need to ask your tutor what his/her preference is.

There is also another excellent guide to using references available in both a printed version and on the Internet: '***Cite 'em Right: how to give good bibliographic references***' (available from the University libraries), and at www.brad.ac.uk/library/electinfo/cdrom/cite.pdf

'ENDNOTE'

EndNote is a useful bibliographic tool, which can help you keep track of the books, journals and other sources that you have used to write essays.

If you enter reference information for all of the resources that you use into **EndNote**, you can then use the program to create bibliographies for your essays, theses and dissertations. Once the basic task of manually entering references has been mastered, you will be able to move on to formatting your bibliography, linking it to your Microsoft Word documents to create references in the text, and exporting and importing references, including the University of Bradford Library Catalogue.

If you are a home student, to buy a copy of Endnote for personal use, please complete the application form at

www.brad.ac.uk/library/electinfo/endnote/about.php and take it for validation to either JB Priestley Building Reception or the School of Management Library counter.

You will be asked to provide proof of your status at the University.

FINALLY...

Before you hand the essay in, we suggest you tick off the boxes in the checklist below.

Essay Writing Checklist

(source: Dr. Peter Morgan, School of Management: *Essay Writing Handout*)

Look at any pieces of work you have completed so far and use the following as a guide for checking your writing before you submit the work:

Purpose:

Am I still clear what my purposes were in writing the essay?

Am I satisfied I went about them in an appropriate way?

To what extent do I feel I attained them?

Is my topic clearly stated?

Have I identified the essential issues?

Have I made clear my intended approach?

Content:

Is it clear what main points I am expressing in each paragraph?

Are my points clearly supported by examples and arguments?

Are my facts correct and up to date?

Are any quotations I have used relevant?

Have I kept an appropriate balance between my own ideas and those of other people?

Have I made clear which points were not my own?

Have I avoided bias and admitted alternative views?

Structure and Style:

Does the assignment have about the expected number of words?

Will the structure of my essay be clear to the reader?

Have I used headings where these might help the reader?

Does each paragraph contain just one idea?

Is there a link between one idea and the next?

Do my conclusions follow logically from my evidence?

Have I used graphs, tables & diagrams where appropriate?

Do my final paragraphs bring my essay to a satisfactory conclusion?

Have I avoided mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar?

Does the essay read smoothly and easily? (If in doubt, try reading it *aloud*.)

Have I followed expected conventions in terms of referencing, bibliography, etc.?

Your Result

You submit the final version of your essay to your tutor who will award it a mark from 0 to 100 and give you written feedback on its strengths and weaknesses. Some general marking guidelines are shown below, although there will be variations to this, according to the level of study, and nature of the course.

Marking Criteria

70-100

Clearly structured work in which the specific assessment criteria are correctly addressed. Arguments are supported by evidence and interpretation. Confident use of specialist vocabulary. At the higher levels of study, there is evidence of originality. There has been an outstanding contribution to group work (if applicable). Correct and consistent referencing using the Harvard System, and displays a high command of English in all respects.

60-69

Displays some of the qualities of the above band, but some aspects not fully realised. High level of participation in group work. Correct referencing using the Harvard System and very good command of English.

50-59

Specific assessment criteria adequately but not completely addressed. Work generally well structured, but may lack focus, and less certain of some concepts. Adequate to limited contribution made to group work. Correct referencing and average to fair command of English.

40-49

Specific assessment criteria inadequately addressed, with parts of the assignment under-developed. Areas of the argument unclear, and uncertain use of specialist vocabulary. Weak to poor structure, referencing and use of English. (Below 50 is a fail at Masters Level).

35-40

Marginal fail (at undergraduate level). Poor to very poor structure and argument lacking relevance to the specific assessment criteria. Substantial generalisation indicating knowledge of basic concepts lacking. Poor referencing and/or poor use of English.

0-30

Fail. Rambling and confused; fails to address the specific assessment criteria. Little or no referencing; poor to bad use of English.

Dealing With Disappointment

Many students who have come to Britain to study for a first or postgraduate degree are often disappointed with the mark they receive for essays they submit, particularly in the first semester. But in Britain the majority of students will achieve marks in the 50-69 range for their assignments, and a mark in the mid 60 range is considered as a **good achievement** for early assignments.

This may contrast with typical pass marks in other countries, where 60 is regarded as a baseline, and 70 regarded as an acceptable lowest point. In Britain a mark of 70 or over would be reserved for a **minority** of students whose work is significantly above average.

“There are six things I look for to justify a mark of 70+.

1. I look for critical analysis and argument. This means I am looking for evidence of the student's own thinking; own criticisms of the main issues, but done in a detached and objective way.
2. There should be clear evidence to support ideas presented, and evidence gathered from a range of sources, such as statistical analysis and case studies.
3. The student should connect with the assignment topic - and answer the set question.
4. The presentation of the assignment should be above average, in terms of good structure, clear introduction, very good conclusion, clear and succinct writing, without spelling mistakes, plus good flow and linkages between paragraphs.
5. The references must be correctly presented, with citations in the text and a list of references presented at the end of the assignment in Harvard Style, that is, in alphabetical order.
6. There should obviously be no plagiarism, and, above all, I ask myself, *'has the student read and followed accurately all the assignment instructions and guidelines'?*”

**(Dr. Deli Yang
School of Management)**

How you deal emotionally with a disappointing result is very important, as it can be all too easy to become frustrated, bitter, ashamed at yourself and angry with your tutors. In the worse cases, this can lead to a student withdrawing from a course. This is something that can be avoided.

The important thing to do is to find out how you can improve your future marks. You have come to the University to learn, so this is all part of the experience. If your marks are low (or fail), there is no shame in this, but it is however, a signal to alert you to a problem that you need to address.

You can **improve** marks by:

- ✓ Making sure you know what is expected of you **before** you write an assignment.
- ✓ Taking careful note of what your tutors say on feedback sheets that you receive with your marks. The feedback sheets will usually separate tutor comments into at least four main sections, including overall structure, balance of understanding, arguments and analysis, research and content, and clarity of expression and use of English.
- ✓ If you are a first year undergraduate student, you could choose the 'Student Self-Development' module as an elective, as this module will help you develop a wide range of skills for managing your learning and personal development. Second and third year undergraduates can now choose a ten credit elective '*Writing for Business and Academic Purposes*'.
- ✓ Reading leaflets in the '*Effective Learning*' series from the library, Effective Learning Service (room 0.10 Airedale Building) or via the School's Home Page. One booklet in particular will help you: "*Your Assignment Results and How to Improve Them*".
- ✓ Making an appointment to talk in confidence with the Effective Learning Officer (ELO) (Email: C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk) or telephone 4414 (internal), or call in at one of the ELO's weekly drop-in 'writing clinics'.

"Thank you very much for your patient help. I am not sure that whether you still remember me... you helped me with my essay writing in the last semester. After discussion with you, I clearly know now about the different approach to take between report and essay writing. With your help, I got the feedback of financial management with the mark 74. It really encourages me".

(Feedback from an international postgraduate student to Effective Learning Officer)

- ✓ Use the resources in the library, particularly books and videos in the 'Study Skills' section at **D.371.30281**
- ✓ If the problem is because of a relatively weak command of English, you can attend English classes, either at the School of Management or the Language Unit at the main campus.
- ✓ Talk to other students and compare your assignment with the assignment of a student who received a good mark.

SAMPLE ESSAY

It is a well-written sample essay to give you an idea about structure, organisation and referencing.

It is written in a **traditional essay** style: in a continuous 'narrative' style, using paragraphs to separate out ideas and without sub-headings or bullet points.

Note the title:

What advice would you give an organisation about ways they could introduce and implement life planning? Support your answer with reference to theoretical and practical evidence and argument (2000 words).

The title assumes that you would **want** to give an organisation advice about ways they could introduce and implement life planning. You must decide if that is the position you want to take up. You might want, for example, to take up a position that argues that life planning is a complete waste of time and you would advise a company not to bother introducing it at all!

The writer's position in the essay is one that implicitly supports the idea of life planning. However, it recognises that many employers will need a lot of convincing on its value to the organisation before it would be introduced as part of any staff development programme. This is suggested in the introduction and emphasised in the conclusion.

It is written in the third-person; note how this is done in the introduction: the writer introduces the structure of the essay without using the word 'I'.

Each paragraph contains a single idea that is expanded using examples and evidence to support points made. The writer attempts to set up a 'cascade' of ideas from one paragraph to the next. A following paragraph tries to pick up on words used in the preceding one to give a sense of continuity.

The referencing is done correctly using the Harvard System, as discussed earlier.

The essay starts on the next page.

What advice would you give an organisation concerning ways they could introduce and implement life planning? Support your answer with reference to theoretical and practical evidence and argument (2000 words).

This essay will define the term 'life planning' and present the advantages for employers of introducing life-planning support for their employees. One of the biggest obstacles to the introduction of life programme for employees is to offer convincing reasons to organisations why they should do it at all. The essay will therefore address the '*what's in it for me?*' questions that employers ask.

Assuming these answers did prove satisfactory to an employer, the ways they could introduce and implement life planning will be discussed. A significant point that will be made is that more research needs to be done on the impact of life planning programmes on the motivation and performance of employees to convince employers of their value.

Life planning is a process to encourage people to review their lives, identify life priorities, consider options and make plans to implement choices (Coleman and Chiva 1991). It is an idea that started in the USA, but has found its way across to UK and the rest of Europe in recent years. Hopson and Scally (1999) suggest the process is built on seven life management skills: knowing yourself; learning from experience; research and information retrieval skills; setting objectives and making action plans; making decisions; looking after yourself; and communicating with others. They argue that these skills are necessary to avoid 'pinball living': where individuals are bounced from one situation to another without any clear direction. At the heart of life planning is the idea of self-empowerment: that individuals should take charge of their own lives and not rely on others to direct or control it for them. This notion of **self-empowerment** is an important element in the process, as 'empowerment' implies that someone on high is giving away the power. Charles Handy, recognising this point, argues for 'subsidiarity': a shift of responsibility to the individual, and that '*the task of the centre, and of any leader, is to help the individual or the group to live up to their responsibilities*' (Handy, 1994, p.36).

The role of the individual in society, particularly in the work place, has risen up the political agenda across Britain and the EU in the last decade: '*Individuals need to take increasing responsibility for their own training and development throughout their*

working lives' (Employment Department 1993, p.40). This notion of individuals taking more responsibilities for their own working lives comes from a change in the contractual relationships between employer and employee. The idea of a 'career' as a long-term vertical progression within an organisation has changed to one where job changes over a period of time is seen as necessary for personal development. Today, a whole range of major changes at work, combined with changes in life-style, puts the emphasis of control on the individual to manage their own affairs.

Life planning can involve individuals focusing on areas of their lives that are important or significant for them. These can include career planning, relationships, health, interests, finances, spirituality and values. Attention to these issues is relevant at all stages of life but particularly so at points of life transition. These can include movement from college or school to employment; the early stages of a career; and later in mid-life in the period leading to retirement. Individuals can focus on these issues on their own, or, arguably more effectively, as part of a collective programme of life planning education.

Although life planning education activity can take place outside the workplace, the workplace is a significant place for it to happen. Work assumes a central position in the lives of many people and is pivotal to many life-planning issues. It also offers individuals points of comparison with others who share similar lifestyles, work values, skills and interests. Many employers also view their workers as important resources and are receptive to ideas about enhancing the skills and motivation of its workforce. This is done for the good of the firm, for example, to foster team-work and to raise morale.

However, the willingness to encourage life planning within an organisation depends on the significance placed on life planning for staff development purposes above other ways of doing this. Law (1996) suggests that life planning could be viewed by organisations in one of four ways, depending on its overall business aim and purpose. It may be seen as a primary essential activity; or as an ancillary and useful activity; or as an additional worthy and worthy but low priority activity; or it can be seen as a marginal activity: of little value to the primary activity, and with little perceived intrinsic value.

Life planning activity rarely occupies a primary position in organisations. At best it is seen likely as a useful ancillary staff development activity. An example of this was a Pre-Retirement Association (PRA) financial education project in six service sector companies. These companies worked with the PRA to offer a financial planning course to their staff with the aim of improving the motivation of staff. (PRA 2000). These companies did not regard it as essential staff development activity, but it was regarded as useful and beneficial to the employees involved, and helpful in developing morale.

However, there is an important question to consider. Is there any long-term evidence that it increases the work commitment of employees? There is, at present, only limited evidence that it does. Eisenberger *et al* (1990), for example, showed evidence that employee perceptions of being valued and cared for did improve attendance, job performance and innovation (as assessed by supervisor's ratings). And Noe *et al* (1990) reached similar conclusions regarding enhanced levels of innovation and creativity displayed by participants following a life planning programme.

But there is as yet no significant or convincing long-term evidence that life planning or career development programmes have any major impact on employee motivation and performance. Employers however, can offer examples of such practice as evidence to support any external or internal quality award they may be striving to achieve, for example 'Investors in People'. They can also use it to enhance their general reputation as a supportive and caring employer, which can have a role in attracting high quality recruits to the company.

It could be argued too that 'Life Planning' is less-threatening to employers, compared to 'Career Planning and Development' approaches, where the emphasis is mainly on individual vocational development and where employers may be wary that these programmes may cause employees to seek employment elsewhere! Life planning, with its emphasis on a broader range of life issues, may not be perceived in the same way. But it would appear that many employers, particularly those operating outside the service sector, would need a lot of convincing on the advantages of life planning programmes before they would consider introducing them.

Nevertheless, life planning can help individual members of organisations in particular ways, according to their age and position in the company. It can help younger members identify their skills, values and ambitions generally, and can help them think about important long-term financial issues (PRA 2000). Employees can become clearer about their skills, and about discussing these with their employer for training purposes. The relevance of long term financial planning also begins to assume more importance for younger employees and, arguably, from an employer's perspective, this might result in a greater commitment to work and the organisation.

With regards older workers, it could help them in two main ways. Firstly, in relation to mid-life and career planning it can help them review their current work. A survey of 600 human resources managers (Rosen & Jerdee, 1990) indicated that career plateau and lack of skill development issues followed from a loss of motivation from older workers. Super and Hall (1978) suggested that mid-life was an important transitional point for older workers, in terms of whether the worker took new opportunities for personal and career growth; maintained a 'solid citizen' performance at work; or lost interest completely in their jobs.

Life planning then, could be an important element in helping older workers review their work and life ambitions generally and help them discuss their skill development needs with their employers. This could form part of performance appraisal and staff development, which could be linked explicitly to such life planning programmes.

The second way it could benefit older worker is in the area of transition from work to retirement. Life planning could provide older employers in the last few years of employment with opportunities to review their working lives and celebrate what they have accomplished. They could then look forward to the final years to see what could be done to gain a positive legacy from work. Mentoring schemes, for example, offer older workers the opportunities to pass their skills and networking contacts on to younger workers.

In both examples, making life planning an integral part of performance appraisal and goal setting is a way of introducing this idea to employers and making it more useful and acceptable to them.

Assuming an employer could be convinced to introduce a life planning programme, a set of basic principles would first need to be identified. Herriot and Pemberton (1996) suggest that a work based life planning programme would include a recognition of five things. Firstly, the programmes need to take into account the social backgrounds of participants. Secondly, the focus of programmes should include consideration of the attitudes of employees toward change, as well as their knowledge and understanding of self and situation. Thirdly, the programme should be put into a 'real world' perspective and presented in a way that related to the participants' knowledge and experiences. Fourthly, the programme would actively involve employees in reflecting on their past, present and future lives, and the connections between these. Finally, the programme would encourage the belief that individuals can cope well with future uncertainty and that change can be managed.

The implementation of programmes, once the principle was accepted, can be shaped by four key tasks. Firstly, there needs to be a relevant and practical programme that served the differing needs of employees at different stages of their life. This might for example take the form of 'core' and 'elective' components including health, financial security, values, interests and future paid or unpaid work. Secondly, the programme would need to be managed effectively, including integration, pace of delivery and overall organisation. This raises issues for organisations whether to manage it themselves or bring in outside consultants. There are advantages for the former option, as it can be a positive indicator of employer involvement and interest if the HRM staff were involved in these programmes. Small to medium sized employers might however, need the expertise of outside consultants to manage such a programme successfully. Thirdly, the programme would need the support of all the stakeholders, including management and participants. This would require the rationale, aims and advantages of the programme to be explained to all with a stake in it. Fourthly, the programme would need to be integrated into the organisational structure and connect with other related activities and interests, e.g. performance and job review, staff development programmes, Investors in People etc.

In conclusion, this essay has promoted the idea of life planning as a process of advantage to both employer and employee. However, at best it is only likely to be of interest to a relatively small number of organisations unless a good case can be

presented to employers for integrating this activity in to the mainstream of its staff development programmes. It would need to be explicitly linked to staff appraisal and goal setting activity before the majority of employers would consider it. More research is needed on its long term impact and effect on employee motivation and performance to convince employers of its worth.

(1946 words)

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FURTHER READING

There are other booklets in the 'Effective Learning' series:

1. *Return to Part-time Study*
2. *Return to Full-time Study*
3. *Accelerated Learning*
4. *20 Tips for Accelerated Learning*
5. *The First Semester (surviving the First Semester)*
6. *Time Management*
7. *Six Steps to Effective Reading*
8. *Essay Writing (2) planning & structuring your essays*
9. *Essay Writing (3) finding your 'own voice' in essays*
10. *Report Writing*
11. *Pass Your Exams*
12. *Your Assignment Results – and how to improve them*
13. *Presentations*
14. *Group Work*
15. *Introduction to Research & Research Methods*

You can download any of these from the School of Management Homepages: Resources– Effective Learning link, or contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 4414 (internal), Email: C.Neville@Bradford.ac.uk, or visit room 0.10 Airedale Building at the School of Management.

The booklets can also be found in the School of Management library, in the foyer of the Airedale Building and in the main entrance/foyer of the Emm Lane building.

Recommended Reading:

Crème, P., and Lea, M.R., (2003) *Writing at University: a guide for students, second edition*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Other Useful Study Skills Guides:

Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*, London: Palgrave. *(This book contains lots of bite-sized chunks of advice and information presented in a lively and visually interesting way. This is an excellent general study skills guide for all undergraduate or postgraduate students).*

Giles, K. and Hedge, N. (1998) *The Manager's Good Study Guide*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press. *(This is a study skills guide written for business studies students and contains advice and information presented in a clear, readable and subject-specific way).*

You should find these in the School of Management library at **D.371.30281**

Also Recommended:

- Marshall, L. and Rowland, F. (1998) ***A Guide to Learning Independently***, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Turner, J. (2002) ***How to Study: a short introduction***, London: Sage.

Some Useful Study Skills Internet Sites:

www.allenandunwin.com/estudy/reportwriting.asp

a website produced by Allen and Unwin publishers on writing for academic purposes, including essay and report writing.

www.support4learning.org.uk/education/key_skills.htm *a good all-round site for study skills advice and information.*

www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/study.htm *for excellent advice and information on developing your communication skills, and particularly for report and essay writing.*

www.bized.ac.uk/ *a study support site for business studies students.*

This booklet was written by Colin Neville, Effective Learning Officer, University of Bradford, School of Management and must not be reproduced without permission. Last updated August 2005.
C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk