

# Your Assignment Results and how to Improve Them



**Effective  
Learning Service**

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Results and how to  
Improve Them**



## YOUR ASSIGNMENT RESULTS – AND HOW TO IMPROVE THEM

Many students, particularly international students, are often disappointed with the marks they receive for written assignments, particularly in the first semester. But in Britain the majority of students will achieve marks between 55-65 for their assignments, and a mark between 65-69 is considered as a good achievement for early assignments.

This may contrast with typical pass marks in other countries, where 60-65 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 students whose work is significantly above average.**

This booklet will help you to understand why you received the grade you did and to help you achieve higher marks in the future. It contains advice from tutors at the School of Management, plus ideas for analysing questions, developing an argument in an essay and for becoming more creative with ideas.

The booklet is the first step, but you might also like to:

- **Discuss this issue with your personal tutor:** seek advice from your personal tutor on ways of improving your grades.
- **Talk to the Effective Learning Officer** for the School about ways of developing effective learning strategies that are right for you. There are learning strategies that take into account your personality and skills, and the Effective Learning Officer, using a short questionnaire, can help you identify these. The Effective Learning Office is in room 0.10 Airedale Building and you can arrange a confidential appointment by contacting Colin Neville, the Effective Learning Officer by Email on [C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk).
- **Attend Effective Learning Service Workshops:** these are offered weekly and focus on aspects of study relevant to all students, particularly writing for assignments. Details of workshops are sent out by Email to all students at the start of each week with reminders sent on workshop days. Workshops generally last for 40-50 minutes.

**IN GENERAL TERMS: marks are awarded according to the following broad criteria**


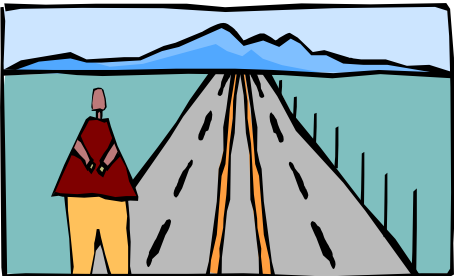
HIGHEST MARKS	GOOD MARKS	LOW MARKS
<p>The <b>highest marks</b> (e.g. 70+) are awarded for work which includes all of the features of 'good marks', and in addition:</p> <p>🏆 <b>Demonstrates</b> good understanding of how and why the topic relates to broader issues or practices.</p> <p>🏆 <b>Gets</b> 'below the surface' of the subject to unravel issues, concerns and connections within an assignment topic</p> <p>🏆 <b>Presents</b> evidence of reading beyond the set texts</p> <p>🏆 <b>Takes</b> a fresh or creative approach to the subject; often interprets available information in an original or objectively challenging way</p> <p>🏆 <b>Writes</b> in a clear, reasoned and coherent way. The ideas and arguments presented are logical and easy to follow.</p>	<p><b>Good marks</b> (e.g. top C-B range) are awarded for work which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Shows</b> understanding of underlying issues</li> <li>✓ <b>Meets</b> the set criteria</li> <li>✓ <b>Answers</b> the set question</li> <li>✓ <b>Develops</b> an argument or point of view</li> <li>✓ <b>Draws</b> conclusions</li> <li>✓ <b>Shows</b> the relationship between different issues or concepts within the subject area</li> <li>✓ <b>Reveals</b> some thought and reflection</li> <li>✓ <b>Organises</b> information into a structure</li> <li>✓ <b>Gives</b> evidence and examples to support arguments and main points</li> </ul>	<p><b>Low marks</b> are awarded for work that is likely to be characterised in one or more of the following ways:</p> <p>☹️ Has weak structure (the ideas are hard to follow)</p> <p>☹️ Shows little evidence of research, thought or reflection</p> <p>☹️ Is mostly descriptive, with little analysis or argument</p> <p>☹️ Considers only one point of view</p> <p>☹️ The assignment may be badly written, with spelling mistakes, poor grammar and confusing sentence construction</p> <p>☹️ No evidence of reading on the subject and little evidence of independent thinking</p> <p>☹️ Gives few examples to illustrate ideas</p>


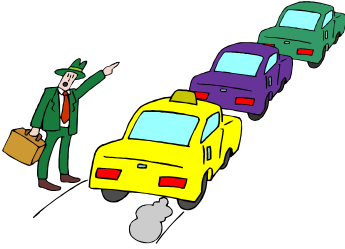
(Source: adapted from Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 181)


You can also draw an analogy between your results and a journey (see next page).

## YOUR ASSIGNMENT RESULTS

It is possible to make the analogy between your assignment results and a journey, in this case a journey of learning.

<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> class (70+)</b></p> <p><b>'A' grade work</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EXPLORER</b></p>  <p>The <b>explorer</b> has pursued the subject in a very thorough and perhaps even a <b>creative way</b>. The explorer will be brave enough to venture into academic 'territory' others have not. For example, the explorer may have demonstrated a willingness and ability to be creative with, or challenge, established ideas or practices in a thorough, analytical and objective way.</p>	<p><b>Features of the work submitted:</b></p> <p>Work of <b>distinguished quality</b> that is based on very extensive reading and demonstrates an authoritative grasp of concepts, methodology and content. Clear evidence of originality of thought and ability to synthesise complex material and to think analytically and/or critically.</p> <p>The work will also be presented to a high standard, including being correctly referenced, free of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.</p>
<p><b>2.1 class (60-69)</b></p> <p><b>'B' grade work</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TRAVELLER</b></p>  <p>The <b>traveller</b> has a plan, purpose and a goal, and has done some careful preparation for the assignment 'journey'. The traveller, with more effort and confidence, could easily become an 'explorer'.</p>	<p><b>Features of the work submitted:</b></p> <p>Competent work which demonstrates a sound level of understanding of concepts, methodology and content.</p> <p>Toward the top end of this range there is likely to be clear evidence of critical judgement in selecting, ordering and analysing content.</p>

<p><b>2.2 class (50-59) 'C' grade work</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TOURIST</b></p>  <p>The <b>tourist</b> likes to play safe and not take any risks. Although the tourist has prepared for the assignment, the tourist quite likes to be told what to do, rather than discover things for him or herself. In assignments, the tourist will report back accurately what he/she has read, but will not get too far, or at all, 'below the surface' of a subject, by, for example, making wider or deeper connections between subjects, or challenging ideas or practices.</p>	<p><b>Features of the work submitted:</b></p> <p>Work derived from a reasonable to good basis of reading and which demonstrates in an adequate way a grasp of relevant materials and key concepts, as well as the ability to structure arguments. There are no serious omissions or irrelevancies.</p> <p>Examples presented however, will tend to come from lecture notes or set text books, rather than from independent reading.</p>
<p><b>3 class (40-49) 'D' grade</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HITCHHIKER</b></p>  <p>The <b>hitchhiker</b> may occasionally be on the journey, but often is not. In a particular assignment, for example, the hitchhiker may have wandered off the track or point, or not really understood where he/she was going, or the 'destination' (e.g. main point of view was unclear).</p>	<p><b>Features of the work submitted:</b></p> <p>Limited understanding of key concepts and limitations in the selection of relevant material. The work submitted may be flawed by some significant omissions or irrelevant material.</p> <p>No examples may be offered to illustrate ideas.</p>

<p><b>Below 40 (or 50 for post-graduate study)</b></p> <p><b>Fail</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LOST</b></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>The <b>lost</b> student either hadn't worked out clearly enough where he/she was going, or became quickly 'lost'. In assignments, the lost student is generally one who has not understood what was expected of them, or thought they knew where were 'going' – but clearly did not! The lost student is one that did not answer the question, or answered it very badly.</p> <p>Like anyone however, who is 'lost', the student can get back on the right track with some help and direction.</p>	<p><b>Features of the work submitted:</b></p> <p>Poor to very poor structure and argument. There is likely to be substantial generalisation, suggesting knowledge of basic ideas is very weak or completely lacking.</p> <p>The standard of English in the writing may also be very poor, making ideas hard to follow or understand.</p>
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(Adapted from Skok, W. (2003) *A Hitch-hiker's Guide to Learning in Higher Education*, in *BEST Practice*, vol. 4, issue 1, September 2003.)

**It can be incredibly frustrating if you are awarded low marks for work that you have put a lot of effort into. You may angry and disappointed and feel very disillusioned. But don't give up.**

You need to wait a day or two then begin to analyse where you went wrong – and how you can improve next time.

So what can you do to achieve (or maintain) higher grades? Essentially, the marks given to you are for the quality of your output and not the effort you put into the assignment, so perhaps you need to work smarter, rather than harder?

This is the subject of the next section of the booklet, so read on...

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR ASSIGNMENT RESULTS

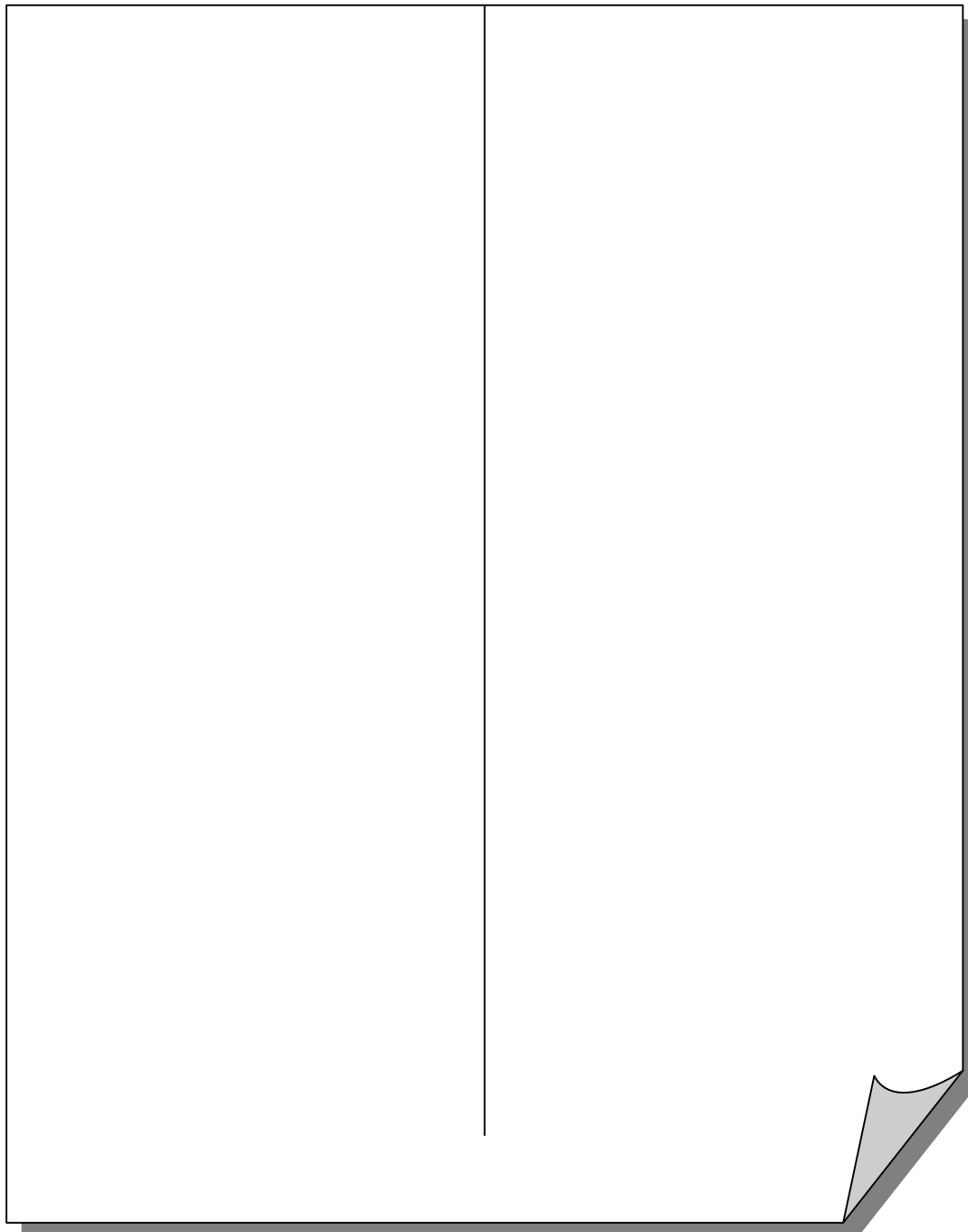
### FIRST STEPS

First, you need to ask yourself "*what are difficulties (or recurring difficulties) in my work? Are there any common themes from the feedback I receive from tutors?*" Try dividing your analysis into two groups: major issues & minor issues, and write them down (you could use the worksheet below).

#### MAJOR ISSUES

#### MINOR ISSUES

MAJOR ISSUES	MINOR ISSUES



## RECURRING ISSUES

If you marginally failed or barely passed an assignment, or obtained just average marks, it is likely that the feedback from your tutor will highlight one or more of the following issues for you to address, using words similar to those that follow:

1. *"You did not specifically or clearly enough address the question set"*
2. *"Your assignment did not explore the subject in enough depth; you should have analysed the subject more thoroughly"*
3. *"Your assignment was badly structured and difficult to follow"*

### **1. "You did not specifically or clearly enough address the question set."**

This is quite a common mistake and a main reason why students fail assignments. The students had no clear vision or clear sense of the direction they were taking in the assignment.

Tutors often complain that students tell them a lot about the subject in general but that they do not relate this knowledge specifically or clearly enough to the assignment or exam question. In other words, they didn't apply their general knowledge of a subject to the specific task in hand.

To avoid this mistake, you really need to analyse the assignment task, project or question in detail and make sure you are clear what you have to do and what is expected of you.

### **How can you do this?**

The first thing is to be clear about what is expected of you by close reading of the assignment title. If in doubt, you need to clarify with the tutor what is expected of you. You also start with the question.



## WHAT TYPE OF QUESTION IS IT?

DESCRIPTIVE	ANALYTICAL
<p><b>Descriptive</b> assignment questions test your knowledge and understanding of a subject and to present your ideas in a clear and organised way. They often contain <b>KEY</b> words, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• Outline</li> <li>• Explain</li> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Show how</li> <li>• Demonstrate</li> <li>• Illustrate</li> <li>• Classify</li> <li>• Give an account of...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Analytical</b> questions also test your knowledge of a subject – but they are more concerned with ability to get below the surface of a subject and to examine it from different perspectives. <b>KEY</b> words include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss</li> <li>• Analyse</li> <li>• Contrast</li> <li>• Consider</li> <li>• Compare</li> <li>• Evaluate</li> <li>• Criticize</li> <li>• Evaluate</li> <li>• Interpret</li> <li>• Justify</li> </ul>

You will also encounter combined questions involving both descriptive and analytical approaches. In this event, although you will need to address the descriptive part of the question in a thorough way, the greater emphasis in your essay should be on the analytical aspects of it.

It is a good idea to highlight key words in essay titles to make sure you focus on what is expected of you. For example:

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

- Assuming you understand what the Internet is, the key words are 'evaluate', 'impact', 'recruitment', 'selection' and 'firms'. The question asks you particularly to **evaluate** (which means to assess the importance of something) 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**' is plural, meaning you need to look at more than one, and suggests that you also need to evaluate the impact on firms of different sizes and to see if there is any variation between them according to the nature of their business.
- In such a question, the tutor will look for evidence in your essay that you can present a range of opinions and arguments that looks objectively at the impact of the internet on both recruitment **and** selection practices.

**2. “Your assignment did not explore the subject in enough depth; you should have analysed the subject more thoroughly.”**



In these instances, it is likely that you have only presented ideas in a superficial way, missed out certain details or not explored in sufficient depth the arguments for and against a particular subject. Tutors will be looking for evidence in assignments that you clearly understand what might be said both in support for or in opposition to any particular idea or practice.

**However, that does not prevent you from stating in your assignment which point of view you find most convincing.**

Often the assignments that gain the best marks are those where the student demonstrates that he/she understands the arguments both for and against a particular point of view, but then puts forward their own conclusions, or summarises the perspective they find the most persuasive. Tutors will not solely look for repetition of lecture material, but expect to see signs of independent thinking and argument.

To help you do this with any point of view, hypothesis or argument, you could use the grid that follows to help you focus on and clarify on both sides of a particular argument/idea/point of view.

<p>Main points in favour of a particular argument/idea/point of view:</p>	<p>Evidence, including references, in support of a particular argument/idea/point of view:</p>
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<p>Cont...</p>	
<p>Opposing points of view to the above argument/idea/point of view:</p>	<p>Evidence, including references, in support of these counter-arguments:</p>

What argument/idea/point of view do you personally feel is the most convincing and persuasive? And why?

There is a convention in higher education (although this can vary from course to course, and from tutor to tutor) that in essays and examinations, (but not necessarily in reports) arguments should be presented in a neutral way. So, unless an assignment or exam question **specifically invites you to give your specific opinion or personal views on a topic**, it is advisable to appear to remain detached from the subject in question. One way of doing this is to try and remove the word 'I' or 'we' from essays.

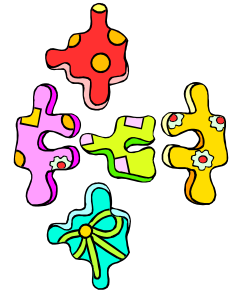
However, you can present your **own point of view** in assignments and appear to remain objective by the careful use of language.

Some ways of keeping the term " I think..." out of essays. Try instead:

- *It can be argued*
- *Arguably...*
- *Some commentators, notably Bloggs (1990) and Jones (1992) have argued...*
- *It may be that...*
- *We can see that...*
- *This essay will attempt to show that...*
- *Perhaps...*
- *One point of view is that ...*
- *Another point of view suggests however, that...*
- *There are two sides to this question. Firstly...*
- *However, ...*
- *In conclusion it can be argued that...*

3. **“Your assignment was badly structured and difficult to follow.”**

This means usually that your point of view or arguments were difficult to follow. You may have, for example, have had too many unrelated ideas in a single paragraph, or that there were no connecting links between paragraphs. For example, you may have put forward one point of view in one paragraph, and then something completely different and unconnected in the next, so that the tutor could not easily follow your arguments.



### Paragraphs

Normally, a paragraph should cover between a quarter and three-quarters of your page. The paragraph should contain one, or at the most, two **key idea** sentences. Other sentences in the paragraph will support this key idea. A common mistake in essay writing is to hop around from one unrelated idea to another in one paragraph. **So, you need to decide on what main point you are going to make in each paragraph – and stick to this.**

Look at the following example, which shows two extracts from paragraphs. This is an example of good structure. You will see how the student ends one paragraph and then starts another by signalling the start of a different perspective on the same issue (The word ‘However’ is a signal that the student is going to offer a different point of view on the same topic.)

*....On-line recruiting, if it is used effectively, is also estimated to cut a week off the recruitment process (Capelli, 2001). Large organisations, like L’Oréal and KPMG, use the Internet to recruit staff on both cost-saving grounds, and because they feel it increases their visibility and attracts high-calibre recruits. With KPMG, for example, the Human Resources staff were dealing with 35,000 paper applications a year, but decided to switch all their UK recruitment online from May 2001 to save time and printing costs. (Carter, 2001).*

*However, despite the obvious impact the Internet has made on the recruitment process, there are a number of concerns and drawbacks to using this medium. These include the issue of relevance of the medium, confidentiality, the large numbers of applications generated, and the problems that job seekers find in navigating websites and communicating electronically with employers....*

## HOW TO GET THE VERY BEST RESULTS (70+)

### What your tutors at the School of Management say about this:

*Assignment work that is awarded a more of 70+ has first and foremost to specifically answer the question set, and not just talk about the issues in the question in general terms. It also needs to show real understanding. This is most likely to come from thorough and detailed critical analysis of relevant ideas and integrating these in discussion this means moving on from 'X says this' and 'Y says that' to an answer that summarizes, compares and contrasts what X and Y say about the issue at hand.*

*You are also very likely to get a good mark **if you tell me something new**. By, for example, either going off the reading list to bring in new relevant work, or through use of examples to illustrate and support arguments. Work that offers new integrative models or attempts to synthesize different ideas is also likely to hit the button in this regard. Finally the work needs to be well written - this means thinking about structure and providing clear and meaningful introductions and conclusions. You are likely to need to write and revise a couple of drafts to get this really right. It also means the avoidance of typographical and spelling errors and the consistent use of Harvard referencing throughout.*

**(Dr. David Spicer)**

I award 70+ marks when:

- *Work demonstrates insight and creativity in using material, including bringing material together from various parts of a course;*
- *Work shows reading outside of the course lists;*
- *Arguments are presented in a coherent manner with examples, research evidence and a good structure.*

**(Dr. Peter Morgan)**

*I will still give high marks, even though I may disagree with the conclusions drawn, providing they are well argued and show an understanding of the relevant literature. Unfortunately, however, there is a group of students who give their own views on subjects, because they do not know any of the relevant material, and give their own views because they do not have anything else they can talk about. They invariably fail badly, because their views are naïve and misguided. Newton said that if he had seen further it was because he had stood on the shoulders of giants.*

**(Dr. Peter Wright)**

*To obtain a mark above 70, a student should know the content of the course, show clear understanding of concepts, be able to provide examples related to the concepts analysed in the course. The essay should be written in a concise manner and be easy to read. Content should be well structured, and information should flow logically.*

**(Dr. Axèle Giroud)**

*Concerning getting better marks for essays, and in particular, for the 'open ended' type essay questions...*

**Answer:** 'Yes' or 'No' is OK.

**Answer:** 'Yes, because...', or 'No, because ...

*(i.e. giving reasons), is a little better.*

**Answer:** 'Yes', with reasons, and, also 'No, with reasons, is better still. It is always good to point out the downside.

**Answer:** *as above, but illustrating the points that are being made with practical examples, and/or references to appropriate literature, plus if appropriate, charts, diagrams, and tabulations. All of this is much better as it helps the student to explain, demonstrate, and illustrate his or her understanding of the question set.*

*In addition, the answers for the 70+ % should demonstrate the student's powers of critical evaluation, reflective learning, and research e.g. via the review of appropriate literature and www sources.*

*From a personal point of view, I rate the conclusions and recommendations section as being highly important e.g. principal findings, rather than a few lines, that in effect says, 'THAT'S ALL FOLKS!'*

**(Les Chadwick)**

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)**

## COMBINING CRITICAL THINKING WITH CREATIVITY

Gaining the highest marks often involves **both** critical analysis and creative thinking.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Much of the thinking done in formal education emphasizes the skills of **critical analysis**: encouraging students how to understand, following or creating logical arguments, working out an acceptable answer, eliminating incorrect paths and focusing on the correct one. It also involves synthesising establishing ideas and identifying the linkages between them. It involves engaging with a particular point of view in one or more of the ways described below:

- **Agreeing with**, acceding to, defending or confirming a particular point of view
- **Proposing** a new point of view
- **Conceding** that an existing point of view has certain merits, but that it needs to be qualified in certain respects
- **Reformulating** an existing point of view or statement of it so that the new version makes a better explanation
- **Dismissing** a point of view on the grounds of its inadequacy, irrelevance, incoherence etc.
- **Rejecting**, rebutting or refuting another's arguments on various reasoned grounds
- **Reconciling** two positions which may seem at variance by appeal to some higher or deeper principle

(source: Taylor, G. (1989) *The Student's Writing Guide for the Arts and Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Would you like to see an example of an essay that engages effectively and critically with an essay topic? The Effective Learning Officer can send you a sample essay with notes on why it received a good mark. Contact Colin Neville by Email: [C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk)

## THE **AEIOU** APPROACH TO CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The **A.E.I.O.U.** system that follows, for example, will help you analyse in depth any new theory, idea or working practice that you encounter.

**A:** Are any **ASSUMPTIONS** being made?

Has anything been taken for granted or left out of the picture? Has the author or lecturer used an isolated example to make a generalised sweeping conclusion?

**E:** What is the **EVIDENCE** for this?

Can you trust the source? Is it really evidence that is being presented – or just opinion? What other explanations could there be? If you are convinced, what else follows from the explanation?

**I:** Can I think of a good **ILLUSTRATION** or example of this?

Does this fit any other topic, category or class of things I am familiar with. Can I think of an example from everyday life, or the past, that connects with the topic/subject?

**O:** What **OPINIONS** or conclusions can I draw personally from this? Are these justified, and why, or why not?

**U:** What are the **UNIQUE** points in all this?

What are the key and new ideas emerging from this subject? Are there new points? Or is this something that has just been 're-packaged' and presented as new and original?

(**source:** Rose, C. & Nicholl, M.J. (1997) *Accelerated Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. NewYork: Dell Publishing)

## CREATIVE THINKING

However, there is another kind of thinking: **creative thinking**, which focuses on exploring or floating new ideas, generating possibilities, looking for many right answers rather than just one. Both of these kinds of thinking are vital to a successful working life – and for gaining the best marks in assignments.

Creative thinking is not separate, but connects and flows on from critical/analytical thinking. A firm knowledge of basic ideas and practices is essential to creativity, as it informs you of what is possible now or from the past.

Creative ideas however, can expand these possibilities by re-shaping them or looking at them from different perspectives.

However, students often play safe in assignments and do not take the necessary risks with ideas that being creative can involve. The most creative ideas can be unconventional and therefore risky – as you have to convince influential others of the merits of them.

Most lecturers welcome unconventional and creative ideas. They also welcome ideas that challenge established principles, theories and practices. **But, as stated earlier, you also need to convince lecturers that you have a firm grasp of established ideas and that your alternative proposals flow from a firm foundation of knowledge.** This means reading widely on the subject – there is no substitute for this process.

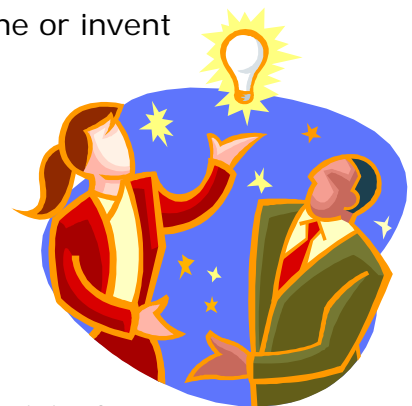
## WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

One definition is that creativity is the ability to imagine or invent something new.

Creativity is not the ability to create out of nothing, but the ability to generate new ideas by combining, changing, or reapplying existing ideas. Some creative ideas are astonishing and brilliant, while others are just simple, good, practical ideas that no one seems to have thought of yet.

Everyone has the ability to be creative - look at how creative children can be if encouraged. In adults, creativity has too often been suppressed, but it is still there and can be reawakened.

In the academic world you can be creative with ideas. You can look at established ideas, theories, practices and principles and turn them upside down, inside out, connect them with other seemingly disconnected practices and ideas and generally try to take a fresh look at things. Don't forget what Dr. Dave Spicer said: **"...you are also very likely to get a good mark if you tell me something new"**. To tell him 'something new' however, as already emphasised, you have to have a good grasp on what is already there!



To be creative you need to:

- make a commitment to be creative
- take the time for it
- gain the confidence to be creative

## FOUR-WAY THINKING

Another approach to creative thinking is to adopt a 'Four-way Thinking' approach to look at problem solving, established ideas or practices in new ways:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FRONT-TO BACK THINKING</b></p> <p>This approach <b>starts with the situation</b> or problem and works systematically toward a solution or explanation.</p> <p>This usually involves a <b>DANCE</b> approach:</p> <p><b>D: Defining</b> the problem or situation</p> <p><b>A: Alternatives</b> – generating lots of alternative situations/solutions</p> <p><b>N: Narrowing</b> down the alternatives</p> <p><b>C: Choosing</b> one &amp; checking out the consequences</p> <p><b>E: Effect:</b> putting ideas into effect</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TOP-DOWN THINKING</b></p> <p>This way of thinking takes an overview position and imagines you are looking at a situation in a detached way, from above – like a fly on the wall - and ready to see other people's viewpoints, and particularly those who may be directly involved as participants.</p> <p>This is a particularly good position to take if you are personally committed to a particular argument or practice, as it forces you to be more objective.</p> <p>Good questions to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How would a detached observer see this idea/practice/problem etc?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are there other underlying issues to consider?</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BACK-TO-FRONT THINKING</b></p> <p>With this approach you <b>start</b> with the desired solution and work backwards to envisage how it might come about in the future.</p> <p>Questions to ask include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is standing in the way of the solution I want?</li> <li>➤ What's the simplest way of removing these obstacles?</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BOTTOM-UP THINKING</b></p> <p>This way of thinking turns a problem or situation upside down and asks or poses different questions, or looks at a situation in a completely different way.</p> <p>Two shoe salesmen were sent to an overseas country to assess potential sales opportunities. One reported back: '<i>no opportunities here – no one wears shoes</i>'. The other reported back, '<i>Great opportunities here – no one wears shoes!</i>'</p>

(adapted from: Rose, C. 2000 *Master It Faster: How to Learn Faster, Make Good Decisions and Think Creatively*. London: The Industrial Society.)

## THREE STAGES OF CREATIVITY

Robert Sternberg of Yale University sees three stages to being creative with ideas:

### 1. Insight

This involves defining the problem carefully and sifting relevant data from the irrelevant

### 2. Combination

This involves re-combining old ideas in new and fresh ways

### 3. Comparison

This involves comparing the old and the new and being clear about the value and differences between both

*(Sternberg, Robert J. (1994). Encyclopaedia of Human Intelligence. Macmillan Publishing Company.)*

## OTHER WAYS OF IMPROVING ASSIGNMENT GRADES

- Talk to other students about an assignment – get their perspectives
- Discuss this issue with your personal tutor
- Find another student you trust, show that person your draft assignments and ask for honest feedback
- Read other booklets from the **Effective Learning Service**, including 'Pass Your Exams' and booklets on essay writing, report writing and referencing/bibliographies.

## PROBLEMS WITH ENGLISH?

If you feel your English is a significant cause of the problem for low marks, you can seek advice from

- The Language Unit, Main Campus, tel. 01274 235208, Email: langunit@bradford.ac.uk

or

- Heather Rea, Language Co-ordinator, School of Management, tel. 01274 234383, Email: h.m.rea@bradford.ac.uk

or

- Colin Neville, Effective Learning Officer, School of Management, tel. 01274 234414, Email: C.Neville@bradford.ac.uk

You may be able to attend English language support classes. The Effective Learning Officer can also give you a list of proof-readers in the area (although they charge a fee for this service).

## FURTHER READING

There are other leaflets in the 'Effective Learning' series. The range of leaflets is growing, and to check on what titles are available at any one time, visit the University of Bradford School of Management Home Page, go to 'Resources', and then click onto 'Effective Learning Service'. Alternatively you can contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 01274 234414 (or just 4414 if 'phoning internally) or by Email: C.Neville@Bradford.ac.uk, or by visiting room 0.10 Airedale Building at Emm Lane.

In the School of Management and J.B. Priestley libraries, there is a study skills section at **D.371.30281**

### Recommended reading:

Cottrell, S. (2003) ***The Study Skills Handbook***. Palgrave  
(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).

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

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

McIlroy, D. (2003) ***Studying at University: How to be a Successful Student***. London: Sage.

Marshall, L. & Rowland. F. (1998) ***A Guide to Learning Independently***. Open University Press.

Turner, J. (2002) ***How to Study: a short introduction***. Sage.  
Other learning material may be available, e.g. videos. Please enquire at library reception.

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