



Planning an assignment

Introduction

Creating a plan is an important part of the assignment writing process. A plan ensures that you successfully address the assignment question that has been set, help you to link ideas together and save time when writing an assignment. There are a number of different techniques that you can use when planning out an assignment question. One of the most popular techniques is the 'skeleton' plan – discussed in this resource.

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:
lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub



How to create a skeleton plan

Step 1 - Identify main topic areas

The first step of creating an assignment plan involves listing the key areas that need to be addressed in your assignment. If you have followed stages 1 and 2 of this guide, creating this list should be straightforward. Make sure you address all of the areas outlined in your assignment brief, and then supplement these with areas that you have identified through your own research. It is a good idea to create this list on a computer so that you can easily reorder it as appropriate (using cut and paste). It is also useful to highlight main topic area headings in **bold** to differentiate them from other parts of your plan.

Step 2 – Break down main topic areas

Once you have listed the main topic headings take each of your headings in turn and list the specific aspects of that area that you want to address (break the topic area down). Questions that can assist this process include:

- What is the topic about?
- What do I already know about this area?
- What do I need to find out about this area?
- What are the main points I want to make?
- What evidence do I have to support my main points?

Struggling to break down your main topics?

Some students find it difficult to break down assignment topics one by one. If this is the case, don't worry. First of all, try and break down the topics as far as possible. Then start making a list of other areas that you think need to be included in your assignment – don't worry about the order of this list. For example:

Main topics that need to be addressed	Ideas of content to include
What are study skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:1s• Lectures• Definitions of study skills• Staffing differences• Seminars• Social learning• Emails• Resources differences
Ways of teaching study skills	
How are teaching methods alike?	
How are teaching methods different?	

The example at the end of this guide shows how these ideas have been organised around the main topic areas.

Once you have created your list, look back at your topics and try to link each of the areas you have listed with one of the main topic areas – where this is possible list them under the appropriate heading.

Information that does not seem to be associated with main topics

List any information that seems relevant to your plan but you can't link to a topic area under a heading called 'other'. As you develop your plan and/or write the assignment keep reviewing information listed in the other section. You might find that as you become more familiar with the subject matter you can start to see ways of adding in the information. If you continue to find it difficult to find a way of linking the information to what you have written, think very carefully about how relevant the information actually is to your assignment.

Step 3 - Order of main topic areas

After you have broken down each of your topic areas, you need to consider the order that you will present this information in your assignment. This might involve reordering some of your topic area sections. Questions that can assist this process:

- What information does my reader need to make sense of later information (for instance, definitions before discussing an area)?
 - Am I discussing something that has happened in a sequence (such as a historical context or what happened during a placement experience)? If so, you will probably want to present this information in chronological order.
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Information that does not 'fit in'

As you order the information that you have collected you might find that some of the information you want to include do not seem to 'fit' together. This might occur for one of two reasons:

- 1) Information is irrelevant and there is no issue with plan structure

2) Information is relevant and there is an issue with plan structure

Think carefully about whether the information that does not 'fit' is definitely relevant to your assignment and should be included. If the information is not directly relevant, including it could break up the flow of what you write or even given the impression that you don't fully understand the assignment question.

If the information is definitely relevant but does not 'fit,' you will need to take another look at your plan. It might be that other information that you have included in the plan needs to be reordered or even removed.

Step 4 - Map the plan to the question

Once you have created your plan, it is a good idea to check your plan addresses all aspects of the assignment question. It should be very clear where each aspect of the question is addressed (including the action verb) – this should also be the case when you write your assignment, be explicit.

Please note

There might be some parts of the plan where you can't go into too much detail – for example the introduction or conclusion sections. This is not a problem. As you write the assignment you will probably get more idea of what to include in these sections.

Example

Using the steps outlined in the guide a skeleton plan has been constructed for the following assignment question:

Compare and contrast study skills teaching methods that can be used in a higher education context.

Please note: That within this plan the content was selected from a range of possible areas – decisions regarding what to include were based on Step 2 (breaking down the main topic areas).

Skeleton Plan Example

Introduction

- Provide a context
- Discuss what will be addressed in the assignment

What are study skills?

- Definition of study skills from Jones (2012)
- Definition of study skills from Hughes (2013)
- Link these definitions together to highlight main points

Face-to-face study skills teaching methods

Define face to face teaching

What are face to face teaching methods?

- Lectures
- Seminars
- 1:1s

How widely used are face to face teaching methods?

Distance study skills teaching methods

Define distance teaching methods

What are distance teaching methods?

- Virtual learning environments (BREO)
- Social learning

How widely used are distance teaching methods?

How face-to-face and distance study skills teaching methods are alike

- Focus upon student learning
- Resources

How face-to-face and distance study skills teaching methods are different

- Accessibility
- Staffing
- Teaching space / room requirements

Conclusion

What were the main themes that emerged?

Can I conclude when specific teaching methods are most appropriate?