



SURVIVAL GUIDE TO ASSIGNMENT WRITING

Planning Your Essay

Decide how many words to allocate to the different sections of the essay

	1,500 word essay	2,000 word essay	2,500 word essay
<u>Introduction</u> 5-8% of total number of words	120 words	160 words	200 words
<u>Body</u> Number of words you've got left when you've taken off Introduction and Conclusion words	1,160 words	1,600 words	1,950 words
<u>Conclusion</u> 12-15% of total words	220 words	240 words	350 words

When you have done this stage, decide what topics you are going to include in the body of the essay. Then allocate the number of words to the topics you have selected.

Support for Assignment Writing

Defining Assignment Questions

In order to answer your assignment question fully, you need to unpack it.

Assignment questions contain **direction** words: verbs, which are crucial in telling you **how** you should answer the question. It is vital that you understand these, as they help you to formulate analysis and discussion in your assignments. Here are some definitions:

Account for	Give reasons for
Analyse	Break an issue or problem down into parts and discuss each part objectively, giving a variety of arguments and evidence
Argue	Support or reject a position by presenting reasons and evidence for/against each position
Comment on	Explain why something is or is not important, using evidence
Compare	Show the way things are alike and explain why
Contrast	Show the way things are not alike and explain why
Critically evaluate	Give your judgement (objectively) about whether something is: important or not important relevant or irrelevant effective or ineffective Give examples and evidence for your reasons
Define	Give the precise meaning or offer different meanings for the same thing
Discuss	Investigate by looking at all sides of an issue/issues
Evaluate/assess/to what extent?	Decide how valuable, important, effective something is or is not and address any weaknesses
Explain	Give reasons for why something does or does not happen
Illustrate	Use clear examples/case studies to explain something
Outline	Give the main features/principles/events, etc

Signposts in Sentences

- Use signposts to guide your tutor through your discussion.
- The clearer your signposts – the easier your work will be to read.
- **Never** make sweeping statements.
- Always back up what you say with evidence and examples.

Introducing an example

an example of this is ...
the following examples ...
for instance ...
for example ...
this is particularly evident ...
this has been observed ...
such as ...

Showing the result of something

consequently ...	thus ...
hence ...	because ...
owing to this ...	as a result ...
the result is ...	due to ...
this caused ...	not only does this ...
the effect of this ...	if this is the case ...
so ...	therefore ...
this could be mainly due to ...	it could be argued ...
it might be suggested ...	
this is possibly due to ...	

Introducing an additional idea or agreeing with what has just been stated

In addition to this ...	in the same way that ...
furthermore ...	as does ...
moreover ...	as Bloggs argues ...
similarly ...	it might be suggested ...
in agreement with this ...	a corresponding theory ...
in agreement with ...	not only does this ...
nevertheless ...	

Introducing an opposing or contrasting idea

but ...	in contrast ...
or ...	a counter argument ...
however ...	alternatively ...
although ...	whereas ...
in other words ...	as opposed to ...
despite this ...	in opposition to this ...
on the other hand ...	unlike ...
on the contrary ...	

Paragraphs (are also signposts)

Paragraphs should have a **topic sentence**, containing one main idea, followed by several **supporting** sentences, which **explain** or **illustrate** the main idea.

Spellings

These are the **correct** spellings of words often spelled wrongly.

academic	occurrences
accessible	opportunity
achievable	pedagogic
committed	preparation
curriculum	primarily
definitely	professional
environment	relevant
existence	society
grammar	separate
independent	strategies
interest	whereas
manner	

Sentence Grammar

Verb Forms

Students sometimes lose marks for incorrect use of verb forms. This is sometimes due to the difference between dialect and formal spoken and written English. Whilst it is acceptable to use informal dialect and accent in informal situations, it is unacceptable in formal written English.

Examples

They was sat down	X	They were sitting down	✓
He was stood there	X	He was standing there. (or) He stood there	✓
She has wrote a book	X	She has written a book. (or) She wrote a book	✓
They could of gone home	X	They could have gone home	✓
She should of told you	X	She should have told you	✓

Common Errors in Spelling and Grammar

These are the **correct** uses

<p>Practice (noun)</p> <p>Examples of regular reading practice were evidence throughout the school</p>	<p>Practise (verb)</p> <p>The children practise reading twice a week</p>
<p>Effect (noun) means caused</p> <p>The Governors' decision had a significant effect on the school.</p>	<p>Affect (verb) means influenced</p> <p>Insufficient water intake can affect concentration</p>
<p>Where (adverb) place</p> <p>(Notice the similarity to here and there)</p> <p>I cannot remember where I left my coat</p>	<p>Were (verb) often used in past plural tense</p> <p>The children were attentive for most of the lesson</p>
<p>There (adverb) place</p> <p>Your coat is over there</p>	<p>Their (possessive pronoun)</p> <p>The children have got their coats on</p>
<p>Was (verb) singular – used with I, he, she, they, it ...</p> <p>He was a very quiet child</p> <p>Note – sometimes people use the term "were" in speech to say the same thing as above: "He were a very quiet child"</p> <p>This is dialect and unacceptable in standard written English</p>	<p>Were (verb) plural – used with you, they we ...</p> <p>They were very quiet children</p>
<p>Maybe (adverb) means perhaps</p> <p>Maybe I will go out tonight</p> <p>Avoid using it in assignments, as it is too informal</p>	<p>May be (2 words – means could be)</p> <p>This may be caused by ...</p>
<p>Too (adverb)</p> <p>It was too hot in the classroom</p>	<p>To (preposition)</p> <p>Children need to learn how to learn</p>

The Apostrophe '

These are the **correct** uses

- The **contraction** shows omission of letters. You **should not** use this in formal Standard English, unless you are quoting direct speech

X	✓
Didn't	Did not
Don't	Do not
Can't	Cannot
We'll	We will

- The **possessive** apostrophe shows ownership. Notice how the apostrophe comes directly after the person or thing that owns something; for example, teacher's, teachers'.

Single possession

The child's books	The books belong to one child
The teacher's office	The office belongs to one teacher
The car's passengers	The passengers belong to one car

Plural possession

The children's book	One book belongs to more than one child
The children's books	Several books belong to more than one child
The teachers' office	One office belongs to more than one teacher
The cars' passengers	The passengers belong to more than one car

Possessive pronouns do not require an apostrophe, for example: His, hers, yours, ours, his, hers, theirs, its.

Another **common error** with the apostrophe is to use it with possessive pronoun its.

Example

The river has burst it's banks = WRONG X

The river has burst its banks = CORRECT ✓

Proof – Reading Strategies

You will get better marks for your essays if you check them properly for mistakes and inconsistencies.

What?	Why?
Leave some time between the end of writing and the beginning of proof-reading (at least 24 hours is best)	You will be more objective and you will notice things you did not see when the piece of work has become very familiar to you
Print off your assignment to proof-read it	It is difficult to see your errors on the PC, when you have been looking at the screen for a long time
Ask yourself "What am I checking for?"	You will focus better
Do your proof-reading in stages: only check for one thing at each reading	You will be more accurate
Try reading your work aloud or asking someone to read it to you	You might hear your errors. Hearing what you've written also helps you to judge how you're getting your point across
Use <i>Read and Write</i> software	The work is read back to you on the computer. You might hear errors
Identify your 'favourite' mistakes and check specifically for these	You will focus better
Check your layout: are spaces between paragraphs regular? Are headings on the same page as their sections? Are the pages numbered? Is the line-spacing regular.	The person marking your work will be able to concentrate on what you have written and not be distracted by poor presentation.
Use Outline View (under View in toolbar) to see the first line of your paragraphs and to check that they follow in a sensible order	Each topic sentence should contain the key idea
Start checking from the last paragraph and move backwards through the essay	Taking the information out of sequence helps to focus on the content of each part
Look at the summary sentences and check that the sequence of information is appropriate for the essay	You will be making your work more coherent if there's a logical flow from one paragraph to the next

Never hand in a piece of work without checking it thoroughly