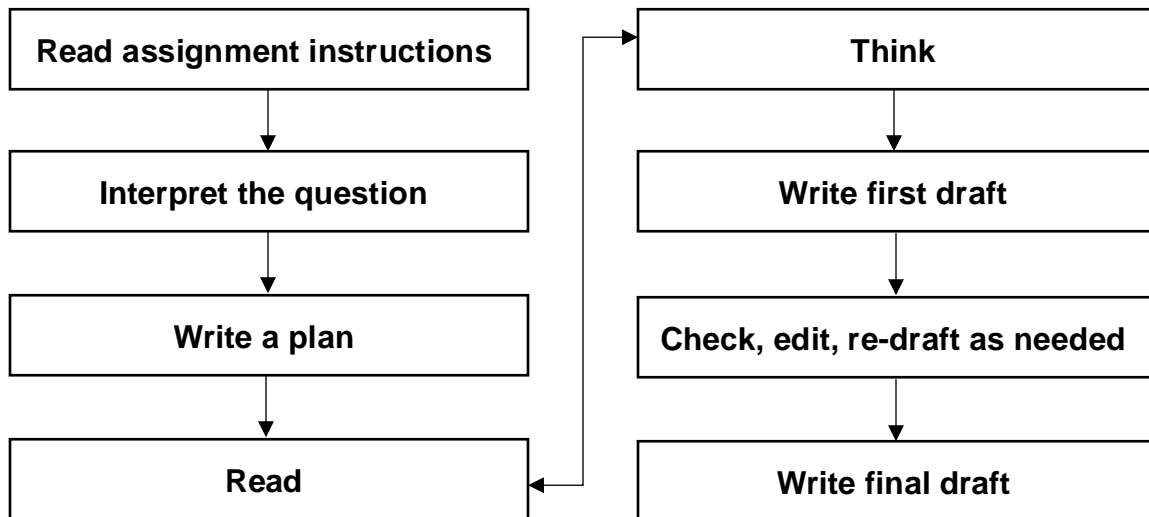




The writing process

Writing is a process that involves different stages. Rather than writing an assignment the night before and handing it in, you will learn more and get better grades if you take the time to read, think, write and rewrite. There are different approaches to the writing process. Below is one good way to organise your time and effort.



Adapted from: Emerson, L. (Ed.). (2005). *Writing guidelines for social science students* (2nd ed.). Thomson/Dunmore Press.

Read assignment instructions

Check the:

- word limit
- format of the assignment (essay or report?)
- referencing style (APA, MLA?)
- due date
- marking guide

Interpret the question

Often there are three parts to an assignment question:

- **Command:** these are command or directing words that tell you what to do, such as “Discuss,” “Analyse,” “Compare,” “Critique,” or “Evaluate.”
- **Topic:** this is the subject of the assignment, which is often quite broad.
- **Focus:** this is the direction you need to take, or the aspect of the topic to focus on.

Example essay question

Compare and contrast Simon (1957) and Lindblom's (1959, 1979) approaches to decision-making with those of Cohen et al. (1973) and Kingdon (1984).

Command: compare and contrast

Topic: decision-making

Focus: Simon and Lindblom's approach and Cohen, March, Olsen, and Kingdon's approach

Command words

Listed are some key words commonly used in essay questions.

- **Analyse:** break the subject up into its main ideas and evaluate them
- **Assess:** judge the value of a subject
- **Compare:** show the similarities and differences of two or more subjects
- **Define:** give the meaning of a word or term distinguishing it from closely related subjects, sometimes by examples and illustrations
- **Describe:** give a detailed account of the characteristics of a subject
- **Discuss:** investigate and present the different aspects of a problem or subject and come to some conclusion
- **Examine:** inquire into, and consider a problem carefully
- **Evaluate:** appraise; judge the quality or worth

Assignment planning

Developing a plan before you start writing helps prevent getting "lost in the detail" after you start. A plan can be very detailed and include a paragraph by paragraph outline, or it can be a simpler bullet-pointed list of the main themes you wish to cover. Either way, consider including the following:

- List major themes and points.
- Include areas that you will need to research.
- Consider what you want to say: what is your thesis statement?
- Consider a possible structure: could you group similarities and differences together, is it more topic based?
- Remember: when you start researching and writing, the initial plan (and your thesis statement) may change

Checking and re-drafting

- Does your overall structure make sense and cover all necessary aspects of the question?
- Does your assignment move from point to point in a way that gives the reader a clear sense of direction?

Editing and proofreading tips

- Read it aloud
- Record yourself reading it and then play it back

- Ask a friend or family member to read over the assignment for you.

Assignment planning calculator

Use the [online planning calculator](#) to create a timeline for planning, writing, and revising your assignment.

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).