ACADEMIC WRITING FOR POSTGRADUATE ASSIGNMENTS

Steps for writing an assignment?

- Analyse the assignment question

- Brainstorm the topic

    - key questions that need to be answered?

- Find and choose sources (see "how to find information on your topic")

- Read and take notes

- Prepare outline

- Write first draft and get feedback

- Edit first draft, second draft, third draft…

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT QUESTION

Assignment 1: Essay
Due date: 28 March, 2013
Word limit: 1500 words
Learning outcome: 3
Weighting: 20%

See CTL workshops & OWLL for other formats
See Assignment Planning link on OWLL
Keep to the word limit!

Use to help you understand assignment requirements
Tells you how much this assignment makes up your overall grade

> In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Take note!

You need to refer to at least 15 academic sources in completing this assignment.

Make sure you use this!

Recommended source:

Griffin, R.W., & Moorhead, G. (2012). *Organizational behavior: Managing people and organizations*. South Western/Cengage Learning.

In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Step 1: Identify the topic

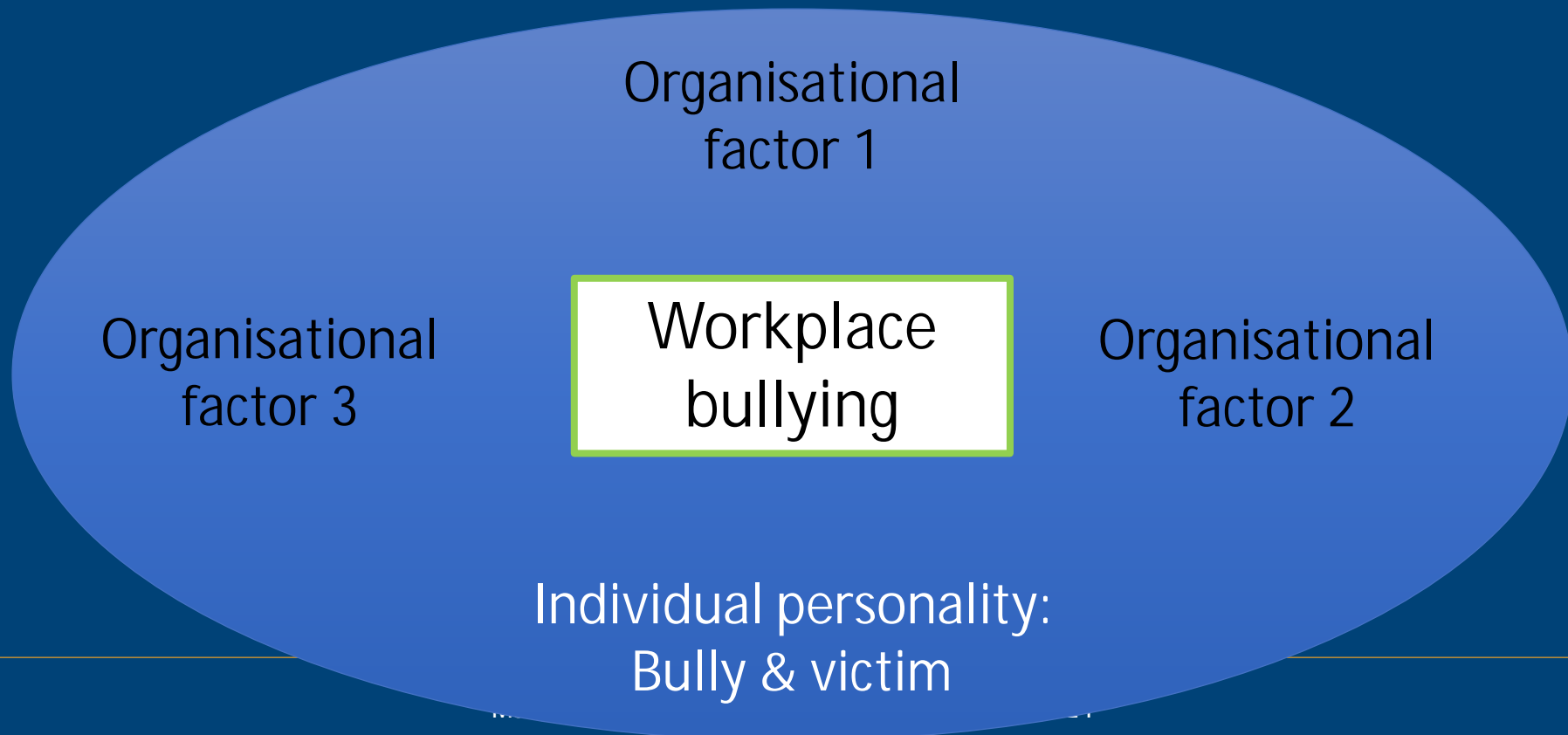- *What is the assignment about (broad topic)?*

Workplace bullying

In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Step 2: Identify the focus

- *What do I include on this topic?*

Organisational factor 1

Organisational factor 3

Workplace bullying

Organisational factor 2

Individual personality: Bully & victim

In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Step 3: Identify the command words

- *What do I have to do in the assignment?*

Organisational factor 1

Organisational factor 3

Workplace bullying

Organisational factor 2

Individual personality:
Bully & victim
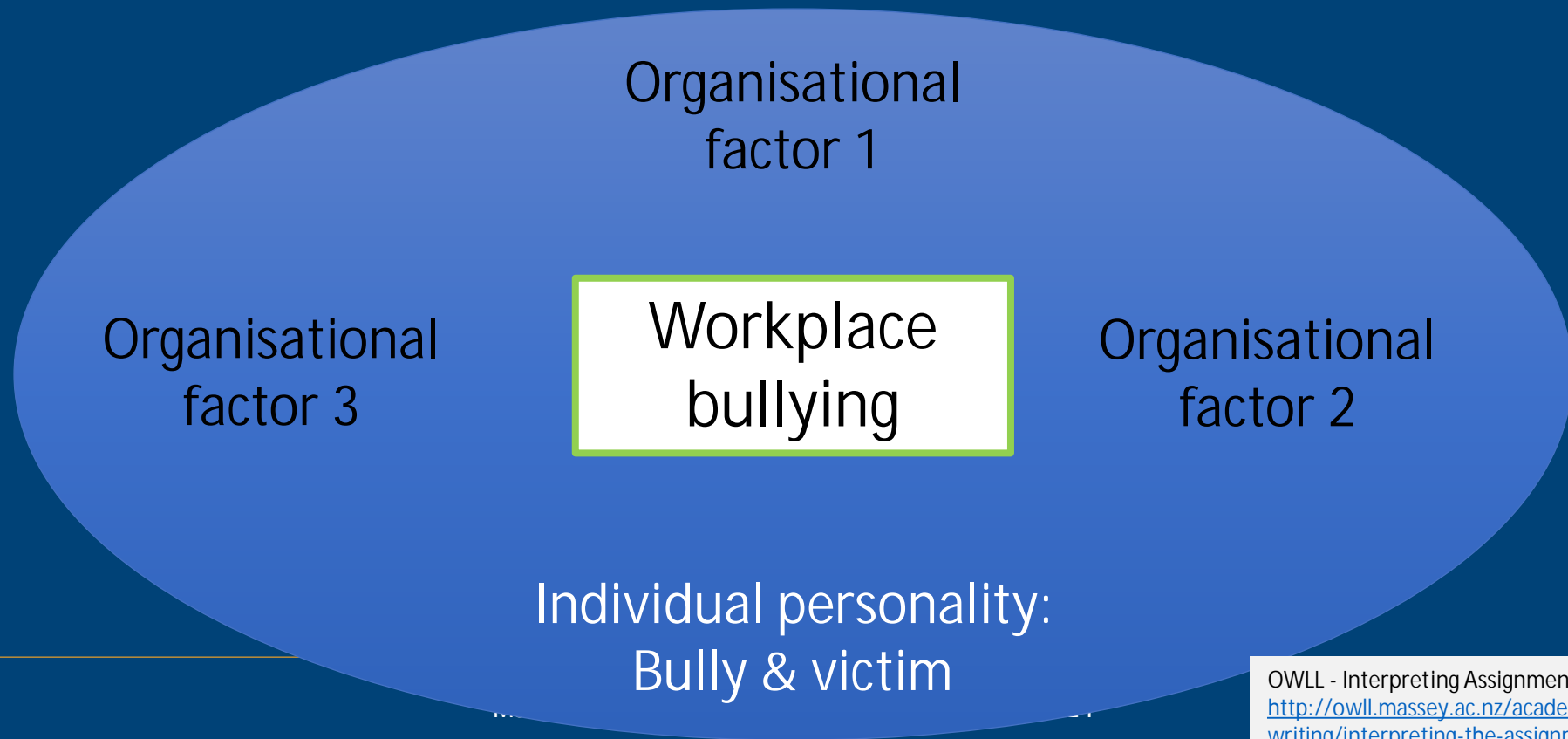
IDENTIFYING THE TASK

'Critically discuss'

- Following a statement/quotation, implies judgement.

- For example:

  - Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

  - Do you agree partially? Why?

- Come to a conclusion on the problem.
  - Does the evidence in the literature support the statement?

- Presenting a critical discussion might include:

  - Covering competing ideas/perspectives and findings on the topic

  - Highlighting where researchers agree/disagree?

  - Pointing out strengths and limitations of suggested ideas

  - Asking, are there gaps in available research on the topic?

In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Does the evidence in the literature support this statement?

Brainstorming the topic before you start searching

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Example: Brainstorming the topic

What are the key questions that need answering?

- What is workplace bullying? Definition(s)   *Define your concepts*

- Why is it a problem?   *Explain significance of problem: Effect on individuals/ organisations/society – evidence from literature*

- How can individual personality contribute to workplace bullying?

- Is a focus on these factors sufficient to prevent workplace bullying? Why?/Why not?

- Can organisational factors contribute to workplace bullying? Which factors? Why? How? Do they work in combination?

- Given our understanding of the factors, how can workplace bullying be prevented? Are there examples of successful implementation of measures?

Key words/phrases for Library search?

Finding and using information in readings

- Finding information in a journal article and taking notes
- Using your readings to help you write

We'll be using extracts adapted from Bentley et al. (2012) in this section
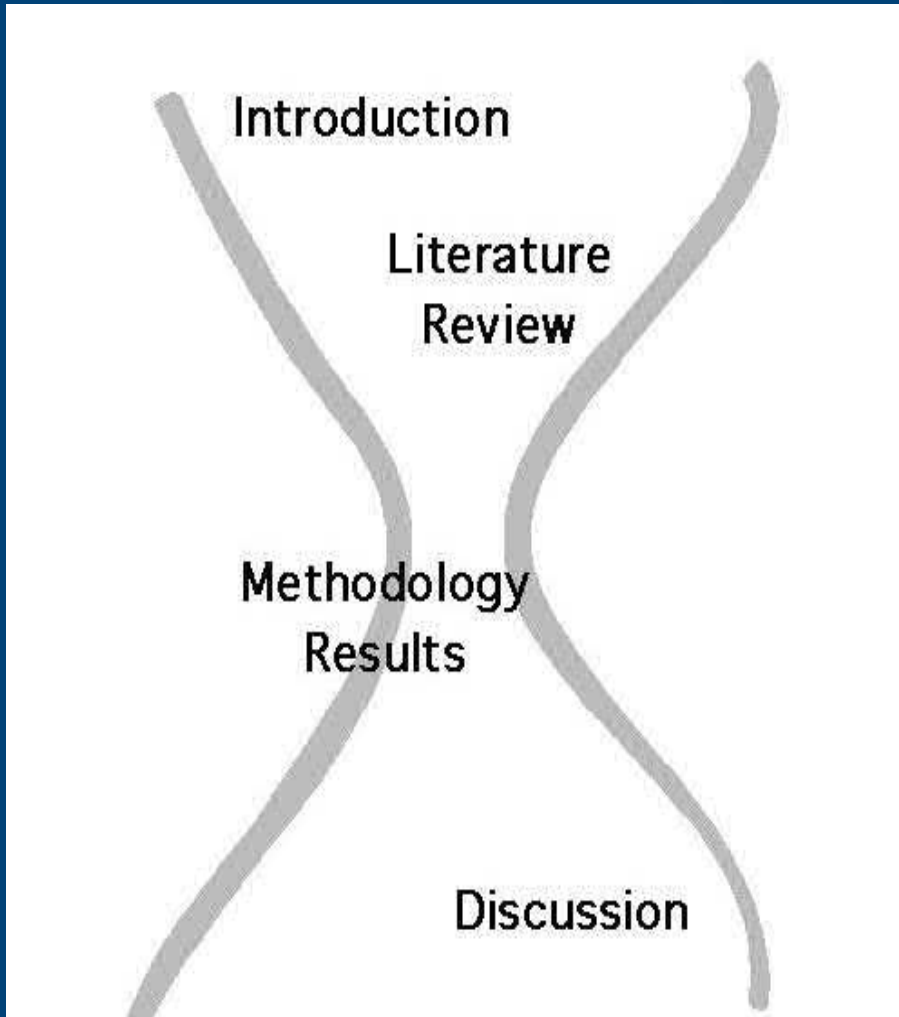
Taking notes for assignments

- When researching literature, try:

  - Keeping a list of key questions to be answered in front of you
    - You're searching for <u>relevant</u> information only

  - Taking notes in the margins of journal articles as you read
    - Summarise relevant ideas
    - What is the writer doing in the text?

  - Making cross references to other articles – note similarities / differences across sources

  - Collecting notes in a document
    - Keep updating until you have enough information for your assignment

Example: Taking notes for your assignment

Keep key questions in front of you – you're searching for <u>relevant</u> information

Key questions	Article	My notes
Definition(s) of workplace bullying	Bentley et al. (2012)	**Tips:** ***Ways of reading*** - Skim through the article by Bentley et al. to see whether it contains relevant information for our assignment. Look at: • the article title • the abstract • the first paragraph • headings • subheadings & first sentences under them ***Using direct quotes*** - Always write them in double quote marks, and note down the page number, so that they are ready easy to find and cite in your own writing. *Also see this online tutorial: "Reading & Notetaking" for downloadable templates.*
Significance of problem?		
Individual factors?		
Organisational factors?		
Preventative measures?		

Structure of research articles

Introduction

Literature Review

Methodology Results

Discussion

(Image adapted from Paltridge & Starfield, 2007)

The story structure of research

- There's this important problem or issue...

- and researchers understand some areas of the problem <u>but</u> others need more research

- a specific area requiring more research is this...and it's important because...

- <u>so</u> what we did was...

- and found that....

- which means we now know this

- and the implications of the findings are...

Example: Components of a research article

Articles generally include:
Abstract: Brief summary highlighting reasons for study, methods & findings
Introduction: Significance of topic; brief review of theoretical background & earlier research on topic; reasons for current research
Method: How research was conducted & materials used
Results: Details on findings and statistical tests, with summaries of data in the form of charts/graphs/tables
Discussion: Analysis, interpretations, implications of results
Conclusion: Summary of key findings, implications for the field and suggestions of future directions for further research

Skim through this passage from Bentley et al. (2012, p. 353):

be a result, as well as a cause, of bullying (Zapf, 1999). Some of the specific work environment factors that have been found to be associated with bullying are outlined below.

- Lack of control over work tasks, time and behaviours has frequently been associated with bullying (Browning, Ryan, Thomas, Greenberg, & Rolniak, 2007; Einarsen, 2000; Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007; Foster et al., 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001; Rayner, 1997; Zapf, 1999). Removing control by micro-management or excessive super-vision can be a form of bullying in itself as it increases feelings of powerlessness in the targets (Vartia, 1996). Lack of control over work is often associated with high workloads, also asso-ciated with bullying, and with lack of time control (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2007; Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 1994; Rayner, 1997).
- Lack of clarity around work roles and goals, and inadequate information and communication are linked to bullying (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, 1999; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007; Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007; Vartia, 1996). Role conflict and role ambiguity can lead to incompatible or conflicting demands and expectations, which in turn can give rise to frustration and stress.

Who should be acknowledged as the author of the bulleted points?

In order to prevent workplace bullying, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss.

Sample from an essay on the topic:

Another organisational factor linked to workplace bullying is the workplace environment. For example, Bentley et al. (2012) list a number of environmental factors found to be associated with bullying. These include...

Google: Manchester University + Academic Phrasebank
 - provides academic phrases to refer to the literature

Read through this passage from Bentley et al. (2012, p. 354)

In regards to employee selection, one key primary prevention strategy is to use staff selection systems to screen out those with undesirable traits or motives (Blackman & Funder, 2002; Fodchick, 2007; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001) or to select those with desirable qualities such as integrity (Ferris, 2009) or emotional intelligence (Yamada, 2008). [However, these approaches need to be treated with care due to their potential for adverse impacts, and all selection methods must be valid and job related.]

- This is how authors demonstrate their critical thinking, propose counter arguments, express notes of caution etc...
    - i.e. Express their voice

Try not to be intimidated by academic text...

The negative consequences of bullying for the target are substantial. At the individual level, targets are likely to have lower self-esteem, more negative emotion, anxiety, stress, fatigue, burnout and depression than non-targets (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, Matthiesen, & Skogstad, 1998; Hoel, Faragher, & Cooper, 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Mikkelson & Einarsen, 2002. These negative impacts are not limited to the target of bullying. Indeed, negative health effects have also been found among those who have witnessed bullying but have not been personally targeted (Burnes & Pope, 2007; Hoel et al., 2004; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007).

Negative consequences for the organisation are also considerable. Targets of workplace bullying have greater absenteeism, along with reduced job satisfaction, organisational commitment and work motivation (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Burnes & Pope, 2007; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010). Targets are also more likely to leave the organisation (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casmir, 2004, 2008). Further organisational costs include displaced effort in helping staff cope with bullying incidents, and the costs associated with investigations of ill treatment and potential court action (Rayner & Keashley, 2005).

Reading tip: Skip over reference brackets when you read

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Writing academic text

- Use journal articles in your own discipline as models to help you write academic text in the discipline

- Requires an examination of the structure and features of academic writing
    - structuring paragraphs to develop your argument
    - using and referencing sources

Note: Not all literature is well written and not all journal articles use APA Referencing!

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: RULES OF THUMB

Each paragraph should…

- Develop one main idea and be approximately 70 - 150 words
- The paragraph should have a topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph
  - usually placed in the first sentence of the paragraph
- The rest of the paragraph should develop the main idea
  - explanations, reasons, evidence, definitions of terms
- Use connectors to link sentences and paragraphs and guide the reader through the text

One main idea per paragraph

Negative consequences for the organisation are also considerable. Targets of workplace bullying have greater absenteeism, along with reduced job satisfaction, organisational commitment and work motivation (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Burnes & Pope, 2007). Targets are also more likely to leave the organisation (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casmir, 2004, 2008). Further organisational costs include displaced effort in helping staff cope with bullying incidents, and the costs associated with investigations of ill treatment and potential court action (Rayner & Keashley, 2005).

Topic sentence - main idea

Supporting ideas:
Examples
Evidence

Use appropriate connecting words and phrases for:

- additional points (also; in addition; furthermore)
- contrasting points (in contrast; however; while)
- result(s) of something (as a result)
- cause of something (one possible reason; one contributing factor

Using `this' to link sentences and paragraphs

Some common words to make the reference back clearer and form a 'bridge' to your developing argument:

For things that happen:

incident

event

situation

circumstances

development

For things that are done:

action

move

reaction

behaviour

practice

For views:

idea

view

attitude

perception

perspective

(Adapted from Pakenham, 2001)

WRITING AN ESSAY

What is an essay?

- An essay is an extended, written response to a particular question that outlines the author's position.

Where the author stands on an issue

Your voice guides the argument throughout the essay

You present your position on the topic, using evidence to back up your statements/claims/arguments

Introduction

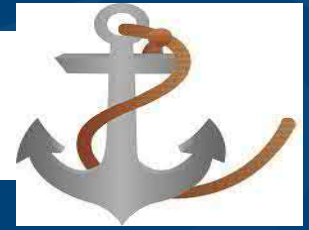- Introduce issue
- State your position

Body paragraphs

- Defend your position
- Each paragraph = evidence based argument

Conclusion

- Restate your position
- Summarise points of your argument

Essay structure

Introduction
10-15%

Set up the context for your topic
Tell the reader about your focus in the essay and what will be included

Each body paragraph delivers on what's been promised
- one main idea per paragraph – usually expressed in first sentence (topic sentence)
- support main idea with evidence from literature
- connect sentences and paragraphs

Anchor each paragraph to the introduction by repeating key words in topic sentences

Conclusion
10%

Come to a logical conclusion
- summarise main ideas
- look to the future
    - significance of what you've found

Preparing an outline for an essay

Assignment topic
In order to counteract workplace bullying and prevent future incidents, organisations need to look beyond issues of individual personality and examine how underlying organisational factors can contribute to the problem. Critically discuss. 1500 words

Average words per paragraph =

- 150 - 200

So for this essay, start off with a rough plan for …

- 10 or 11 paragraphs

A plan for this essay might look like this …

1: Introduction: prevalence of workplace bullying; definition of bullying; consequences of bullying: individual & organisational

2: Current policies & practice often focus on issues with individual employees but research shows organisational factors also very important

3/4 : Factors with individual employees

5/6 : Organisational factor 1

7/8 : Organisational factor 2

9/10: Organisational factor 3

What is the issue?
Why is it a problem?
What interventions can be used address it?
Strengths/limitations of interventions?

11: Conclusion: combination of interventions needed to address complex problem; future – research and practice

Introduction: Narrowing down to specific focus and thesis statement

Prevalence of workplace bullying

Consequences of workplace bullying

Formal definition of workplace bullying

↓

Policy and practice in organisations often focus on issues with individual employees

BUT

Research has identified organisational factors associated with increased risk of bullying

SO

Organisations need to understand these factors in order prevent bullying

↓

Essay discusses four main factors & critically examines measures to address them

---

General topic area

- Significance of problem or issue
- Definition of concept from academic source

↓

Specific focus

- Focus in this essay?
- Why this specific focus?

↓

Thesis statement

- Main point / argument / position

↓

Essay map

- What are you going to do in the essay? (Indication of structure)

Thesis statement examples

Issues with individual employees cannot be ignored in any attempt to analyse and address an organisation's problem with workplace bullying. However, it is crucial that the organisation also recognises and addresses organisational factors (A, B, C and D), which may be enabling and even encouraging bullying behaviour.

Or

This essay argues that while issues with individual employees cannot be ignored in addressing workplace bullying, organisations need to recognise and understand the significant role played by organisational factors in enabling and even encouraging workplace bullying. Four major organisational factors will be discussed, including A,B,C and D...

More examples: http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml

When do you refer to literature?

1: Introduction: prevalence of workplace bullying; definition of bullying; consequences of bullying: individual and organisational.

Thesis statement

2/3: Factors with individual employees

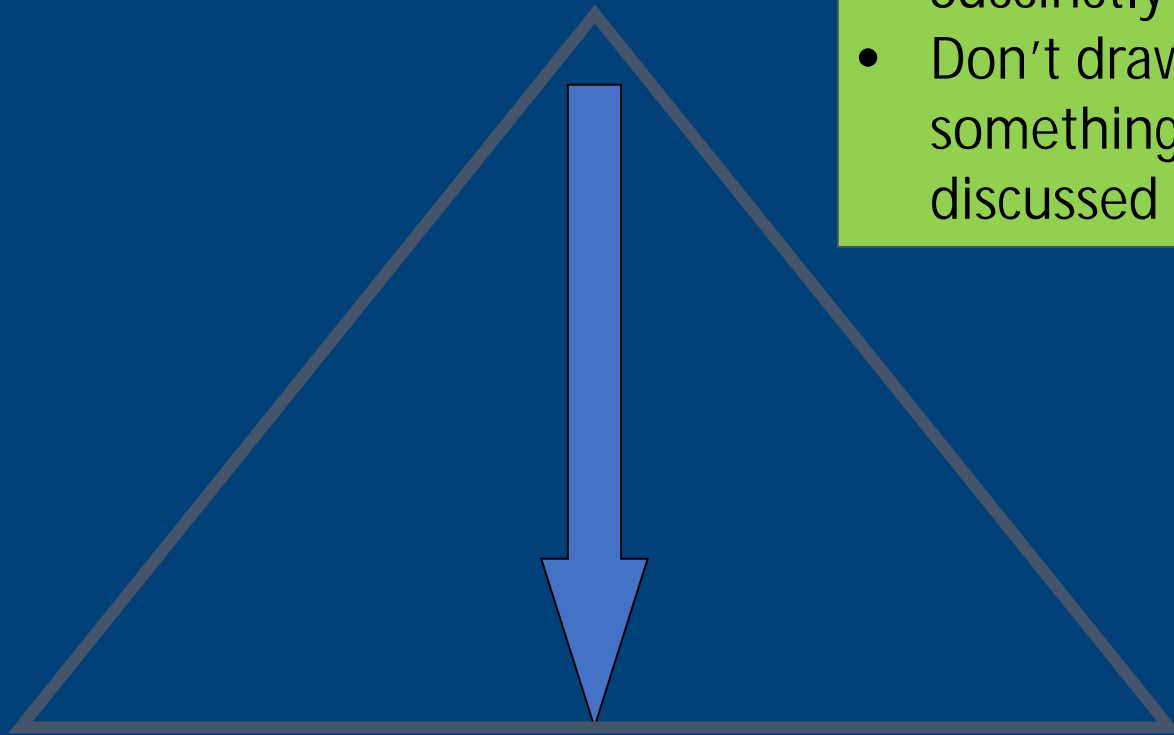4/5: Organisational factor 1

6/7: Organisational factor 2

8/9: Organisational factor 3

10: Conclusion: combination of interventions needed to address complex problem; future – research and practice

The Conclusion

Restate thesis; Summarise main points made in argument

- Succinctly written
- Don't draw conclusions about something you haven't discussed in essay

Look to the future: application of what you've found; further research needed on topic

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