An approach to writing academic assignments

Writing assignments is a kind of cycle. The order here is not set in stone.

**Think first**

What are you being asked to do?

Analyse the question (or brief).

Rewrite the question as a set of your own instructions, in your own words.

**Initial writing**

This initial writing is for yourself.

It is designed to help you work things out.

It can be pretty ‘messy’, you needn’t worry about accurate grammar or correct spelling at this stage.

Get into the habit of writing a little everyday, even if it’s just writing about how you feel about what you’re doing (this gets you in to a ‘writing frame of mind’).

**Gather & record**

Find books and articles that are on your reading lists (in your module handbooks).

Reread your lecture notes.

Keep good records of what you find.

Write about how you think you might use it all in the assignment.

**Reflect & evaluate**

Keep on track, so while you read, look back at the question and ask yourself:

- Is this really going to help me answer the question?

- Where shall I include this bit of information?

- How shall I use it...as a quote, or a paraphrase?

- Is this text from a trustworthy source?
Organise & plan

Assignments often follow a general-to-specific structure
- At the beginning we tend to introduce ideas, then we go into more detail as we make our points.

Sections help us to group related ideas together.
- Ask yourself how many paragraphs you think you will need in each section.

Paragraphs are usually about one topic/idea.
- The first sentence of a paragraph is often a summary of the paragraph’s main idea.
- The rest of the paragraph goes into more detail to explain the main idea, with examples and quotes, etc.

Draft, draft and draft again

Initially, your drafts can be pretty ‘messy’.
Gradually, they become ‘tidier’, as you get closer to letting someone else read your assignment.

Proofread

The final double-check:
- Has your assignment answered the question?
- Is your language is accurate?
- Do your paragraphs focus on one idea each?
- Do your references follow the conventions expected by your lecturers?

Allow plenty of time to do this.

Hand in (or submission)

Check the deadline, and hand your assignment in on time.

Most written assignments at Middlesex are submitted electronically, via Turnitin.

See our material on Structure for more detail.

‘Writing is re-writing’

Paul Abbott (TV writer (Shameless, State of Play)

See our proofreading checklists for more detail.

Please note: AWL lecturers cannot proofread your texts for you, but we are happy to help you develop your ability to proofread for yourself.

There are videos about Turnitin, and how to use it, on the Library website.