



Essay Writing

Learning Enhancement Team

LET@mdx.ac.uk

Variety is the Spice of Life!

Different Schools...

....Different Rules

- Can you use 'I' in an academic text?
- Should an essay have section headings?
- How long is a report?
- Do you use primary or secondary research?
- Footnotes, endnotes or no notes?
- Harvard style referencing or MLA? What about APA?

Which school are you in? What is acceptable and what is unacceptable in your field?

Always check in your module handbooks or with your tutor if you are concerned about appropriacy

Essay Writing Aims

- To look at the stages of writing an essay
- To analyse question formats
- To discuss Introductions, and how they can improve an essay
- To review ‘analysis’ / ‘description’
- To look at ways of being ‘assertive’ / ‘cautious’
- To briefly review plagiarism and referencing



Introduction

Essay writing is one of the biggest challenges students face at university. Therefore please:

- Please feel free to be independent
- Please feel free to be curious
- Please feel free to ask questions
- Please feel free to disagree
- Please feel free to challenge
- And please bring your various assignments etc. into our classes

Task

How many of these word can you define in 60 seconds?!

- Analyse
- Justify
- To what extent
- Critical
- Evidence
- Referencing
- Process
- Genre
- An assignment
- Evaluate
- Account for
- Implication



Success In Assignments

What do you think makes a successful assignment? Discuss.

- Addressing the question asked is pivotal to doing well
- Staying focussed on the question asked
- Observing word limits
- Supporting your arguments / opinions
- Providing evidence
- Relating your thinking to that of other people
- Analysis ≠ Description
- Referencing appropriately & consistently
- Academic writing as a process

Being critical is essential when writing academically. If you feel unsure, try the **Critical Thinking AWL Open Workshop**.

Different Levels Of Writing

Nuts & Bolts

- Grammar
- Sentence construction
- Punctuation
- Using suitable language
- Correct technical use of referencing system
- Paragraph structure

Knowledge-telling

- Summarising, paraphrasing, describing, outlining, defining ideas of others
- Using greater range of formal /technical vocabulary
- Referring to sources
- Synthesising sources
- Overall discourse structure, including signposting

Knowledge-transforming

- Reviewing, critiquing, questioning, challenging the ideas of others
- Using features of 'academic style' to develop voice & stance
- Using sources to develop disciplinary argumentation
- Understanding genres

Weak Writing

— Lack of Planning

- No direction
- No focus

— Failure to dissect the problem/issue/question

- Just writing about the general topic

— Weak introduction

- The reader can't see what's coming and why

— Letting the material 'speak for itself'

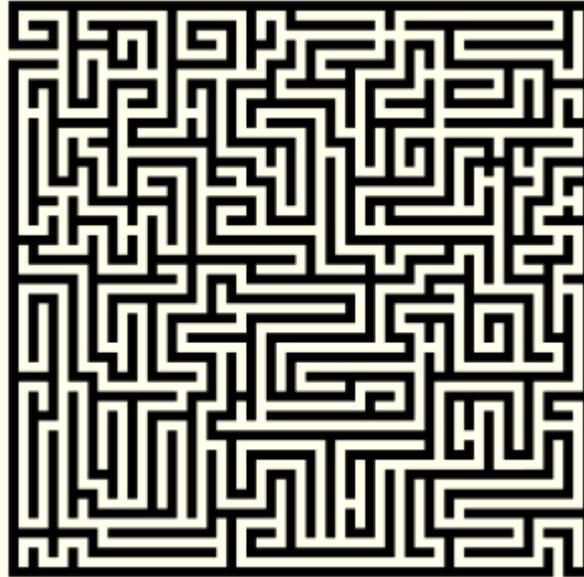
- Vague, detached, aimless writing
 - The reader is thinking “and..?”; “so what..?”



Results in the text
having **no genuine
meaning**

Good Writing

Good writing maintains **the thread**. Do you know the story of Theseus and the Labyrinth?



“Ariadne, King Minos' daughter, fell in love with Theseus and gave him a ball of thread so he could find his way out of the Labyrinth”.

Theseus In The Labyrinth

Theseus found his way out of the Labyrinth by using a thread. You can do the same by:

- Create a thread (planning)
- Maintain the thread (stay focused)
 - Careful planning
 - Dissection of the research question / issues
 - Guide the reader through your argument(s) / analysis
 - Signposting your direction / your progress
 - Assertive introduction
 - Use topic sentences and transition paragraphs
 - Relate you ideas, arguments and statements back to the research question and/or the issues in **order to answer the question**

To Create Your Thread

Maintaining a clear thread through your essay is vitally important. Here are some ways to do this:

- Develop crystal clear understanding of the assignment question/s
- Develop your way of addressing the question
- Develop clear aims
- Plan & structure your approaches
- Develop analysis & an argument/s

Question Types

There are two common types of assignment question, direct and Quotation.

Direct Questions:

- *Discuss the strategic importance to a business of the operations function*
- *Identify and critically discuss the major factors that can and should influence the pricing policy of exporting companies*

Quotation Questions:

“Of course, managers should avoid treating their customers in an unethical manner. After all, in the long run, unethical behaviour towards customers only serves to harm the firms’ own interests.”

Critically evaluate this statement with reference to examples illustrating at least two areas of the Marketing Mix.

Essay Question

To make an essay question easier to tackle, it can be useful to divide the question into three parts:

- **TOPIC** – the broad phenomenon under examination
- **FOCUS** – the specific “what about” the broad phenomenon?
What angle / perspective?
- **INSTRUCTION** – what you should do in the essay (i.e. Discuss / Analyse / Outline etc.)

The *AWL Open Workshop*
Understanding Assignment Briefs
can help you further!

Example

Consider the following essay question:

“Discuss the Strategic Importance to a Business of the Operations Function”

- TOPIC = The operations function
- FOCUS = The strategic importance to a business
- INSTRUCTION = Discuss

Task

With a partner, decide what is the **TOPIC**, **FOCUS** and **INSTRUCTION** is for these questions:

1. *Discuss the main reasons leading to the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreement.*
2. *Compare and contrast the urban problems of developed and less developed countries.*
3. *Account for the success of the mobile phone industry in Britain today.*

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4. *Account for the success of the mobile phone industry in Britain today.*

Research

What research would you need to do to answer this essay question?:

“Any contemporary education system which only focuses on traditional understandings of the concept of ‘intelligence’ is not only fundamentally flawed, but unethical too”

Critically assess this statement with reference to one contemporary education system which you know well. Outline implications for assessment practices.

Research

“Any contemporary education system which only focuses on traditional understandings of the concept of ‘intelligence’ is not only fundamentally flawed, but unethical too”

Critically assess this statement with reference to one contemporary education system which you know well. Outline implications for assessment practices.

- What is “contemporary education”? What characterises / distinguishes it?
- What are traditional understandings of the concept “intelligence”?
- What are more contemporary understandings of “intelligence” implied in the title?
- How do / would more contemporary understandings of “intelligence” impact on assessment practices?

Description And Analysis

At university, you are expected to be analytical (critical) in your writing – but you still need to include some description!

What is the difference between ‘description’ and ‘analysis’?

DESCRIPTION =

- An explanation of the issues that are relevant to the essay
- The ‘what’ ‘where’ ‘when’ ‘who’ aspects

ANALYSIS =

- An actual line of argument that formulates an evaluation of the issues
- The ‘why’ (and maybe the ‘how’)
- Analysis of the roots of theories, ideas etc

Stages

How do you write an essay?

What stages do you go through?

Does each stage follow another, or do they overlap?

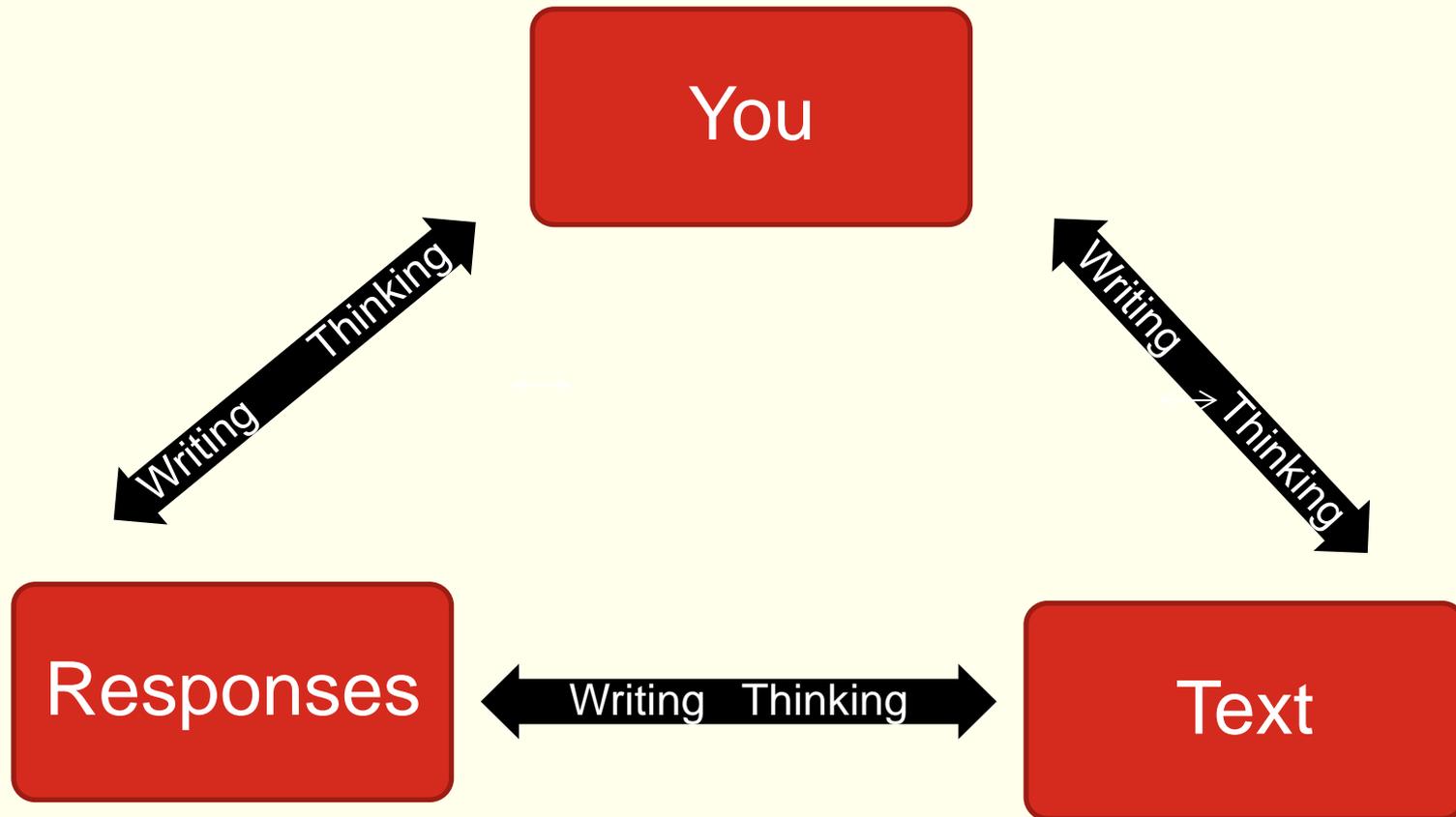
Stages

- Pre-research: analysing title; brainstorming ideas; what is required? Where is it?
- Research: reading list; library; internet [Google Scholar; databases; Athens]; notes
- Planning: read & organise notes; select relevant material; devise structure
- Writing: drafts; paragraphing; refining thinking; evidence; intro & conclusion
- Editing: have I addressed question?! Logical flow? Evidence? Argument?
- Proofreading: grammar? Spelling? Punctuation?

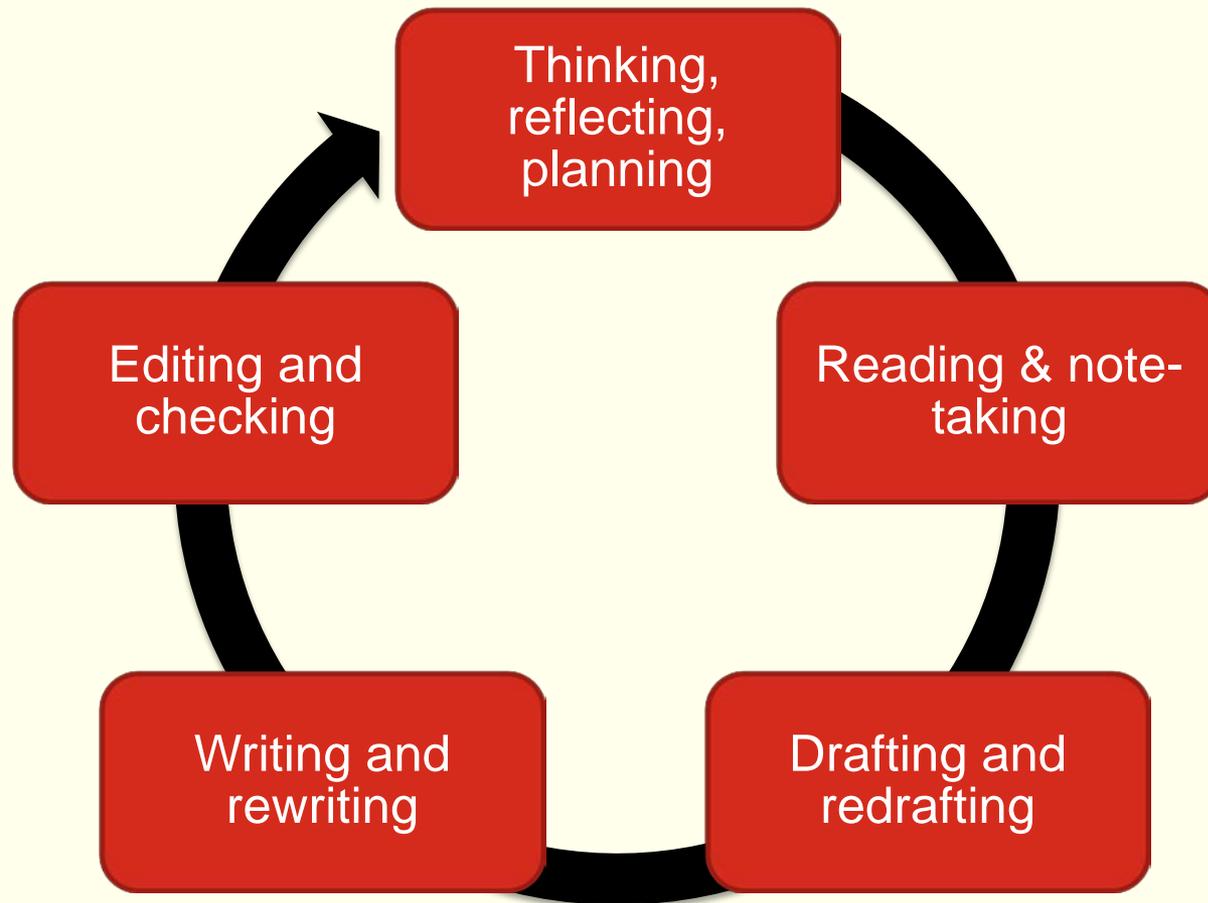
The *AWL Open Workshop* **How To Proofread Effectively** may be useful!

Reading

Reading should be an interaction between yourself and the text, not simply highlighting sections in bright colours!



Writing Process



Or To Put It Another Way...

“To be accurate, write; to remember, write; to know thine own mind, write” (Tupper in Douglas (1937)).

To this we might add:

“to know thine own mind **and other people’s minds,**
write”.

Thinking...

- Finding things out
- Working things out
- Deciding
- Solving
- Justifying
- Remembering
- Planning
- Arguing
- Identifying
- Speculating
- Calculating
- Comparing
- Deducing
- Realising
- Implications
- Analysing
- Summarising
- Hypothesising
- Evaluating
- Sequencing
- Ordering
- Sorting
- Classifying
- Grouping
- Predicting
- Concluding
- Distinguishing
- Noticing exceptions
- Noticing connections
- Realising underpinnings
- Noticing assumptions
- Testing

(Adapted from McGuinness, 1999)

Don't forget, you can book a spot on the **Critical Thinking AWL Open Workshop!**

Weak Writing

- Lack of Planning
 - No direction
 - No focus
- Failure to dissect the problem/issue/question
 - Just writing about the general topic
- **Weak introduction**
 - The reader can't see what's coming and why
- Letting the material 'speak for itself'
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Results in the text having **no genuine meaning**

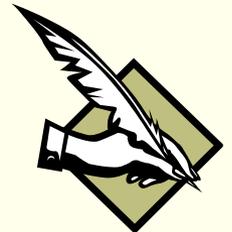
Introductions

What is the purpose of an introduction?

What information should you include?

A good introduction typically:

- Introduces the topic generally
- Indicates why & in what ways the topic is important
- Highlights any differences of opinion about the topic
- Describes how the assignment will be structured
- Clearly states the writer's thesis [i.e. the writer's forthcoming argument]



Introductions - Get The Reader's Attention:

The significance of the writing product in contemporary US university English writing instruction

There seems to be a conflict between the methods we composition instructors employ in teaching writing and the requirements for success in freshman composition courses. Students are encouraged to focus on the writing process, but they are evaluated primarily upon the production of a product, usually the "academic" essay. Even when students are allowed to revise graded papers, or when grades are delayed until student and teacher agree that the essay is "finished" to the best of the student's ability, the implicit message remains the same: the point of the process is the product. Thus the writing process all too often becomes, in students' eyes, a waste of time. In this paper I would like to investigate this problem; in particular, students' attitudes to contemporary methods of writing instruction.

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Persuasion

Academic writing is ultimately about persuasion. At any one time, you may be trying to persuade your reading about some/all of the following:

- That you are right
- That something is important
- That something should change
- That something has changed
- The advantages / disadvantages / causes / effects of something

What methods can you use to persuade your reader?

Persuasion

Some methods of persuasion:

- Clear claim – what are you trying to persuade me?
- Significance – why does it matter?
- Coherence of thought & argument – does your argument / claim make sense to me?
- Rigour – why should I accept it? [methodology & evidence]
- Alternative explanations / ideas / theories – have they been discussed? Why / not? Is there dogma?
- Clarity of expression – do I like what you're saying?
- Relationships – social aspects

Did you know that an LET **Tutorial** can be used to check plans and/or drafts? You don't need a 'finished' text to ask for help!

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Assertion

Effectively Academic writers are assertive. You, the writer, are the one in control. You must guide your reader through your arguments to your conclusion.

How does this writer guide the reader?:

Before we move on to consider in more detail why the work-life balance should be understood through a gender lens, we need to develop a richer understanding of precisely what the term “gender” actually means. This is particularly important given the complexity of the term.

This begs the question, however, of precisely what “gender” actually is / means, and of precisely what is understood within the term.

Assertion

Readers (and markers!) do not like surprises. A good academic writer will say what s/he is going to do, and then do it.

Look at these topic sentences. What will the paragraphs be about?

1. Gender is a term with numerous understandings, not all of which are altogether clear / not all of which are necessarily agreed upon. At the simplest level, ...
2. The term “gender”, probably one of the most debated and complex terms in social science, is a term which carries a number of key understandings. On the one hand, ...

Assertion

It is the writer's responsibility to tell the reader what relationships exist between facts/methods/theories/writers.

Look at these sentences. How do they relate?

1. Manchester City played well. They lost the game.
2. Wolves played well. They won the game.
3. Most of the decisions went Wolves' way.
4. The Manchester City fans supported their team well.
5. Wolves won the game. They are still in the relegation zone.

Assertion

Look at these sentences. How do they relate?

1. Although Manchester City played well, they lost the game.
2. Despite playing well, Manchester City lost the game.
3. Manchester City played well. However, they lost the game.
4. Manchester City played well. Nevertheless, they lost the game. This was therefore a tough result for them which may knock their confidence.

Assertion

Complex relationships can be shown with the judicious use of linkers. What are the relationships in these sentences?

1. Although the referee generally had a good game, most of the decisions went Wolves' way, which probably contributed to their victory.
2. Although the referee generally had a good game, most of the decisions seemed to go Wolves' way. This is likely to have helped to result in their victory.
3. Despite seeing their team lose the game, the Manchester City fans supported their team well.
4. Despite playing well and winning the game however, Wolves are still in the relegation zone. This raises the issue therefore of why Wolves continue to play well but tend to struggle for points.
5. Although they played well and won the game, Wolves however are still in the relegation zone. This begs the question therefore of why Wolves continue to play well but tend to struggle for points.

Caution

Sometimes we must be cautious in our arguments. Linkers can help us 'hedge'. Look at the examples of cautious language in these sentences:

1. Although Manchester City generally played well, they lost the game.
2. Manchester City played well. Nevertheless, they lost the game. This was therefore a tough result for them which may knock their confidence.
3. Although Manchester City played well, Wolves also played well, as a result of which they won the game. Given how well both teams played however, it was a tough result for the losers. This might mean it's a slight blow to Manchester City's confidence.

Caution

How is caution shown in these sentences?

1. Although the referee generally had a good game, most of the decisions went Wolves' way, which probably contributed to their victory.
2. Although the referee generally had a good game, most of the decisions seemed to go Wolves' way. This is likely to have contributed to their victory.
3. Despite playing well and winning the game however, Wolves are still in the relegation zone. This raises the issue therefore of why Wolves continue to play well but tend to struggle for points.
4. Although they played well and won the game however, Wolves are still in the relegation zone. This begs the question therefore of why Wolves continue to play well but still seem likely to struggle for points.

Referencing

Why do you think referencing is so important in academic writing?
Here's a clue, plagiarism is only one of the possible answers!

- To give yourself **credibility**
 - This establishes your right to participate in the field (ethos)
- To make yourself more **persuasive**
 - Giving evidence in your arguments (logos)
- To give **credit to the original author**
 - This shows professionalism and respect
- To give your readers **clear and sufficient** detail
 - This allows your readers to locate ideas for themselves

Referencing

With a partner, decide which of the below would need a reference:

1. Images from a website / textbook
2. The exact words of another author
3. Every day facts
4. Ideas belonging to another author
5. Ideas belonging to you
6. Your own findings (primary research)
7. Data from public sources

Referencing

1. Images from a website / textbook
 - YES! This would need to be correctly referenced.
2. The exact words of another author
 - YES! This would need to be correctly referenced.
3. Every day facts
 - NO? “The sky is blue”, “The UK is in Europe” – these are ‘common knowledge’ and would not need a reference. However, “79% of British Citizens speak only one language” is specialist knowledge and would need a reference.
4. Ideas belonging to another author
 - YES! This would need to be referenced.
5. Ideas belonging to you
 - NO. Your ideas are your own creation. You would only need to referencing yourself if you were quoting/summarising/paraphrasing from an earlier work. Note: You CAN plagiarise yourself!
6. Your own findings (primary research)
 - NO. See above. You may however wish to refer your reader to a specific diagramme: (see fig.1), for example.
7. Data from public sources
 - YES! Any data that has not been self generated needs to be referenced.

Avoid Plagiarism

- Write notes in your own words
- Be fanatical about keeping notes of where you get your information from when making notes
- In your own writing, use a clear & consistent system of referencing
- Always provide a full list of references in your bibliography
- When in doubt – give a reference!

For more detailed information on Plagiarism, why not attend the *AWL Open Workshop* **Understanding Plagiarism and Referencing?**

Avoiding Plagiarism

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Paraphrasing & Summarising

When you are paraphrasing and summarising, it's good to also consider these points:

- What's your purpose?
- What are you trying to do?
- Why are you using the material?
- How does it fit into your writing?
- How can you use it?
- How *will* you use it in ur writing?

You may find it useful to sign up for the *AWL Open Workshop* **Integrating Sources Into Your Writing.**

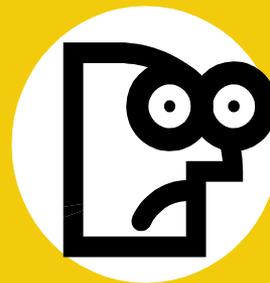
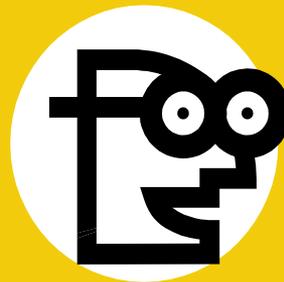
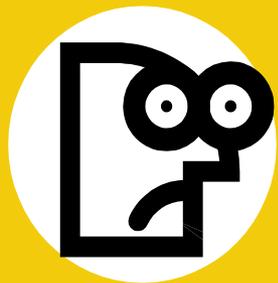
Useful Words

| Verb | Noun | Adjective |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Analyse | Analysis / Analyses | Analytical |
| Justify | Justification / Justice | Just / Justified |
| Criticise | Criticism | Critical |
| – | Evidence | Evident |
| Evaluate | Evaluation | Evaluative |
| Imply | Implication | Implied |
| To account for | Accountability | Accountable |

Where now?

- Need more detailed assistance? [Book a tutorial!](#)
- Want feedback on a specific section? [Drop in to Getting Your Assignment Ready!](#)
- Want somewhere quiet to write, and get on the spot assistance? [Try The Writing Space!](#)
- Got a few quick questions? *AWL Office Hours* at [The Study Hub] are for you!
- *AWL Open Workshops* can be [booked here!](#)
 - *Suggestions:*
 - Critical Thinking
 - Understanding Plagiarism and Referencing
 - Integrating Sources Into Your Writing
 - Understanding Assignment Briefs
 - How To Proofread Effectively

Essay Writing



It's QUESTION TIME!!