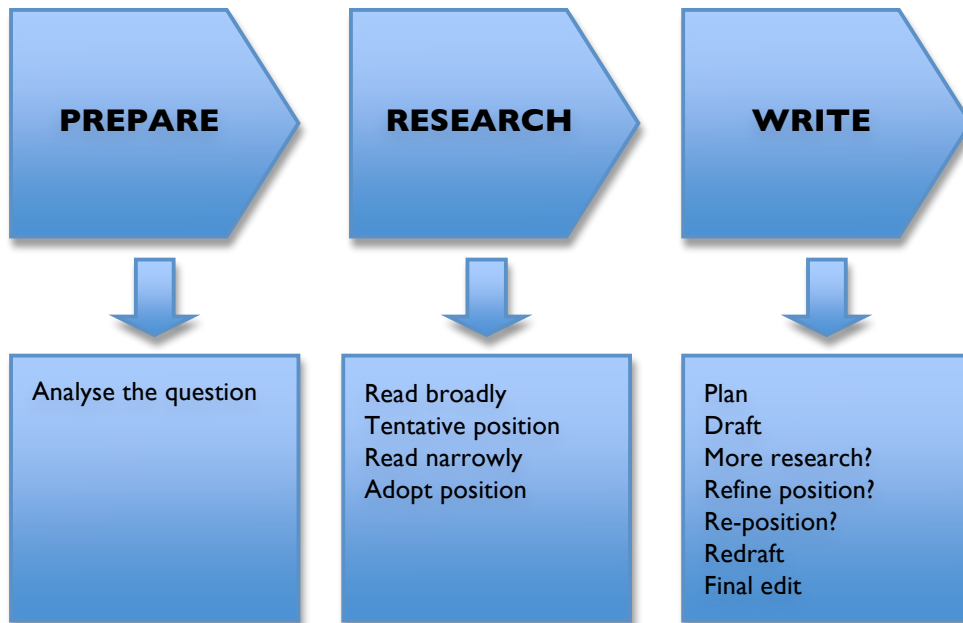


Academic writing process



I. Preparation

- Analyse the task for key words – words that identify the topic or issue. See *Table 1* for some common key words used in assignment/examination questions.
- Try rephrasing the assignment question to ensure that you fully understand it.
- It can be helpful to break down the assignment question into a series of questions.
- Use the assessment criteria as a checklist: marks allocated for each criterion gives an indication of how much time should be spent on (and therefore how much to write on) each part of the question, and ensures that no parts of the question are left unanswered.
- Seek clarification if necessary – discuss the interpretation with your classmates, and ask your lecturer/tutor if unsure.

- Knowing precisely what content is required will help you make an informed choice on the material you need to read about or research.

Table 1: Common key words in interpreting a task

account for	give reasons for, explain
analyse	examine each part of an issue or argument, and describe the relationships between them
argue	develop a logical sequence of discussions, either presenting opposing views or supporting a particular one
assess	make a judgment weighing up the positive and negative features
compare	show the similarities and differences
contrast	emphasise the differences between
critically evaluate	make a judgment weighing up positive and negative features
critically analyse	examine each part of an issue or argument, weighing up positive or negative features
criticise	analyse and make a judgment weighing up positive and negative features
critique	see criticise
describe	tell about features, factors, qualities, aspects
define	set out the meaning (of a term, word); describe (sometimes explain)
discuss	see account for; also to weigh up and compare several views on an issue, develop a thesis
enumerate	specify and list the main features
evaluate	consider the various arguments, and try to reach a judgment
explain	give reasons for, clarify cause and effect; reason and result
indicate	point out and list the main features, factors
identify	select and list the main features, factors
interpret	explain what is meant and relate to the topic
illustrate	give examples; explain
justify	give reasons

outline	describe the main points
prove	Demonstrate by logical argument
(give a) rationale for	give reasons, explain why
review	provide an overview; also to make a critical analysis
summarise	give a concise description

2. Researching

- Reading broadly. To get an overall picture of the topic in question, start with your lecture notes, subject learning guide, introductory and general texts. Keep the assignment question in mind while you read. Refer to *Academic reading* for efficient and critical reading strategies.
- Committing to a tentative position. Once you have an overall understanding of the topic, you are ready to commit to a tentative position on the assignment question, and are able to focus on more detailed texts.
- Reading narrowly. Reading narrowly helps to validate your adopted tentative position. Search for texts that detail the issues you have identified as part of the overall picture by referring to the reading list in your subject outline, the reference lists in the introductory/general texts and relevant journal articles, and the library catalogue and databases.
- Adopt a position. Having done the research and read narrowly, you should have a clear view of what your position is with regards to the assignment question; this will help to keep your writing focused and coherent.

3. Writing

- Planning. Map out a plan – organise your argument and evidence, and establish connections between your points. Note that not all students need a detailed plan prior to writing a draft; some students may work well with just a list of headings and sub-headings to guide them. Whatever the format of your plan is, it is essential to have a plan prior to writing as it provides an overview of what your assignment will cover, guides you along the way, and ensures that nothing is left uncovered.

- Drafting and redrafting. Once you have a plan, start writing the first draft. More than likely, you will find that you need to redraft your writing a few times. In the process of drafting and redrafting, you may find that you need to do more researching or reading in a particular area in order to strengthen an argument or evidence in your assignment.
- Final editing. After you have completed the final draft, leave it for at least a day before you do the final editing. Check for the following: (a) structural aspects (introduction-body-conclusion) – logic and coherence, (b) grammar aspects and punctuation, and (c) technical aspects – presentation, in-text referencing and reference list, and spelling. It is also useful to have a fresh pair of eyes to read it over – ask a friend, or book an individual consultation session at the ELSSA Centre.

Adapted from the following sources:

Morley-Warner, T. 2000, *Academic writing is... A guide to writing in a university context*, Centre for Research and Education in the Arts, Sydney.

UniLearning 2000, accessed 10 June 2000, < <http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/main.html>>

