

SHL Developing Your Essay Planning and Writing

Broadcast, 9 December 2020

Handout: Essay planning

- It is often a good idea to do a 'pre plan' to break down the title / question and work out exactly what it is asking and then think about what would be needed in order to be able to answer that. This is done before even looking for the actual content, but helps to have an idea about what type of content that might be
- Look for process words in the task remit (what is being asked about) such as describe, explain, evaluate. <https://help.open.ac.uk/process-word-activity>
- The best essays are planned so that it is clear *how* the question is going to be answered, with *what* information, and then cross checked back to the original instructions.
- Type of plans can vary but could be a list, mind map or spiderdiagram. These are usually personal choice depending on what works best for you personally.
- Good plans make it clear how the information will be structured in the correct essay format that has been asked for. This ideally should include an indication of number of paragraphs and what would go in each.
- Plans may include definitions or indications of key facts but don't need full sentences to copy out verbatim.
- Plans can be thought of like a shopping list which gives prompts about what is needed as a series of *aide memories* that can then be covered in detail in the main essay itself.
- Plans can be thought of as a road map which makes it clear how to get from place a (the start of the essay) to place b (the end of the essay) and what to expect along the way. This would include a specific route and method and be clear how each part is important.
- A good plan could be picked up by someone else with a similar knowledge level and they could write an essay from it.
- Plans can be dynamic and won't be perfect first time but may change as more research is done about the source material.
- When the essay has been written go back to the plan and check everything intended has been covered. If anything is missing check if it does need to go in after all.
- A plan written after an essay is invariably a waste of time as it is not an actual plan which has helped to write the essay.