

student hub live is the OU's live online interactive platform to support academic community



Fred is a Lecturer in Law and is heavily involved in designing and writing the new LLB Law degree. After more than a decade of full-time teaching, Fred became a student once again in 2021 when he commenced studying for his PhD through the Open University.



Rob Moore works on a range of under-graduate and post-graduate modules for the Open University Business School. Rob's passion is in making live online sessions fun and effective.

Session purpose

- **Is for:**
- Covering essay planning for people who have planned before
- Give some guidance about ways to plan effectively
- Provide a space to share ideas and connect with other students
- **Is not for:**
- Telling you what you HAVE to do
- Providing any module specific advice

Initial poll

What is your main reason for coming along to this session?
Please choose the option that fits for you today:

- Study skills for current module(s)
- Study skills for future module (s)
- Connecting with other students
- Gain new ideas
- Responding to recommendation from tutor
- Curious about what studenthublive is

Developing Your Essay Planning

This was our advert...

“If the plan doesn’t work, change the plan, not the goal.”

Find out how to use effective planning to formulate the best argument to address a set question, structure your points coherently, write effective introductions and conclusions.

First thoughts

What part of the planning process do you most want to improve?

- Please use the short answer poll provided to say your ideas

Possible themes

Planning the introduction and conclusion as well as the main body

Structuring the paragraphs effectively

Establishing a clear focus for each paragraph

Understanding weight and that all weights are not equal

Actually planning (not just pretending)!

Why plan?

- To get the best possible outcome (this was exactly the same mix but different outcome cookie)



Planning introductions

Not just restating the question and instructions

Start with a brief account of the main issue

Make it clear HOW you plan to answer the question

Be clear about what is in (and perhaps out of) scope – give some details about what's included

Consider if there are any key terms/definitions that will be required

Don't be afraid to give away key clues, you want your reader to have a clear idea about what is coming. This is not the same as repeating details

Planning conclusions

Not just restating content but summing it up and relating back to the topic

Making it clear **how** the content you have covered has been relevant in answering the question and the contribution that each paragraph has added

Not covering new information or suggesting future ideas
(unless specifically asked to)

This is not an opportunity to be profound or overly dismissive as you launch into another tangent

Length

This may come within the plan itself but it is important to think carefully about how you will allocate words within the essay

The word count you have will affect how much you can include, and this will shape the breadth vs depth you can consider

Broadly speaking the allocation is as follows:

Introduction is ~10-15% of words

Content (body) is ~75-80%

Conclusion is ~10-15%

Paragraph structure ideas

- PEE

Point – make it

Evidence – support it with facts

Explain – why the evidence is supportive and it is relevant

Or

- PESELS

- Point - make the point for this paragraph
- Explain - what do you mean by this point
- Support - provide evidence from studies and research
- Evaluate - what is there about this point that is

Weighting

Not all paragraphs are of equal importance

Not all sources of evidence are of equal proportion

For your reader to interact with these things you can prepare them for the lift!



Focus for each paragraph

Each paragraph should have a clear focus and include one key topic

There could be a variety of sources of evidence but the theme should be singular

The beginning line of each paragraph, if read alone, should be the spine of the essay. The beginning sentence should be a point which is about what will be covered and why that is important in answering the question

Paragraphs may well contain different voices: the theorist/evidence source, perhaps the author of the text and your own objective interpretation of the value of that evidence in answering the question

However remember!

Essay writing is objective and not personalized so the plan may be ‘your’ plan but needs to make it clear how the essay will be objectively written with the required evidence

Your objective interpretation is you as a student of your module as opposed to you as an individual

This is why referencing is important and it is good to be clear about who owns which opinion – but do not write in the first person (unless explicitly asked to)

Another way to look at planning

A plan is like a map of what you intend to do

If you are taking someone on a journey with you (your reader) they may benefit from knowing your plan

They can then prepare well and allocate their attention for the best bits forthcoming journey including where you are going, what you may meet along the way, the highlights, the "do not miss" bits, and some parts may require a little additional context

You can also think of it as a recipe which makes it clear what is going to go into the essay and the order

A (river) journey



- A river starts somewhere
- It goes somewhere
- It has a journey which may be different along the way

A (sightseeing) journey



- A tour starts somewhere
- It goes somewhere
- It has a journey which may be different along the way depending on what you have booked to see

Poll time

- Please suggest in the short answer poll pod available anything that would be important if you were starting a new tour of the place where you live (or another location) – e.g. how would you decide the route and what people would look at

Our thoughts

- Statues
- Important buildings
- Gardens / parks
- Interesting sights / Photo spots
- Quirky things
- Toilets!

Poll time

- Please suggest in the short answer poll pod available what type of plans you can think of. (here think about the style of plans you might be aware of – don't worry if you don't know but do look at other suggestions)

Types of plan

Simple list

Series of relevant page numbers / topics

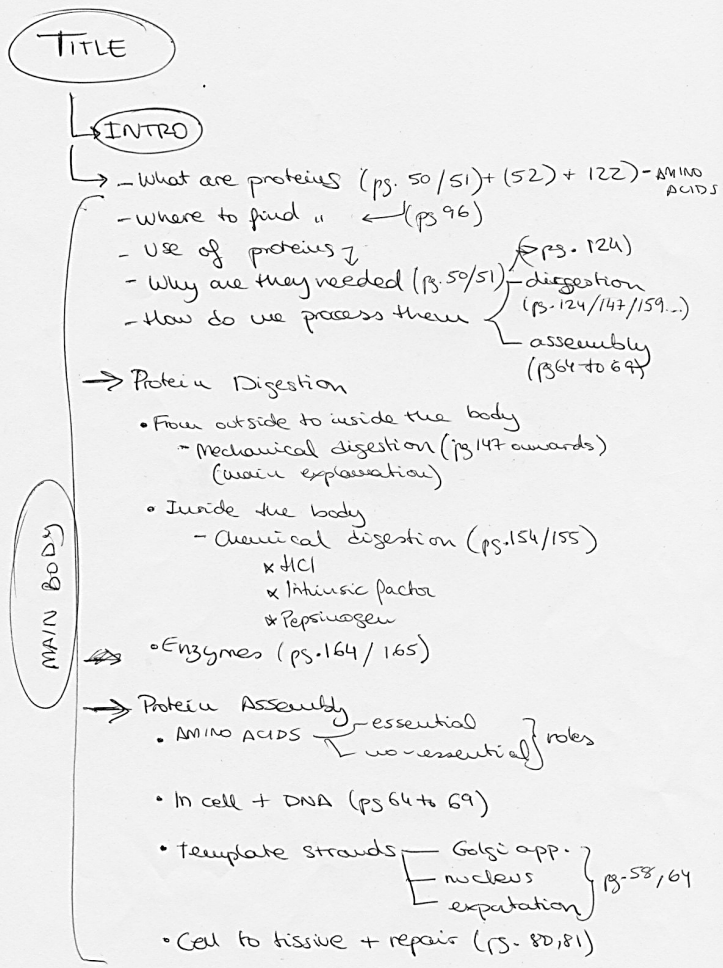
Mind map

Spider diagram

Post it on a whiteboard

(selected examples to follow)

List style plan



List style plan

Plan

Form protein comes in from diet / route through digestive tract

eat protein → digest - how digested - stomach - pepsin p154 ✓
 absorb - how absorbed - small intestine - paracetic + brush border enzymes p164 ✓

disassemble | can't use in form as ingested - macromolecule p50 ✓
 polypeptide p52 + 3D shape = function ✓
 - proteome p51 ✓

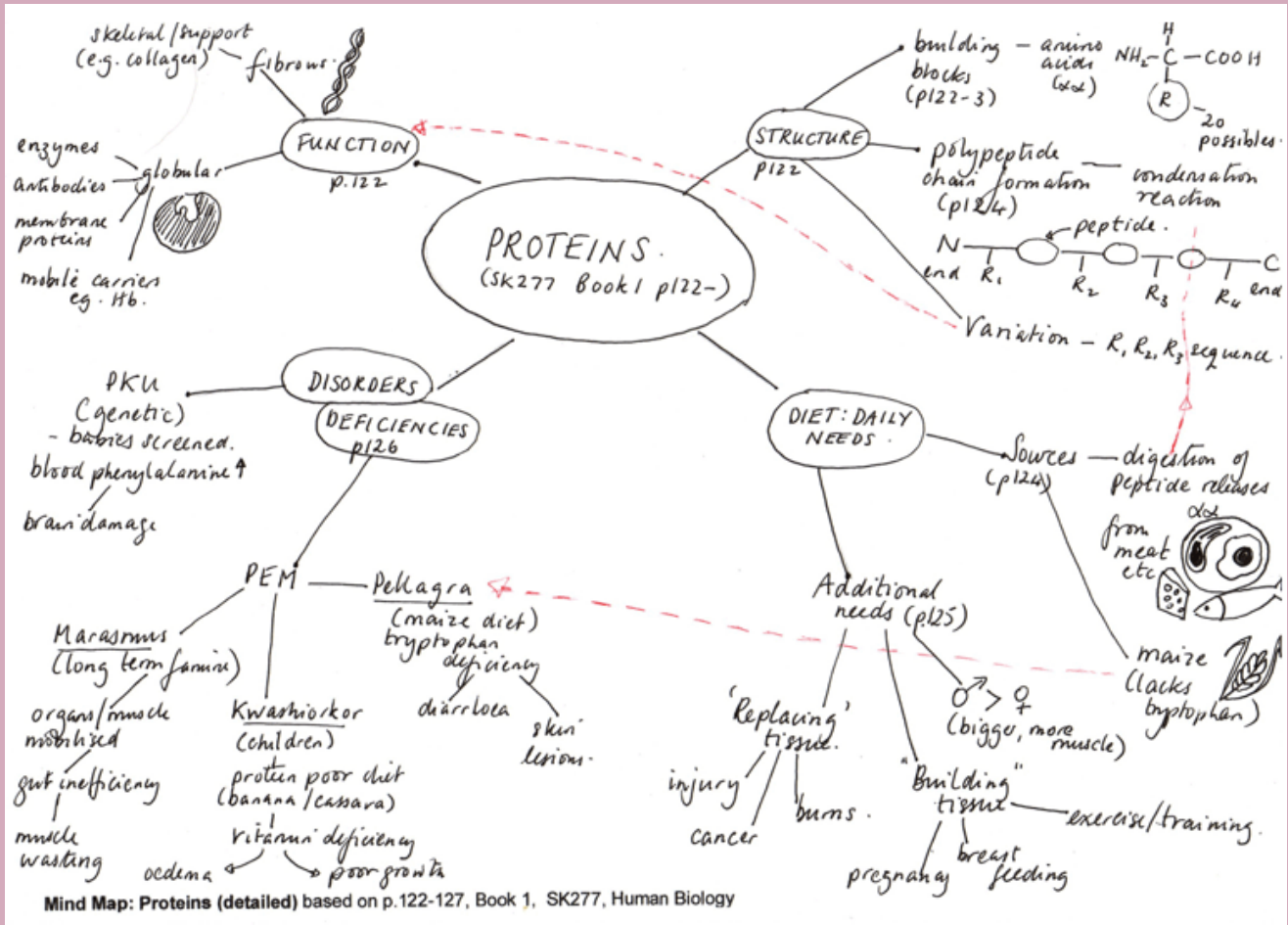
assemble protein → building blocks - from what is absorbed
 whole protein - how constructed - p68+ - RNA ✓
 - lose protein p124 ✓
 - p122+ amino acids ✓

use protein → roles - different roles / function - importance
 deficient what happens with lack of protein /

essay main focus = assemble

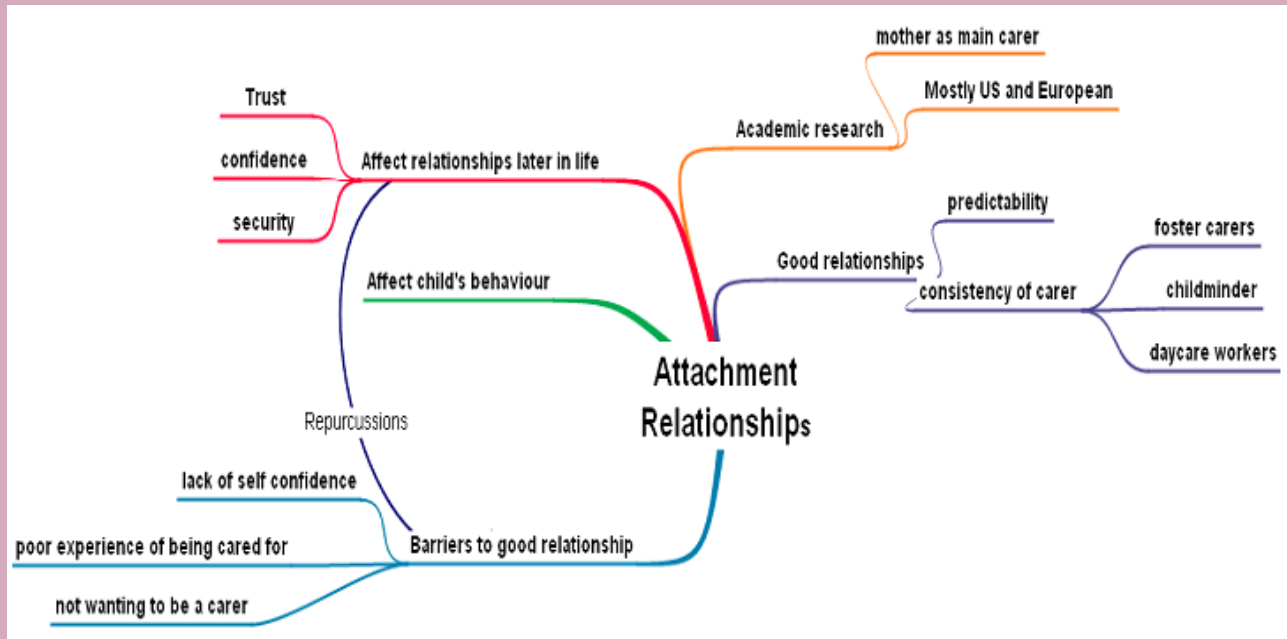
p51 roles / p96 roles / p51 tissues / metabolic process / enzymes p53 / p122 roles / transporters p166, 170 / cell - p61+ ✓
 healing p80+ ✓
 does not add anything lack of words available
 p126 - disorders ✓
 lipoprotein / vit B12 ✓
 p134 factor

Hand drawn mind map



Mind Map: Proteins (detailed) based on p.122-127, Book 1, SK277, Human Biology

Computer generated mind map



Using structures to help plan

Visual and structural things like grids and diagrams can help you think about the information in a different way. Identifying the bits that are missing, the things that may not neatly fit offers the potential for a more critical approach

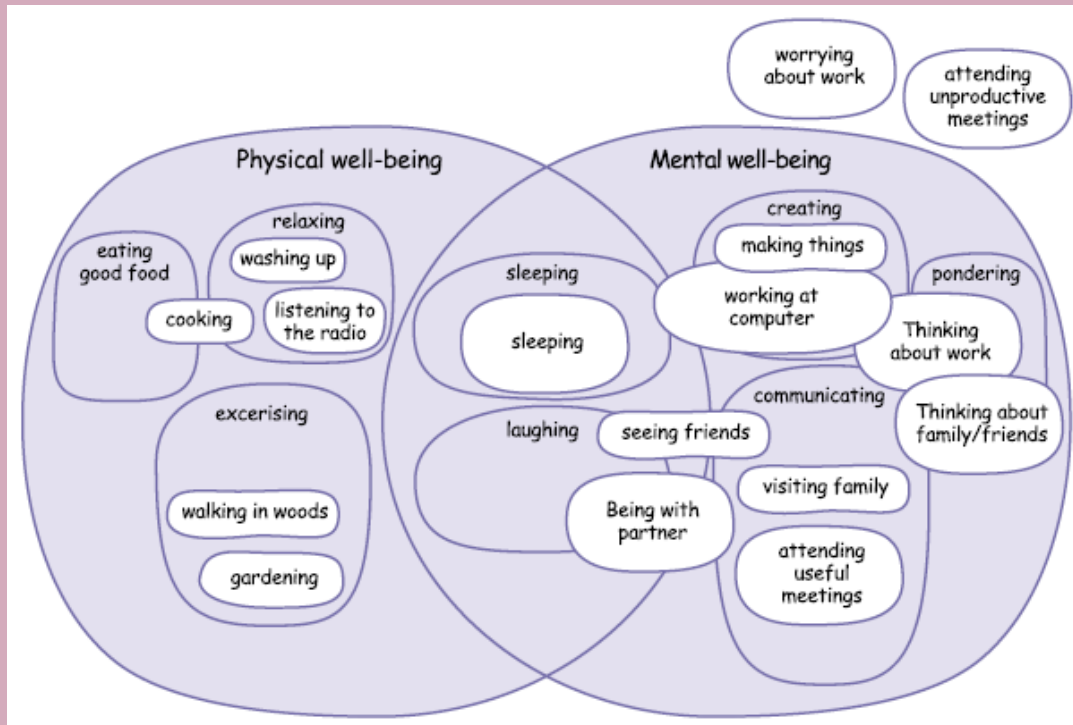
Tables are very good for comparisons, separating out specific parts of a theory for example

Flow chart can show how things may impact on other things

Concentric circles and venn diagrams can show connections and overlaps

Grouping concepts can identify relationships between

Grouping concepts together



More help

- <https://help.open.ac.uk/planning-and-writing-your-answers>
- The studenthome help centre has lots of great ideas

Get active!

Planning involves ‘movement’ e.g. action & a plan has to be active:

- HOW will you answer the question?
- What is the AIM of your essay?
- How does the information you are including relate to the topic – not just because a word search or the suggested areas to look has revealed it as relevant – WHY is it relevant?

So....

- What can people share from their sessions? Please use either the chat pod or the anonymous short answer polling pod

Take home message


- Effective essays are planned so that you have a clear idea of what you are going to do and can then know how to achieve that
- Any plan needs to have enough information for you or someone else with a reasonable grasp of the content to pick up and be clear on what is intended


Upcoming sessions



 Study skills workshop

 Study skills workshop

 Live broadcast

 Live broadcast

18th October

Past student hub live online study skills sessions [here](#)

Visit us at <http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/> and subscribe for events as they are announced. Send us feedback at studenthub@open.ac.uk