

Session description



- Do you struggle knowing what your assignment question is asking? Or have you received feedback that you 'didn't answer the question given'? If so, this SHL workshop is for you!
- We will look at the wording used in questions and give a tutor's insight into how this relates to the marking process, as well as the other obvious mistakes they regularly come across. Different process words (the instructions that are given) will be looked at and we will signpost useful resources.

What are SHL workshops?



- Studenthublive is non modular and focuses on study skills relevant to higher education
- This means all sessions are skills based and are not subject based. We cannot provide subject/ faculty related sessions
- SHL workshops do not take the place of tutorials provided by your modules
- All events are always advertised on our website along with studenthome news, social media channels and careers sources
- All events are bookable; workshops do fill up as they are popular

Online workshop basics



- Polls are anonymous to other participants but the chat box will have your logged in name associated with your comments during the live session.
- All online sessions are recorded and available to view on catch up after the event.
- Slides are available to download during the session and from <https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/content/ready-understanding-questions-6-march-11am>

Today's workshop



- This is going to be a structured workshop to help you consider how to interpret questions and understand academic terminology
- We use illustrations and examples to get you thinking, as well as providing specific suggestions and ideas to consider the topic further
- There is a lot of interaction so please be ready to answer polls (questions) or add to chat pod during the session, as you find comfortable
- You'll get the chance to share ideas with others and learn from each other

Please be aware



- These sessions are large scale
- They are very busy
- There is lots of interaction
- They are not the same as other tutorials
- You can maximise slides on your own screen by clicking the icon
- You can also feel free to ignore the chat if it is too distracting for you personally



Inclusivity



- We welcome all students at our workshops.
- Please do be aware that they can be very busy and some students may struggle with the non-scripted nature.
- Slides are available to download within the live session and from the event page on the studenthublive website at <https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/content/really-understanding-questions-6-march-11am> to follow along or prepare for what will come up.

Please



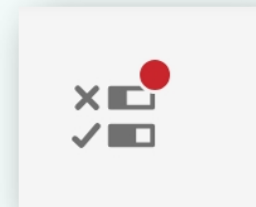
- Do NOT share any personal information in the chat pod during the session.
- On the recording names will be anonymised to user number.
- However, if you type anyone's full name or any other personal information in the chat pod it can be seen by everybody and it would also show up on the recording so we would not be able to make the recording available after the session.

What do you want to learn?



Using the short answer poll provided please say what you are hoping to learn from today's session

(If you are on a mobile device remember you need to tap into the polling option)



To come back to these slides after completing a poll click on the share pod slides icon



Really understanding questions

Student input



- I asked a number of students who have discussed their experiences with me in the past whether as a live guest or otherwise to give some ideas.
- There are suggestions are woven throughout this session.
- Grateful thanks to them for being willing to share their ideas.

First poll



- Using the poll pod available please answer the question **What is the main thing that helps you to know what an academic question is asking?**
- Don't worry if you aren't quite sure but think of all the possibilities and then look at other suggestions by scrolling up and down.

Some ideas



- The individual words of the question
- If there is a question mark ?
- Mark allocation
- Word count
- Suggested reading
- Learning outcomes or similar

Kit's ideas



- Always read any guidance notes thoroughly.
- Do this before attempting the question as there will be information there to help.
- If in doubt ask your tutor.

Read aloud poll



- Have you ever used the read aloud / narrator functions of your computer? Please indicate with the poll pod available
 - Yes
 - No
 - I didn't even know there was such a thing

Accessing on windows computer



- Start > settings > ease of access > Narrator

Microsoft George - English (United Kingdom)

Microsoft David - English (United States)

Microsoft Hazel - English (United Kingdom)

Microsoft Susan - English (United Kingdom)

Microsoft Catherine - English (Australia)

Microsoft Zira - English (United States)

Microsoft Mark - English (United States)

Microsoft James - English (Australia)

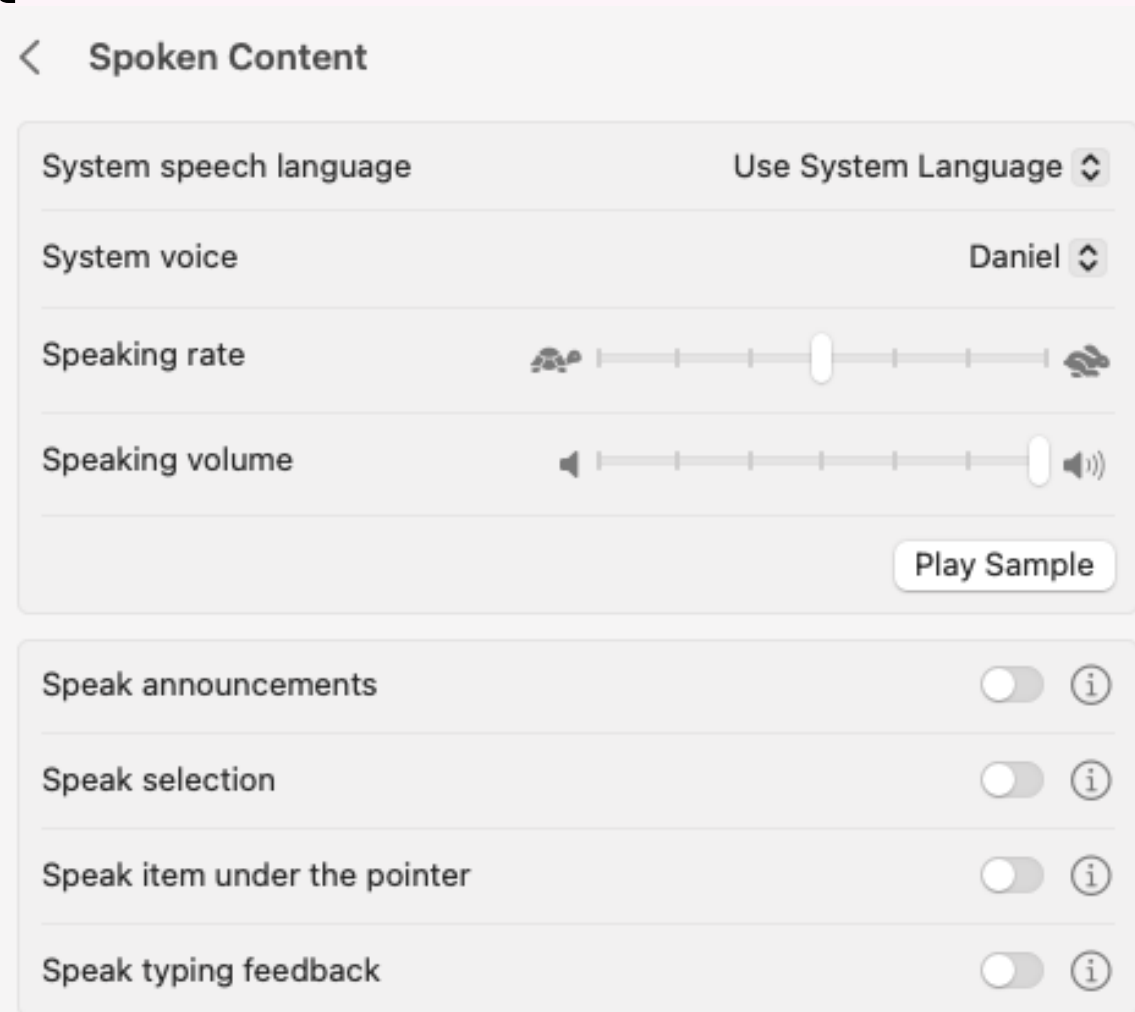
Microsoft David Desktop - English (United States)

Microsoft Hazel Desktop - English (Great Britain)

Microsoft Zira Desktop - English (United States)

Accessing on a Mac

- System setting > accessibility > spoken content



Angela's comments



- Keep printed out TMA to hand to cross check.
- Cut up the question to identify key parts.
- Do as has been asked.

Reading the question

Reading and answering the actual question is crucial when tackling assessment

- Read out loud
- Underline key words
- Consider making the instructions into a question that you then know you have answered
- Pre plan and consider what you will have to do / know to be able to answer the question

Process words



These are the instructions that tell you what you need to do:

- Describe
- Explain
- Critically analyse
- I recommend the studenthome > study skills resources here including the process words activity - <https://help.open.ac.uk/understanding-the-question>

Describe

- Describing is to keep details about what
- Much like the game catchphrase – what is it? what are the features?
- You can look at this image and describe it in a literal way – focus purely on what it is



Explain

- Explaining is to give the information about why or how
- It takes into account past experience and other knowledge
- You can look at this image and explain it because everyone will have a different perception and experience about what it means to them



Arran's ideas 1



- Read the question several times.
 1. read everything.
 2. read bit by bit and underline important bits.
 3. Try to rephrase so you know what the question is asking you
- Do questions out of order as later parts can sometimes give hints for earlier parts.
- Read the question out loud as it sounds different from how it looks.

Objective focus



- The majority of academic questions are not subjective
- They are looking for you as a representative open university student of x module at y level having made use of the information presented within that module
- This is not the same as you as an individual with all of your other experiences and what you think should be there

Ruth's ideas



- Look at the TMA and learning objectives and see where they fit into each question.
- Break questions down into bullet points to incorporate learning objectives.
- Reframe to ask self questions e.g. 'define systems thinking' to 'what is systems thinking'.

Sieving and selecting



- There could be a lot of potential information for a question, or there could be a small specific answer required. Things like word counts and mark allocation will help decide this
- Knowing what type of question it is will influence knowing how much potential content you will need to sift through

Considering material



- What information are you going to need to find out? What does the question assume in terms of knowledge?
 - Think definitions
 - Think facts
 - Think what might need to be included

Peter's ideas 1:



- Read at least 3 times then go away before coming back and reading again.
- Rephrase the question to help consider why the OU is asking me as a student to answer this question
- Check learning outcomes and relate these to the question.
- Consider how the questions could be answered in relation to learning outcomes
- Draw a mind map of ideas – probably around 20 at this stage

Peter's ideas 2:



- Whittle down initial ideas to 5-6 relevant ones
- Leave it for a while for brain to work it over silently
- Do a new mind map of the relevant ideas and consider each paragraph of the answer

Unpack the question



- Have you ever heard this phrase – to unpack the question?
 - Yes
 - No
- Do you have any idea of what it might mean (regardless of whether you have heard before) Please use the short answer poll provided to give your ideas

What is unpacking the Q?



It is:

- Reading the question
- Noting the key words
- Understanding what the question is actually asking

Don't worry!



- Unpacking the question involves coming up with things that you might need to find out and then considering the material is what that might be
- You aren't expected to know everything before you even start!

Arran's ideas 2



(STEM focus)

- Write down any equation or variable on a separate page to be able to see it
- Include any equation as it shows what is being used to answer.

Use your ideas



- Sometimes you can look at a question and consider potential answers even before you know anything about the topic
- What could you do?
- What information might be relevant?
- Some people find this kind of consideration process really helpful to begin with
- Sometimes it is about parameters and clues – which ones are given in the instructions?

Imposter syndrome



- Some people feel they can't understand a question as they shouldn't be doing the study in the first place.
- Please be kind to yourself.
- Everyone is learning and some things are hard

Leighah's ideas



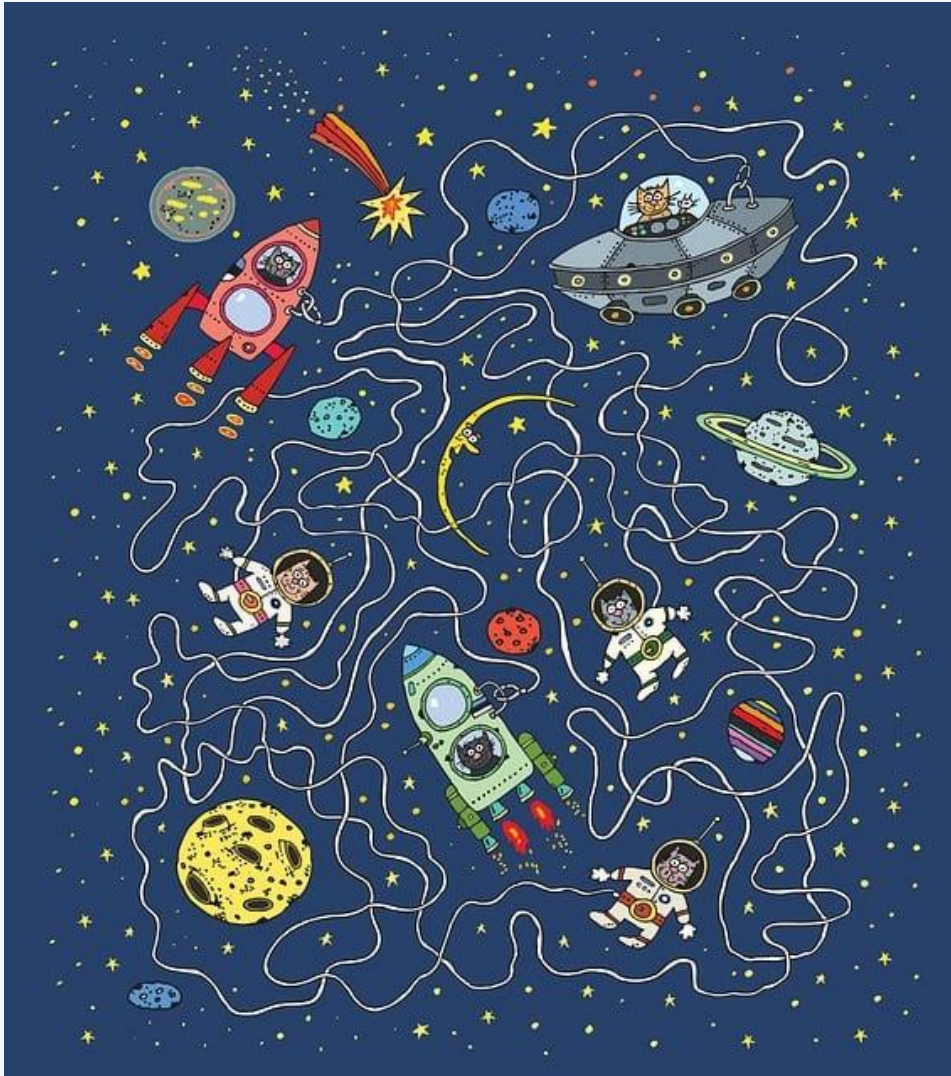
- It doesn't matter how much you know, if you don't stick to exactly what the question is asking you will lose marks.
- Look at what the question is asking, including the terminology used – descriptive elements are different from critical analysis.
- Use the word count wisely – be succinct but thorough.

Using materials



- Be selective.
- If the instructions say using topic 4 – that doesn't mean every single word in topic 4 will be relevant.
- You can read through topic 4 and hope something jumps out or you can consider what you need to look for

What option to select?



Looking at this image – what could impact which of the places the maze could end up?

Please give your suggestions in the poll pod provided

What does that mean?



- Not every part of the topic will be useful for question
- Part of your task is to select the most relevant information
- Having a clear idea of what might be relevant first will help
- What path or route you going to take may influence you although be wary about being subjective and opinionated (unless you are asked to be)

Realistically



- You can't read every single thing in order to be have to answer each and every question. Academic judgement comes in here to select information.
- But is it that easy?

Using materials poll



In your TMA instructions are you asked to make use of any of the following? Please select any that apply

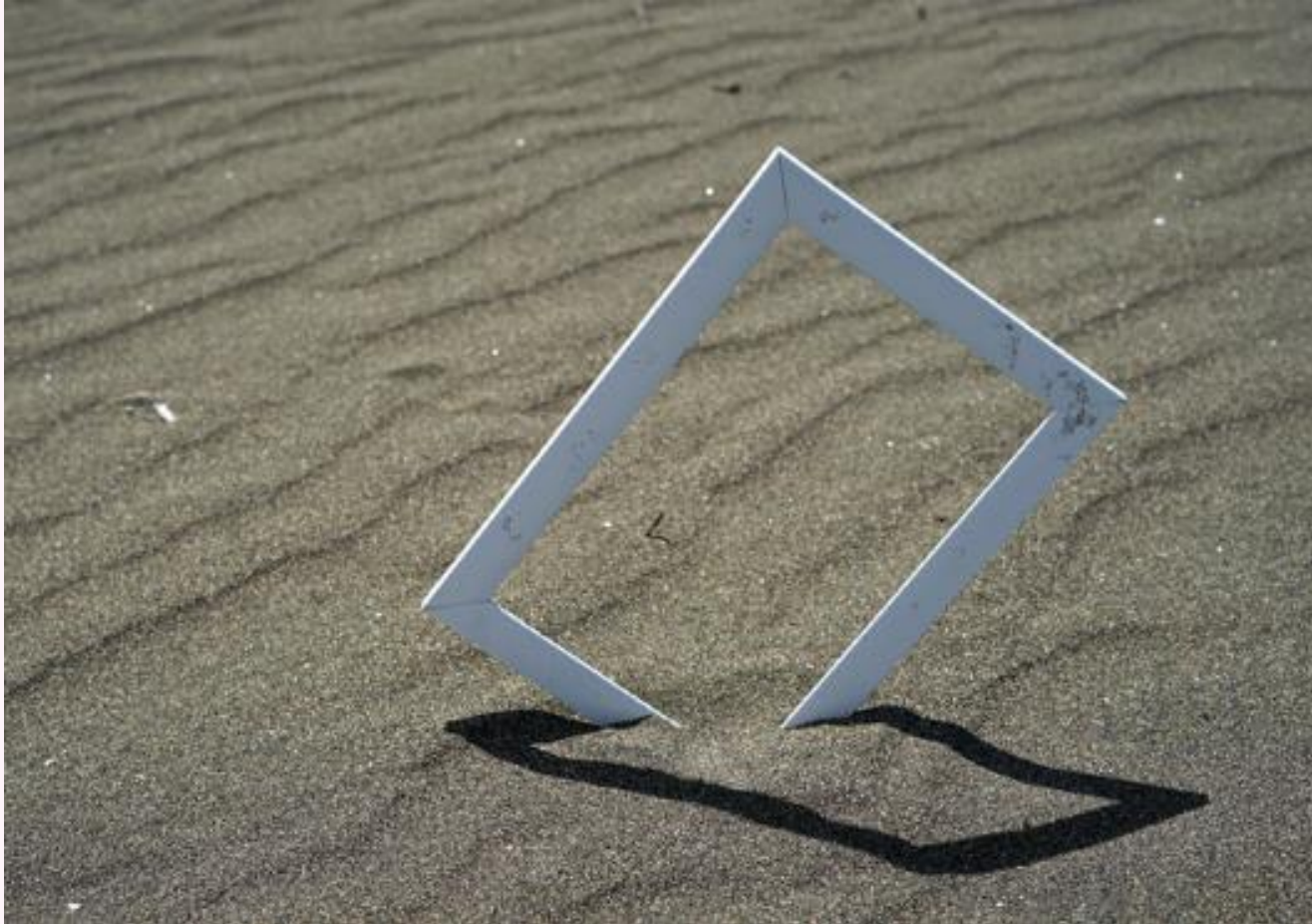
- Learning outcomes
- Student notes
- Topic materials
- External materials
- Tutorials

Selecting based on understanding



- This comes back to understanding what the question is asking
- Be balanced and objective
- Use practical devices like a ruler to read each line one by one (or get the computer to read it out for you)
- Don't second guess and assume it means something it doesn't
- It takes time to learn academic terminology

Building your frame...



Fenella's comments



- Make use of any disability support you have.
- Look for tips that are tailored for what *you need*
- Be aware of extra 'noise' from additional comments.
- One size does not fit all when it comes to understanding.
- Find the method that works for you.

External validation



- This is where you receive feedback and guidance from someone else to help you build up your own frame of reference
- When you start out you don't have a frame of reference so you will have to build it up based on this external validation and feedback

Internal validation



- As you become more experienced you will begin to have that frame of reference and recognise what has happened when you've done something so that you have a better idea of what to replicate
- It does take time and practice, as does understanding a question overall – the frame of reference includes all of those experiences, common knowledge, feedback

Take home message



- It is important to carefully read all questions step by step to make sure you are using your efforts to answer what is being asked
- Check you understand what the different process words and instructions mean and cover all parts of what you are asked to do
- You will have to make some judgement calls on what can go in to the answer

Feedback



- Please complete the feedback form that is available at

<https://forms.office.com/e/gr39PKZKQc>

This is immensely valuable to provide information on how studenthublive is beneficial to students as well as to help us plan our future programme

(Please remember that as studenthublive is non modular we cannot provide subject based sessions- sorry!)

Selected Upcoming events



17 Mar	11am	Critical thinking (intermediate)
19 Mar	11am	Creative problem solving
20 Mar	7 pm	Introduction to essay writing
25 Mar	11 am	Critical thinking (Advanced)
26 Mar	7 pm	Developing your essay writing
27 Mar	11 am	Q & A ask the student support team
01 Apr	11 am	Memory and Learning

For more information on all past and upcoming events, go to <http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/>