

# Written Assessment Hints

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## Key features of good written assessment work

How to do well in written assessments work should not be a mystery to you. Some tutors (including Hazel) supply cover sheets (title pages and marking schedules) for written assessment components. You can use these to identify the standard of work expected. The allocation of marks reveals the extent to which you should devote your efforts. For example, if 15% of the marks are for "Sources" you need to direct 15% of your time to ensuring that you have (a) consulted enough relevant sources at the appropriate level, (b) used them sensibly as evidence in support of your arguments, (c) cited them correctly in the main text of your work and (d) formatted them correctly in the reference list and/or bibliography.

### Please pay particular attention to the following:

1. Your work should begin with a strong introduction to the content of the report/essay/paper.
2. Your work should have a tight structure, presenting a series of linked paragraphs drawing attention to main points of direct relevance to the topic of the report/essay/paper.
3. Your work should develop the main points with detailed explanations and illustrations. Depending on the instructions for the task that you have been set you will be expected to provide explanations and illustrations derived from:
  - *theoretical contributions* discussed in the literature of the subject area;
  - *reported practice* outlined in the literature of the subject area;
  - *actual practice* based on an interview conducted for the assignment;
  - what you have learnt from guest lecturers who have contributed to the module.
  - *actual practice* based on your own experience, for example on placement or at work;

The explanations and illustrations for the first four types of source should take the form of *referenced* paraphrased words or quotations (with page numbers for print sources, paragraph numbers for web page material, slide numbers for PowerPoint presentation material), with full citations provided in the reference list and/or bibliography of the work.

4. Your work should have a sensible balance between context and focus.
5. Your work should be presented thematically.
6. Your work should include material to address *all* relevant aspects of the question.
7. Your work should end with a strong, balanced conclusion based on the evidence presented.
8. Your work should be properly referenced within the text.

The examiners will be impressed to see evidence that you have extended your use of the literature beyond simply using the lecture notes and hand-outs. (Indeed at level 3 and above it is highly unlikely that you would be set a course work assessment task that could be

answered on the basis of work completed in class.) You should demonstrate a good command of English for academic purposes.

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## **Practices to avoid**

### ***1. Presenting irrelevant work/missing out sections of work***

The work presented should be relevant to the work assignment task set. It should be complete. It should be presented at the appropriate level. NB Level 4 students working on Level 3 assessments should take care not to "read into" assessment tasks extra work that isn't required, or make unwarranted assumptions. It is important to ensure, for example, that your work does not drift away from the main theme of the assessment task.

### ***2. Presenting irrelevant introductions***

The introduction should be used to provide the reader with the indication of the direction the report/essay/paper will take before conclusions can be drawn. It should not be a general introduction to the topic of the report/essay/paper. You should take care not to conclude in your introduction. (Concluding in an introduction is illogical: you have to present the evidence before making a conclusion.)

### ***3. Failing to develop main points***

Work that attracts higher marks considers the implications of what is discussed in the report or essay, rather than simply notes the main findings. Each main point should be explained and then illustrated or referenced. If the main point is not developed the work reads as superficial. If it is not supported by an illustration or quotation/paraphrased material from the literature, the argument of the text is weakened (due to this lack of supporting evidence). If illustrations or references are presented before the main point in a paragraph the work becomes muddled and it is difficult for the reader to follow the line of argument. So, for example, make sure that your work does not make statements that are then left to "hang" in the text. You have to make it clear why these statements had been made or how they related to the theme of the assignment. Otherwise the reader is left wondering "So what?" Equally, if the work presented does not develop the main themes, it reads as fragmented and the line of argument is broken. It may be evident that you understand what you are writing about, but you fail to apply your knowledge adequately. More work should be spent on developing paragraphs, forming your line of argument.

### ***4. Failing to provide a logical structure***

The structure of the report/essay/paper should match the structure suggested by the question so that work is presented thematically. Following a structure suggested by a guest lecture, the responses to the list of questions asked of an interviewee or an article found to be useful, or simply summarising a set of articles author by author will not permit a logical discussion of the issues under consideration. This will turn the job of the marker into a treasure hunt, in which he/she is forced to try and identify the material of relevance to the question set. Common mistakes include presenting work in a haphazard way because not enough time has been allocated to sorting ideas into a logical sequence, and ignoring the conventions of report

writing, such as the requirement to organise work using numbered headings and sub-headings.

### ***5. Providing too much description and too little analysis***

The higher the level of your course the greater the expectation of analytical argument in the work submitted. Work that is driven by description leaves the reader thinking "So what?" It is your job to explain the main point of each paragraph, point the reader to its importance, then illustrate it. (A common mistake is to allow the work to be led by a set of examples from the reading with little attempt to put meaning on to them.)

### ***6. Padding out material***

If you find yourself "short of words" when writing up you need to consider whether you have done enough research for your assignment at this stage and check that you have developed the relevant main points adequately. "Padding" normally takes the form of repetition or the provision of irrelevant material.

### ***7. Presenting inappropriate conclusions***

The conclusion should relate back to the introduction where what the report/essay/paper set out to do has been noted. It should conclude on the evidence presented in the main text of the report/essay/paper itself. It should add value to the work presented by making sense of the main points of the report/essay/paper. No new material should appear in a conclusion. You should ensure that your conclusion is a *genuine conclusion* and not a simple summary of the rest of the report/essay/paper.

### ***8. Failing to make best use of sources and/or referencing in a non-standard way***

You should check the marking sheet for the final report/essay/paper to see how the percentage of marks for sources will be allocated. You should not rely too heavily on a small number of references. You should also take care to ensure that the range of references that you use is of the appropriate standard: the higher the level of your course the greater the expectation that you will be using research literature from refereed journals and conferences as a basis of your analysis of theoretical issues. (It is still appropriate, however, to use textbooks and trade/practitioner press articles for illustration purposes, especially if you need to provide examples of reported practice.) If your lecturer has specifically recommended particular material for you to consult for the course work, make sure you *do* consult it. You are likely to do well if you extend your research beyond the confines of the reading list material. Poor referencing (in both the text and at the end of the assignment) is a daft way to lose marks. Common mistakes include:

- Over-reliance on one source from the reading list.
- Ignoring one/some of the sources highlighted as a "key text for the written assessment" on the reading list.
- Failure to reference non-retrievable sources (such as interviews and guest speakers) properly.
- Failure to cite authors cited by other people properly.
- Use of "lone" quotations, i.e. dropping quotations into the text as "sentences" without indicating why the quotations are being used.

- Listing in reference lists and bibliographies material that they has not actually been used for the assessment. *This is a form of plagiarism for which there are serious sanctions.* Students should be discriminating in their use of reading list material.
- Failure to provide page numbers (paragraph numbers for web page material) for directly cited or paraphrased work.
- Presentation/formatting mistakes in listings.

### ***9. Using poor expression***

Reports/essays/papers are formal pieces of work which should follow standard use of English and grammar. You must take care not to present your work too informally, for example through the use of:

- the first person (comments on personal experience should be introduced in the passive, for example by writing: "Personal experience has shown...", rather than using the first person, for example "I thought that...")
- chatty asides
- clichés (for example "at the touch of a button")
- journalese (for example "In today's society")
- interrogatives (i.e. dropping questions into the work)
- the over-enthusiastic use of exclamation marks

It is a shame to mask good ideas with poor English, for example mixing singular nouns with plural verbs and vice versa, incorrect use of punctuation.

### ***10. Failing to proof read the final piece of work to be submitted***

All work should be proof read and corrected, then proof read and corrected again until it is ready for submission. Time should be built in for this.