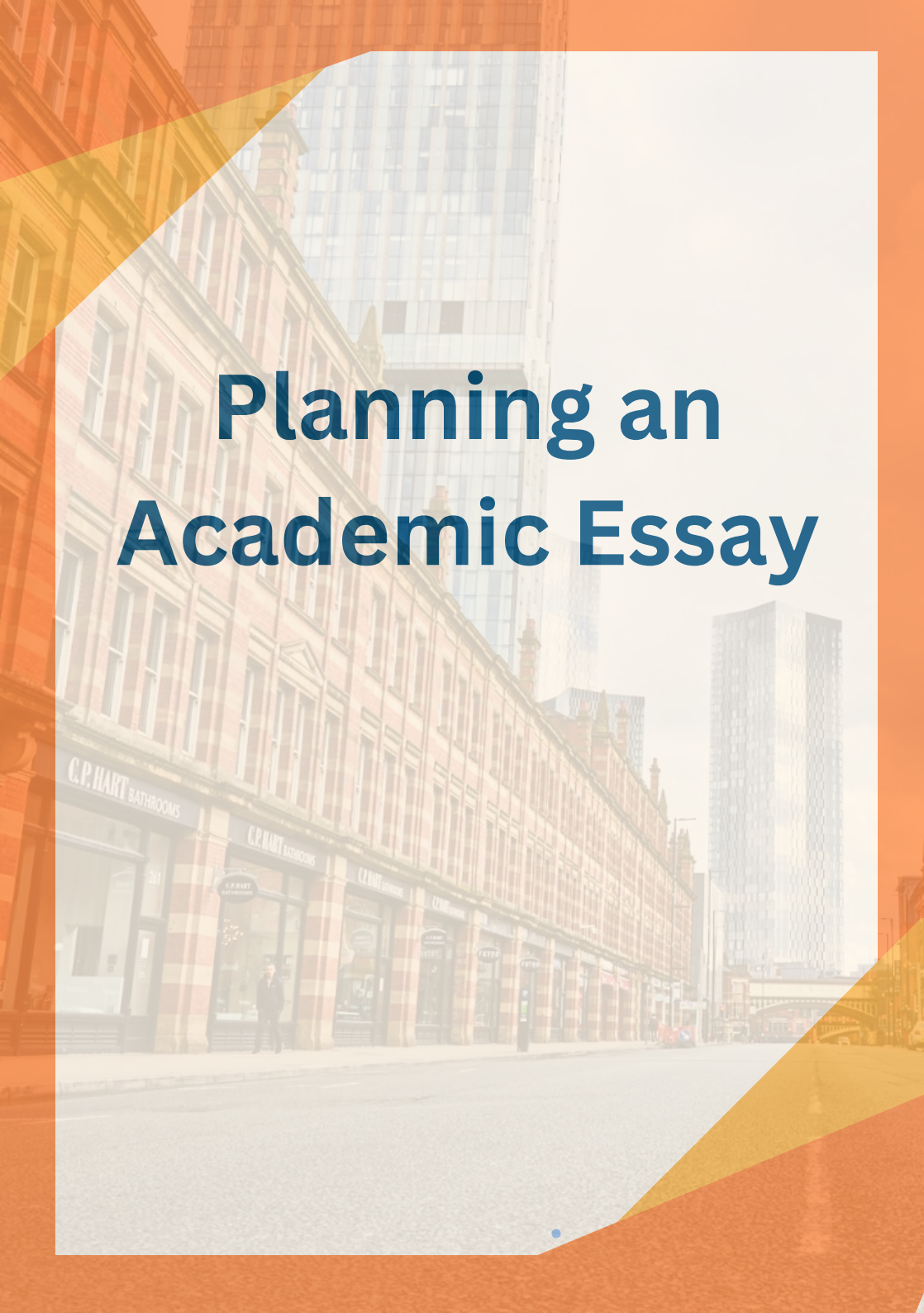


The background of the slide is a photograph of a city street. On the left, there is a row of historic, multi-story brick buildings with many windows. The ground floor of these buildings has shops, with signs for 'C.P. HART BATHROOMS' and 'PETROL' visible. A person is standing on the sidewalk in front of one of the shops. In the background, modern skyscrapers with glass facades rise above the historic buildings. The sky is overcast. The entire image is framed by orange and yellow geometric shapes in the corners.

Planning an Academic Essay

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Using this guide

Writing an essay can seem like a daunting task, but with the right approach, it becomes much more manageable!

The key to producing a well-crafted essay lies in effective planning and structuring.

This guide will provide you with practical tips and techniques for **planning** a coherent and logical piece of writing!

We recommend that you take some time to work through this guide prior to starting your essay as a good understanding of the techniques discussed will help you to elevate your writing. It is important to note that not every technique will work for you and you should take whichever approach suits your needs best.

This guide has been compiled by the student experience and engagement team with the help of other academic resources.

What is an essay?

An essay is a written piece of academic or creative writing that presents a focused argument or idea and explores a specific topic in a structured and coherent manner.

Essays are widely used in academic settings, but they are also used in various other contexts, such as journalism, literature, and business.

Usually, an essay is comprised of 3 parts: introduction, main body, and conclusion. An essay should also include a reference list at the end.

Essays serve various purposes, including informing, persuading, analysing, or reflecting on a particular subject. Their length can vary, ranging from short pieces to extensive research papers. The ability to craft a well-structured and coherent essay is a valuable skill in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

Why plan?

Essay planning is essential to help you construct a coherent argument. Taking time to plan your essay out will ensure that you have a logical structure in which to present your ideas and arguments before you start writing. Having a plan makes writing the essay much easier and can help you to keep focus and stay on topic.

Academic essays will always have a word count and you will never be able to cover everything about a subject in one piece of writing. To ensure that your essay is articulate, you need to decipher what you need to include, and what you can leave out. Being able to filter the information you want to include and the stuff you don't, will help you to meet your assignment criteria.

Generating Ideas

Once you have analysed your assignment title or topic and have a good understanding of what you are expected to do, you can start to generate your ideas.

Brainstorming or mind-mapping is a technique you can use to think about your question title or topic and quickly collate thoughts, ideas, and associations. Some of these early thoughts may prove valuable as you move through the writing process so it's important to let your mind think freely during this process.

At the stage you shouldn't make any judgment about what is right or wrong or whether it is useful or not. Refer to notes, handouts and other useful resources that might help you to compile all your thinking in one place.

Example:

Analyse the influence of social media on the spread and shaping of viral challenges in popular culture

- Types of viral challenges
- Different platforms
- Platform characteristics
- Platform demographics
- Positive effects
- Negative effects
- Celebrity influence
- Influencer accounts
- Marketing and branding
- Brand involvement
- Influencer endorsements
- Platform responsibility
- Consent and privacy concerns
- Popular culture
- Lasting impact
- Psychological drivers

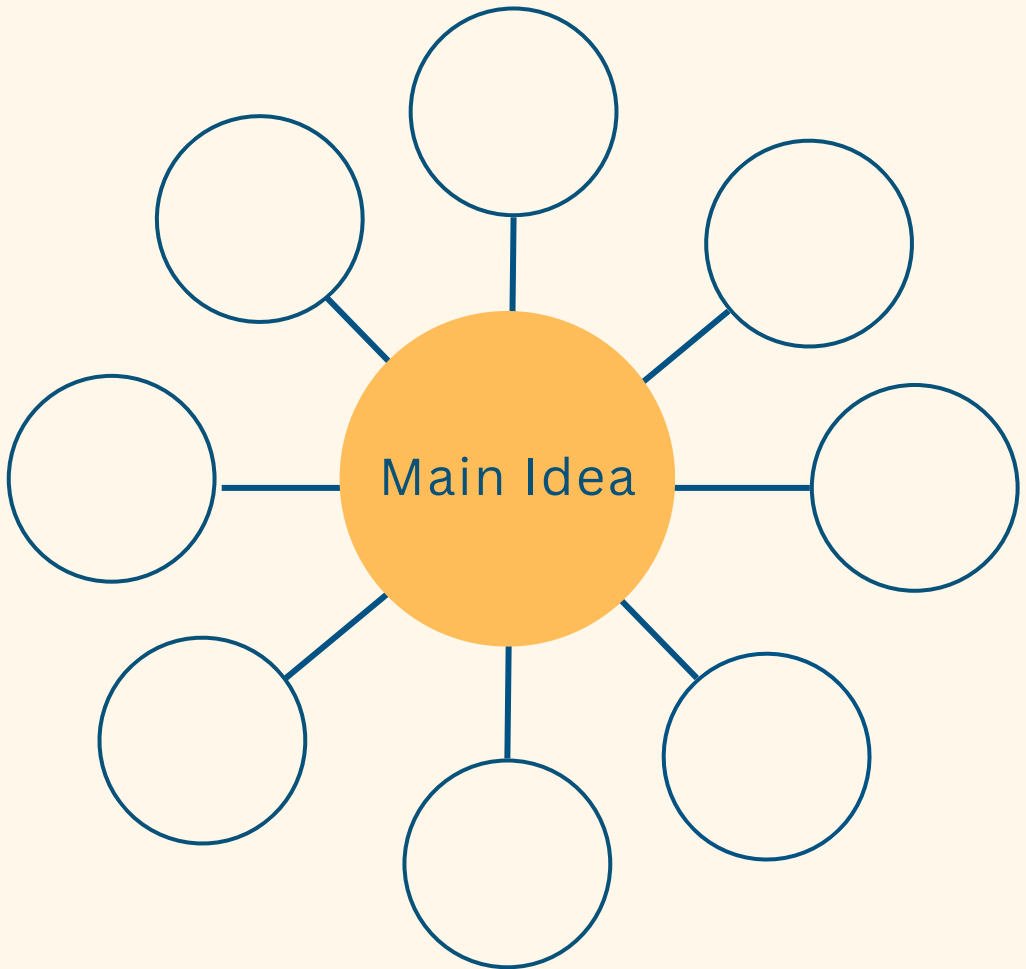
Generating Ideas

There are various ways of recording your ideas and you should use whichever method works best for you. You may want to consider some of the following.

- **Blank sheet** – take a blank sheet of paper and write anything that comes to mind when you think about the question.
- **Lists** – list your ideas as they come to you. You may wish to use ‘Notes’ on your phone so you always have access to the list.
- **Spider diagram** – start by putting your essay topic in the middle and work outwards.
- **Voice notes** - use your phone to capture spoken ideas. This can be helpful when you're on the go or if you find it easier to express your thoughts verbally.
- **Screenshots** - if you come across relevant online information, capture screenshots or save web-page links for later reference.
- **Outline template** - develop a structured outline for your assignment. Break down your essay into 3 sections (introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion). Under each section, outline your initial ideas and supporting details.
- **Story-boarding** - If your assignment involves visual elements, consider story-boarding. Use sketches or digital tools to plan the layout and sequence of visual content.

Generating Ideas

Mind-mapping template



Generating Ideas

Flow chart template

Introduction

- Hook or attention grabbing statement
- Brief background or context of the topic
- Clear thesis statement (main argument or purpose of the essay)

Main body

- Topic sentence (main point of the paragraph)
- Supporting evidence (facts, examples, quotes)
- Explanation or analysis of the evidence
- Transitional sentence to the next paragraph

Conclusion

- Restate the thesis statement in a fresh way
- Summarise the main points of arguments from the body
- Offer insights, implications or recommendations based on the information presented.
- DO NOT introduce new information.

Generating Ideas

Blank Flow chart template

Introduction

-
-
-

Main body

-
-
-
-

Conclusion

-
-
-
-

Organising Ideas

After you have exhausted all the ideas relating to your topic, it's important to go back through your notes and review their relevance and potential use.

Once you have done this, you can start to put them into some kind of order. At this stage, you should be aiming to bring related ideas together and build connections.

You can use the following plan to help you do this. As you organise your ideas, you should continually refer to the assignment brief to ensure that you have covered everything you need and that your essay maintains a coherent structure.

Organising Ideas

Essay title/theme:

- Including your essay title or theme at the top of your notes can help to keep you focused and your ideas relevant.

Main idea:

- Adding structure to this part of your planning can ensure that your thoughts are easy to process as you start to write and build your content plan.

Supporting ideas:

- These enrich the content, provide evidence, and strengthen the overall argument, making the essay more convincing, informative and engaging for the reader.

Counter-arguments (if applicable):

- Address potential counter-arguments to strengthen your position.
- Dispute counter arguments with evidence and reasoning.

Conclusion:

- Summarise the main points without introducing any new information.
- Restate your thesis statement / link back to your essay title
- End with a strong concluding statement.

Top tips

1. Understand the assignment brief:

Carefully read and comprehend the essay prompt or assignment to ensure a clear understanding of what is required.

2. Brainstorm Ideas:

Generate and jot down ideas related to your topic. Consider key points, arguments, and relevant examples.

3. Research and Gather Information:

Conduct thorough research to gather relevant information and supporting evidence. Take note of credible sources.

4. Create an Outline:

Develop a structured outline outlining the introduction, main body paragraphs, and conclusion. This provides a roadmap for your essay.

5. Revise and Refine:

Review and refine your initial plan. Ensure that each section contributes to the overall coherence and effectiveness of your essay.

Top tips

6. Time Management:

Allocate sufficient time for each stage of the planning process. Avoid last-minute rushes by planning well in advance.

7. Seek Feedback:

Share your plan with peers, teachers, or writing partners to gather constructive feedback. This can help identify potential areas for improvement.

8. Introduction and Conclusion:

Pay special attention to crafting a compelling introduction and a conclusive conclusion. These sections should leave a lasting impression.

9. Check Requirements:

Verify that your plan adheres to any specific formatting or style requirements provided by your instructor.

10. Proofread and Edit:

Before moving to the writing stage, carefully proofread your plan for clarity, coherence, and grammatical accuracy.

A final note

This booklet has provided you with guidance on how to effectively plan your essay. You should refer to this guide regularly during the essay planning process.

In conclusion, effective planning is the foundation of a successful essay. It involves carefully understanding the assignment, defining your purpose, brainstorming ideas, creating a well-organised outline, and incorporating strong supporting ideas. The planning stage sets the foundation for a coherent and compelling essay, ensuring that each component works together seamlessly to convey your message.

Remember to consider your audience, allocate sufficient time, and seek feedback for refinement. By investing time and effort in thoughtful planning, you lay the groundwork for a well-structured and impactful essay that effectively communicates your ideas to your readers.

A final note

If after working through this booklet you are still unsure about how to plan your essay effectively, please do not hesitate to contact our Student Engagement Officer who can offer additional advice and guidance to build your confidence and skill-set.

- You can contact us via our central email - **studyskills@ucenmanchester.ac.uk**
- One-to-one appointments are available through **Microsoft Bookings**.
- See the digital screens at your campus for drop-in session information

Have your say

Your input is invaluable in helping us to enhance the Study Skills package we provide. Your honest responses will enable us to identify areas of improvement and tailor our approach to better support your learning journey.

After you have completed this booklet, please take 5 minutes to let us know what you thought!

You can do this by scanning the QR code below!



