

# WRITING TIPS

## TAKING NOTES

Taking notes from a book or from the web site requires that you select the information that you want to use, and that you express this information in your own words. You may write out a long quotation or an extensive paraphrase from a book; if you summarize the book's ideas succinctly, then you will save yourself a lot of time when you come to writing the essay. If you copy out a quotation, make sure you note the page reference and the author in the appropriate system of notation.

## STRUCTURE

Essays, independent studies, examination answers, presentations – all written and verbal work, have the following structure

- Cover page
- Abstract / Executive summary (might not be necessary for short work)
- Introduction: you need to 1) bring in the discussion the main concepts, 2) make a thesis or a hypothesis or take a position (i.e. state the purpose of the work), 3) outline the way you intend defending your thesis or proving your case (i.e. set out a map).
- Body: you need to 1) write out the arguments as per the map in the introduction so as to sustain your thesis 2) discuss and counter antitheses to your argument 3) use course concepts and theories backed by examples or where necessary graphics, and data 4) use additional concepts and theories equally backed by examples or where necessary graphics, and data 5) make interdisciplinary connections (i.e. use concepts, theories and examples from other disciplines) so as to provide a holistic answer.
- Conclusion: you need to 1) sum up the main points and findings 2) give pointers for further study, research or reflection on remaining issues.
- Bibliography (not necessary for verbal presentations)
- Appendices (not necessary for verbal presentations)

## INTRODUCTION

There is an unfortunate and damaging stereotype in the academic world whereby written and verbal work does not require having a very precise beginning i.e. that it is not necessary to neither spell out the purpose nor map out the work. Indeed, but only if these are implicit and deducible. The risk, however, is that there is no purpose at all not to say that the structure may become muddled. For this reason it is recommended to always state the purpose of the work and map out the ensuing discussion.

## SOURCES

Although on-line encyclopedias and wikipedias are useful to get a first idea concerning a topic, they only serve this only purpose: get a first idea. You are therefore advised to continue with your research into primary texts and articles. Beware of on-line information that bears no name or contact as there is no way of verifying the information presented.

## REFERENCES

A reference (or citation) is an acknowledgement of sources of ideas, arguments or factual information. When you employ an idea that is not your own, summarize someone else's argument or report information which you did not collect yourself, you must identify the source. To fail to admit that you do as well is a

sign of intellectual immaturity. Deliberate failure to refer to sources is considered plagiarism – be warned that universities increasingly are using plagiarism software.

## **PERMISSIONS**

For extensive studies that may be published or simply made available for circulation, ensure that you have received permission to use a quote – with the exception of work that has fallen in the public domain (usually older than 50 years).

## **STRATEGIES – ESSAYS & STUDIES**

Here are some strategies:

- **Planning:** The planning of essays and studies is the key to developing a coherent work. A plan structures argumentation.
- **Timing:** Start working on assignments and studies as soon as possible to allow sufficient time to think the issues and carry out research.
- **Commitment:** Examiners often seek the demonstration of commitment to the study being undertaken and the only way to show this is to have spent sufficient time to deal with issues and carry out sufficiently comprehensive research. Spending a couple of hours before due date will not be sufficient to demonstrate commitment and a low grade is likely to be awarded.
- **Expectations:** Make sure you are clear as per the expectations and key words of assignments and studies before you undertake doing the work.
- **Completion:** It is crucial to write a complete answer within the allocated time and the word limits. The purpose of such limitations is to streamline your work.
- **Task effectiveness:** Regardless of your knowledge about the matter, it is important that you answer the posed question in the manner the later is actually posed and not the way you think should be posed!

## **STRATEGIES – EXAMINATIONS**

Here are some strategies:

- **Planning:** The planning of each of the examination answers is the key to getting a good mark. A plan structures argumentation.
- **Expectations:** Make sure you read the examination question carefully and that you are clear as per the expectations. Consider that you will not be able to write as much in an examination as you would for an independent study.
- **Completion:** It is crucial to write a complete answer. If you have to answer to two or three questions timing becomes the crucial issue.
- **Task effectiveness:** Regardless of your knowledge about the matter, it is important that you answer the posed question in the manner the later is actually posed and not the way you think should be posed!
- **Structure:** Examination answers are structured pieces of work, with an introduction, body and conclusion and not a mere collection of unrelated sentences and paragraphs!