The Writing Process Steps 1 and 2: Inventing Ideas and Planning an Assignment

Decode the assignment brief or title

Begin by reading the assignment guidelines your tutor has provided and any general writing advice given in your module and course handbooks. Next, re-read the assignment brief or title and circle key words.

Most assignments require you to identify a question (or questions) at the heart of the topic you are given. If you are unsure of what question lies at the centre of the topic on which you are working, discuss this with others on your course, or with your module tutor. Remember that every student-writer will have a unique perspective on the issues, so no one will have exactly the same points to make.

You will need to formulate a response to the essential question you have identified (usually in one or two sentences). This ‘thesis statement’ or ‘statement of argument’ usually goes at the end of your paper’s introductory paragraph or introductory section. You can then use the main body of your paper to develop your response to this statement.

Consider what content knowledge you are required to demonstrate, and which writing and thinking skills (e.g. summarising, defining, applying, analysing, critiquing, evaluating, synthesising). To do this, look again at your assignment brief or title, and consult the marking criteria and learning outcomes in your assignment brief or module handbook.
Once you have generated ideas for your paper, draw up a plan or blueprint of the paper’s structure. You can create a formal outline, or group and order your ideas more informally. Keep in mind that your plan should be flexible. Also plan ahead so that you can make use of time during seminars or office hours to discuss your plan with your tutor. Do not expect the tutor to be available to answer questions outside the contact time you have been allocated.

**Invention strategies**

Discuss the assignment with a variety of people and write down your ideas using one of the following invention strategies:

- **Ideas generation**: write down all of the ideas on a topic that come into your head, in any order.

- **Listing bullet points**: list your ideas in a linear fashion.

- **Webbing**: group and develop your ideas for sections and paragraphs in the form of a ‘spider’ web or pattern notes.

- **Freewriting**: write or type for 10 minutes without stopping on your topic. This will produce a ‘stream of consciousness’ paragraph from which you can extract one or two ideas to develop further through more freewriting, bullet pointing, or webbing.

**Library resources**

Book an appointment with your subject librarian at https://subjectlibrarians.coventry.ac.uk for tips on how to identify and access the best databases and journals for up-to-date research in your field. Show the librarian the assignment brief and any reading lists you have been given.
Remember! By focusing your efforts on responding to the assignment brief or title, you can avoid doing unnecessary research. Do not get side-tracked by doing either tangential research or too much background research. Also remember that in most assignments—especially those beyond the first year—descriptive material is not allocated many marks, whereas analytical writing (arguing a case by weighing up the evidence) is highly rewarded.

**Useful sources**


**Planning checklist**

- Is the assignment brief clear?
- Do I need to discuss the topic with my colleagues or a tutor?
- What key questions are being asked?
- Do I have the information to answer these questions?
- Where can I get the required information?
- Should I seek guidance at this point from the University librarian who specialises in my subject area?
- What writing skills are required?
- Where can I find out more about different kinds of writing?

(see Useful Sources above)