

mmu Institute of Education



Continuing Professional Development  
Professional Development Programme

Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University

# Guidance 4

**GUIDANCE ON WRITING  
ASSIGNMENTS**

***2008 onwards***

<http://www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/cpd/>

## **Guidance on Written Assignments**

All students studying within the Professional Development Programme (PDP) are expected to complete written assignments. These guidance notes offer some advice with these written tasks; but they are not expected to be the only advice students have access to. Remember that tutors can offer advice and guidance; there are also a number of “study guide resources” in the library, and a wide range can also be found on the Internet.

This Guidance is divided into the following sections,

### **Before writing**

- Clear view
- Assessment Criteria
- Planning
- Word-processing
- Tutorial guidance

### **Whilst writing**

- The introduction
- The body of the assignment
- The conclusion

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- Tutors advising on work in progress or drafts
- Proof-reading
- Coversheets and Assessment sheets
- Submission dates
- Assessment

### **After Assessment**

- Re-submission
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### **Further Reading**

#### **Before writing**

Have a clear view of the title of your assignment. Ensure that you know what it means; and if you are unclear of any terms ask for guidance from either the unit tutor or your course leader. If you are completing a negotiated assignment, then you may have to complete a “Negotiated Assignment Approval Sheet”, which has been signed by the appropriate tutor.

Read through the assessment criteria and assessment matrix in your course handbook. Remember that there are General Assessment Criteria which all assignments must adhere to. In addition there may well be specific Assessment Criteria for the assignment you are going to submit. If your assignment is connected to a Unit, you should look carefully at the Unit Handbook. If you are in any doubt about which Assessment Criteria

you should follow, it is imperative that you consult your unit tutor or course leader before planning your assignment.

### Planning

When planning an assignment it is worth remembering that the more carefully you plan, the more likely it is that the work will be successful. The planning process has a number of strands, which you should consider.

- When considering your assignment, you will need to explore fully what the topic covers. Some students find it useful to complete a concept map or topic web others list out the areas and ideas that they see as falling within the topic.
- Choose the areas that you wish to cover, and write down the reasons for your choice. This process helps you understand the rationale for what you are going to write, and will form the basis for part of your introduction.
- With the plan and rationale in mind, look for appropriate literature. (See Guidance on Reading and Reading Log), and relate the literature to the issue you will be writing about in the body of the essay.
- Bearing in mind the word length for the assignment, write a short outline of each paragraph. Remember that each paragraph will only support one issue or idea.

It is vital that at the end of this planning process, you have a clear idea of the content, structure and literary support that will make up your assignment.

### Word-Processing

It is important to remember that although word processing is required for dissertations, it is not mandatory for other assignments. This does not mean that word-processing of assignments is not preferable! On the contrary, if your handwriting is poor, it may be necessary for you to word-process your assignments simply so they can be read.

What is essential to remember is that work is not failed because it hasn't been word-processed.

### Tutorial Guidance

Please remember that assessment is based on the units being taught, and with all units apart from Independent Study, you may ask the unit tutor for advice on assessment – and this is built in to many units as a formal or informal session. Tutors will adhere to the policy on work in progress and drafts which is found in GUIDANCE9 DRAFTS, and students must not expect them to make exceptions to this.

Remember that if you are experiencing difficulty trying to contact your tutor, you should get in touch with the Student Life Office or the Programme's Office at Didsbury or Crewe campuses (see the contact information on the WebCTVista site or on <http://www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/cpd/> for the contact numbers of the administrators who can take messages and contact tutors for you.

## Whilst Writing

### Introduction

The introduction of an essay has three functions:

- It should state the central idea to be developed in the rest of the assignment.
- It has to explain the rationale of the assignment.
- It has to tell the reader clearly how the assignment will be constructed.

If your planning has been thorough, and you have a clear idea about what you are going to say in the assignment, the Introduction is easily written. You should avoid beginning with a quotation, but rather write a clear and succinct statement of what you intend writing about.

The Rationale for your assignment attempts to answer the question, “Why did you write about this issue in particular?” In some cases it may also be answering the question, “Why did you write about this part of an issue?” In other words, your rationale explains why you decided to write about some things and not others.

Finally, the introduction explains the methodology of your assignment. It will tell the reader whether it is partly based on experience, whether you have gathered data through observation or interviews. In short it assures the reader that he/she has a clear view of where the assignment is leading, rather than giving them the impression that they are embarking on a “Mystery Tour”.

### Body

It is not possible to give much guidance on the body of the assignment, since each one will be unique. The following comments may be helpful.

- Every paragraph must develop and support a clear point and must tie in directly with the introduction.
- A variety of techniques (examples, explanations, descriptions, and quotations) can be used to support ideas.
- Assignments must be written in flowing prose, and each paragraph should be of sufficient length to make its point clearly. If your paragraphs are very short then you are either trying to cover too much, or you are not covering issues in sufficient depth.
- Literature should be used critically. This means that the ideas contained in the literature are the crucial feature, and your comments about these ideas. It is rarely necessary to use quotations from the literature, but when one is used, it should be concise, appropriate and vital to the issue being discussed. Remember that all quotations should carry their precise page reference in the book or article from which they have been taken.
- Plagiarism is a difficult issue to explain in a short guidance note. Students should bear in mind that it is their ideas that tutors are interested in! When using literature remember it is being used to support, illuminate or challenge **your** ideas. A simple

rule to remember is to always say where the idea came from ... if it was you, say so; if it was literature, give its full reference; if it was an incident or experience in school, then point that out. Never claim an idea is your own, when it is someone else's; the chances are that the tutors will have read the original work!

## Conclusion

A conclusion signals the end of the essay and leaves the reader with a final thought. It should note what the assignment asserts, and should be written with the introduction in mind. If an issue features in the Introduction, it must also feature in the Body of the Assignment and the Conclusion – if it doesn't feature in all three sections then you are not writing correctly.

Avoid the temptation to end with a quotation; your words will have far greater weight than someone else's will.

## **After writing**

### Tutors advising on "work in progress" or "drafts"

The Professional Development Programme has guidance on tutors offering advice on work in progress or "drafts" as they are often referred to. Please read a copy of this guidance, which you will find on the WebCTVista site or which will be given to you by tutors on request.

## Proof-reading

Proof-reading is an essential element when submitting any work for assessment. As the assessment matrix makes clear, you should submit essays that are written in fluent English, without grammatical or spellings errors. Assignments submitted for assessment may be returned to the writer unmarked because they are "not in a fit state for marking" because they are poorly written or do not follow guidance on bibliographies etc. Proof reading does not mean merely running the essay through the computer spell checker. A spell checker would find the following statement perfectly acceptable.

" I maid the largest discovery of me live on my thirst day of school. Their were know books."

*(I made the largest discovery of my life on my first day of school. There were no books.)*

The words were spelled correctly but the errors are obvious. Even when a computer programme claims to check the grammar of a piece of writing, students should still be wary of these claims. There is no substitute for carefully reading and re-reading your work.

It often helps if another person can read your essay, since they will pick up not only errors in spelling and grammar, but also point out where the writing isn't clear. If you read the essay aloud to yourself, you will also discover that many common errors sound strange.

## Assessment Cover Sheets

Work will only be accepted for marking if the correct Assignment Cover Sheet and Assessment Matrix accompanies it. These sheets are available from the Student Life Office, the Programme's Office or may be downloaded from either the WebCTVista site or <http://www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/cpd/>, and must be fully completed before work is submitted. Failure to complete the sheets will mean work being returned, with the possibility of deadlines being missed. Students should not submit work via a tutor unless they are students who study "off campus", they should take it to the appropriate office and submit it formally. Students working "off campus" will have special arrangements explained to them which will allow them to submit work via the post, via a tutor or in some other acceptable and agreed way. If you are unsure of the procedure you should contact the Student Life Centre (Didsbury or Crewe) for advice. All students submitting work at a Student Life Centre will be sent a receipt for it.

## Submission dates

Work may be submitted to the Professional development Centre at any time, but it will not be assessed until the next examination board. The submission deadlines for assessed work each term are linked to the formal meetings of the Examination Board. They are clearly indicated in the student calendar sent to each registered student at the beginning of each academic year. Work submitted after the deadline will not normally be examined until the following term's examination board. Requests for late submission of work are at the discretion of the Course Leader, and will only be allowed in very exceptional circumstances.

## Assessment

Students are reminded that all work is marked initially by one tutor. If there is concern over whether an assignment meets the assessment criteria then the assignment is marked by a second tutor. Where a difference of opinion occurs between tutors as to the "passworthiness" of an assignment, it will be passed to a third moderating tutor for assessment. All work that is deemed a failure, as well as a representative sample of other assessed work is sent to the External Examiner, who will read the work and offer his advice. The marks for all work are formally ratified by the Examination Board, which meets three times a year. Students are given official notice of the result of their work after this examination board.

## After Assessment

After an assignment has been marked, it is vital that you read the comments of the markers carefully. This is important irrespective of the outcome of the assessment.

## Re-submission

If an assignment fails to meet the assessment criteria, students will be asked to re-submit the assignment. Students may ask for additional guidance from tutors, and they should note carefully the remarks made by the team who marked the assignment. Sometimes it is better to start an assignment again, at other times it is possible to "repair" an assignment. It is vital that students talk to tutors about the assignment, so

that they have a clear view of why their assignment failed. This should then give them a basis for setting about re-writing the assignment.

It is important to remember that when work is being re-submitted, the original work and assessment sheets are submitted, as well as the re-submitted work.

### The next assignment

Where an assignment has passed, it is important for students to plan as thoroughly as they can for the next assessment. This means reading the assessment sheet carefully, and ensuring that any points concerning weaknesses are thoroughly explored and remedied before the next assignment is submitted.

### **Finally...**

It is worth bearing in mind a point made earlier ... written assessments have replaced formal written examinations for the courses run by THE PDP. Therefore the assessment has the rigour and formality of those examinations. Nobody likes to fail an assessment, and tutors don't like to fail assignments. That is why the assessment criteria and matrix are published in the handbook, and why tutors will always be sympathetic when asked for help and guidance.

### **Some further reading**

Barnes, R (2005) *Successful study for degrees [3<sup>rd</sup>. Edt]* London, Routledge

Currie, D (2005) *Developing and applying study skills: writing assignments, dissertations and management reports*. London, CIPD

De Fazio, T (2002) *Studying part time without stress*. London. Allen & Unwin

Neville, C (2007) *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*. Maidenhead, Open University Press

Payne, E & Whittaker, L (2006) *Developing essential study skills [2<sup>nd</sup>. Edt]*. Harlow, Prentice-Hall

Peck, J & Coyle, M (2005) *The student's guide to writing: grammar, punctuation and spelling [2<sup>nd</sup>. Edt]* London, Palgrave MacMillan

Wallace, M & Wray, A (2006) *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates*. London. Sage