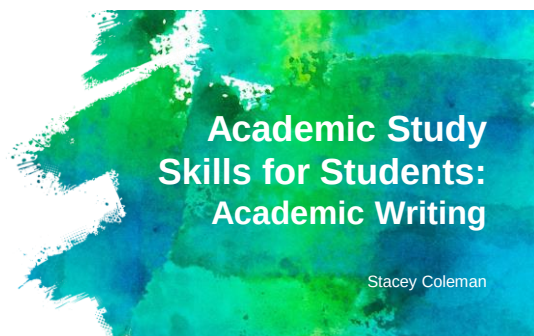




Aims:

- × Consider requirements of writing at HE
- × Assess criteria for good essay writing
- × Consider note taking strategies
- × Understand key words used in essay titles in Psychology (handout)

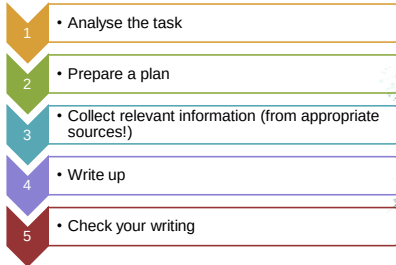


Essay writing

- × Coursework is designed to assess students understanding of subject area / module topic
- × A well structure essay that demonstrates a good understanding of the provided **question** is FUNDAMENTAL
- × Failure to communicate well to demonstrate understanding = lower marks



Writing process



4

1. Analyse the task

- × What is the question?
- × What are you being asked to do?
- × Long description (task description)
- × Locate the specifics of the question first
- × Locate the **topic**...
 - × What the question is about
- × And then the **purpose**
 - × The information you need to provide about the topic

5

Topic

- × Failing to identify the topic will result in you producing an assignment that lacks direction, and potentially including information irrelevant to the question
- × This will then score badly when marked

6

Purpose

- × After identifying the topic, you then need to identify the purpose
- × Ask the following question:
 - × *What does this question require me to do?*



7

Psychology example

- × Discuss Erikson's theory of lifespan development with particular reference to Adolescent stages
- × What are the TOPIC and PURPOSE of this question??



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First things first...



Understanding the task

- × Understanding and interpreting the question
- × Planning
- × Structuring
- × Drafting

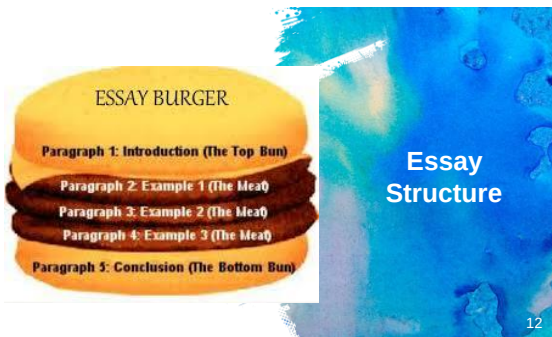
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What constitutes a 'good' essay?



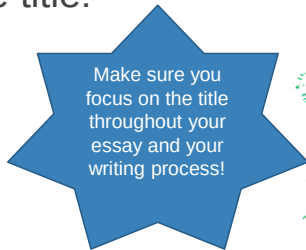
- × Demonstrating a good understanding of the set question
- × Interpreting the question
- × Understanding of the topic
 - × Demonstrating your OWN understanding
- × Critical thinking
 - × Presenting a balanced argument
- × Structure!

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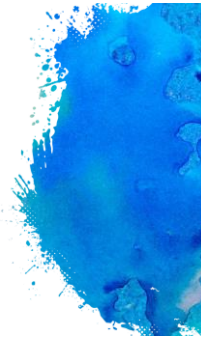
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The title!



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The introduction



Guidance: Introduction

- × Provides some background to what you are going to explore
- × Aim to indicate how the topic / question will be addressed
- × 'tell me what you're going to tell me'
- × Aim for 1-2 paragraphs



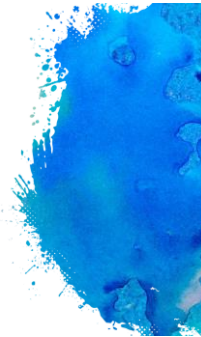
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Guidance: Introduction

- × Sets the tone for the whole essay, so the introduction is a vital part to get right
- × Aim to ensure there is distinction between the introduction and the main body of the essay, but **not** through the use of sub-headings
 - × No sub-headings in essays!
- × Before writing the introduction, useful to plan what you want to explore first



Main body



Guidance: Main body

- × The **main focus** of the essay – this is where you answer the specific assessment question
- × **You should:**
 - × Demonstrate your understanding of the question
 - × Demonstrate effort
 - × Read, read, read...
 - × Back up claims with empirical evidence
 - × Engage in critical thinking



Guidance: Main body

× Coverage of literature:

- × Ensure your essay covers a reasonable amount of relevant information
- × Present a balanced argument
 - × Present arguments 'for' and 'against'
- × Use up to date literature
 - × Some classic studies may be required, but must be complimented with contemporary literature

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Guidance: Main body

× Structure:

- × Ensure you structure your evidence in a way that the reader can follow the argument you're making
- × There should be a clear progression of ideas
- × Individual and dependent on question
 - × Not necessarily chronological...

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Guidance: Main body

× Clarity, analysis and interpretation:

- × Presenting an argument may mean covering more than one theory / conflicting perspectives
- × Aim to indicate how evidence relates to theories being discussed
- × Use research that is **directly relevant**
 - × This is important in the clarity of your argument

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Guidance: Main body

× Clarity, analysis and interpretation:

- × All assignments will call for a degree of **analysis and interpretation...**
- × THINK about what you're writing
 - × Does it make sense?
 - × Are the arguments plausible?
 - × Have you covered all relevant and important pieces of information?
- × Evidence that you are an intelligent thinker and not a photocopier...

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Guidance: Main body

× Clarity, analysis and interpretation:

- × Remember that opinions are of little value unless they are supported by (or grounded in) some kind of research evidence
- × Analyse, criticise, and scrutinise
- × Engage in research!!
- × And be selective...

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Guidance: Main body

Empirical vs. Anecdotal evidence

- | | |
|---|--|
| × Empirical is the preferred option | × Anecdotal = useful – in some cases! |
| × More scientific | × Sometimes unable to find research examples |
| × Demonstrates engagement with reading and literature | × Can demonstrate some understanding |
| × Anecdotal = lazy | |

24

Guidance: Main body

- × Final things to consider:
 - × Flow
 - × Don't 'hop' between topics / paragraphs
 - × One paragraph should lead to the next
 - × No sub-headings
 - × Demonstrate critical thought
 - × Check spelling, grammar, punctuation and referencing!



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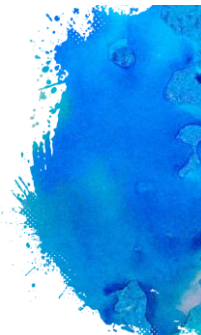
Guidance: Main body

- × Final things to consider:
 - × Make links between sections / paragraphs
 - × Use 'linking phrases'
 - × 'Therefore'; 'on the other hand'; 'next'; 'however'
 - × Plan ahead!



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Conclusion



Guidance: Conclusion

- × Brief summary of the main arguments
- × No new arguments should be presented here
- × Aim to comment on strengths/weaknesses of the work and speculate on possible gaps in the literature



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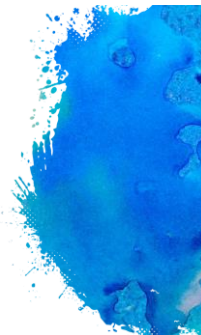
Guidance: Conclusion

- × Do not simple repeat everything you have said in the essay!
- × Aim to offer an informed opinion/judgement based on the evidence you've presented throughout the essay



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Developing your writing style



Writing style

- × Be objective (not subjective) and authoritative
 - × Subjective = me, me, me
 - × Objective = take yourself out of the equation, so to speak
- × Keep language simple and sentences / paragraphs of a reasonable length
- × Don't use long words for the sake of it
 - × Use of the 'synonym' button sticks out!



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Writing style

- × Remember the point of the essay – to communicate your understanding of the topic
- × Read through your work and check that **you** understand what you've written!
 - × Or better yet, give it to someone else to check for grammar, spelling, etc.
- × Avoid emotional writing (i.e., in your face)
- × Write critically, not descriptively



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Writing style

- × Write formally!

I'm of the opinion
It doesn't
There's no
They'd

The research suggests
It does not
There are no..
They did/ did not



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Writing style: What is wrong here?

E.g., the author's argument is terrible and I don't agree with it

1. Too emotive – be objective



Writing style: What is wrong here?

E.g., the author's argument is terrible and I don't agree with it

2. Use of first person – always write in third person!



Writing style: What is wrong here?

E.g., the author's argument is terrible and I don't agree with it

3. Do not use contractions

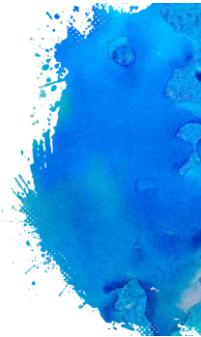


Writing style: how can we re- write this?

It could be suggested that the author's argument has not been fully developed or supported



Finally... standard formatting expectations



The Word Count

- × Stick to it!
 - × - / + 10% allowance
- × The aim of the word count is to demonstrate that you can answer the provided question in a concise and succinct way
 - × Do not waffle – this doesn't demonstrate understanding



Researching

- × Use peer-reviewed academic sources where absolutely possible
 - × i.e., Journal articles
- × Books and edited books are also ok to use
- × DO NOT reference Wikipedia, SimplyPsychology, etc
 - × This doesn't mean don't use them – but they are to be used for basic information



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Writing

- × Objective and in the third person
 - × Only exception is when you are asked to write reflectively
- × Avoid chatty and informal style
- × Avoid unnecessary long words / jargon
- × Do not use bullet points, lists or sub-headings



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Writing

- × No contractions
- × No personal anecdotes or opinions
- × No slang! Remain academic throughout
- × Proof read your work



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Formatting

- × 1.5 or double line spacing for all main text
- × Reference list should start on an entirely new page
 - × Referenced in APA 6th style
 - × Hanging indent looks more professional
 - × Only include materials you have cited (this is not a bibliography)



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