

Hello and welcome to this podcast on tackling your first assignment or essay.

Assignments are sometimes presented as questions and other times as more detailed and extensive briefs depending on the subject. You can save yourself a lot of effort if you spend some time reading and analysing the brief and the first thing to do with a question or brief is to read it carefully then read it again. This will allow you to pull out the key concepts and phrases. Refer to the learning objectives to see what you should be aiming for and also be aware of the different tasks that the question's instructions imply, for example phrases like analyse, assess or compare.

Come back to the brief throughout the writing and research process to make sure you address all the tasks laid out there. Remember you're expected to adopt critical perspectives towards your subject so ask your tutor if you need more help to interpret the brief or a member of the ASK team. Once you understand the brief, think about a research plan. Organize your thoughts by using visual or textual technique to plan your research. Also you can see a librarian if you need advice on finding resources and take your plan plus the brief along if you can.

Now I'm going to talk to Gareth from the ASK academic skills team about his top tips for tackling your first assignment.

Gareth

I've got a few top tips. My first one is developing on what you said about looking at the brief. That's really really important to make sure you understand it. You look at whatever is given to you on the learning space, so the module guide and brief. Anything that tells you what's expected for the assignment. And then you try and really pick it apart. So ways of doing that could be reinterpreting the brief in a mind map or printing the brief out and highlighting key terms as you said or you know what you gonna get marked on. Key terms is really good because then you can start to really focus on what you're being asked to do.

Deconstructing the brief and being really clear to yourself about what you need to do is kind of the most important thing, because the danger being that you might wander off and start looking at different things which aren't quite what the brief's asking for. So that's my first hot tip.

Second one is thinking about the time that you've got to do the assignment. So if you do that first stage, looking at the brief and interpreting it nice and early you can then start thinking about how long you think it's going to take you to do the assignment, write the essay, or whatever it is you're being asked to do.

So think about making sure you know when the deadline is and then maybe working backwards from there using a calendar or something to work out what you need to do. We also tend to suggest using Assignment Calculator which is a gadget we have on Study Hub. If you go to Study Hub then Written Assignments you'll find assignment calculator there and you can put in the deadline and it will work out the five stages of writing an essay or an assignment. And then it suggests times when you should start each of those stages. So breaking down the process is really useful to help you feel like you're managing

the process. You might start on doing research at a certain time and then you might stop doing a bit of research and start writing.

It's good to kind of identify when you would do that so you can see things coming up ahead over the horizon that you know you're conscious of. Other projects that you're doing as well and also other stuff that's going on in your life as you know when you're going to be busy during certain weekends and when you're not going to be able to work on your assignment. So I tend to suggest to students they do it on a calendar like maybe on an A3 calendar on the wall or using a calendar app that they can even check on their phone means that they could set themselves mini deadlines for certain aspects of writing the essay. Or they could set themselves reminders to do things on the phone. You feel maybe a bit more ownership over the process and not just worry about it and then leaving it and then finding that it's all a bit too much towards the end.

So it's a good idea to look at the brief and then work your way backwards in the deadline to what you need to do and then a final one is going back to the brief and looking at exactly what the essay title is that you need to answer. Maybe you've chosen your own essay title but in any case you need to really find out what it is that you need to answer. If you are answering an essay title that you've chosen then what I always tend to suggest to students is that you write that in the middle the paper, put a circle around it and around the outside you just force yourself to sit there and write as much as you can think of to answer that question from just from the top of your head. Hopefully finding that you writing loads of things that you maybe didn't really realize that you knew, but you think might be relevant to this essay and to answering this particular question that will then hopefully give you a better sense of confidence that you're already kind of on track with what's being asked to do. But also what you could potentially see as areas where you need to do some research to fill in some gaps in your knowledge to send you to the next stage of researching. That exercise is probably a really good way to get started on going into the library finding sources.

So yeah that's my three top tips.