



THE POWER OF PLANNING

Planning and outlining are **the most important parts of the assignment writing process!** Good writers spend *much* more time planning than actually writing. Planning is critical in being able to focus both your research and writing. It allows you to evaluate and organise ideas, find the best evidence to support them, and give your writing a cohesive, logical structure. It also allows you to plan your time effectively!

First, spend some time **analysing the task**. Then it's time to start brainstorming some ideas.

[SEE THE GUIDE ON GETTING STARTED WITH ACADEMIC WRITING](#)

BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES



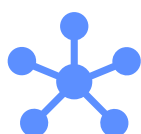
Brainstorming is the process of generating ideas, thinking creatively, and considering what you already know about the topic and how it might apply to the question. Brainstorming allows you to consider different approaches to a topic and see connections and gaps in your knowledge. There are several different brainstorming techniques you might consider:

FREEWRTING

Freewriting is a creative process that involves writing down everything you can think of about a topic without worrying about sentence structure, grammar, or even making sense. Try either prose or dot points and don't limit yourself in terms of what you can come up with; it's about getting as much down on paper as possible! If you struggle, try setting a time limit of 5 – 10 minutes and don't stop writing until it's up.



MIND MAPPING



Mind maps allow for abstract and visual generation of ideas. Start in the middle of the page with the main topic and branch out into more specific ideas to create a diagram. Mind maps are an excellent way to visually represent your thinking and see connections you may not have considered.

ASK QUESTIONS

It can also be useful to ask questions of your topic. Focus on the 'W' questions: what, where, who, why, when, and how. What is the basic problem? Who is involved or affected? Where does it take place? Why does it happen? How does it occur? There are lots of 'W' related questions you can ask depending on the topic.



EVALUATING YOUR IDEAS

Before you start turning these ideas into a structural plan, it's important to evaluate them. Consider using an ABC analysis, where you give an A to the most important and relevant ideas, B to relatively important ideas, and C to the least important ideas. This will help you determine the relevance of each idea to the topic and each other and prioritise what will end up in your final assignment.



Hot tip: Use your final list of ideas as key words to focus your research!



DEVELOPING A STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

Once you've finished brainstorming, it's time to organise your ideas. Developing a structural outline allows you to consider the best logical order of key points, how they link to evidence, and the overall development of your argument. It also makes the writing process much easier as you no longer have to concentrate on logic and structure, and can instead focus on critical content and expression.



Before developing an outline, you may need to conduct more **research** based on any gaps you found during the brainstorming process. This is a back and forth process – the research will inform your plan, and your plan will inform your research. Try to keep things flexible!

EXAMPLE STRUCTURAL OUTLINE

Below is an example of a structural outline. Note that the development of ideas within each paragraph and how many key points you include will depend on *your assignment*. This is a general guide only!

1. Introduction (approx. words)
 - a. Background and context
 - b. Significance of the topic
 - c. Thesis statement and main points
2. Key point one (approx. words)
 - a. Topic sentence
 - b. Introduce evidence from author A
 - i. Develop with an example
 - ii. Develop in relation to the essay's argument
 - c. Compare with evidence from author B
 - i. Link to topic and develop the paragraph's premise
 - d. Linking sentence to next key point
3. Key point two (approx. words)
 - a. Topic sentence
 - b. Introduce evidence from author C
 - i. Develop with an example and link to argument
 - c. Introduce evidence from author D
 - i. Contrast and evaluate in relation to evidence from author C
 - ii. Develop in relation to the argument
 - d. Concluding sentence
4. Conclusion (approx. words)
 - a. Synthesis of key points
 - b. Link them back to the thesis
 - c. Conclude and make recommendations

THE NEXT STEPS



After finishing the outline, you may also wish to consider whether you need to conduct more research. If so, re-evaluate your plan afterwards as you may have discovered new information that changes the structure or relevance of ideas. Then, finally, it's time to start writing! Remember, even this process has several stages including writing a draft, editing, and proofreading.