

ESSAY WRITING SKILLS

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Essays are arguably the most widely used form of assessment for psychology students. They allow an examiner to assess a student's factual knowledge, as well as their ability to create logical arguments and critically evaluate the material they have been taught. So, essay writing is more than just writing about what you know, it is also about being able to show that you can discuss relevant material in a scholarly and critical way. As a result, successful essay writing requires a range of skills and knowledge. The following sections are designed to guide you through the kinds of things you need to think about in order to write a successful essay that will get you a good mark. This advice should be general enough for you to use it to write an essay in any area of psychology, but the particular examples used will relate to essays written on topics related to psychopathology and clinical psychology.

1. WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU START ANYTHING

Before you even begin to plan or write your essay, you may need to check some or all of the following:

1.1 ***Am I familiar with the Assessment Guidelines?***

Check that you are familiar with the assessment guidelines for your essay.

- Assessment guidelines are provided by your Department and outline the qualities that an essay must have to achieve a particular mark. An example of a set of assessment guidelines is shown in Table 1. [TABLE 1]. Assessment guidelines not only provide you with insight into how the mark for your essay was derived, but assessment guidelines can also provide a good deal of insight into how you might improve your essays in order to get a better mark. Table 1 provides some examples of this. Usually a Department will have one set of assessment guidelines for essays on all courses, and you can usually find these on the *Teaching Pages of your Department's web-site* or in your *degree programme handbook*. In some cases, assessment guidelines may apply only to individual courses or modules, and you need to look at your *course documentation guidelines* in these instances.



Assessment guidelines can provide a good deal of insight into how you might improve your essays in order to get a better mark.

- The link http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/documents/assessment_criteria_for_coursework_essays.doc provides you with an example of the generic essay assessment guidelines for Psychology students at the University of Sussex.

1.2 ***Am I certain that I know the Submission Deadline?***

When is the deadline for submission of your essay and at what location do you have to submit it?

- Most Departments impose penalties for submitting work after the deadline, and these are often severe – a good quality essay can lose anything between 10-25% of its marks if it is only 24 or 48 hours late. A submission deadline will usually be very precise (e.g. 4pm on Thursday 23rd May), so make sure you are aware of the *time as well as the date* of the deadline. Submission deadlines will usually be printed in the documentation you have for that course. Don't rely on what friends or fellow students say the deadline for the essay is, because information often becomes changed or confused as it passes from one person to another!



Make sure you are aware of the *time as well as the date* of the essay submission deadline. Don't rely on what friends or fellow students say about when the deadline is.

- Make sure you know exactly where to submit the essay . This may be your Psychology Departmental Office, but be sure of that because some individual courses may require that you submit essays to a different location (such as your University's Academic Registry or a School or Faculty Office).



Make sure you know exactly where to submit the essay.

- Don't rely on friends to submit your essay for you! When essays are handed in they usually have to be registered as submitted. This means ensuring that they are handed to the correct person who will usually time stamp the essay or will ask the person handing it in to sign a submission sheet. Friends may often be unaware of this and simply leave your essay on a desk or counter in the office – and it won't be registered as handed in!



Don't rely on friends to submit your essay for you!

- If you have missed a submission deadline and think that there were good reasons for this (e.g. you were ill prior to the deadline), then you need to provide your department with ***evidence of mitigating circumstances***. If you have been ill, then this will usually need to be a doctor's note. If you are unsure where you should take this evidence ask either your Departmental Office or your own personal tutor/academic advisor/mentor. If your mitigating evidence is accepted then you may be given a time extension in which to complete the essay. If you have handed your essay in late and are *not* able to provide any acceptable mitigating evidence, then prepare to have your mark for the essay significantly reduced!



If you have missed a submission deadline and think that there were good reasons for this (e.g. you were ill prior to the deadline), then you need to provide your department with ***evidence of mitigating circumstances***.

- Remember, the main point of ensuring that you know the submission deadline is to ensure that you can give yourself enough time to plan and write a good essay before you have to hand it in.

1.3 ***How Much Does The Mark For My Essay Contribute To The Final Mark For This Course/Module?***

Your essay may not be the only piece of assessed work you have to do for that individual course or module.

- If so, make sure you know what percentage of the final mark for your course your essay will contribute. It could be as little as 20% or as much as 100%. If the essay contributes most (e.g. 70%) or all (100%) of the final mark for the course, then you need to give it more time and attention than if it were only a minor contributor, and this will depend on your work priorities at that time.



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1.4 ***Do I know what the word limit for this essay is?***

Most, if not all, essays will have a specified word limit.

- Word limits can vary between 1000, 1500, 2000, 3000, and 4000 or in extreme cases 5000 words. You will find the word limit for the essay specified in the course/module documentation.
- Paradoxically a 2000 word essay is often more difficult to write than a 3000 or 4000 word essay because in a shorter essay your arguments have to be short but very clear and concise if you are to get in all the material that is required. So don't think that a shorter essay requires any less time

than a longer one – it may require even more planning and editing to get the required information in.



Don't think that a shorter essay requires any less time than a longer one.

- Don't forget, there are likely to be penalties for exceeding the word limit. Some Departments will allow you leeway of 10% above the word limit but no more, and marks will be deducted for exceeding the word limit.
- Many Departments will also require you to specify the exact number of words in your essay. Don't lie about the number of words in your essay because experienced markers will usually have a good feel from marking many essays whether you have exceeded the limit or not!



Don't lie about the number of words in your essay!

- Before writing your essay, always check whether your references and bibliography sections are to be included in the word count.



Before writing your essay, always check whether your references and bibliography sections are to be included in the word count.

- Regardless of the length of your essay what you write still has to comply with the criteria given in the assessment guidelines (see Table 1). So, whether your essay is 2000 or 4000 words, to get a 2.1 mark, the essay still has to be "comprehensive, well organised, and accurate, with evidence both of having understood the issues and of being able to think about them effectively". As you can imagine, meeting the criteria for higher marks (2.1 and First) can often be more difficult in a shorter essay than a longer essay.



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1.5 ***How many credits do I get for completing this particular course/module successfully?***

Most, if not all, courses/modules on a psychology degree programme will earn you credits.

- Normally, at undergraduate level, you must successfully complete courses that earn you a total of around 120 credits each year in order to progress to the next year in your degree programme (this differs for postgraduate taught Masters programmes). The more credits you get for a course/module, the more that any mark you get on the assessment for that course is likely to contribute to your final degree classification.
- As a consequence of this, the mark you get on a course with a high number of credits (e.g. 30) will count for more than a course with a low number of credits (e.g. 10) when your final degree classification is calculated (see XXXXXX). One implication of this is that if you are pressed for time and you need to prioritise your academic work – you should commit more time and effort to an essay on a high credit-rated course than a low credit-rated course.
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2. **HOW TO PREPARE BEFORE PLANNING & WRITING THE ESSAY**

Don't just start reading and writing; there are a number of things you can do to prepare yourself properly before you even start planning your essay let alone start writing it:

What essay titles can I choose from?

First, you need to check what essay titles are available and decide which one you want to attempt.

- Can you make up your own title? This option is becoming less common in psychology departments because lecturers want to be sure that you have learnt material relevant to the course's learning outcomes (these are usually specified in your course/module documentation). Making up your

own essay title means that you may end up writing about things that are irrelevant to the course's learning outcomes.

- If you are given a list of essay titles to choose from, make sure you know if there are any restrictions on which essay title you can choose from the list. For example, must you write an essay on a topic that is *different* from one on which you may have given a presentation?



Make sure you know if there are any restrictions on which essay title you can choose from the list of essay titles.

- Decide whether you want to do an essay that will help you learn about material you find difficult or help you to familiarise yourself with material that may be useful in a forthcoming exam. There are practical benefits to doing this, because it actively helps you when it comes to revision. However, the potential cost of this strategy is that you are attempting an essay on a topic that you admit you find difficult, and so you may risk getting a poor or disappointing mark.



Decide whether you want to do an essay that will help you learn about material you find difficult or help you to familiarise yourself with material that may be useful in a forthcoming exam.

- Should you attempt an essay just because the topic interests you and you think you can achieve a good mark? Yes, of course! Don't forget that in the second and third year of your undergraduate degree, almost every mark you get for every piece of formal assessment counts towards your final degree classification. Doing essays on topics that interest you should motivate you to write a good essay!



Doing essays on topics that interest you should motivate you to write a good essay.

What references do I need to read?

Reading lists for many courses are often long and inclusive. You can't read everything on the list, so how should you go about choosing what to read?

- First, get advice from course/module convenors or seminar tutors about what to read. They are the ones most likely to know what references are relevant to an essay title and which are not.
- It is generally *not* a good idea to go to the library and randomly sample from books that look as though they may be relevant but are not on the reading list. This is because the book may be out of date (check when it was published – anything over 10 years old is almost certain to be out of date whatever topic you are writing about!) It may be written from a different perspective to the one preferred by your tutor/lecturer (e.g. for an essay about treatment of depression it may be about psychoanalytic approaches when your tutor prefers you to learn about CBT approaches). Or it may simply be irrelevant to the specific syllabus of your course (e.g. for an essay about treatment of depression it may discuss drug treatments when the syllabus requires discussion of psychological treatments).



It is generally *not* a good idea to go to the library and randomly sample from books that look as though they may be relevant but are not on the reading list.

- If you look at the assessment guidelines in Table 1, you will see that to achieve a First class mark you will need to show "evidence of extra reading". So how do you choose what extra reading to do? One safe way of doing some "extra reading" is to pursue references given in articles and books that are on your reading list. For example, if your reading list recommends you read a certain review paper, you can then pursue relevant other readings/articles from the reference list presented in that paper. If you have a good understanding of the topic, and you understand what you have read in that review paper, then you are very likely to be able to choose relevant "extra reading" from that paper's reference list.



One safe way of doing some "extra reading" is to pursue references given in articles and books that are on your reading list.

- Some of the more general text books (e.g. Introduction to Psychology texts; basic core area second year texts) may not provide you with enough detail to write a good essay. General text books will give you a clear overview of the topic you are writing about, but you will not be able to write a 2.1 or First class essay solely from that one book.



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- Textbooks and book chapters usually provide the best overview of a topic rather than journal articles. However, there are some journal articles that are written at an appropriate level for undergraduate students and can be used as a useful source for an essay, but these will usually be suitable only for Year 2 or more advanced Year 3 essays. At the end of each chapter in ***Psychopathology***, examples of suitable review articles are usually provided in the section labelled ***Reviews, theories & Seminal Studies: Links to Journal Articles***.
- Many of the books and journal articles given in your reading lists may be available electronically from your own University Library. Check which references on your reading list are available electronically because you should be able to access these at your convenience on your PC or laptop at home.



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- For advanced level essays (e.g. for third year options/elective courses or Master's courses) you may want to access psychology databases to supplement your reading. Databases such as Web of Knowledge (<http://wok.mimas.ac.uk>) and PsycInfo (<http://www.apa.org/psycinfo/>) are often available free through your University or College Library, and they can provide access to useful review articles on essays covering a relatively well-defined topic. Table 2 provides you with an example of the kinds of references that you could locate and access through Web of Knowledge for an essay on eating disorders. [TABLE 2].

At what level am I writing the essay?

How you plan and write your essay will to some extent depend on your year of study – are you a first year undergraduate, a second year undergraduate, third year undergraduate, or a postgraduate Master's student? As you can imagine, essay markers expect you to show a gradual progression in skills and learning as you progress through your degree programme.

- Table 3 provides a list of the general qualities that a marker might be looking for in essays at different levels of study [TABLE 3].
- In Year 1, make sure that you understand the structure and style required of an academic essay in psychology (see Section XX), that you carefully and clearly describe key concepts, and you support your arguments with evidence (in the form of references to other texts or studies). Make sure you provide a reference list or bibliography.
- In Year 2 you will be learning core concepts and basic facts. This is the year in which you are expected to acquire a broad factual knowledge of psychology, and so this needs to be reflected in your essays where appropriate.
- In Year 3 you will be studying psychology at an advanced level, and this will mean you will be studying quite specific topics in some depth. This intense learning of focussed topics is reflected in the option courses and electives that most Psychology Departments offer to their third year students. These are often given by individual lecturers and reflect their own specific research interests. As a consequence, essays will be expected to reflect an in-depth knowledge of these focussed areas and to demonstrate a clear understanding of theoretical issues.
- At Masters Level, students should be expecting to study material that is at the cutting-edge of research and application in psychology, and essays would be expected to reflect this. If your Masters programme is a professional or vocational one (i.e. one that is part of the qualifications required to eventually practice psychology), then you will need to show a clear and thorough understanding of professional issues as well as a broad academic knowledge of the subject.

What Internet Resources Should I Access And Use?

There are certainly some internet resources that can help you research material for your essay (such as *Web of Knowledge* and *PsycInfo* mentioned above). However, you need to be very careful about where you source information from and use web-sites that you are fairly certain are reputable and reliable.

- Don't just start searching the web randomly for web sites that you think might provide you with material for your essay. Remember, many web-sites contain inaccurate or out-of-date information, and may provide unbalanced and biased views on a topic.



Remember, many web-sites contain inaccurate or out-of-date information, and may provide unbalanced and biased views on a topic.

- Searching the internet randomly for information can also lead to information overload, where you feel you are unable to filter out useful from non-useful information. Too much internet surfing will also result in the temptation to cut and paste information directly from web-sites into your essay, with the result that you could be accused of plagiarism (see Section XXX). Tara Brabazon in her book *The University of Google: Education in the (Post) Information Age* (2007) says "Google offers easy answers to difficult questions. But students do not know how to tell if they come from serious, refereed work or are merely composed of shallow ideas, superficial surfing and fleeting commitments – Google is filling, but does not always offer nutritional content" – so beware!
- A good place to start your internet search for essay material is the *Internet Psychologist* (<http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/tutorial/psychologist/>). This provides information about bona fide psychology web-sites that are likely to be useful when writing an academic essay as well as tips on how to search for valuable and relevant information on the internet.
- Other useful web-sites include the Higher Education Academy for Psychology web-site (www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk) and the Intute website (<http://www.intute.ac.uk/psychology/>), both of which provide useful information about psychology teaching and learning resources.

Can I Use My Lecture Notes As A Source Of Information For My Essay?

The best way to view your course lectures is (1) as a guide to the syllabus of your course – i.e. the lectures will give you a good idea of what you *need to know*, and (2) as a means of hearing first hand about important concepts and having these explained to you.

- Even if you have taken copious lecture notes, it is unlikely that you will find these notes provide you with anything like the detail and accuracy of information that you need to put into an essay

- However, lectures may well give you a good idea of what the important references are to read on a particular topic, and the lecturer may have explicitly pointed these out to you in the lecture.
- Lecturers will usually only examine you on material that has been covered in lectures, so this alone can be an important reason for attending lectures.

3. **PLANNING YOUR ESSAY**

Once you have decided on the essay you are going to attempt, the next steps are (1) planning your time between reading and writing, and (2) planning the structure of your essay.

How much should I read and when should I begin writing?

- Before you begin to write the essay, begin by gathering together all the reading materials you think you will need to write the essay. This is important for a number of reasons: (1) you don't want to disrupt your thinking and writing by having to interrupt the process to go off and find new material, and (2) if you leave it to the last minute to get your references, you may well find you're unable to get hold of them – don't forget, your fellow students may be writing the same essay to the same deadline, so they will be wanting these references as well, and University Libraries will only have a limited number of some important books.



Before you begin to write the essay, begin by gathering together all the reading materials you think you will need to write the essay.

- In order to make notes while you read, it is useful to have your reading material in a form that allows you to highlight passages and to make notes directly onto the reading material. This means photocopying relevant passages in books or using electronic material that you can download and print out yourself (e.g. papers from electronic journals, see section 2.2) – But remember – be responsible – books provided by a library are crucial resources for all students and will not last for long if they are written on or defaced!
- Before you start reading and writing, it is worth planning out reading and writing time. Decide when you have free time to work on the essay up to the submission deadline, and then allocate time to reading or writing in those free slots. Make sure this is a flexible timetable, because even with

the best of intentions, timetables will always get disrupted by something! The amount of time you will need to spend reading will depend on the complexity of the essay you have to write and the amount of reading material you have decided to review.



Decide when you have free time to work on the essay up to the submission deadline, and then allocate time to reading or writing in those free slots. Make sure this is a flexible timetable, because even with the best of intentions, timetables will always get disrupted by something!

How can I get the most benefit from my reading?

- Before you begin your reading, make sure you understand the essay title you are attempting and what the title is asking you to produce in an essay. Table 4 provides you with some standard template example essay titles with some advice on interpreting what these essay titles require of you.[TABLE 4]. You can only constructively begin reading for your essay once you are clear about what the essay title is asking you to write about. Activity Box 1 provides you with some sample Level 3 essay titles that you can discuss with your fellow students. This discussion should help you to gain insight into how to interpret essay titles and how you would go about writing essays on each of these topics. [ACTIVITY BOX 1].



You can only constructively begin reading for your essay once you are clear about what the essay title is asking you to write about.

- It is best to begin your reading with material that will give you a broad overview of the essay topic. This will allow you to put the essay topic into a broader context and will hopefully enable you to grasp the main issues you need to write about more clearly. You can do this by reading review articles or book chapters, or reading relevant sections from more general text books on the topic.



It is best to begin your reading with material that will give you a broad overview of the essay topic.

- After gaining a broad overview of the topic you will need to read in a more focused way on issues relevant to the essay title itself, and to make notes on what you read. You will need to have some strategy that will enable you to keep track of important and relevant material you have read, and to link these different pieces of information together in a way that is relevant to answering the question. You can try some of the following;
 - Using a *highlighter pen* to highlight important passages in your reading (but do not do this directly onto books or journals that you don't own!!)
 - On photocopies or print-outs of references make *notes in the margin* that will help you remember the significance of the material when you return to it.
 - Use *spider diagrams* to help you summarize information as you read it; this may also help you to develop your ideas as you read.



Use *spider diagrams* to help you summarize information as you read it.

- Spider diagrams are useful because they allow you to summarize information as you read and to link different issues and ideas together in a way that may help you to structure your essay. Figure 1 illustrates the use of a spider diagram in relation to an essay on theories of specific phobias. [FIGURE 1]. Spider diagrams also allow you to overview a lot of material visually, and to get a broader picture of the logical connections between facts and concepts. However, spider diagrams seem to be suitable for some students and not for others – try them out first to see if you find using them beneficial.

4. WRITING YOUR ESSAY

There are a number of important things to remember as you start your essay: (1) Your essay must have a structure – be sure you know what this structure is before you begin writing, (2) remember to answer the essay question as set, (3) write in a scholarly rather than egocentric fashion, (4) make sure you provide a proper reference list or bibliography at the end of the essay, (5) think about how you will format your essay, and (6) avoid plagiarism.

How should I structure my essay?

- It may seem obvious, but always think of your essay as having a 'beginning', a 'middle' and an 'end', and be quite clear what kinds of things you want to say in each section:

- The 'beginning' will probably be no more than a paragraph long, but in this section you should (1) describe how you have structured the essay, (2) say why the issues to be discussed in the essay are important, and (3) if you have focussed on some specific issues within the essay, explain why you have chosen to discuss these in particular. Remember, markers usually have a lot of essays to mark, so providing them with a clear and succinct overview of your essay in the first paragraph is likely to be welcomed. Focus Box 1 provides you with some examples of essay introductions and highlights the characteristics that makes these introductions either good or bad.



Remember, markers usually have a lot of essays to mark, so providing them with a clear and succinct overview of your essay in the first paragraph is likely to be welcomed.

- The 'middle' is the 'meat' of the essay where you present your arguments and evaluations. Make sure this does not read like a catalogue of seemingly unconnected paragraphs – you need to be a storyteller, and the issues you discuss should unwind in a logical sequence to tell a specific story. If you have drawn up a spider diagram, refer back to this to help you construct the logical order in which you need to present your facts and arguments. If you want to make different sections of your essay more distinct, most tutors and markers will allow you to use *sub-headings* to indicate the content of different sections of your essay (but check with your tutor first that this is OK).
- The 'end' of the essay, should very much be a conclusion that draws together all your facts, evaluations and arguments and sets out an answer to the essay question. This will usually be your own considered response to the essay title because most often there will not be a right or wrong answer. If you are dealing with issues that are at the cutting edge of science or professional practice, there will almost certainly be on-going debate about all of the issues you are writing about, including the adequacy of explanatory theories and the validity of supporting evidence, so your conclusion should reflect the fact that there may as yet be no clear cut answer to the question you were set.

Am I sure I'm answering the question?

An essay title is rarely an instruction to just 'write all you know' about a topic, it is usually an attempt to assess your critical and analytical skills in relation to a particular body of

knowledge. If an examiner wanted to assess simply 'how much you know', then they would probably set you a multiple choice exam (see Section XXX of the web-site) rather than set you an essay assignment.

- Have a look back at Table 4 to refresh your memory about how to interpret essay questions, and as a guide to what you should write about.
- In the concluding paragraph to your essay, don't just summarise what you've written about, make sure that you provide an answer of some kind to the essay question.
- Don't assume there is a right or wrong answer to the essay question – an essay is largely a way of assessing whether you can argue a case logically and critically and use your knowledge of the appropriate literature. But even if there is no obvious and clear answer to the essay question, you should still couch your conclusions in relation to the essay question that was set.

How do I write a scholarly essay?

Most tutors will want you to write the essay as if it were a scholarly piece of work. This has implications for both your style of writing and for the content of the essay. Once you have read the paragraphs below, you can take a look at Focus Box 2 that provides you with some examples of scholarly and unscholarly essay writing. [FOCUS BOX 2].

- Try to write the essay in the third person and not in the first person. Do not begin sentences with "I think that..." or "I will argue that...", begin them with statements like "It has been shown that..." or "The next section of the essay will cover..." This conveys a greater sense of objectivity about what you write, and does not convey the impression that you have just thought up the material you are writing about.



Try to write the essay in the third person and not in the first person.

- Always provide evidence to support your arguments. This evidence should be in the form of descriptions of studies that support what you say, or include references to studies that support your arguments (see Focus Box 2).



Always provide evidence to support your arguments.

- It is often inadvisable to include your own personal speculations about a topic unless you have good objective evidence to support what you say (e.g. can you support your assertions with evidence from journal articles or books?).
- Make sure you properly define any technical terms that you are using in your essay when they are first introduced (this includes spelling out acronyms in full when they are first mentioned).



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- A scholarly essay will usually provide a balanced view of a topic or issue. That is, it will clearly discuss both the pros and cons of a topic and provide evidence for and against a particular view. Make sure your essay provides a properly balanced view of the issues relevant to the essay topic.



Make sure your essay provides a properly balanced view of the issues relevant to the essay topic.

- A scholarly essay must provide evidence of breadth and depth of reading. You can do this by including references to texts and articles that you have read at appropriate points in the essay. You can also demonstrate how aware you are of current developments in the area by quoting references that are only 1-2 years old (this is especially the case in advanced undergraduate and postgraduate Masters essays).



A scholarly essay must provide evidence of breadth and depth of reading. You can do this by including references to texts and articles that you have read at appropriate points in the essay.

- When providing supporting evidence for an argument or assertion it is important to provide an optimal amount of relevant information. For example, you do not need to describe every single detail of an experiment that you are using to support an argument, just enough detail of the nature of the study and its results that are relevant (see Focus Box 2 for some examples).

4.4. *How should I present my reference list or bibliography?*

At the end of your essay you are expected to provide a list of books or articles that you have either read as preparation for writing the essay or have cited in the body of your essay. Providing these lists is important and is seen as good academic practice, so if you don't compile these properly you will almost certainly be marked down.

- You are expected to provide a reference list or bibliography for a number of reasons: (1) you may have presented arguments in your essay that are basically the ideas of other people – you need to reference these appropriately otherwise you might be accused of plagiarism, and (2) providing a full reference for supporting evidence allows the reader to follow these up and read them in full if they are either interested in the topic or want to be sure that what you have written is genuine!
- A **bibliography** provides a list of background or general reading that is relevant to the essay; a **reference list** is a list of all the articles, books or works of others that you have mentioned or quoted in your essay. Check whether your tutor or your Department requires you to provide both a bibliography and a reference list or just one of these.



Check whether your tutor or your Department requires you to provide both a bibliography and a reference list or just one of these.

- There is normally a standard way in which references should be cited in a reference list. Most Psychology Departments will require referencing in the style recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA), and details of this can be found at <http://apastyle.apa.org/>. Table 5 provides you with some examples of APA referencing formatting for different types of references. [TABLE 5].

- All references should be listed alphabetically in a separate section at the end of your essay – Table 5 provides you with an example of what a properly constructed and presented reference list should look like.
- You can use software that is specifically designed to organise your references and create bibliographies. These products will search on-line bibliographic databases to retrieve the full references you require, will construct your bibliography or reference list as you write the essay, and will print out your references in the required format. Endnote is one such product (<http://www.endnote.com/>) and your own University or College Library may provide you with licensed access to referencing software of this kind.

4.5 *How should I format my essay?*

Different Universities, Colleges and Departments will have their own rules about how you should format your essay. Some important considerations are set out below.

- Most Departments now require you to type rather than handwrite your essay. Some will even require you to submit it electronically. This will help to save office resources, and will ensure that your Department has a copy of your essay stored electronically. Make sure you are clear about whether your essay should be typed and whether it needs to be submitted electronically.
- You may be required to submit more than one copy of your essay. This is so that one copy can be handed back to you when it has been marked (together with the necessary feedback) and the second can be retained by your Department in case it needs to be scrutinised more closely during the examination and assessment period (e.g. your Department's external examiner may want to look at a selection of essays from students to ensure proper marking standards have been met).
- Ensure that your essay has adequate margins on either side of the paper. Markers will want to put comments and feedback on your essay and this can be quite difficult if the margins are very narrow.



Ensure that your essay has adequate margins on either side of the paper. Markers will want to put comments and feedback on your essay and this can be quite difficult if the margins are very narrow

- You need to decide whether to format your essay as single-spaced or double-spaced. Double-spacing does make the essay more comfortable to read and provides more room for markers' comments. However, it will cost you more in ink and paper, and the environment more in terms of trees!
- There is nothing more annoying for a marker than having to read an essay where the print is grey and faded. This can often be the case as an ink cartridge or ink ribbon is coming to the end of its life. Always make sure you give yourself good time to print out your essay before submitting it – just in case that ink cartridge runs out at the very last moment and you have to submit an essay with untidy and faded print.



Always make sure you give yourself good time to print out your essay before submitting it – just in case that ink cartridge runs out at the very last moment and you have to submit an essay with untidy and faded print

4.6 *How can I avoid plagiarism?*

Plagiarism in coursework essays is a major concern for markers and examiners. The number of cases of plagiarism has been increasing significantly over the past few years. This includes an increase in the number of students committing plagiarism, an increase in the number of cases of plagiarism being detected, and an increase in the number of students being convicted of plagiarism.

Plagiarism occurs when you present someone else's words, work or ideas as if they were your own. This will be considered as plagiarism regardless of whether it occurred deliberately or accidentally – so you need to be highly vigilant about how you write your essay, and you need to actively find ways to avoid accidental plagiarism (see below).

Plagiarism in essays occurs in two main forms. The first is when you use a form of words to describe something which is identical to, or very similar to, the form of words used in a source book, article or web-site. The second is when passages in your essay closely resemble similar passages written by other students in their own essays. If a student produces a piece of work and then allows another student to copy it, this is known as **collusion**, which will result in *both* students being reported for misconduct. So, never lend your essay to another student unless you are absolutely sure they will not plagiarise it, because if plagiarism is discovered you will both be punished.



Never lend your essay to another student unless you are absolutely sure they will not plagiarise it, because if plagiarism is discovered you will both be punished.

Plagiarism includes exact copying of phrases from other sources without acknowledging the source, and copying of passages from other sources with only minor changes of wording. If you are unclear about what might constitute an example of plagiarism your own University or College will have further information on its web-site on this. Alternatively, try some of the quizzes and tutorials that are designed to raise your awareness of what is and what is not plagiarism – examples include the Indiana University Plagiarism Test (<http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>), University of Bradford, School of Management Plagiarism Quiz (<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/management/external/els/plagiarismquiz.pps>) and the University of Toronto Plagiarism Tutorial (<http://www.ecf.utoronto.ca/~writing/interactive-plagiarismtest.html>).

You can actively avoid the possibility of plagiarising by taking a few basic steps when planning and writing your essay;

- (1) When making notes while reading for your essay, avoid making verbatim notes from books and journals. Write down the information you want in your own words.



When making notes while reading for your essay, avoid making verbatim notes from books and journals.

- (2) Never cut and paste material from a web-site into your essay. This is easily detectable, and many Universities now have software that can reveal when you have done this (see below).



Never cut and paste material from a web-site into your essay. This is easily detectable, and many Universities now have software that can reveal when you have done this.

- (3) Always give yourself enough time to write the essay. Many cases of plagiarism arise when a student needs to finish an

essay in a hurry to meet an impending deadline. There is then either a temptation to plagiarise or the student simply becomes sloppy and does not have time to check whether what they have written is plagiarised.



Always give yourself enough time to write the essay. Many cases of plagiarism arise when a student needs to finish an essay in a hurry to meet an impending deadline.

- (4) By all means discuss how you would write an essay with other students, but try not to read other students' completed essays before you write your own, you may wittingly or unwittingly adopt a similar structure, use similar references, and use similar phrases to them.



Try not to read other students' completed essays before you write your own, you may wittingly or unwittingly adopt a similar structure, use similar references, and use similar phrases to them.

The consequences of being convicted of plagiarism are usually quite severe. Most Universities and Colleges will have clearly defined procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism, and if the evidence is compelling the student will normally be asked to attend a misconduct hearing. If the student is found guilty, then penalties may vary according to the extent of the plagiarism. A penalty is likely to mean that the piece of work is awarded a mark of zero (0%). In more extreme cases, when a student has plagiarised in more than one piece of work, they may receive more severe penalties such as the capping of the degree classification they can be awarded (e.g. the highest award they may receive is a Pass degree). Make sure you are aware of what penalties you might incur if you are caught plagiarising.



Make sure you are aware of what penalties you might incur if you are caught plagiarising.

Remember, plagiarism is much easier to detect than you think:

- (1) Experienced markers often know that a passage is taken verbatim from a book or research article (students even used to write passages in their essays that were verbatim from my own books – and they expected me not to notice!).
- (2) It is also very easy for an experienced marker to detect when the style of writing changes suddenly and this may indicate plagiarism.
- (3) A marker can usually verify whether a phrase or passage is pasted directly from a web-site. This can be checked by putting a phrase or sentence from the passage into a Google search and see if it corresponds with anything written on the internet.
- (4) Many Universities now use electronic plagiarism software to detect plagiarism. Table 6 shows examples of the outputs of such software, the kinds of plagiarism they detect, and how they assign a quantifiable 'plagiarism score' to an essay. [TABLE 6].



Remember, plagiarism is much easier to detect than you think!

5. THINGS TO REMEMBER AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED WRITING YOUR ESSAY

You'll probably experience a sense of relief and – hopefully – satisfaction once you have completed your essay. But just in case you get 'demob happy' too soon, make sure you check the following:

- Always make sure you keep a copy of your essay. Normally this will be in electronic form and stored on your laptop or PC. But if the essay is handwritten, then you need to be sure you've kept a photocopy. Essays do sometimes get lost in the marking process, so having a back-up is important. You will also probably need a copy of your essay for revision purposes.



Always make sure you keep a copy of your essay.

- When writing an essay, you will usually have become very closely involved with what you are writing, so it is often difficult to see the wood from the tress. When you've finished the essay, leave it for a few days, then return and re-read it. This will give you a better feel for whether the essay is readable and logically constructed, and you may spot errors that you hadn't seen before.



When you've finished the essay, leave it for a few days, then return and re-read it.

- Don't forget to use a spellchecker to correct any basic spelling and grammatical errors. Apart from your basic word-processing spellchecker, there are now software packages that are available that can check for grammatical errors, highlight awkward or verbose sentences and phrases, and advise on word choice and word order. (One example is ErrNET™ <http://www.errnet.net/>)



Don't forget to use a spellchecker to correct any basic spelling and grammatical errors

- Don't be so relieved at finishing your essay that you forget to hand it in on time! But when you do hand your essay in, make sure that (1) it clearly has your name or candidate number on it (it is wise to put this on all pages of the essay in case the front page becomes detached) as well as the course for which the essay is being submitted, and (2) you have completed and attached any front sheet that your Department requires you to submit with the essay.



When you do hand your essay in, make sure that it clearly has your name or candidate number on it (it is wise to put this on all pages of the essay in case the front page becomes detached) as well as the course for which the essay is being submitted

- If you have been diagnosed by your University or College Student Support Unit with a learning disability such as dyslexia, don't forget to flag this on your essay cover sheet (usually with a special sticker that has been supplied by your student support unit). This will entitle you to sympathetic marking that takes into account the nature of your disability.

Table 1: Example essay assessment criteria

Class	Assessment guidelines
First	<i>An excellent answer, well written, logical and critical, showing appreciation of major points, and integration with points that go beyond the basic module material. An outstanding essay will also show originality and flair.</i>
Good 1 st (85-100%)	Could be used as a "model answer" on the module; contains relevant material that would not have been anticipated on the basis of module content
Solid 1 st (75-85%)	A full, organised account; evidence of extra reading.
Low 1 st (70-75%)	Well argued and full account, perhaps missing some relevant (but not critical) material. Showing some evidence of originality, whether in content or presentation of argument.
Upper second	<i>Comprehensive, well organised and accurate answer. Evidence both of having understood the issues and of being able to think about them effectively.</i>
Good 2.1 (67-69%)	Well organised and full description of core material, lacking the originality or organisation that would qualify for a first class mark.
Solid 2.1 (63-66%)	As above, perhaps missing some relevant details.
Low 2.1 (60-62%)	Relatively full account of core material, missing a relevant study or some part of the core argument, but showing evidence of appreciation of the core material.
Lower second	<i>An adequate answer that is mostly accurate, but there may be some errors or omissions. Limited organisation and scope with no real development of argument.</i>
Good 2.2 (57-59%)	Good answer, as far as it goes; perhaps introducing irrelevant material, or missing a sufficient amount of core argument to no longer qualify as a comprehensive answer.
Solid 2.2 (53-56%)	Pedestrian account of a selection of the core material.
Low 2.2 (50-52%)	As above, with some errors, or many irrelevancies.
Third	<i>Incomplete answer, sparse information, substantial errors or omissions, poorly organised. Perhaps relating to a different aspect of the core topic.</i>
Good 3 rd (47-49%)	Incomplete knowledge of module material.
Solid 3 rd (43-46%)	Confused knowledge (with errors) of module material.
Low 3 rd	Very confused and incomplete knowledge account of relevant material.

40-42%)	
Pass (30-39%)	Provides some evidence of (disorganised) knowledge from the module material. Inaccurate with numerous errors and omissions; very poorly organised; irrelevancies; show little grasp of issues.
Fail	<i>A very deficient to totally inadequate essay. Serious errors or omissions. May include only personal opinion with no evidence of having read anything or attended the module.</i>
Marginal fail (25-30%)	One or two relevant ideas
Clear fail	No real idea
(1-24%)	
Zero mark (0%)	No answer, no psychological content

Adapted from Davey et al. (2004) Complete Psychology. Hodder Arnold.

How can I use the Assessment Guidelines to improve my essays?

Let's assume you are generally getting good 2.2 marks (around 57-59%). According to the guidelines above you will need to do the following to improve your essay:

- You know that your essay is good but has some limitations (you are either including information that is irrelevant to answering the question or missing some information that is central to answering the question. You need to be sure in the feedback that you get from the marker that you know either what it is you have excluded or what it is that you have included that is not relevant.
- You can improve your essays by looking at what criteria are necessary to get a 2.1 (60-69%) or a First class mark (70-100%). To get a 2.1 mark your essay needs to be (a) well organized and (b) a relatively full account of the core material. Look at your previous essays and try to work out how these characteristics might be missing. To achieve a First class mark, in addition to meeting the criteria for a 2.1, your essay needs to (a) show evidence of extra reading, (b) show evidence of originality (i.e. you are not simply regurgitating the standard answers to the question that most students give), and is consistently 'well-written, logical and critical'

TABLE 2 – USING PSYCHOLOGY DATABASES AND ON-LINE RESOURCES TO ACCESS POTENTIAL READING MATERIAL FOR ADVANCED LEVEL ESSAYS

Imagine that you are attempting to write an advanced level (third year undergraduate or Masters level) essay entitled ***“Compare and contrast some of the psychological factors thought to underlie eating disorders”***

One way of sourcing some additional reading is to use a knowledge database such as **Web of KnowledgeSM** that will provide you with (a) access to the abstracts of relevant journal articles, and (b) possible free access to the full papers themselves through access to the electronic journals supplied by your University or College Library.

Putting important key words into the search engine for Web of Knowledge will help you to source articles that may be useful and relevant. In this case, we have entered the words *eating disorders, risk factors, causes and review*. This has specified terms that will be important in answering the essay question, and by adding the word *‘review’* we are likely to source articles that give a good coverage of the topic we are interested in as well as an evaluation of the topic and relevant theory.

ISI Web of Knowledge [v.4.0] - All Databases Home - Windows Internet Explorer

http://apps.newisiknowledge.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/UA_GeneralSearch_input.do?product=UA&search_mode=GeneralS

ISI Web of KnowledgeSM Take the next step

All Databases Select a Database Additional Resources

Search Search History Marked List (0)

Search for:

eating disorders and risk factors and causes and review in Topic

Example: oil spill* AND "North Sea"

AND in Author

Example: O'Brian C* OR O'Brian C*

AND in Publication Name

Example: Cancer* OR Journal of Cancer Research and Clinical Oncology

Add Another Field >>

Search Clear

Limit to: All Years

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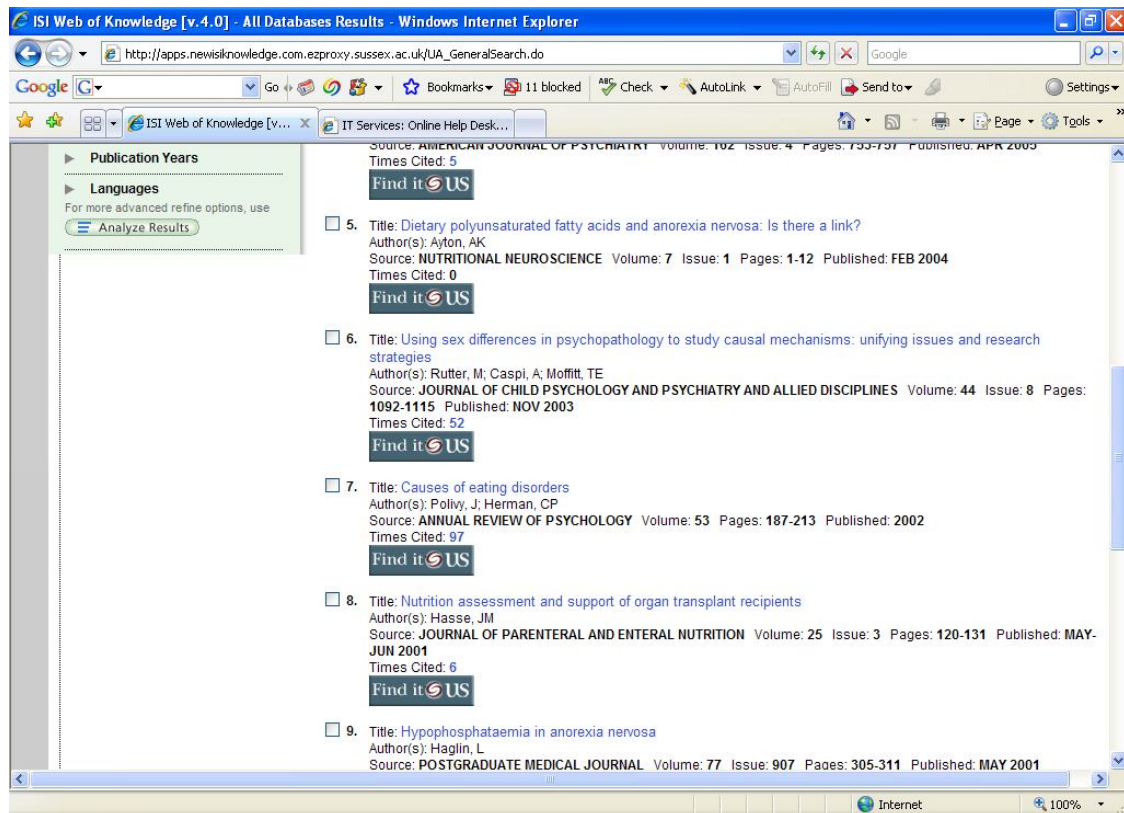
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Further Information

Once we have pressed the **'search'** button a list of articles whose title or abstract contain those key words is revealed. The window below gives an example of what this search reveals. Many of these titles will not be relevant to writing our essay because they are too specific or are too high level. However, our search has revealed one article that is likely to be relevant which is ***Polivy & Herman (2002) Causes of eating disorders. Annual Review of Psychology, Vol. 53, pp187-213.***



When we then look at the abstract for this paper (by clicking on the title) we see that indeed it may be very useful for writing our essay, and if that journal article is available electronically through your institution's Library you can click on the **"Find it."** logo to access the full article.

ISI Web of Knowledge [v.4.0] - All Databases Full Record - Windows Internet Explorer

http://apps.newisiknowledge.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/full_record.do?product=UA&search_mode=GeneralSearch&qid=10

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Search | Search History | Marked List (0)

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Causes of eating disorders

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Author(s): Polivy J, Herman CP

Source: ANNUAL REVIEW OF PSYCHOLOGY Volume: 53 Pages: 187-213 Published: 2002

Times Cited: 97 **References:** 153

Abstract: Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa have emerged as the predominant eating disorders. We review the recent research evidence pertaining to the development of these disorders, including sociocultural factors (e.g., media and peer influences), family factors (e.g., enmeshment and criticism), negative affect, low self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction. Also reviewed are cognitive and biological aspects of eating disorders. Some contributory factors appear to be necessary for the appearance of eating disorders, but none is sufficient. Eating disorders may represent a way of coping with problems of identity and personal control.

Document Type: Review

Language: English

Author Keywords: anorexia nervosa; bulimia nervosa; contributory factors; identity; control

KeyWords Plus: PERCEIVED WEIGHT STATUS; ONSET ANOREXIA-NERVOSA; MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS; LOW SELF-ESTEEM; BULIMIA-NERVOSA; BODY-IMAGE; ADOLESCENT GIRLS; COLLEGE-WOMEN; RISK-FACTORS; FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Cited by: 97

This article has been cited 97 times (from Web of Science).

Jung J, Forbes GB Body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among college women in China, South Korea, and the United States: contrasting predictions from sociocultural and feminist theories PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN QUARTERLY 4 381-393 DEC 2007

Shomaker LB, Furman W Same-sex peers'influence on young women's body image: An experimental manipulation JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY 8 871-895 OCT 2007

Goethals I, Vervaeke M, Audenaert K, et al. Does regional brain perfusion correlate with eating

Internet 100%

TABLE 3 – General qualities expected in psychology essays at different levels of study.

Degree Level	Qualities expected in an essay
Undergraduate – Year 1	<p>Where applicable, essays should:</p> <p><i>Exhibit a structure and style that is expected of an essay in that academic discipline.</i></p> <p><i>Demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts central to the discipline.</i></p> <p><i>Show evidence of reading at a foundation or introductory level</i></p> <p><i>Reveal evidence of critical thinking about the topic, and the use of evidence to support arguments.</i></p>
Undergraduate – Year 2	<p>Where applicable, essays should:</p> <p><i>Demonstrate understanding of core concepts and reflect the learning of core facts about specific areas of psychology</i></p> <p><i>Display a clear ability to support arguments and statements with relevant evidence</i></p> <p><i>Demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate facts as they are applied to an evaluation of an academic problem.</i></p> <p><i>Show evidence of learning through the reading of textbooks and journal articles</i></p>
	<p>Where applicable, essays should:</p> <p><i>Present multiple perspectives on a topic in a way that reflects critical evaluation</i></p>

<p>Undergraduate – Year 3</p>	<p><i>Emphasise the role of empirical evidence in the development of theory in the relevant areas</i></p> <p><i>Reflect an understanding of the research skills and methods that have been utilised in the relevant area</i></p> <p><i>Reflect the in-depth study of a specific area in terms of research and application</i></p> <p>(from Quality Assurance Agency Psychology Benchmarking Statement, 2002)</p>
<p>Postgraduate – Taught Masters</p>	<p>Where applicable, essays should:</p> <p><i>Be informed by material from the forefront of an academic or professional discipline.</i></p> <p><i>Show originality in the application of knowledge, and reflect an understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research.</i></p> <p><i>Deal successfully with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and the student should show originality in tackling and solving problems.</i></p> <p>(from Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK)</p>

TABLE 4: UNDERSTANDING AND DECONSTRUCTING ESSAY TITLES

Essay Title	Deconstructing the Essay Title
"Describe the main characteristics of the personality disorders"	Most essay titles will want you to 'evaluate' the material you are writing about (i.e. are the theories you're writing about good explanations of the subject matter; is the evidence you are using to support your arguments robust). However, this title simply asks you to be descriptive. That is, do you know what the main symptoms and characteristics of personality disorders are?
"Critically evaluate the main theories of the acquisition and maintenance of major depression"	The word 'critically' does not simply mean a negative appraisal of the theories. The word requires that you give a balanced (pros and cons) argument for each theory
"Compare and contrast biological and psychological theories of schizophrenia and its symptoms"	This type of essay requires you to integrate issues from both types of theory and to discuss the similarities between each theory (e.g. do they explain similar symptoms, or do they explain things in different ways?), and the differences between each theory (e.g. are these theories explaining the same phenomenon but at different levels – i.e. biological vs. psychological?)
"How are information processing biases involved in the acquisition and maintenance of anxiety disorders?"	This requires more than just a description of each kind of information processing bias, but requires you to describe how each type of information processing bias might contribute to the symptoms of anxiety.
"What are the problems for the practicing clinician of using a diagnostic system that does not classify psychopathology according to its causes?"	This is an example of an essay title that on the face of it looks complicated and difficult to deconstruct, and you'll need to think beyond the basic terms in the title to write a good essay. First, ask yourself which diagnostic systems do <i>not</i> classify psychopathology according to its symptoms (DSM-IV-TR is a good example of this, see Chapter 1 in <i>Psychopathology</i>). Secondly, ask yourself what

	<p>kinds of things clinicians do (they assess and treat clients – see chapters 1 & 2 of <i>Psychopathology</i>). So the question then becomes “What problems does DSM-IV-TR create for clinicians who are assessing and treating clients”. You have deconstructed the title in a way that should now indicate what you need to read (i.e. you need to read about DSM-IV-TR and the potential problems it creates for assessment and treatment) – but it is still a demanding essay to attempt!</p>
--	---

TABLE 5

BIBLIOGRAPHIES & REFERENCE LISTS

6.1 EXAMPLES OF AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA) REFERENCING FORMAT

Below are some examples of how you would format references according to the APA style that is usually required for psychology essays. Note that (1) journal names and book names are usually highlighted in italic or by underlining, (2) references to book chapters should include the page numbers of the chapter, (3) web-pages should include the date that you retrieved that web-page (because you may have retrieved an early version of a web-page that has since been updated), and (4) lists of references are often difficult to read, but you can increase their readability and the attractiveness of their presentation by using the 'hanging' format where all lines of a reference are indented slightly after the first line (this can be achieved in Microsoft Word by highlighting the reference and then clicking 'Format'>'Paragraph'>going to the window labelled 'Special' dropping the menu and choosing 'Hanging').

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Davey, G.C.L., Startup H.M., MacDonald C.B., Jenkins D. & Paterson K. (2005) The use of 'as many as can' stop rules during worrying. *Cognitive Therapy & Research*, 29, 155-169.

BOOKS

Davey G.C.L. & Wells A. (Eds) (2006) *Worry and its psychological disorders: Theory, assessment and treatment*. Chichester: John Wiley.

BOOK CHAPTERS

Davey G.C.L. (2006) A mood-as input account of perseverative worrying. In G.C.L. Davey & A. Wells (Eds) *Worry and its psychological disorders: Theory, assessment and treatment*. Chichester: John Wiley. Pp217-237

AUTHORED WEB-PAGE

Lecce S. (2005) Should egalitarians be perfectionists? Retrieved January 30, 2008, from <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2005.00237.x?cookieSet=1&journalCode=ponl>

UN-AUTHORED WEB-PAGE

New child vaccine gets funding boost. (2001). Retrieved March 21, 2001, from http://news.ninemsn.com.au/health/story_13178.asp

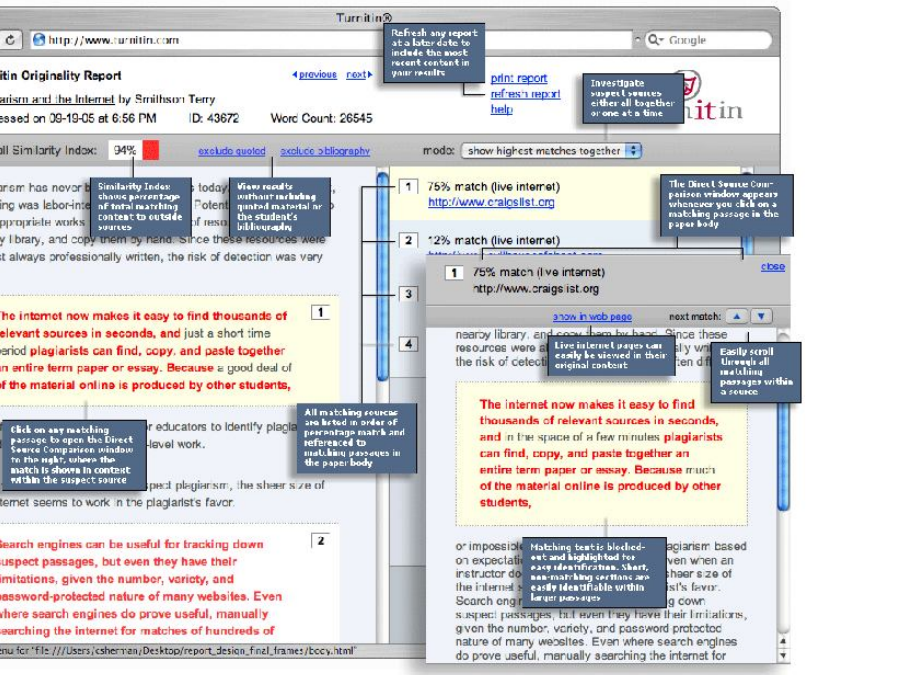
6.2 AN EXAMPLE REFERENCE LIST

Note that if there are a large number of authors for a particular reference, you need not include all of these but just cite the first 3 or 4 and then write 'et al'. (see reference marked *)

- Antony M.M. & Swinson R.P. (1998) *When perfect isn't good enough: Strategies for coping with perfectionism*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
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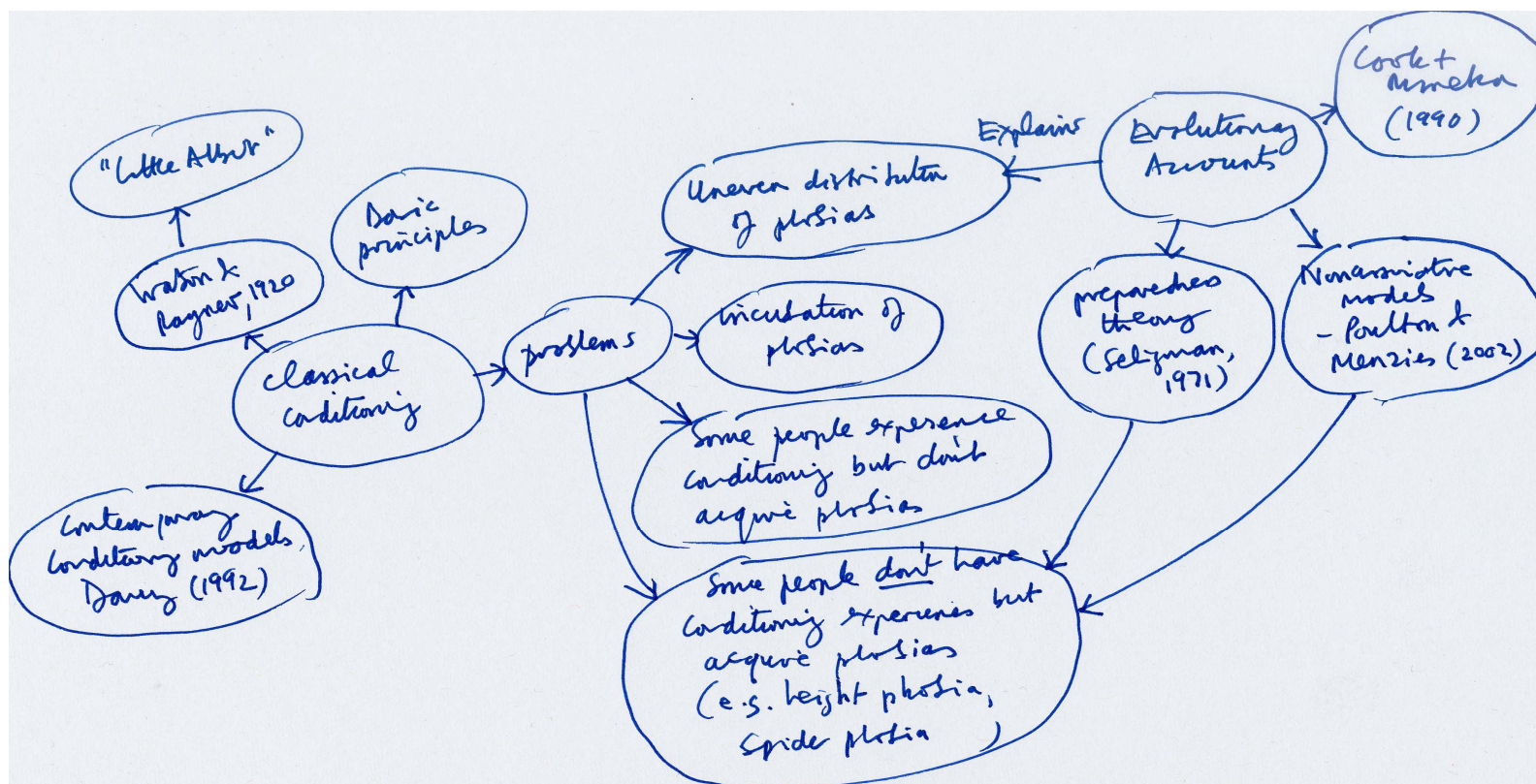
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FIGURE 1 – EXAMPLE OF A SPIDER DIAGRAM

Below is a spider diagram constructed from reading for the essay title "How do evolutionary models attempt to account for deficiencies in conditioning models of specific phobias?" This shows how different ideas gleaned from reading about the topic are linked together in ways that can help you to structure your essay. Read the relevant section of Chapter 5 in *Psychopathology* to see how this reading maps on to the diagram below.



FOCUS BOX 1

GOOD AND BAD ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS

EXAMPLE OF AN ESSAY INTRODUCTION THAT IS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT (WRITTEN AT LEVEL 3)

Essay title: Describe the main impairments within autistic spectrum disorders and discuss how these might present difficulties across the lifespan.

"The autistic spectrum consists of varying disorders from those that cause little difficulty to the sufferer to those that make independent living possible. People who are classed as suffering from disorders within the autistic spectrum have a range of difficulties. These difficulties can cause many problems over the lifespan for the person with ASD (1) (2). The impairments and levels of impairment in individuals with ASD vary greatly and there is no hard and fast rule as to what the person will have difficulties with. This makes the subject difficult to confine within a word limit. (3) The explanation of impairments is brief and in no way comprehensive, the main impairments reported are described but there are many, many more that are not. (4) ASD is a broad spectrum of potential impairments that some sufferers find themselves with to some degree whereas others have differing levels of impairment and therefore each individual faces different challenges and difficulties in their life." (5) (6)

1. An abbreviation (ASD) has been introduced without spelling out in full what it means.
2. This sentence is asserting a particular fact about people with autistic spectrum disorder without providing the evidence to back it up – this can be done by inserting an appropriate reference.
3. Mentioning the word limit of the essay makes it appear less scholarly – you should be getting over the impression that you are writing a scholarly research piece rather than worrying about how much you can write in an assessed essay.
4. This sentence highlights negative aspects of the essay (what is left out), rather than positive aspects of the essay (i.e. what is being covered).
5. The introduction as a whole gives the reader very little indication of what will be in the essay or how the essay will be structured.
6. The whole of the introduction has been very repetitive and the point being made (that people with autistic spectrum disorder differ in abilities and symptoms) could probably have been written in a couple of sentences.

EXAMPLE OF A WELL-WRITTEN ESSAY INTRODUCTION (WRITTEN AT LEVEL 3)

Essay title: Describe how bilateral deep brain stimulation of the sub-thalamic nucleus alters motor, cognitive, emotional and psychosocial functioning in Parkinson's disease. By what brain mechanisms are these changes brought about?

"Parkinson's disease (PD) (1) is one of the most common chronic progressive neurological disorders. It is characterised clinically by major motor symptoms such as tremor, rigidity, bradykinesia and postural instability (Jahanshahi & Marsden, 1998) (2). Bilateral deep brain

stimulation (DBS) (1) is a technique used in functional neurosurgery, which consists of delivering a neural brain structure continuous electrical stimulation through chronically implanted electrodes (3). Limitations of drug therapy, such as levodopa, in the long-term medical management of PD have led to increasing use of DBS in the internal globus pallidus (GPi) (1) and particularly of the subthalamic nucleus (STN) (1). This essay will describe how bilateral DBS of the STN alters motor, cognitive, emotional and psychological functioning in PD. The essay will then move on to clarify what brain mechanisms underlie the changes brought about in PD by bilateral STN DBS." (4)

1. Abbreviations are introduced and explained at the first opportunity.
2. References are provided at a source of evidence for statements about the disorder.
3. Terms basic to the essay (e.g. deep brain stimulation) are described and explained as early as possible.
4. The introduction ends by very clearly describing the structure of the essay and how the essay topic will be tackled.

FOCUS BOX 2

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY AND UNSCHOLARLY ESSAY WRITING

EXAMPLES OF UNSCHOLARLY WRITING

"I will now talk about how those impairments can cause problems in an individual suffering from autism during his or her whole life (1). Autistic children are very vulnerable and immature. As a result, they are very restricted regarding their actions, and their motivations are incoherent and ambiguous (2). Their contact and examination of reality is twisted (3). This is perhaps why their personality is withdrawn and why they are scared (4). Even when they take initiatives, they are not effective in changing reality because the way they perceive things is focussed on their "disorganized inner psychic processes" (5). They are outside the real world so it is difficult for a child or even as an adult suffering from autism to really understand what is going on." (8)

"At the age of nineteen, autistic teenagers still have the same impairments as before (6). The only change is that, thanks to early interventions, they develop some of their capacities and can be more independent (2). Autistic young adults are still vulnerable and insecure because of their disabilities but their past experiences, and individual learning has given them some strength they did not have before (7). However, they still require teachers, professionals and parents help for everything. Their problem with social communication and social interaction might be an important problem for their future career. They might be scared or stressed to be in contact with others. (8)

1. It's best not to write sentences in the first person, most tutors prefer you to write in the third person, so this sentence could be rephrased as "The next section will describe those impairments that can cause problems in an individual suffering from autism across his or her whole life".
2. Statement of facts are made without any supporting evidence – references that would enable the reader to verify these facts would be expected.
3. Don't use words and statements where the precise meaning is unclear – what is meant by their "reality being twisted"?
4. This is written as though it is a personal speculation. Personal speculations are fine, but they must be supported by good arguments and/or facts, this one isn't.
5. The term "disorganised inner processes" is clearly taken as a quote from some other source, so the source needs to be acknowledged and referenced.
6. Try not to use vague sentences such as this that are unclear – simply using the word "before" at the end of the sentence begs the question of "before what?"
7. This is another vague sentence that uses terms that are imprecise and poorly defined. For example, what is meant by the term "strength"? This needs to be

unpacked more precisely to describe exactly how individual learning has helped young autistic adults.

8. Facts are provided without supporting references (texts or journals that will verify these facts), and assertions are made about the effects of certain experiences and interventions without any evidence being provided to support these assertions. This evidence should either describe relevant scientific studies or provide references that describe such studies.

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLARLY WRITING

"Salkovskis (1985) (1) provides an analysis of obsessional-compulsive problems from a cognitive-behavioural viewpoint. He proposes that OCD is a cognitive distortion in that the sufferer's combination of intrusive thoughts and the 'individual's belief system' result in 'negative automatic thoughts' (2) (Salkovskis, 1985) (1). He proposes that this way of thinking leads to a greater feeling of responsibility for potential harm to others, unless they can take action to ensure the negative thought does not actually happen and that they are blameless. Looking at OCD from this point of view, Salkovskis would argue that it is not the intrusive thought itself that results in the compulsions but the automatic thoughts that arise as a result of the intrusion (3). Evidence that supports the view of Salkovskis comes from a study by Salkovskis & Campbell (1993) (4). In this study they looked at intrusive thoughts that were relevant to the participants.. *(details of the study and its relevance to the argument)*.. Despite the fact that this study demonstrated a link between suppression of intrusive thoughts and obsessional thinking, there are a number of criticisms of Salkovski's (1985) account (5) ... *(details of arguments and studies that provide evidence contrary to Salkovskis' account)*."

"Several studies indicate that bilateral DBS of the STN significantly improves all of the cardinal motor symptoms of advanced Parkinson's Disease (PD) (Benazzouz, Ardouin, Hoffman & Benabid, 1998; Mackinnon & Webb, 2005). (6) Burchiel, Anderson, Favre & Hammerstad (1999) assessed the neurological condition of five patients with PD who underwent bilateral STN DBS and found that patients demonstrated approximately 40% improvement in Unified Parkinson's Disease rating Scale motor scores (UPDRS-III) after 12 months DBS. Rigidity, tremor and bradykinesia were improved, as well as a reduction in levodopa-induced dyskinesias. In an objective examination of the clinical effects of STN DBS in advanced PD, Kumar et al. (1998) found it to improve the mean UPDRS motor scores by 57%, including improvement in the composite scores of akinesia (57%), rigidity (52%), tremor (82%) and gait and postural stability (49%). (7)"

1. Appropriate referencing of important theories and research providing supporting evidence.
2. A clear and succinct description of the theory being discussed using appropriate terminology.
3. A good example of how hypotheses can be derived from a theory, and so can be used to test the theory.

4. A description of research supporting the theory in sufficient detail for the reader to assess its contribution.
5. Discussion of material that may be inconsistent with the theory, and so provides a balanced overview of the topic.
6. Good use of relevant references, it is always good to also show that you are up-to-date with the material by providing recent references.
7. This example provides about the right amount of information to support the assertion made at the outset of the paragraph (i.e. that bilateral DBS of the STN significantly improves all of the cardinal motor symptoms of advanced Parkinson's Disease). It provides evidence from more than one study and gives sufficient detail to be convincing.

ACTIVITY BOX 1

Below is a list of end-of-year Level 3 essay titles in psychopathology. The essay has a word limit of 3000 words. Discuss with your fellow students how you would go about answering each essay title, what kinds of information you might want to include in each, and how you would construct your essay. Which essay title would you choose to answer and why? Next to each essay title are the ***Psychopathology*** chapters containing information relevant to answering the question.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Year 3

End-of year 3000 word assessed essay

Write an essay using ONE of the following essay titles

1. Often the clinical work of clinical psychologists is structured around four stages: assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation. Describe what these four stages are and explain why they are each important. Support your arguments by giving examples of these four stages from at least two different areas of clinical psychology. (*Chapters 1,2 & 4*)
2. Describe the main ways in which childhood anxiety and depression is conceptualized and assessed? (*Chapter 15*)
3. Describe the possible consequences of life-threatening trauma on an individual. How might these effects be ameliorated? (*Chapters 5 and 13*)
4. Why might we perform a neuropsychological assessment with a person suspected of suffering with a dementing illness? What factors would inform test selection, the interpretation of results and the nature of the feedback provided to the referrer and to the client? (*Chapter 14*)
5. How can personality be 'disordered', and what might this mean in clinical practice? (*Chapter 11*)
6. How has society's response to people with learning disabilities changed over time? Consider this both in terms of the concept of learning disability and the types of service offered to this group of people. (*Chapter 16*)
7. Describe the main impairments within Autistic Spectrum Disorders and discuss how these might present difficulties across the lifespan, i.e. at age 6 years, at age 11 years, at age 19 years, at age 35 years. (*Chapter 16*)
8. Compare and contrast the methods and effectiveness of two treatments that are currently used with adult depression. (*Chapter 6*)