

# FE Study Skills

How to write a college assignment

**STUDY SKILLS**

# Before you start

- Do your reading
- The unit you are studying will have a reading list; make sure you actually use it! Your tutors choose texts to specifically help you with your assignments. You will gain valuable information into the topics you are writing about
- **Expert tip:** if you have the time do some reading from other sources not on your reading list. This will help you back up your arguments

# Check the deadline

- There's nothing worse than scheduling time to sit down and write then glancing at the calendar and realising you've only got a few days left. Double-checking the deadline means you'll have no nasty surprises
- **Expert tip:** There are many apps out there that can add a 'countdown' to your phone or tablet. Use these to keep your assignment deadline front of mind

# Plan your assignment structure

- Before you start, it can help to create a basic assignment structure. This can be as detailed as you like but the basic structure should contain your introduction points, your key arguments and points, and your planned conclusion
- **Expert tip:** Try writing out your plan on sticky notes. These will allow you to rearrange your arguments and points easily as your plan develops

# Start with an introduction

- You wouldn't start a conversation without introducing yourself; your assignment is the same. Your first paragraph should introduce your key argument, add a bit of context and the key issues of the question, and then go on to explain how you plan to answer it
- **Expert tip:** Some people find it easier to write their introduction after they've finished the rest of their assignment. Give it a try!

# Main body

- As you write the body of your assignment, make sure that each point you make has some supporting evidence. Use statistics or quotes you gathered during your reading to support your argument, or even as something to argue against
- **Expert tip:** If you're using a lot of different sources, it's easy to forget to add them to your reference list. Make things easier for yourself by writing it

# Conclusion

- Your conclusion is your final chance to summarise your argument and leave a lasting impression with your reader. Make sure you recap the key points and arguments you made in your assignment, including supporting evidence if needed
- **Expert tip:** Make sure that you don't introduce any new ideas in your conclusion; this section is purely for summarising your previous arguments

# Finding inspiration

- Struggling to write? There's nothing more frustrating than putting aside time to write and then just staring at a blank page. Luckily, there are lots of things to try to get you inspired: a change of scenery, putting on some music, writing another section of the essay or just taking a short break
- **Expert tip:** If you find yourself unable to write, try to use your time to read ahead or re-read what you've already written

# Plan your time

- Finding time to write is easier said than done, but if you break your time down into manageable chunks you'll find it's much easier to keep on top of your workload. Try scheduling mini-deadlines along the way (e.g. aim to have the first section done by a certain day) to keep your momentum going
- **Expert tip:** Be realistic about the time you have spare, and the time you're willing to give up. If you schedule a writing session at 9 p.m. on Friday evening when you'd rather be relaxing, chances are you won't get anything done.

# Writing style

- Even though West Nott's College has its own writing style guide you should always use a neutral and professional tone when writing an assignment. Try to avoid slang, overly-familiar phrases and definitely don't use text-speak!
- **Expert tip:** If you're not sure about a phrase or word, search for it online to see what other publications use it. If it's in a dictionary or used by a national newspaper it's probably OK to use in your assignment.

# After you have finished

- Check you have answered the main question
- Don't be afraid to cut text out if you have reached a word count
- Check your spelling and grammar
- Cite your sources

# Your turn

- Now its time for you to start your assignment plan. Use the information in this presentation to map out how your assignment will be structured
- Make a list of reading material and begin reading today
- Make a start. Try writing an introduction, or dive right into the main body. Check the slide on writers block if you are struggling