

STUDY SKILLS GUIDEBOOK



All Case Histories in this text are presented as examples only and any comparison which might be made with persons either living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Introduction

Welcome

This guide has been created to assist you in the process of essay writing, applying APA style referencing and managing your study time. It is not intended to provide detailed guidance on how to answer all essay questions, but rather it offers a comprehensive set of guidelines that can be applied broadly to the development of an essay framework and/or format. You will find you can also apply these guidelines when responding to other types of assessment, including case studies, and writing long answers and reports.

“There is no ‘correct’ way to write an essay. Sometimes, the most exciting essays will be those that address the question in an unexpected way, that challenges its fundamental premises, or that succeeds in producing new insights, rather than recycling old ideas... Your essay writing will improve mainly through your own hard work in thinking things out for yourself, through experience, and through increasing knowledge of the field in which you work” (Redman, 2006, p. 4).

This guide is divided into three main sections:

1. The process of effective essay writing

Effective essay writing occurs in a five-step process: (1) Analyse the essay question; (2) Gather information; (3) Plan; (4) Write and (5) Edit. Each of these steps are covered in detail in this section of the guide.

It is important to recognise that overall your assessors will be looking for the following criteria in your essays.

Component	Criteria
Coherency of arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear and comprehensive understanding of the unit material has been demonstrated• Arguments have been well structured throughout all assessment items
Use of supporting evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All arguments are well supported with credible literature, research and/or examples from the course material• APA format used both within the text and in the reference list of all applicable assessment items
Formal aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Correct spelling, punctuation and grammar• Clear, legible, professional presentation

2. APA style referencing

You are required to use APA (*American Psychological Association*) style referencing throughout your essays. This section offers an introduction to this style of referencing and provides some guidance on recognising credible and relevant literature.

3. Time management

The final section of this guide offers strategies for managing your time and prioritising your study tasks. Additionally, this section offers two relaxation techniques to assist you in achieving some well-deserved time-out.

The Process of Effective Essay Writing

The Process of Effective Essay Writing

Effective essay writing is an essential skill for students studying higher level courses. The flow chart, below, illustrates the steps involved in the process of writing an essay.

The key to effective essay writing is accurately interpreting the essay question.

Step 1: Analyse the question

- Read the essay question carefully
- Highlight key terms
- Define key terms
- Determine what information you require

There is little point in developing a well-structured, well-written essay that fails to address the essay question. Thus, the first step of effective essay writing is analysing and understanding the essay question. Analysing the question means breaking it down into key terms, defining the key terms and reassessing what's being asked.

Step 2: Gather information

- Research the essay topic by accessing a wide-range of resources
- Make clear notes in relation to the essay question
- Record all details required for referencing

Step two in the process of essay writing requires you to gather information. Remember to collect information from a variety of sources. The more information you have, the more precisely you will be able to answer the question. When gathering information, it is crucial that you record details of the source (such as title, author(s), year of publication and place of publication) so that you are able to correctly reference it in your essay.

Step 3: Plan

- Develop a structure for your essay
- Reread your essay question
- Refine your essay structure

Step three is the planning stage of the essay. Use this step to decide how the information fits together and in which order you are going to present your arguments. It is often a good idea, after the planning stage, to return to the essay question and determine whether your plan clearly addresses the requirements.

Step 4: Write

- Use your plan to begin writing your essay
- Arrange paragraphs logically
- Ensure you have an introduction, body and conclusion

Step four is the process of putting your thoughts and ideas into words. Be sure to include an introduction, a body and a conclusion in your essay.

Step 5: Edit

- Check that you have answered the essay question
- Check spelling and grammar
- Ensure the structure is logical
- Reference using APA style

Step five, editing, is a crucial aspect of essay writing. Editing means that you read and rework your essay until you feel that it is well structured, coherent and error-free. The following pages outline these stages in further detail.

Step 1: Analyse the question

Analysing the question requires two main steps:

- 1) Identify and define key terms
- 2) Determine what information you will need in order to fully answer the question

Consider the following essay question.

“What is the impact of genetic factors on the development of self-esteem in adolescents? Discuss the evidence.” *(Adapted from Findlay, 2006, p. 95)*

1. Identify and define key terms

The key terms (and their definitions) for this essay question are:

- Impact - An effect or change caused by some factor
- Genetic factors - Pertaining to genes and/or their effects
- Self-esteem – The degree to which an individual feels worthy of esteem or respect
- Adolescent – An individual in the period of psychological, social, and physical transition between childhood and adulthood

2. Determine what information you will need to fully answer the question

From the definitions of the key terms, a more comprehensive understanding of the essay question will emerge.

It is clear that to answer this question we will need to research:

- The genetic factors that are linked to the development of self-esteem and related concepts
- How the development of self-esteem manifests or occurs in adolescents
- The evidence that suggests genetic factors do affect the development of self-esteem in adolescents
- The evidence that suggests genetic factors do not affect the development of self-esteem in adolescents

Once you have analysed the essay question, you are in a much better position to begin step two, gathering information.

Step 2: Gather information

To gather information effectively, it pays to access a myriad of resources. The more resources you gather, the better prepared you will be when it comes to writing the essay. Be sure to utilise the reading material you have been provided, along with any additional readings or journal articles you find. Make clear notes and remember to keep all the details you require for referencing (i.e. author, year of publication, title of book, title of journal article (if applicable), publishing company and place of publishing).

Step 3: Plan

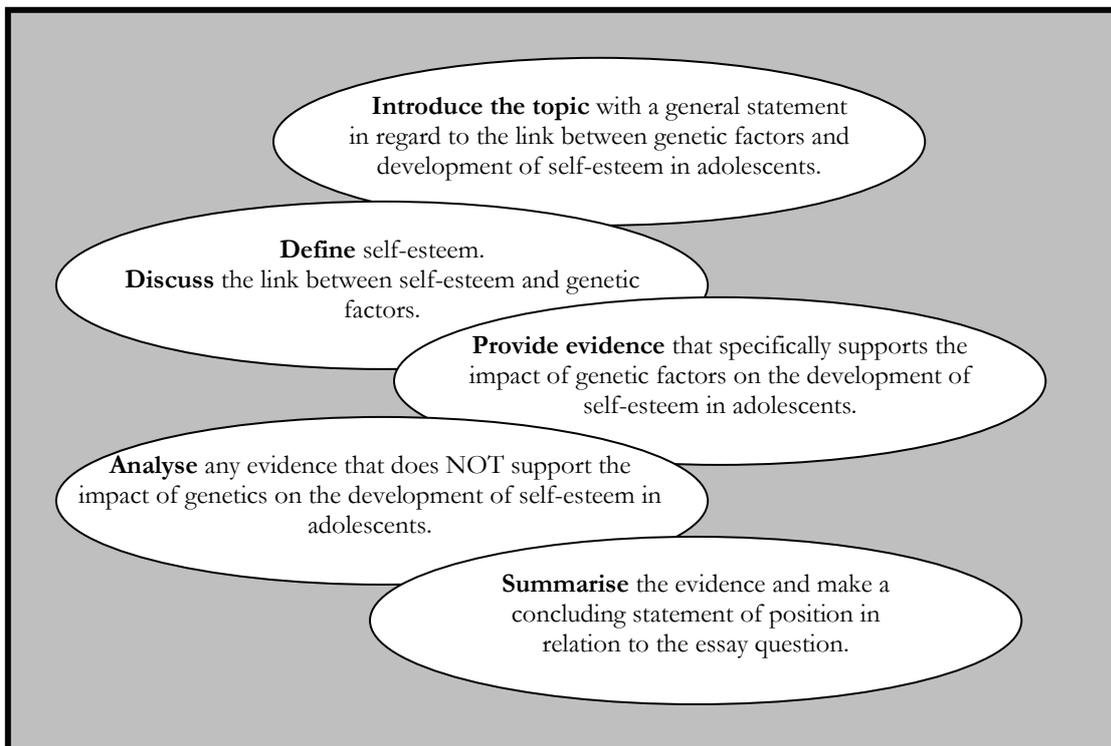
Effective essay planning can save a lot of time in the writing phase. An effective plan provides the structure or framework for the information you have gathered in relation to the essay question.

Start planning by deciding how you are going to argue the point of the essay. Let's again consider the following example:

“What is the impact of genetic factors on the development of self-esteem in adolescents? Discuss the evidence.” *(Adapted from Findlay, 2006, p. 95)*

Imagine that from my research, I find there is considerable evidence to suggest there is a significant link between genetic factors and the development of self-esteem in adolescents. This would mean I would write my essay stating that the impact of genetic factors is significant, but I would also include research that was inconclusive or did not support my argument. The inclusion of information that does not support my argument demonstrates to the reader that I have considered all available information before making a decision. It also assures the reader that my essay is balanced and unbiased.

My essay plan may look something like this:



Step 4: Write

The next step in the process of formulating an essay is to write it. Your essay should always have an introduction, body and conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Tell the reader what you are going to discuss in the body of the essay. Keep it brief, but mention all your main ideas.

BODY

You answer the essay question in the body by developing an argument and supporting it with evidence.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion finalises and summarises the main points made within the body of the essay. Do not introduce any new information in the conclusion.

1. Introduction

An introduction is a long paragraph (approximately 10% of the total word count) that outlines what to expect and what you intend to argue throughout the body of the essay. Opinions vary as to whether you should write the introduction first or whether you should wait until after you have completed the body of the essay before writing the introduction. It is up to you which order you complete each part of the essay but be mindful in your final revision to make sure each part flows on to the next.

Example introductory paragraph:

A large proportion of the research on the development of self-esteem in adolescents relates to the presence of positive factors in the individual's environment and the presence of specific forms of nurturing whilst growing up (Smythers, & Burns, 2005). Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence that genetic factors play a large role in the development of self-esteem in adolescents (Jenner, Brian, & Emnu, 2004; Merrill, & Coport, 2007). This essay will briefly examine the inherited aspects of an individual that continue to be linked to the development (or lack of development) of self-esteem, specifically those factors that tend to manifest or affect the development of self-esteem during adolescence.

2. Body

The body is the largest part of an essay and, as such, requires the greatest amount of planning. In this section you summarise, criticise and/or compare past literature and research in accordance with the essay question.

3. Conclusion

The concluding paragraph summarises your argument by outlining what has been discussed, and the conclusion that has been drawn from the information in the body of the essay. It is a statement in regard to your final perspective on the essay question.

A conclusion may start like this:

In conclusion, the research on the impact of genetic factors on the development of self-esteem in adolescents indicates...

OR

Overall, evidence suggests that the development of self-esteem in adolescents is...

Step 5: Edit

Once you have finished writing the first draft of your essay, it is time to read it through in its entirety, checking for spelling and grammatical errors as well as any errors of expression.

The following checklist may help.

Checklist

Introduction

- Have you begun your essay by stating what you intend to cover in the body?
- Have you provided the reader with an idea of the structure of the essay?
- Is it 10% (or less) of the total word count?

Body

- Have you listed the argument for your case?
- Have you listed the arguments against your case?
- Does your argument make sense? Is it well supported by research?

Conclusion

- Have you tied together your argument and made a clear statement in regard to your perspective?

References

- Have you ensured that all information (except when you are being asked your opinion) has been referenced appropriately?

Presentation

- Have you ensured your essay is error free?
- Have you remained within the word limit?
- Have you left a 3cm margin down each side of the page?
- Have you double-spaced each line?
- Have you used a professional font (such as Arial 11 or Times New Roman 12)?
- Have you included your name and student number on each page?
- Have you kept a copy of the essay for your own records?

APA Style Referencing

APA Style Referencing

You are required to reference all of the information you use in your essay. This means that you cannot make a statement unless you support it with something you have read (from a credible source).

Note: Exceptions to this rule include instances in which you have been asked to share your opinion on something; have been asked to reflect on an experience or a reading; or are required to gather material for inclusion in a portfolio. In such instances, referencing is not required. In all other instances, assume referencing is a requirement unless it is stated otherwise.

Most textbooks and journal articles are considered credible, however, many website references are not. If you are using information from a source other than your Book of Readings, please try to ensure that the information is credible and non-biased.

Ask yourself questions such as the following:

Content Criteria

- “Is the source valid? Factual? That is, do you have reason to think that it is accurate information? Does the author appear to have done a thorough job locating and researching the topic?”
- Is the topic treated thoroughly? Does the source cover the topic in an appropriate breadth or depth? By having read widely when you start, you will be better able to judge whether or not your source is sufficiently comprehensive.
- Is the treatment biased? If the author acknowledges the bias, you will have an easier time deciding whether or not to use the source. The problem is that many authors do not admit their bias: information is often put on the Web for the sole purpose of promoting a particular point of view; thus, many sites have “hidden agendas.” Always check to see if you can learn more about the organization that sponsors the website or the background of the writer. The author of a book or journal article probably has a specific purpose in writing, and that purpose may be biased toward a particular perspective. In and of itself, that is neither unusual nor wrong, however, to judge the value of the source, you need to be aware of the bias or perspective that the author has.

Currency

- Is your information current? Avoid out-of-date books or journal articles, unless you use the sources to establish a point. (For example, you may want to demonstrate what books in the early part of the century said about your topic or summarize their perspectives on that topic.) Sources in the sciences must especially be as current as possible. Sources in history or literature need not be the most current, but even in those fields current knowledge may add substantially to our understanding of the subject.
- The type of information may determine how critical its being current is. For example, a source based upon a survey may need to be as current as possible. Respondents’ attitudes change over time. A source using business data to support a business technique may be more valuable if it is recent. An interpretation of a Shakespearean sonnet or of an historical event need not be current, but the theoretical perspective of the source might matter, so more current theories should not be ignored.

Source of Publication

- Is the author an expert on your topic? Find out something about the author. What are the author's credentials? Check the author's Web page to see if he or she has published widely in the field. Check the bibliography or references the author includes. Do these sources appear to be current? Do other sources often cite this author or this particular work? If so, this citation indicates that others consider the author an authority. Checking an appropriate citation index through your library may indicate the number of times other authors have referred to the one you are considering as a source. Among the citation indices are the following:
 - Science Citation Index
 - Computer Science Directory
 - Social Sciences Citation Index
 - Arts and Humanities Citation Index
 - Bio Sciences Citation Index
 - Chem Sciences Citation Index
 - Clinical Medicine Citation Index
- Is the source reliable? If you used a scholarly source, such as a source from an academic press or from an educational institution, it is likely to be reliable, for it probably has been objectively evaluated before being published. If it is a popular source such as a magazine, you need to be sure that you are using the best source on your topic. If it is a source on an organisation's website, then you need to know more about the organisation and the purpose of the website.

Coverage

- How complete or extensive is the coverage of the topic? You may be able to use a source that doesn't cover a topic thoroughly, but be sure to supplement it with other sources.
- Does the source include specific details? When you quote or summarize information, you want to be using material that is not written in general terms that anyone might know or think.

Relevance

- Is the source relevant to your own research question? Even in the early phase of your research, you can weed out many sources that in isolation would be good sources. If they aren't related to your needs, they aren't good sources for you.
- Even if the source is relevant, does it simply repeat information that you have found in another source? If so, choose the more current or more authoritative source for your paper. If multiple sources stating the same thing strengthens the point you are making, then do cite them.
- Is the information significant or important within the context of your research? You probably will not be able to make this judgment when you are starting your research, but as you become more knowledgeable, you will be more able to make that judgment.
- Note whether the website is a commercial site. Search engines generally are commercial ventures, designed to make money. The common way most have made money is by selling banner ads to advertisers. You, as the user, can choose to ignore those banner ads. As it turns out, most users do ignore them, so now many Web search engines are selling places to businesses that allow their business to show up as a 'hit' when someone is searching the Web. Some search engines overtly indicate which hits are in fact commercials, but others do not. With experience, you will soon recognise these "covert advertisements." If the URL is that of a "dot com" (.com), that automatically identifies it as a commercial site.

Any given source you find is not necessarily valuable for your topic: it may be overly biased, it may be out-of-date, and it may not have been published by a respectable press. Learning which sources are the most appropriate for your paper comes later in the research process, but is only possible if you have done a good job sorting and sifting early on.

Preliminary Evaluation of Web Sources

You can weed out many sources quickly by learning what to look for in a “good” source and what to avoid. Methods used to evaluate print sources, such as journal articles and books, can also be applied to sources you find on the World Wide Web. In addition, you should be aware of some ways to evaluate Internet sources.

- Check to see if there is a tilde (~) in the URL, which often means that the information is part of someone’s personal website. Personal sites may be created by people very knowledgeable in their fields; by people who are knowledgeable in one area, but who have created a website that has little to do with their expertise; by people who simply want to proclaim their opinions; or even by other students who post their research papers, travelogues, or other very personal items. Do not automatically reject these sites. Judge their quality by considering the other criteria we have summarized for you below.
- Check the URL to see if it ends in **edu** (education), **com** (commerce), **gov** (government), **mil** (military), **net** (telecommunications) or **org** (organization). Different types of information can be found on any of these sites, but being aware of the type of site you are looking at can help you make a judgment. For example, if you are investigating the status of medical research on arthritis, you will want to question information that you find at the website for a pharmaceutical company. Is the information strictly public relations and commercial promotions or scientific reporting?
- Examine the style of writing and the level to which it has been edited. If you find incoherent passages and occasional grammar or punctuation errors, you should be wary.
- Look at the date the site was created or last updated. If the site is out-of-date, you can eliminate the site as soon as you see it listed in the search engine’s report.
- Note the relationship between author and publisher. For example, if the author is a university professor, and the source was published on a commercial web site, ask why. Scholarly articles are more likely to be published at an educational site or at the site of an academic publisher.
- If the website is owned by an organisation, society, or club, try to learn as much as possible about that group before accepting what they publish to the Web. Check their mission statement or membership of their governing board or other statements that indicate their particular orientation or bias.

One of the biggest problems some students have is trying to use sources that are simply not “meaty” enough to provide them with in-depth information on a topic. Sometimes, even an out-of-date book on a topic can provide a more thorough introduction than a cursory Web page. Don’t use a source merely because it is the most convenient one. Determine whether your topic demands that you use a more authoritative or thorough source than is available on the Web” (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2003, pp. 82 – 87).

Referencing within the text

To acknowledge the source in your essay include the surnames of the author(s) and the year of publication.

For example:

Psychotherapy has been demonstrated to be an effective intervention for individuals struggling with depression (Summers & Bennett, 2006).

OR

For example:

Summers and Bennett (2006) found psychotherapy to be an effective intervention for individuals struggling with depression.

If the book or article has more than two authors you are required to list all authors when you first cite the reference and then every time after that simply use the first author's name, followed by 'et al.' and the year of publication.

For example (first citation):

The primary goals of early recovery are acceptance and surrender (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, & Willingham, 2005).

AND

In subsequent citations:

Active involvement is more than simply attending a meeting (Guerin et al., 2005)

Quoting directly from an existing source

The basics

When you include a direct quotation, put the quote within "quotation marks" and acknowledge the author's surname, date of publication, and page number(s).

For example:

“Case managers should not take on the advocacy role as a habit without careful consideration” (Frankel & Gelman, 2004, p. 26).

OR

As Frankel and Gelman (2004) caution, “Case managers should not take on the advocacy role as a habit without careful consideration” (p. 26).

When a direct quote is more than 40 words, indent the quote five to seven spaces, leave out the "quotation marks" and single spacing may be used:

For example:

Effective evaluation and termination leave both the practitioner and the client with a shared sense of the accomplishments achieved in their work together. This process affords the opportunity to model ending a relationship in a way that is not hurtful or damaging to the client. Effective termination equips the client with the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain gains or to seek further help as needed in the future. (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2006, p. 584).

Creating a reference list

All references you cite in your essay must be included in the reference list. The details required for the reference list are:

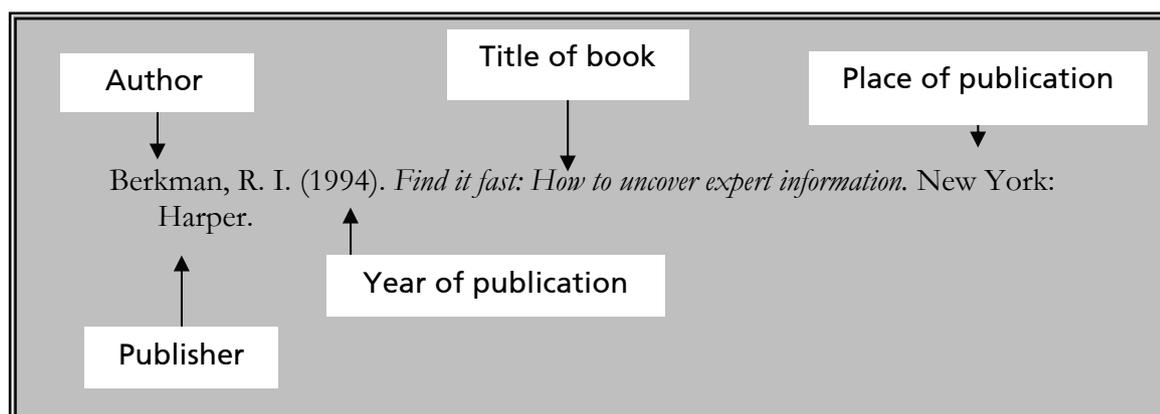
1. name(s) of author(s), editor(s) or the institution responsible
2. year of publication
3. title of publication and subtitle if any (all titles must be italicised)
4. edition (if other than first)
5. place of publication
6. publisher

The details are to appear in the order listed above.

Some examples of reference list entries are included below.

➤ **Book - Single author**

Berkman, R. I. (1994). *Find it fast: How to uncover expert information*. New York: Harper.



➤ **Book - Multiple authors (2-6 authors)**

Hepworth, D. H., Rooney, R. H., Rooney, G. D., Strom-Gottfried, K., & Larsen, J. (2006). *Direct social work practice: Theory and skills* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.

➤ **Book - Multiple authors (more than 6 authors)**

When a work has more than six authors cite the surnames & initials of the first six authors then follow with the abbreviation et al (followed by a full-stop). For example:

Ball, B., Blum, R., Chastain, T. D., Duff, H., Horvath, D. B., Kennedy, J., et al. (2002). *Red Hat Linux 7.2 unleashed*. Indianapolis: SAMS.

➤ **Book – Edition other than first**

Renton, N. (2004). *Compendium of good writing* (3rd ed.). Milton: John Wiley & Sons.

Note: An edition number is placed after the title of the work. This is not necessary for a first edition.

➤ **Article or chapter in an edited book**

Baker, F. M., & Lightfoot, O. B. (1993). Psychiatric care of ethnic elders. In A. C. Gaw (Ed.), *Culture, ethnicity, and mental illness* (pp. 517-552). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

➤ **No author or editor**

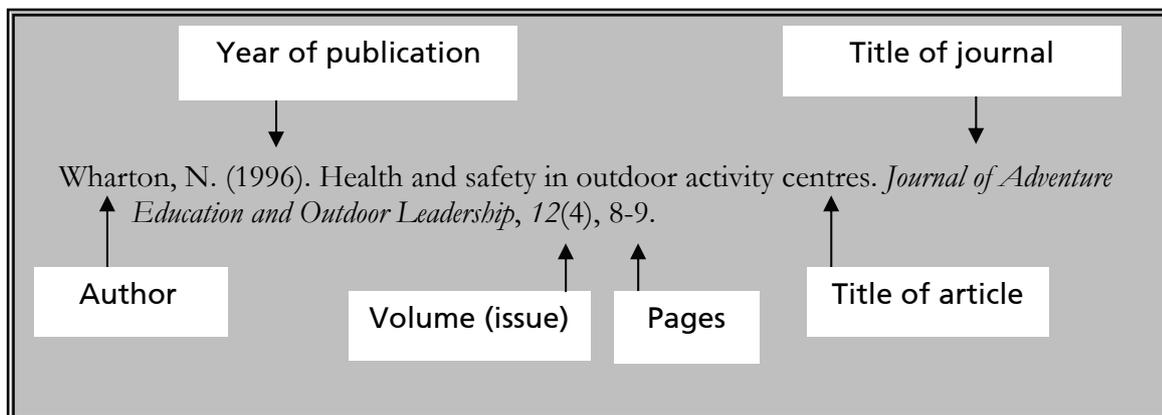
The CCH Macquarie dictionary of business. (1993). North Ryde, NSW: CCH Australia.

➤ **Full text from the Internet**

Sopensky, E. (2002). Ice rink becomes hot business. *Austin Business Journal*. Retrieved October 16, 2007, from <http://www.bizjournals.com/austin/stories/2002/10/14/smallb1.html>

➤ **Journal article**

Wharton, N. (1996). Health and safety in outdoor activity centres. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 12(4), 8-9.



➤ **Online article no author**

Leafy seadragons and weedy seadragons. (2001). Retrieved November 13, 2002, from <http://www.windspeed.net.au/~jenny/seadragons/>

For a more comprehensive overview of APA referencing, please refer to the **Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association** accessible from most university libraries and available for purchase through the AIPC bookshop (see also APA Referencing Styles Home Page <http://www.apastyle.org/>).

Basic APA Reference List Rules

- An author's last name always appears first.
- The reference list should be alphabetised by first listed authors' last name.
- If you have more than one work by a particular author, order them by publication date, oldest to newest (thus a 1991 article would appear before a 1996 article)
- If there is no author then the title moves to that position and is alphabetised by the first significant word excluding words such as "A" or "The". In text you may use a shortened version of the title for parenthetical citations.
- Use "&" instead of "and" when listing multiple authors of a single work.
- The first line of each entry in your reference list should be a hanging indent with subsequent lines indented.
- Capitalise only the first word of the title and of the subtitle, if any, and any proper names - i.e. only those words that would normally be capitalised.
- Italicise titles of books and the names of journals.
- Do not create separate lists for different styles of sources i.e. whether the source is a book, journal/serial, brochure, newspaper or electronic media, all entries are placed in one list.

* Source – Adapted from Universal College of Learning (2002). *A beginners guide to the APA reference style*. Retrieved November 30, 2007, from <http://library.ucol.ac.nz/main.asp?page=44>

Effective Time Management

Effective Time Management

Effective time management and prioritising can assist you to focus your efforts on those things that matter most to you. Balancing all of life's pressures with the completion of assignments and assessment pieces can be challenging. The following four strategies have been included in this study guidebook to assist you in setting your priorities and managing your deadlines.

The four strategies are:

- 1) Developing efficient study skills
- 2) Preparing a study timetable
- 3) Determining priorities with the prioritisation matrix
- 4) Using relaxation techniques

Strategy 1: Developing efficient study skills

Developing efficient study skills will ensure you optimise use of your time. We will consider the following skills in this section:

- i) Being an adaptable reader
- ii) Note-taking and summarising
- iii) Avoiding plagiarism

These skills are outlined in further detail below:

Being an adaptable reader

Efficient readers are 'adaptable' readers. An adaptable reader is one that adjusts their style of reading according to their purpose for reading. There are three main types of reading: (1) Scanning; (2) Skimming and (3) Scrutinising.

Scanning is used when you are looking for a specific piece of information. Scanning involves glancing over the written material and reading only the headings or introductory paragraphs in order to locate the information you require. As you narrow your search, reading becomes more focused in an effort to locate exactly what you are looking for.

Skimming should be applied when you are attempting to ascertain the key points of the article or if you are seeking to determine whether the material is worthy of further inspection. Skimming involves identifying the main points of each paragraph and ignoring the finer details. Skimming provides a higher-level comprehension than scanning but not as high as scrutinising.

Scrutinising should be used when you are seeking full comprehension of the material. Scrutinising means reading the material thoroughly and possibly re-reading if required. It can be helpful, particularly if you are finding the material challenging, to read it out aloud. All *required* readings should be read at this level.

Note-taking and summarising

Note taking whilst reading is an important aspect of studying. There are a number of techniques you can apply to make sure your note taking is effective. Below is a step-by-step guide for you to follow. Note, however, that there is no set procedure for effective note taking. You may like to trial the process suggested and adapt it according to what suits you best.

- Step 1:** Scan and skim articles and books for information that is relevant to the essay question.
- Step 2:** Make a photocopy of any readings you require (this ensures that you are free to mark and highlight the pages).
- Step 4:** Read (scrutinise) the readings and highlight or underline the text that is of specific importance.
- Step 5:** Once you have highlighted or underlined the important information on a page, use a post-it note or flag to mark the side of the page (you may like to use different coloured flags to distinguish between different topic areas *eg. an orange flag for information pertaining to self-esteem, a red flag to signify information regarding adolescent development and so on*).
- Step 6:** Finally, use a notebook to summarise each reading. Draw a line down the centre of the page so that you have two columns. Title one column, **summary** and the other, **ideas** (see below).

Summary	Ideas
<p>In this column write a general summary of the content of the reading.</p> <p><u>For example:</u> <i>Reading 12.2 describes how the development of self-esteem is influenced by a variety of biological, social & psychological determinants.</i></p>	<p>In this column write your own ideas regarding how you will integrate this information into your essay.</p> <p><u>For example:</u> <i>I could use this information in the introduction to explain how the development of self-esteem is multi-faceted and although genetics might affect the development of self-esteem – so do other factors.</i></p>

Avoiding plagiarism

All of the information you provide in an assessment item **must be written in your own words** (with the exceptions of quotations). Quotations must be referenced and it must be clear where the quote begins and ends (use inverted commas (or indent the paragraph for quotes over 40 words) to illustrate this).

Additionally, any information you have paraphrased from a source must be clearly referenced. Failure to acknowledge the source of information is plagiarism and is considered highly unethical.

How to avoid plagiarism

1. Always use your own words. Don't try to reshuffle or modify the words of others. Demonstrate your understanding of the material by providing your own interpretation of the information.
2. Be aware of “**common knowledge**”. Common knowledge is information that does not require referencing as it is considered to be well-known by most. To determine what is and what isn't common knowledge, there are three criteria to consider: (1) Can the information be found in numerous places? (2) Is it likely to be known by a lot of people? (3) Can the information be easily found in a general reference source?

For example:

- *There are four seasons in a year* - this is common knowledge.
- *Autumn and winter are the most common seasons for the onset of seasonal affective disorder* – this is not common knowledge and should be referenced.

* The Cleveland Clinic Health Information Center (2007). Seasonal affective disorder and light therapy. Retrieved November 30, 2007, from <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/1400/1484.asp?index=6412>

3. If in doubt, reference. It is better to play it safe by over-referencing than to risk plagiarism.

Strategy 2: Preparing a study timetable

A study timetable is visual summary of your study tasks. It provides an overview of what needs to be achieved within a particular timeframe. It is a great way to track your progress and ensure you are on target to meet deadlines and, as such, is a critical part of effective study planning.

Tip: *When preparing a study timetable be sure to factor in the commitments you have outside of your studies.*

Let's look at an example to illustrate how to prepare a study timetable.

Imagine I have a 2000 word essay to finish within six weeks.

I would follow the four steps outlined below to develop a study timetable in relation to this task.

Step 1 – Break the assessment task into steps

I'd divide the essay into parts by considering each step that needs to be completed along the way, such as (1) Analyse the essay question, (2) Gather information, (3) Create a plan, (4) Write the introduction, (5) Write the body of the essay, (6) Write the conclusion, (7) Create the reference list and (8) Edit the essay.

Step 2 – Estimate how long each step will take to complete

I would then estimate how long it might take to complete each part.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---------|
| 1) Analysing the question | – | 1 day |
| 2) Gathering information | – | 3 days |
| 3) Creating a plan | – | 1 day |
| 4) Writing the introduction | – | 1 day |
| 5) Writing the body | – | 10 days |
| 6) Writing the conclusion | – | 1 day |
| 7) Creating the reference list | – | 1 day |
| 8) Editing the essay | – | 2 days |

Step 3 – Map the steps in a timetable

My next step is to consider how I might fit those estimates into the six week time frame. The timetable below is an example of this.

Note: I have kept my weekends free and have blocked out Fridays, as I work on that day. You will have different commitments, so be sure to factor those into your plan.

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1		Analyse the question	←	Gather information	→		
2		Create a plan	Write introduction	DAY OFF	DAY OFF		
3		←		Write the body	→		
4		←		Write the body	→		
5		Write the body	→	DAY OFF	DAY OFF		
6		Write conclusion	Create reference list	← Edit	→		

Step 4 – Stick to the timetable

I would use this timetable as a reference to clarify what I need to achieve each day and to determine if I am on track with my targets. If I see that I am getting behind in my timeframes, I will need to re-establish how long I have to spend on each part of the assessment item. I may need to sacrifice one of my planned days off or work over the weekend to make up the time.

Remember, creating a study timetable is great way to monitor your progress toward the completion of your assessment tasks and allows you to plan accordingly for events outside of your study commitments.

Strategy 3: The prioritisation matrix

The prioritisation matrix below can assist you in determining what should take priority in your studies. To use the prioritisation matrix, you need to rate each task/event/activity according to its urgency and importance. This information will assist you in planning how to best structure your time.

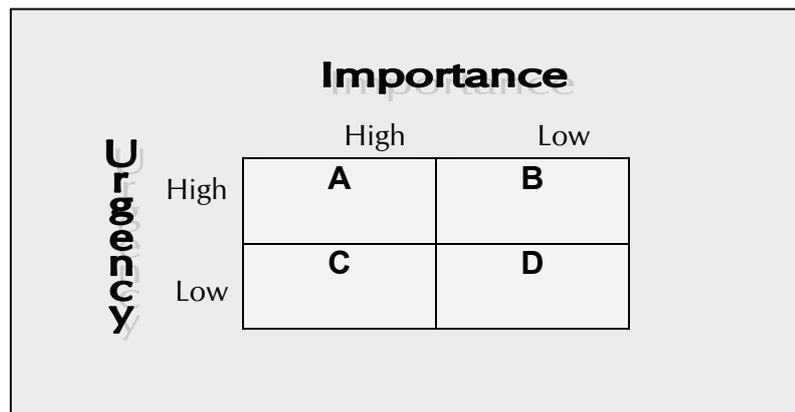


Figure 1 - The prioritisation matrix

- Quadrant A** - Indicates tasks which are both urgent and important. These are to take priority over all others
- Quadrant B** - Indicates tasks which are of little importance but high urgency. These tasks can generally be completed with little extra effort.
- Quadrant C** - Indicates tasks which are not urgent but are important. They are often tasks that do not need to be started immediately.
- Quadrant D** - Indicates tasks which need to be reassessed for their relevancy.

Source: Covey, S. (1989).

Individual Activity

(Note: This activity is for your own personal learning and does not need to be submitted for assessment)

1. Jot down five tasks that you know you must do within the next month. These tasks may be a combination of both study and personal obligations.

2. Assign each task to its relevant quadrant by writing an A, B, C or D beside it.

3. In what quadrant do most of your tasks fall?

4. If you have any tasks that fall into quadrant D, take some time to think about their relevance. Jot down your thoughts below.

5. How do you think you could use the prioritisation matrix in your studies?

Strategy 4: Relaxation strategies

Throughout the day your conscious mind may be inundated with thoughts and feelings that trigger stress. It is important to know how to shut off the constant inner dialogue and quiet the mind. Relaxation exercises allow you to create a state of deep rest, which is very healing to the entire body.

When you are in a meditative state, your body responds in a number of ways.

- Metabolism slows, as do physiological functions such as heart rate and blood pressure.
- Muscle tension decreases.
- Brain wave patterns shift from the faster waves that occur during a normal active day to the slower waves, which appear just before falling asleep or in times of deep relaxation.

Not all relaxation exercises suit everyone. So it is important to try a number of techniques to find one which suits you. We are going to look at a two relaxation techniques that take little time and can be implemented anywhere. When a technique is practised regularly, you will find that it becomes easier, and therefore will be more effective in reducing your stress and anxiety levels.

Technique One – Erasing Stress

Erasing stress is a visualising technique. It allows you to visualise the thought or situation which is constantly on your mind and helps erase it from your thoughts.

Instructions –

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Visualise a situation or person that causes you to feel anxious, stressed or upset.
- As you do this you might see a specific person, an actual place, or simply shapes and colours. Where do you see this stressful picture? Is it below you, to the side, in front of you? How does it look? Is it big or little, dark or light, or does it have a specific colour?
- Imagine that a large eraser (like the kind used to erase chalk marks) has just floated into your hand. Actually feel and see the eraser in your hand. Take the eraser and begin to rub out the stressful image. Watch as the picture fades, shrinks, and finally disappears. When you can no longer see the stressful picture, simply continue to focus on your deep breathing for another minute, inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply.
- Any tension or stress that you were feeling upon starting the exercise should be lessened.

Technique Two – Focusing

This exercise can be used to block out negative or stressful thoughts. Focusing on one item slows your thought processes and helps to increase your concentration. At first, the focusing technique can be challenging, because the mind automatically starts thinking about other areas of your life.

Instructions –

- Select a small personal object that you like a great deal. It might be a jewelled pin or a simple flower from your garden.
- Focus all your attention on this object as you inhale and exhale slowly and deeply for one to two minutes.
- While you are doing this exercise, try not to let any other thoughts or feelings enter your mind. If they do, just return your attention to the object. At the end of this exercise you should feel more peaceful and calm.
- Any tension or nervousness that you were feeling upon starting the exercise should be lessened.

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