

STARTING ASSIGNMENTS

What's first?

Once you receive an assignment question, the first thing to do is work out what the question is asking you to do.

Spending time analysing or 'unpacking' the question will save you time in the long run.

It will help you

- focus your research and reading.
- stay on track when you are writing your assignment.

Analyse the question by looking for certain types of words.

Task words tell you what you have to do in your assignment. They help you decide the style, emphasis and structure of your essay.

Task words include:

analyse	compare	contrast
describe	define	explain
evaluate	outline	predict
review		

All have implications for how you write your assignment and the types of information and evidence you include.

Content words tell you what the main focus of your assignment will be.

Limiting words indicate how to restrict the content of your assignment. They will vary according to your area of study but might include phrases like:

- in the final years of WW2
- in businesses of less than 100 employees
- In temperate regions of Australia
- among school children from rural areas

Taking time to analyse each assignment question will help ensure you 'answer the question'.

An example

You've just been given this essay topic.

Critically evaluate the statement: In Western Australia, adolescents have not got the message, drinking alcohol and driving do not mix.

1. Task words. 'Critically' and 'evaluate' are the task words. These words give the message that you are being asked to

- examine the case for and against the topic, *In Western Australia, adolescents have not got the message that drinking alcohol and driving do not mix.*
- state your position.

2. Content words. The focus of your essay will be an examination of whether the message *drinking alcohol and driving do not mix* is being heeded.

3. Limiting words. Your essay will be limited to a discussion of *adolescents in Western Australia*.

What's next?

Once you're clear about what the question is asking you to do, it's time to work out what information to include in your assignment.



You can do this by asking a series of smaller questions about your topic.

If this seems a bit difficult, try this idea.

Tip

Think of yourself as a reporter and list the questions you want answered before you write your story.



Sample essay question

In Western Australia, adolescents have not got the message that drinking alcohol and driving do not mix..

Questions you could ask include:

Western Australia	Adolescents
Is a comparison with other states needed? Where will I get information/statistics about WA from? Government departments? Research institutes?	Does adolescent cover a specific age category? What is the variation in alcohol use between age groups within this category? Do I include adolescents driving without a licence?
Drinking alcohol and driving message	Accidents
How many ways is the message delivered? What is the target age group? What evidence is there that the message is not being received?	The question implies negative consequences of drinking and driving. Do I consider the effects of drinking and driving on the drivers, victims of accidents, family members?

Researching

Now you have a series of smaller questions you can research the answers. Knowing the questions you want answered will help you decide what you need to read. You may want to ask a librarian for help with a key word search.

Staying on track When doing your reading, keep referring to your analysis of the main question and to your list of smaller questions.

Reading for assignments

- Remember to read actively.
- Ask questions as you read, don't just highlight.
- Record all the necessary bibliographic information, including page numbers.
- Take note of definitions, examples and explanations you can use in your essay.
- Note down differences of opinions expressed by different authors.
- Keep asking yourself "What's my position", "How can this information help develop my position?"

Mind mapping is useful for organising your ideas, e.g. you could use a different symbol and colour for each section and paragraph you intend to include in your assignment.

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