A Guide to Producing Coursework

for the Weekly Class Programme
INTRODUCTION

If it is some time since you last produced work for assessment, or you feel that you would like help developing your writing and presentation skills, we hope that you will find this introductory guide to producing coursework useful. We believe that coursework is an important element in the weekly class programme because it encourages independent study and provides a focus for your reading and thinking. Working on a coursework assignment allows you to pursue your own interests within the subject you are studying and to measure your own progress and achievement on your course. In addition, successful completion of the assignment and regular attendance on your course enables you to work to achieve an undergraduate-level qualification. Most weekly classes carry university-level credit points which can be accumulated to gain the Department’s Certificate of Higher Education or be transferred to other institutions.

Your tutor will provide you with a list of coursework assignments or help you to choose a suitable project. It is essential that your assignment is directly relevant to your course and its stated learning outcomes. The range of available assignment activities varies from course to course, but may include a portfolio of exercises, worksheets, essays, reports, book reviews, records of fieldwork or experiments, the writing up of a museum or gallery visit, oral presentations or data analysis. It is important to select an assignment that interests you because it will be easier to produce a good piece of work if you enjoy what you are doing. These notes are designed to help you to tackle your coursework successfully.

PLANNING AND WRITING AN ESSAY

Examining the title

Read the question carefully and check that you understand what you are being asked to do. Identify key instructions such as account for, assess, compare, contrast, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain, outline or questions such as why, when, what, how and use them to determine the material you need to cover and how you need to organise it. Make sure that you understand the meaning of unusual or specialised words or phrases.
Producing a plan and collecting material

Once you have done some preliminary reading it is useful to produce a plan for your essay. This will help you to organise your ideas and enable you to plan your research and gather relevant material from your class notes, hand-outs, books, articles, electronic media or other sources purposively. Your plan should be a list of the main points which will form the basis of your argument or discussion. As your work progresses, you may discover that you need to modify your plan as your ideas change, or you find that some material is not available. Select your research material carefully, seeking advice from your tutor if needed.

Reading and note-taking

It is helpful to make brief notes when reading. This will enable you to list the key points and evidence you need to write your essay and help you to understand and digest what you have read. Record the source of your notes and the relevant page numbers. Develop a system for storing your research notes and references (perhaps in a loose leaf file or card index) so that they can be retrieved easily.

Structuring your essay

An essay consists of a beginning, a middle and an end. These are the:

- **Introduction** which explores the question, provides context and indicates the direction or structure of the argument to follow.

- **Discussion** which develops a logical argument from a series of points and supports it with relevant evidence such as facts, examples, illustrations, data tables etc.

- **Conclusion** which draws together your ideas, summarises your argument and demonstrates that you have answered the question.

Writing your essay

Many students find it difficult to start the writing process. You may find it convenient to write your introduction first but it is not essential to work through an essay from beginning to end. Some students prefer to write their essay in stages and then combine the separate parts to produce the final polished version. Try to write clearly and precisely and to explore one major point per paragraph.
Reviewing and editing your essay

It is always useful to produce a draft version of your essay. This will enable you to:

• check that you have answered the question
• re-order points to strengthen your argument
• check grammar, punctuation and spelling
• add or remove supporting evidence
• check the length of your essay. (Essays which do not conform to the prescribed limits may be penalised.)

PRODUCING OTHER FORMS OF WRITTEN WORK

Much of the guidance given above can be applied to other written work, including short answers to coursework exercises or course worksheets. You may, though, find the following tips useful:

Producing a project

For projects you need to collect, present and interpret information on a particular topic and to identify a central question. You may find it useful to produce a short draft outlining how you plan to tackle the project in order to assess its feasibility with your tutor.

Writing a report

Reports recording research projects or practical exercises are structured differently from essays and usually include the following:

• **Aims** which define the objectives of the project

• **Methods** which describe how the project was planned and implemented and discuss methodological strengths and weaknesses

• **Results** which present the findings of the project or exercise in prose, tabular and/or graphic form

• **Conclusions** which summarise and interpret the results, critically evaluate findings and show that the aims have been achieved.
**Writing a course journal**

You will be expected to write a brief report on all or a specified number of sessions attended. Your journal entries might summarize the content of the session, describe what you found particularly interesting, highlight subjects, activities or skills that you would like to pursue further etc. Your reports should be reflective in character and trace the development of your knowledge, skills and ideas as the course progresses.

**Writing a book review**

You will need to supply full details of the book (title, author, publisher or journal, year of publication and number of pages). The review should be structured like an essay (with an introduction, middle and end) and include:

- a brief summary of the book
- an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses
- an indication of whether it is enjoyable and easy to comprehend
- an assessment of its contribution to the subject.

**PRESENTING YOUR WRITTEN WORK**

It is important that work produced at undergraduate level follows accepted academic conventions. You will be familiar with many of these from your reading but applying them to your own work takes practice and patience. Mastering presentation conventions is one of the objectives of undergraduate work and your tutor can provide further advice as needed.

**Quoting from sources**

If you want to quote material from other authors in your assignment you can do this directly (reproducing the actual words of the author) or by using paraphrase (describing the author’s idea or ideas in your own words). Direct quotations are usually reserved for important or provocative points, for example ideas or language which need to be discussed or produced in support of an argument. Try to keep direct quotations as short as possible because one of the objectives of writing an assignment is to express your own views in your own words. Short quotations should be placed in inverted commas. Long quotations, if used, should be indented from the main text and do not require inverted commas.
Acknowledging sources

When you use material or arguments (including quotations) from other writers’ work it is important to acknowledge your debt and to include a reference identifying the source. If you do not you may be accused of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the deliberate copying of passages wholesale (or disguised by paraphrase) from books, other students’ work etc, without acknowledgement. Plagiarism is dishonest and is always penalised.

References

There are three main ways of presenting references. Seek advice from your tutor about which to use but remember that once you have chosen a method for your assignment you need to apply it consistently in that piece of work.

• Footnotes Each point or quotation to be referenced is numbered consecutively (using brackets (1) or superscript ¹) and a list of numbered notes is provided at the foot of the page:


A short form can be used for subsequent references to a title:

  eg  2. Lockyer, p.120.
      3. Tudor and Stuart Britain, p.120.

If consecutive references are taken from the same source ibid (meaning in the same place) or ibid plus page number are used:

  eg  4. ibid.
      5. ibid p.40.

Material taken from an article in a journal or from the internet should be similarly acknowledged.

• Endnotes The same conventions are used as for footnotes but the notes are listed at the end of the assignment, chapter or book.

• Harvard system An author date note with page numbers is enclosed in round brackets and inserted in the text directly after the point or quotation. Full details of the work are provided in the bibliography.

  eg  It has recently been suggested (Guy 1988, p.36) that…
In some subjects, for example music or art, you may need to refer to material such as specific passages of music or individual paintings in your assignment. Your tutor will advise you about the appropriate referencing conventions for your subject.

**Bibliography**

You need to include a list at the end of your assignment of all the books, articles, internet sites etc which you have used to write your essay. The list should be given in alphabetic order of authors’ surnames with:

- **for a book**: author’s surname and initials or first name, publication date, title (italics or underlined), place of publication.


- **for an article**: author’s surname and initials or first name, publication date, title of article (in inverted commas), title of periodical or book (italics or underlined), editor’s name or volume number and page numbers.


- **for material from the internet**: author’s surname and initials or first name, title of page (in inverted commas), title of complete work if page is part of a group of documents, date page was created, URL (in angle brackets), date you saw page (in round brackets).


**Layout**

Assignments can be hand-written, typed or wordprocessed but must be legible. For ease of administration and marking please:

- use A4 paper and write or print on one side only
- leave a wide margin for your tutor’s comments
- write the title of the assignment on the first page
- number and write your name on each page.
PREPARING AND GIVING ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Many students enjoy sharing their work with other members of the class by making an oral presentation. You will need to negotiate a date and time with your tutor, and to seek advice about the form and length of the presentation and whether or not it is possible to share the work with one or more of your fellow students. Like written work, an oral presentation needs to be planned and structured with an introduction, development of argument and conclusion, but you will also need to consider what resources you wish to use (slides, overhead transparencies, handouts, etc.). Careful preparation contributes to confident delivery: it is particularly useful to inspect your equipment in advance (especially slides to ensure that they are the right way up), to find a comfortable position to speak from and to check that you are not speaking too quickly or too quietly. Try to keep to time and remember that your tutor and fellow students will be more interested in hearing what you have to say than in judging your performance! Remember to keep your notes as you will need to submit them for assessment purposes.

UNDEARTAKING PRACTICAL WORK AND FIELDWORK

In some subjects it may be possible for assessment activities to be integrated within the class programme or field trips and to combine written, oral and practical elements. These might include:

- the identification and classification of samples
- simple experiments
- practical demonstrations
- problem-solving exercises
- analysis of data
- drafting of plans or maps.

You would need to plan and prepare the activity in advance of the session, and to complete and write up the work afterwards. Advice - including assessment details - will be provided by your tutor.
SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS

It is important to plan your work schedule carefully in order to ensure that you leave enough time to complete your coursework by the submission deadline. It is useful to keep a copy of your script so that if the original is lost or damaged you do not have to rewrite your assignment.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR LEVEL 1 CREDIT

The following criteria are used to assess assignments for credit:

Knowledge and understanding
• shows understanding of the requirements of the assignment
• displays knowledge of subject matter
• demonstrates understanding of relevant ideas, contexts, issues and relationships

Selection and analysis
• selects appropriate ideas, evidence, data, techniques
• evaluates evidence / analyses data or sources used to support argument or justify conclusion

Organisation and structure
• structures assignment according to the conventions of the discipline
• develops a logical and coherent argument
• shows ability to organise ideas, evidence, data, to support argument

Communication and presentation
• uses language and/or tables, graphs etc, effectively to communicate ideas
• provides references and reading list.
SEEKING FURTHER HELP

If you encounter a problem with your coursework, for example you are uncertain what is required or you cannot find the books you need, do seek advice from your tutor. It is often possible to arrange a brief discussion during coffee break or after class.

If you require further help with study skills, the Department’s Study Skills Programme offers a wide range of study skills workshops and an on-line introductory study skills course. Details can be found in the prospectus, newspaper and study skills three-fold or on the website at

http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/category_results.php?Subject=Study+Skills.

If you require further assistance contact the Weekly Class Programme Office on 01865 280892 or email studyskills@conted.ox.ac.uk.

Alternatively, the Department’s library at Rewley House holds a wide range of study skills textbooks which you can borrow or consult.

We particularly recommend:


