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## **Writing an assignment**

Writing an essay is a learnt skill – it needs practice to improve it. You will need time for writing drafts and rewriting them until the final version is produced. The following advice is for helping students to understand the basic concepts of assignments along with some ‘practical’ advice.

1. The language of essays is different from live speech simply because it is a leaner medium: there is no body language, change in the tone and there is no interaction between the writer and the reader.

Therefore, when writing an assignment, you have to use words that are unambiguous and understandable within its context (e.g. when waiting for the bus at the stop it is sufficient to say: ‘It’s coming.’, but when you want to relate to somebody who was not present, you would have to describe the context, i.e. waiting for the bus, which bus, how long for, watching the road, etc.).

2. However, the language of the essay needs not be artificial. It is a language in which every bit and context of your inner speech (thoughts formulated in words) are developed. The language of the essay has a major advantage over live speech as the reader has the time to absorb new information and thoughts. For example, understanding negative sentences and questions, not to mention composite sentences, takes three to four times as long as statements or simple sentences, thus we do use them less frequently in live speech.
3. When you redraft your essay do not do it on the monitor – print out a hard copy. The technical construction of the monitor allows for a very different type of reading than that of reading a book.
4. For structuring the essay use headings and paragraph breaks. However, be sparing with headings – it is bad when the headings indicate the train of your thoughts instead of the understanding of the reader.
5. The word-limit stipulated by your tutor is meaningful. Try not to go over it significantly. You can use an appendix for giving information that are not crucial but help the reader. However, be aware of the danger of putting crucial information in the appendix – this is a bad practice and you will be penalised for it.

6. Do not use footnotes if it is possible: what is necessary should be in the main text - what is not necessary should either be omitted or put in the appendix.
7. If you use other people's work (or your own previous works) pay the due respect: make references to them (including your own work). If you do not make references to these, you commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is an offence, which results in an automatic fail/resubmit result at CTPDC.

When you make references, avoid direct quotations. Instead of this, try to reword the referred text by capturing its meaning. Thus, for example, instead of faithfully copying the paragraph on page 89 of [Nelson-Jones' textbook](#) (the 'Maintenance' section), you could write, for example, 'An important term in person-centred counselling is maintenance, that is the way behaviours inappropriate to meet real needs are reconditioned instead of discarding or replacing them (Nelson-Jones, 2001). It derives from the focal point of person-centred counselling: the way in which an individual's experiences are transformed into perceptions and these perceptions are reflected back in behaviours.' In these two sentences the first takes the information and pays the respect to another person's work, while in the second sentence the information is used for positioning it in a context.

If you must use direct quotation, use indentation to clearly separate this text from your own work, use the reference as it given above with the page number (Nelson-Jones, 2001 p. 89).

8. CTPDC's preferred way of referencing is:

Books: author's surname, initials (if it is an edited book, after the name: (eds) (year of publishing): *Title of the book*, place of publishing, publisher.

E.g.: Nelson-Jones, R. (2001): *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Therapy*, New York: Continuum

Book chapter in an edited book: surname of the author of the book chapter, initials (year of publishing): 'Title of the chapter', in surname of the editor, initials of the editor, *Title of the book*, pages from-to, place of publishing, publisher.

E.g.: Yontef, G. and Jacobs L. (2000): 'Gestalt therapy', pp. 303-339 in Corsini, R. J. and Wedding, D. (eds.), *Current Psychotherapies*, Itasca: Peacock

Article: surname of the author, initials (year of publishing): 'Title of the article', *name of the journal*, Vol (volume number):issue number (this depends on the way the journal publishes its issues, there are journals without volume number), pages from-to

E.g. Ho, D.Y.F. (1985): 'Cultural values and professional issues in clinical psychology: Implications from the Hong Kong experience, *American Psychologist*, 40, pp. 1212-1218

While the world wide web contains a huge amount of valuable and free information, it does not mean that you can plagiarise it and not only because it is relatively easy to find an un-attributed source. If you refer to a web-based resource, you will have to provide the

author (if known), the title (if known), the full address (not only the home page) as well as the day of accessing.

9. Your essay will have at least three major sections, all equally important: introduction, main body, conclusions.
10. The function of introduction is to set the wider context of the essay. It should explain the purpose of the essay and in what way it contributes to our understanding of the issue discussed in the main body. Or to put differently: why it is worth to anybody to read the essay. A good introduction also sets out potential controversies around the subject of the essay. Depending on the nature of the essay, the writer should set out the expectations about the outcomes of the analysis on the basis of the wider context. It is a good practice to finish the introduction with the description of the structure of the main body of the essay (e.g. 'first 'A thing' will be discussed, then I will turn to 'B thing' and finally on the basis of these discussions I will analyse 'C thing'')
11. The main body contains the analysis. It is impossible to completely avoid descriptive parts in this section, however, they should be kept to a minimum. Any description that is not used in analysis, reasoning or discussion should be omitted. There is a number of ways to avoid being too descriptive. One practical way is to answer the questions: why, in what way and why in this way and not in another.
12. The conclusion part is not a summary! To some extent, of course, you have to emphasise the main findings in your analysis, but now from two angles. Firstly, compared to the expectations described in the introductory section. Secondly, and more importantly, it should give a perspective: where are we now, where do we go now on the basis of the findings and analysis. Anything you did in the main section of the essay but did not use in the conclusions are unnecessary and should be omitted. Conversely, any claims in the conclusions that are not substantiated in the main body should be discarded or the main body should be revised. In effect it means that conclusions should be a significant part of your essay, both in terms of content and length.
13. The essay should be finished with a bibliography. It should only include those books, articles, etc. that you referred to in your essay and not everything you read about on the subject.
14. At the front of your assignment you may (but it is not necessary!) include an abstract (of about 200 words) to summarise your main claims or findings.
15. Avoid referring to yourself as 'author': use 'I' or if you do not like it, use passive sentences (e.g. 'I will discuss' or 'It will be discussed', but definitely not 'The author will discuss'). As the essay carries your name, you have the full responsibility for the content, thus you may use 'I' or passive sentences.
16. Use spell check! It is nothing more annoying for the reader when the essay is full of spelling mistakes or mistyping. However, be aware of the shortcomings of the spell check functions (especially grammar) of computer programmes.

17. Do not try to massage the length of your essay. Use at least size 12 fonts, leave ample (at least an inch on each side) margins and single line spacing (that is do not use the 'exactly' option). Respect the eyesight of the tutor.