Dyslexia at College

Third edition

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Chapter 12

Essays and other written assignments

This is a long chapter: students are advised to read it in small doses! It breaks down the work involved in a written assignment into its various stages; it also gives you strategies for tackling each stage and suggests how you can ensure that your writing flows logically from start to finish.

WHAT ARE YOUR DIFFICULTIES?

We would like you to suggest to your college tutors the following penance: they should imagine themselves cooking the breakfast and finding that the milk is boiling over, that the toast is burning, that the telephone is ringing, that there is a knock at the door and that several members of their family are simultaneously asking them questions. This may give tutors some idea of the problems confronting you as a dyslexic student when you have to write an essay or carry out an assignment: there are simply too many things to attend to, all at the same time.

Teachers will have told you to plan the essay as a whole, but there may be a dozen or more threads or separate topics which have to be thought about and arranged in order. In addition, no progress will be possible until you have found the right words for saying what you want to say, and even when you have found them there is the danger that in typing or writing them down your hand movements may get out of step with your thinking. Many students say to us, 'I can think faster than I can write.' As if all this were not enough, you then have to check whether the words are correctly spelled and whether
there is correct paragraphing and punctuation. Our experience is that many students have not been taught punctuation; and since it involves learning to name and use yet another group of symbols – the full stop, the comma, the semicolon, the colon, the question mark etc. – it is easy to see why you failed to pick it up at a younger age, when all your energies were directed towards writing and spelling.

Many of the essay-writing skills are second nature to non-dyslexic students. If they wish to write a word, they do so; in most cases the word 'just comes' and they do not need to think about its spelling. There is no danger for them that words or phrases will come out jumbled up or in the wrong order; and even if they have not received individual teaching they may well have acquired the essentials of punctuation without conscious effort. As a result they are free to concentrate their energies on the subject matter of the essay and on the construction of fluent and easily readable sentences.

For you, as a dyslexic student, the process may be very different, and it is little wonder that your written style suffers in comparison. With so much else to think about you may forget what you wrote a moment earlier. The result may be a very staccato and jerky style as you struggle to express a large number of ideas briefly before you lose track of them. Alternatively, you may sometimes go to the opposite extreme and write long convoluted sentences as though you do not know when to stop. In general, so much is being demanded of you at the same moment that you cannot monitor all of it efficiently.

The result of all this is illustrated by a tutor's comment which criticised a dyslexic student's 'inability to sort out and organise his main ideas despite a keen understanding of the subject'. Sometimes, the essays of dyslexic students may appear to have a relatively low level of analysis or abstraction: they sometimes appear packed with detail which is not sufficiently related to key concepts or presented with adequate generalisations. This chapter offers some advice on how to minimise these problems.

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING – ONE THING AT A TIME

Most dyslexic students find it useful to break down complex material into its component parts and deal with these parts one at a time. It is widely agreed that, for many people, the best way to remember a six-digit telephone number is to break it down into two groups of three, or even three groups of two. The same principle applies if you need to remember items in series, such as the months of the year; and similarly if you need to spell or write longer words it is often helpful to break them up into smaller parts (compare the suggestions on spelling in Chapter 14).

Similar strategies will almost certainly be helpful in essay writing. The different components of the task need to be considered separately, one at a time. Reading the question is a different activity from thinking about how to answer it; and planning the essay as a whole is a different activity from considering how best to get across what you want to say, while questions of paragraphing and punctuation are different yet again. If you try to attend to all these things at once, the result may be chaos: you may well be told that you have failed to answer the question, that the essay lacks coherence, that the style is immature and that your punctuation is all wrong. If you have experienced such criticisms, we suggest that you work on them one at a time.

In what follows there will be sections concerned with:

- what is expected in a college essay;
- reading the question;
- reading for and planning the essay as a whole;
- getting across what you want to say;
- writing your first draft;
- paragraphs;
- setting out references;
- your final draft – and checking your work.
Questions of grammar and punctuation will be discussed in Chapter 13 and strategies for improving spelling will be found in Chapter 14. We recommend that you read this chapter a little at a time.

WHAT IS EXPECTED IN A COLLEGE ESSAY?

Essays at college are not normally set with the purpose of making you 'write down all the facts'. Rather, you are being given the chance to examine a problem and to show that you can formulate ideas about that problem – thus presenting a debate or an argument. As an essay writer, therefore, your purpose will not normally simply be to describe things, concepts or events but to analyse, discuss and interpret them. This applies to scientific essays as well as to those written by students doing courses in arts and social sciences. Scientists may need to consider the implications of the topic, whether it is based on ground-breaking research and what further research might be done. It is useful in the case of any essay to ask, 'Why has this question been set?' You will therefore need to arrange your ideas in a logical order and to produce evidence from the relevant literature in support of your argument.

Some departments supply information as to how the assignment will be graded – a handout or, in some cases, a sheet at the head of the assignment. If they do, you should look at it carefully. It may say, for example, that marks will be given for your understanding of the subject, for the quality of your argument, for your use of evidence and for the way in which you express yourself.

READING THE QUESTION

The first essential, before you embark on an essay, is to read the question carefully. You should then spend time considering what the question means and what precisely you are being asked. This will ensure that all aspects of the question are covered in the answer.

If you ring or highlight key words in the question, you will be better able to focus on their meaning. A question set in a recent English paper was: 'How successful is Wordsworth in integrating the various strands of philosophy and experience in The Prelude, Book 1?' All students discussed what was meant by 'strands of philosophy and experience', while many referred to the integration of the two; but there were very few who dealt with the key words 'how successful'. The question might in this case have been highlighted or ringed as follows:

How successful is Wordsworth in integrating the various strands of philosophy and experience?

You would then be in a position to use the highlighted words to guide your answer. Thus, since 'How successful' is highlighted, you are immediately led to thinking about the notion of 'succeeding', while because 'integrating' is highlighted it reminds you that it is not enough to consider each of the components separately. Highlights on 'philosophy' and 'experience' are further reminders that the meanings of these two key terms are by no means self-evident.

In the case of many essays it may be helpful to experiment with changes in the wording (Does it mean this? or Might it mean that?), since such changes may help to clarify what is and is not relevant and may open up new ways of treating the topic. It is important, too, that you should make full use of the information which has been given in the title; this can be done in particular if you make sure that you pay attention to all the key words. Indeed there are some words which are likely to keep occurring both in essays and in examinations, for example 'compare', 'contrast', 'assess', 'analyse', 'discuss', 'outline', 'evaluate' and 'summarise' (see note 12.1). These words call for careful thought, and you should make sure that you completely understand their meaning.

Above all, you should spend time considering what is implied by the title of the essay and what are the important issues that it raises. Ask yourself: 'What exactly is the argument to be debated here?' 'What are all the implications?' 'What debate does it raise?' From these basic questions further questions will arise. Write these
questions down on a sheet of paper – in the form of a mind-map if you wish – or on your computer screen. (An example of a mind-map is given in Chapter 11.) If you do this, there is a good chance that you will genuinely be answering what you were asked, and will not be sidetracked.

If you are still unsure about what the essay is about, then it may be helpful if you go to see your tutor. You should do so, however, only after you have gone through this initial stage of analysing the title, and have an outline of your plan written down, so that she can see that you have already given thought to the topic.

**READING FOR AND PLANNING THE ESSAY AS A WHOLE**

It is at this stage that you should be aware of your objectives; in particular you should ask yourself as far as you can:

- What are the main things that I want to say?
- How can I arrange them logically?

You will then need to do some preliminary reading. You may like to look again at the section on reading in this book (Chapter 11). It is a good idea to start by reading a short book or chapter that gives you an outline or overview of the topic; if you have lecture notes on the topic, look at these. It is also important that you should be clear as to what information you are looking for so that you are not wasting time on irrelevant material.

At the same time as you do your preliminary reading you should provide yourself with a master plan or page on the computer and develop the main outline of the essay on it. For this purpose you could use a mind-map, as you will be able to extend ideas across and down the page and then make the links between them. Many students prefer paper at this stage, but there is the useful mind-mapping software (see Chapter 16). Figure 3 is an example of a basic master plan. We have in fact chosen a topic from the history of education, but the same principles would of course apply to essays on most other subjects.

Let us suppose, then, that you have been given the following title for the essay: ‘Assess the changes introduced into British state education by the comprehensive system.’ Your first move should be to put the title in a central box from which arrows can flow in a variety of directions. You should then consider each key word in turn and write notes on each. ‘In turn’ is important: if you try to think of all the points at once, you may well forget some of them and become confused. (One advantage of a mind-map is that if a point does occur to you, you can put it down somewhere on the page and consider later where exactly it fits in.) The end product might look like that shown in Figure 3.

Once you have understood the central theme of the essay, it will be easier for you to ensure that all your reading is purposeful and that you select only material which is relevant.

Think about what you are reading. Try if you can to organise your material by giving it headings and sub-headings; these can then be linked to your master plan. Some students prefer to use cards rather than ordinary paper for this purpose: they are stiffer and therefore
easier to organise, and there is the advantage that cards of different colours can be used for different topics. If all cards are numbered, this will save time when you come to re-read them. Some students use A5 sheets (or A4 sheets torn in two) as they are smaller and therefore more manageable. You should write on one side of the page only; then, if necessary, you can cut pieces out or add them.

If you quote from the books which you have read, check that the quotation is relevant and makes the point that you wish to make — and for future reference make a note of the page number. Also make clear that it is a quote and that the words are not your own; otherwise it may seem that you are plagiarising (that is stealing other people’s ideas and passing them off as your own). Either choose really apt quotes or paraphrase, using your notes as brief summaries.

There is a section on referencing later on in this chapter. In the meantime, when you take a book out from the library, make sure that you have recorded all the information which you need for your reference section — the full title of the book, the name and initials of its author and the book’s publisher and place of publication (you could photocopy the page on which these details appear). We cannot stress too often the importance of noting down all references — on card or on the screen; either way you will be able to arrange them easily into alphabetical order when you have finished the assignment.

Some students prefer to plan as they read and put all their notes straight onto the computer, moving and editing at the same time. Others choose to put everything onto the screen and then move the material around. The difficulty in the second case is that you can see only a limited amount of material at a time and it can therefore take you quite a long time to search for relevant sections. However, you can use colour, bold or italics to indicate where certain parts belong. As already indicated, there is software which can help you to plan essays (see Chapter 16). You can also use a scanner; this allows printed text to be transferred onto your screen. You should be careful, however, that you do not put this material into your essay without analysing or paraphrasing it.

While you are reading, you may suddenly be struck by a new idea, and in that case you should be prepared to explore it. For this purpose, you may find it useful to keep a page where you write down notes for future use: these can include opinions, questions, agreements, disagreements etc. about which you will later need to examine all the relevant evidence. If you are working on the computer, you can scroll down to the end of your work and jot down the thoughts which pop into your mind, perhaps in colour, so that you can pick them up and use them later.

Keep your mind receptive and **keep asking questions**. Some of what you are reading may not fall easily under a particular heading, in which case it may be better to put off classifying it until you have read further and done the necessary planning. It does not matter at this stage if the pages are filled in a seemingly haphazard way as long as all relevant material is included (and you may need to refer back to the title in order to make a decision as to whether a particular topic is or is not relevant).

You can next look back at your master plan. This will help you to organise your notes and jottings into a coherent order. It is helpful to number each jotting as this will give you an order in which the different topics can usefully be discussed. Try using fluorescent markers or different coloured pens to circle related topics, and, as we have said, you can if you wish cut up your pages into strips so that the different topics can be clearly distinguished.

Before you start to write your rough draft, you should again look at your master plan, considering all the questions you have raised. You should then write them down in a logical order. **Check that each point follows on from the one before.** You may sometimes find that there is material that now seems irrelevant and that you can get rid of it. However, there may also be new ideas which you have learned from your reading, and these should be written down. You will probably end up with a series of questions or points arranged in a logical order. These can then be numbered, and you can sort out your notes into numbered piles which correspond. Then you will be able to expand in detail on each of the numbered points. One of our
students put her points onto Post-it notes, which she arranged and rearranged on her wall until she was satisfied with the sequence.

GETTING ACROSS WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

Many dyslexic students can talk about difficult concepts with fluency and yet when they have to express themselves in writing they cannot get across what they wish to say with anything like the same level of sophistication. A group of dyslexic students had an interesting discussion of an essay written by a physics student on the theme of ‘nuclear power stations’. What was particularly noticeable was the maturity and complexity of their spoken language in contrast with the level of language they used when they tried to summarise the argument in writing.

Having to write down the words seems in some cases to affect fluency and spontaneity. The extra effort needed adds an unwelcome complexity, and the result may be that some students come to doubt whether they will ever be able to find exactly the right word. If, in addition, they are worried about making spelling errors, they may conclude that the best response to all these pressures is to choose a simpler word, even though it may be a very much less effective one. To avoid this, it might be useful for some students to use a Dictaphone into which they can talk out their ideas.

Try talking through your ideas

This is the kind of situation where a tutor can be very helpful. He can discuss the use of alternative words and phrases and call attention to nuances of meaning. We often find that our students offer key words and phrases orally, which the tutor then writes down. (In fact, one of the most common comments made by our students is ‘Did I really say that?’) Where appropriate this discussion can be recorded on tape and the student can be asked to summarise it in writing. The tutor can sometimes offer key words which trigger off further relevant phrases from the student.

A similar technique is that suggested by Dr Alex Main (see note 12.2). Main suggests that students struggling with written expression should select a passage written on a specialist topic. Main first read it with them, and they selected key words from each paragraph. The student then rewrote the passage using these key words as a basis for the reconstruction: ‘This exercise, repeated several times with different passages, if necessary, builds up the student’s critical awareness of her writing style, and increases her confidence in seeking different ways of expressing herself’.

Using diagrams and graphs

It may also be helpful if you consider the use of illustrations and diagrams as ways of getting across your argument, and in some contexts graphs, histograms, bar charts and pie charts can also be useful for this purpose. The great advantage of these is that they often convey information more succinctly and clearly than is possible by means of verbal explanations. If they are used, however, it is important that they should be well presented: it is best if they are drawn on a blank page which can then be mounted into the main text of the essay. Scanners and graphics packages are, of course, invaluable here. They should also be labelled and referenced if necessary.

Technical terms

Give careful thought to the question of whether and how to define technical or unfamiliar terms. In the first place, there are some situations where you can assume that the reader has the required knowledge. This is true, for example, of many mathematical or statistical terms, such as ‘correlation coefficient’, and of standard physical or biological terms such as ‘impedance’ or ‘monozygotic’. Second, however, there may be terms which call for explanation, either because you cannot assume that the reader is familiar with them or sometimes because there is genuine doubt as to what they do mean, as in the case, for instance, of ‘romanticism’ or ‘phenomenology’. When any unfamiliar term is explained, it is often
useful to give one or more examples of situations where it is being correctly used. This shows that you understand what you are talking about. What is unsatisfactory is to introduce the word without explanation – which may baffle the reader – and then several lines later try to explain its meaning. Good examples can, in fact, be useful both in illustrating the meanings of words and in clarifying the intended argument.

**Reading to improve your writing**

Do plenty of reading, even though some of you find it hard work. One reason for this is that if you pay attention to the ways in which the writer is expressing himself you are likely to achieve a more mature written style yourself. It does not, in fact, take all that much effort to set yourself to read for, say, ten or 15 minutes each day, and the choice of material can be guided by your personal interests. As with other kinds of reading, it is important that this reading should be done purposefully, and we recommend that a dictionary is available for looking up unfamiliar words and that a notebook is available for writing them down.

**Use a thesaurus**

We have found that some students do not use a thesaurus. Once they have been shown how to use one, whether in book form or on a computer, they have found it a very valuable form of support in written work (see note 12.3). We have also found that students can be made more aware of style if they try to analyse some of their own work under the tutor’s guidance. An exercise like this may demonstrate to you the greater powers of expression you can achieve if you examine shades of meaning with care (see note 12.4).

**A DIALOGUE WITH THE READER**

Part of developing a good style involves thinking about the reader. As we pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, some students write in a very jerky or abrupt style. It gives the impression that they have the knowledge but cannot be bothered, or are too impatient, to explain it thoroughly. They seem to assume that the reader knows what they are talking about. Thus, seemingly illogical leaps occur and it is not always easy to follow their train of thought.

We encourage students to see essays as a dialogue with the reader. This ties in with what we said earlier about the purpose of essay writing, namely to show that you can analyse and discuss the question set. The term ‘intelligent layman’ should help you to visualise the reader: you can picture your mum or your support tutor (indeed, a support tutor is often a layman, dealing with essays from every field of learning, most of which he knows little about). You should assume that the reader is unlikely to be aware in advance of how you are going to treat the subject, and therefore you should lead him through the essay step by step.

Now, a dialogue:

- introduces
- explains
- analyses
- assesses
- discusses
- links up
- summarises.

If you think in terms of a dialogue, it helps you to be clear as to your own train of thought and it also helps the reader to follow the chain or pattern of your ideas. This dialogue can comprise introductory or concluding sentences within paragraphs, or it could comprise whole linking paragraphs.

At each stage, therefore, it is important to check that the reader is being given a sense of direction. For this purpose, suitable signposting is very important – it makes explicit to your reader the logical links between one sentence or paragraph and the next.
Also, you should take special note of connecting words such as ‘nevertheless’, ‘but’, ‘however’, ‘on the one hand … on the other hand’, ‘consequently’, ‘likewise’, ‘thus’ etc. The function of these words is to mark a variety of relationships, including contrasts, similarities, alternatives and results. Even the use of the familiar words ‘this’ and ‘that’ can help the flow of ideas within an essay. To check that these connecting words are being correctly used is important for any writer, since such checking forces you to consider where exactly the argument is leading; without it there is serious risk that the essay will lack direction. We provide our students with a list of such words and an account of their functions.

WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

This is the most important part of the writing stage. The rough draft is where you think, question, alter, move text, cross out, revise and edit. If all the work is done at this stage, the final writing-up should be a fairly mechanical copy of what has been done on the rough draft. You should take heart from the fact that almost all writers struggle with this stage of drafting – not just dyslexic writers.

If up to this point you have planned your essay by hand, you should now turn to the word processor. The advantages are that moving text, re-editing etc. all become very much easier. However, since there are some students who prefer to write their essays by hand we shall refer in this section to both ways of working.

If you are writing by hand, it is sensible to put the rough draft on one side of the paper only, since this means that passages can be re-written or re-ordered without other passages being thrown into disarray. You can cut sections off and add them on elsewhere (which is why this facility on your word processor is called ‘cut and paste’). It is also a useful precaution to write the essay title in pencil at the top of each page; if this title is attended to, there will be less risk of writing things which are off the point. It may also be helpful to summarise the main points in the margin; and for this reason you should allow wide margins and plenty of space between lines and at the end of paragraphs. This will also enable you to make corrections. Trying to save paper can sometimes be a false economy.

If the questions and problems crop up as you write, it is useful to have a piece of paper at hand so that you can make a note of them. Alternatively, you could put them in the margin of your script in pencil or a different coloured pen. The kind of comment you might write in could be: ‘check reference’, ‘more needed here’, ‘re-phrase’, ‘is this OK?’ Some students may like to have a recorder handy into which they can speak their comments.

All this is easy on the word processor. If there are things you have queries about, you can write them in italics, in colour or in bold. You can do the same with your comments; it might be useful to put some stars (***) at the start and at the finish (***) of any comments that you make. If you move text, have some way of indicating where you are going to put it and where you have taken it from. It can involve some time searching through a document; stars are again useful. If you are not sure whether you want to move a piece or not, or if you want to move it somewhere to get it out of the way of the section you are working on, then, again, you can highlight it or put it in bold to indicate that it needs attention.

Getting started – and coming to the conclusion

Some students find it difficult to know how to start an essay. In fact, you do not need to write the introduction until you have written the body of the essay. In many ways the introduction is rather like the conclusion. There is no one set way of writing an introduction, and the suggestions which follow should not be adopted uncritically. However - depending on the topic – you may find some of the following suggestions useful.

- Say something about the key terms in the question.
- Indicate how you are interpreting them.
- Tell your reader what the essay is going to be about, i.e. how you are going to treat the topic and what will be your lines of argument.
One of the most important functions of the list of references is to enable the reader to evaluate the credentials of claims made in the essay. For example, if you have used expressions such as, ‘it has been shown that x’, it is important to indicate how x was shown and who was responsible for doing so. You should imagine the marker writing, ‘How do you know?’ or ‘Evidence?’ over every statement that you make.

Some students find it difficult to know how to introduce references. To some extent this will depend on the style recommended by your department, but at many colleges the Harvard system is widely used. In this system the name of the author and date of publication are put in the text, and the full reference is given at the end of the essay or book. Books and names of journals are put in italics; in the case of books the town and publisher are given at the end, while the titles of journal articles are put in plain text, followed by the name of the journal in italics, followed by its volume, issue and page numbers. Thus in the case of a book you might write:


while in the case of a journal you could write:


We encourage our students to look in their books to see how writers present their references, and we have also drawn up a list of useful phrases such as:

- Brown (2004) states that …
- Brown (2004) points out that …
- Brown (2004) describes how …
- This has been shown by Brown (2004), who …

If you refer in the reference section to a book or article, this is, in effect, an undertaking that you have read the work in question. If, as sometimes happens, you have to rely on secondary sources – for example a textbook which asserts that Brown pointed out such and such in an article in an untraceable journal dated 1870 – the correct procedure is to quote the textbook, since this carries no claim that you have read the original paper.

It is also important to check that the style of the reference list is consistent. What is irritating to the reader is to find that the year or place of publication is given in some cases and not in others, or that some references to journal articles carry page numbers and some do not. Advice on the most appropriate style for the references should readily be obtained from the department. We must emphasise again how important it is when you are doing the initial research to keep a record of all the references which you consult. Students can spend many tedious hours trying to find them again.

YOUR FINAL DRAFT – AND CHECKING YOUR WORK

When writing your first drafts, there is no need to spell out each word in full, since nobody has to recognise what is written except you yourself. If you are doubtful about some grammar or spelling, you can always mark or highlight the words in question and return to them at leisure. Similarly, if you are not immediately able to produce the exact wording that you want, you can again indicate this and return to the passage when your mind is fresher. If you start worrying about such things at the time, there is a serious risk that you will lose track of your arguments and forget what you were trying to say. As we noted, the advantage of writing on a computer is that you can use bold or colour or italics to indicate places where you would like to make changes.

When you have completed your rough draft, you will need to give time to checking it. The crucial point in such checking is that you should make sure that what you have said reflects adequately what you meant to say (compare also what is said in Chapter 19 when you come to sit your examinations). As we have already indicated, there is a tendency on the part of dyslexic students to take too much for granted on the part of the reader: they may not appreciate that
the details of their argument need to be ‘spelled out’ (an interesting and significant metaphor) if someone else is to understand it. They may, in fact, genuinely believe that they have made themselves clear when all that the reader finds is some cryptic utterances which in themselves do not amount to an argument at all.

A useful device is to read aloud and record what you have written and then play it back. This will provide the opportunity for listening rather than looking, and the result may be that inadequacies in logic, presentation or style are easier to detect. Many students who write onto a computer which has text-to-speech software say that they find it really useful to listen to their work being read out to them, especially if they leave some time before coming back to listen to it (see below).

The following are some further points which need to be checked:

- Does the essay answer the question?
- Does it contain irrelevancies which should be excluded?
- Does it maintain a logical sequence, and does the use of ‘connecting’ words or expressions such as ‘therefore’ or ‘in contrast’ contribute to showing the direction of the argument?
- What is the point of each paragraph, and does it form part of the flow of the essay?
- Are the sentences complete and are they of the most suitable length?
- Can the things which you have learned about style, grammar, punctuation and spelling (see this chapter and Chapter 13) be put to good use?

This checking or editing will need to be done at least three times, as it is extremely difficult to read for sense and style, for punctuation and for spelling simultaneously. We suggest one check for sense and style (which should include a check that the essay reads coherently), one for punctuation and one for spelling.

It is often helpful if you can allow a gap of several days between the completion of your rough draft and its re-reading. After this interval, you can come to what you have written with a fresh mind, and it is easier to imagine yourself as someone who is looking at the essay for the first time. You may find it helpful to think of yourself as a tutor whose task is to make critical comments. You can then mark these in pencil or with a coloured pen. We ourselves, wearing our hats as tutors, have often found it helpful to say to students, ‘From now on you do not need me to make these critical comments.’

Students should redraft their written work in the way that suits them best. A few students will want to handwrite their first and even second drafts. They may not yet feel confident about typing out their work to begin with, especially if they have been used to handwriting work in school. It is not a good use of time to handwrite many drafts: it is better to get the work onto a computer as soon as possible and then print out drafts so that they can be more easily read through, highlighted, annotated or cut up and rearranged if necessary. Alterations can then be typed in straight away.

It will help the person grading your script if your work is well presented. It is best, therefore, if you type with double spacing or use wide-lined paper, writing on one side only. Remember to number all your pages. On the front cover you may need to include:

- your name
- the name of your course
- the year or module number
- the name of your tutor
- a clearly written title.

You should follow your department’s guidelines here, and with respect to page headings and numbering if this is required. Again, a bibliography or reference list needs to be in the department’s style, and it is useful if you package your essay in a plastic envelope or folder. (Do not put every page in a separate envelope, as this means the marker has to pull each one out in order to read it, and this is very time-consuming.)

And – finally – do not forget to hand the work in!
CHECK POINTS FOR CHAPTER 12

You will be more successful if you tackle essays and other written assignments in stages – and try to concentrate on one thing at a time.

- Ask yourself why the question has been set; what are the issues and ideas that you need to explore?
- Give time to reading the question; highlight and focus on the key words.
- If you develop a rough outline or master plan, it will be easier to focus your reading on relevant material.
- Be careful to note down details for references.
- If you think of your writing as a dialogue with the reader, this will help you to make your points clearly and in a logical order.
- Make sure that each paragraph carries the essay forward.
- Follow your department’s guidelines for referencing.
- You may need to write several drafts before you are happy with your work.
- Check your writing in separate stages for sense and style, punctuation and spelling.
- Don’t forget to hand your work in.