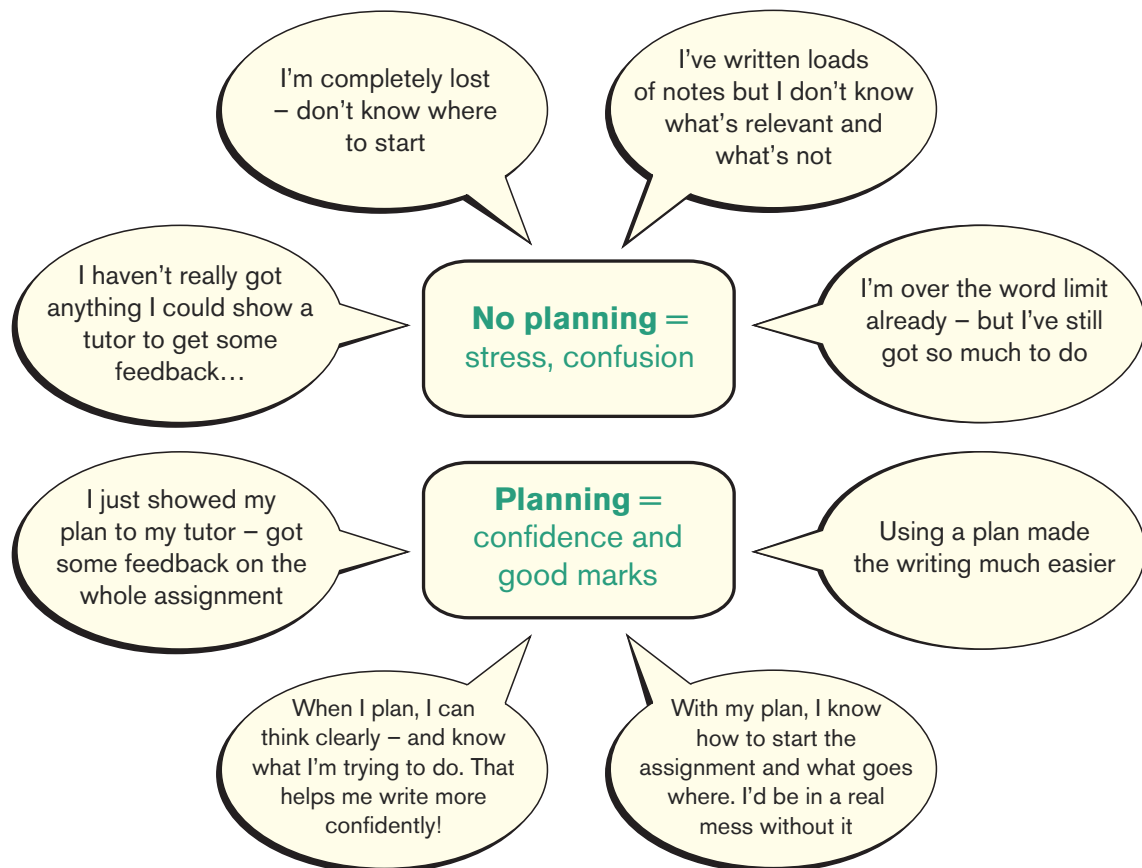


Stage 4

Planning the structure of your assignment



What are the benefits of **PLANNING** the structure of an assignment?



This section will help to:

- **Choose a clear focus for your assignment**
- **Clarify your ideas**
- **Put your ideas in order**

How to make an Assignment Plan

Clarify your ideas

- **You might already have used free writing** when you started thinking about the assignment – but it can be useful at this stage too, because your ideas may have changed after your reading and they will certainly have developed. (See page 38)
- **Use bullet points and lists** to capture the information and ideas you want to include.
- **Try using a mind map, a spider gram, a flow chart** or use **sticky notes** to get your thinking started. (See pages 39-40)

Top Tip:

There's no right way to do this so find what works best for you. Time to experiment!

Choose a clear focus for your assignment

- **Have a go at explaining the main point of your assignment** in just one sentence, e.g. *'This essay will show that students who plan their assignments before they start writing, achieve higher marks than students who do not'*
- **Try to identify** three or four key topics that you consider to be essential to support or explain your main point.
- **These key topics** will really help you to focus your writing. You could use the 'Table to make an initial Assignment Plan' (page 41) or the mind map example (page 31) to help you to do this

Top Tip:

Why not give each of your topics a colour – and then colour-code your notes with highlighter pens – so you can find all the relevant information easily

Now put your ideas in order

(This will form the main body of your report or essay)

- **What order would be most helpful to your reader?** Imagine helping a fellow student to learn about the topic.
- **Try using one of these ideas**
 - A simple bullet point list
 - A flow chart
 - Sticky notes that mean you can move your topics around until you're satisfied with the order
- Look at the 'Essay Structure' and 'Report Structure' Handouts to get your thinking started. (See pages 42-44)

Top Tip:

It's easy to sort out the structure of your assignment at this stage – but it's harder when you're in the middle of writing the assignment. Planning reduces stress!

Free writing – for your eyes only

This is a great stress free way to make a start on your assignment, or to begin to plan your first draft, after your reading and research. Put your notes and books away and just write...

- Set a timer and write for 10 minutes
- Don't stop – keep writing, even if you're writing *'I don't know what to write about'*
- Any order, anything, (*have a look at the questions below*)
- You can use single words, phrases, sketches, diagrams, pictures
- Don't worry about spelling or grammar – don't cross **anything** out
- Even writing down what you don't know or don't understand can be a great starting point
- After 10 minutes, look back and decide what you want to use and develop.

These questions might help you...



Focus on: starting or developing writing

There are many ways of doing this and you need to work out which suits YOU best. Here are a few ideas to start with – see if you think any of them might help you, or adapt them to suit your own way of learning.

The ‘Sticky-note Shuffle’

You will need:

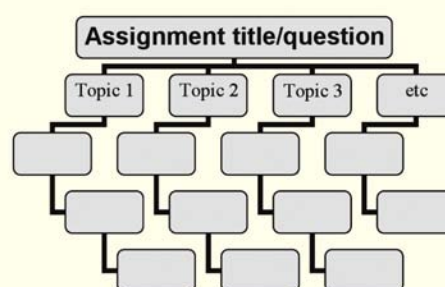
- Pens/pencils (a range of colours if it helps)
- A large piece of paper, or a wall or a cupboard door, or even your desk
- A supply of sticky-notes (preferably in different colours)

How to do it:

- One idea per sticky note
- Stick them on a door or wall or table. Look at them daily – live with your ideas. Add in new ideas as they occur
- Move them around until you’re happy with the order – you will start to build a basic shape for your writing and see what else you need to do.

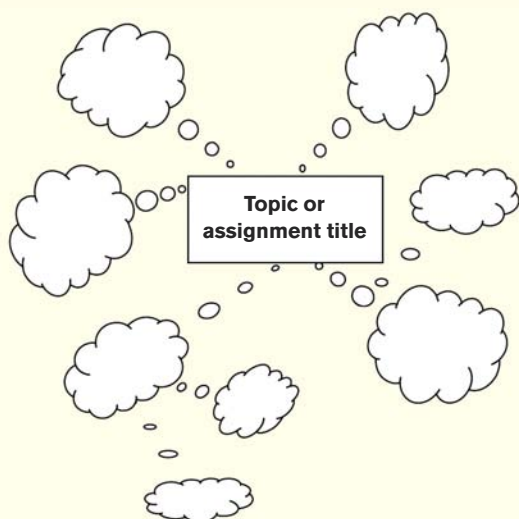
The ‘Family Tree’ or ‘Flow Chart’ Approach

Start with the basic title or question, break it down into topics and then smaller and smaller chunks:



Extend the ‘family tree’ or ‘flow chart’ as you get more ideas

The ‘Thought Mapping’ Approach

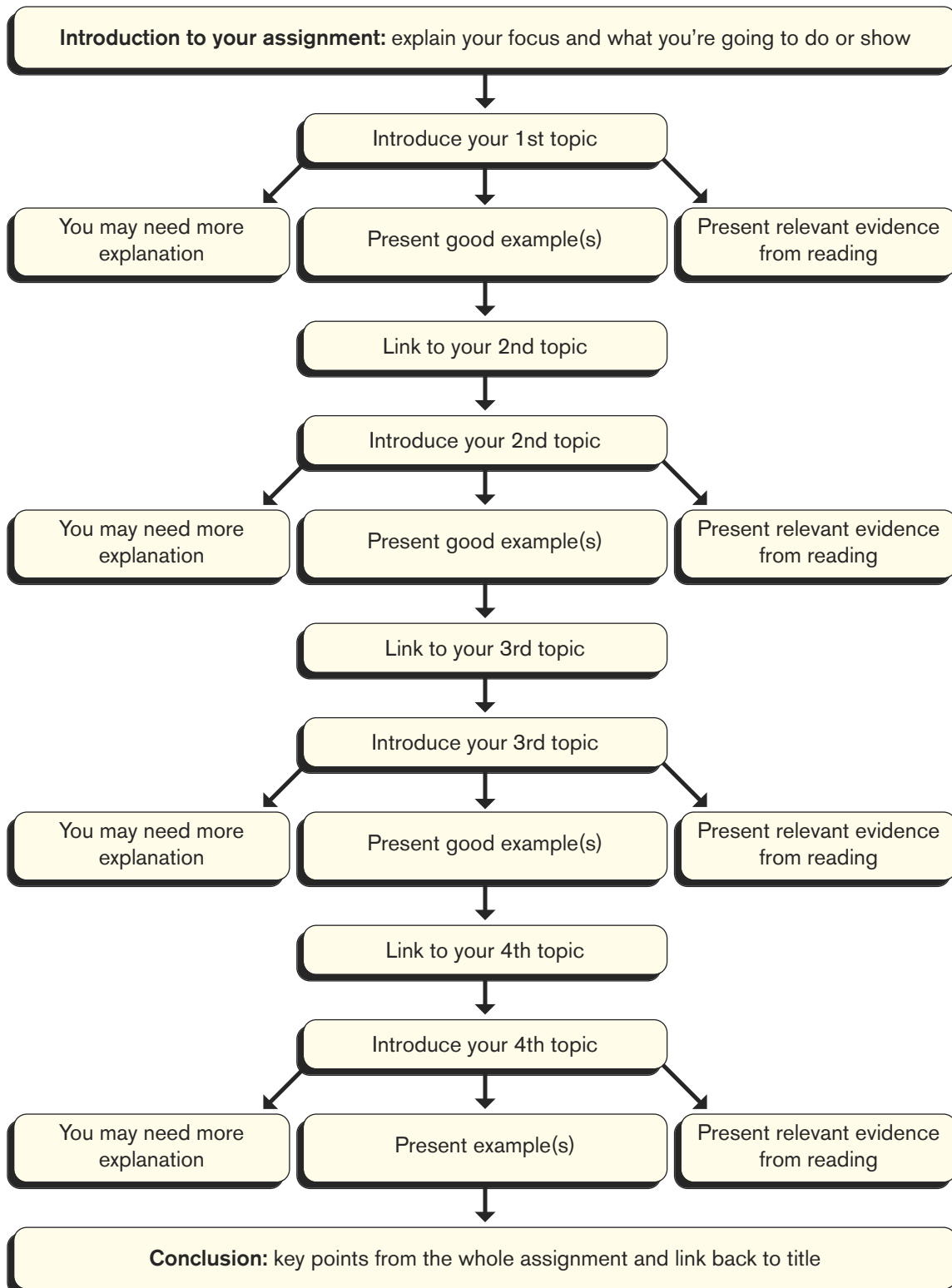


Just add more ‘clouds’ as you get more ideas

The ‘Tidy Table’ Approach – example

Assignment title – and your focus			
Topics	What do I already know?	What do I need to find out?	Key points
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

Try using a flow chart like this to plan your assignment.
 Note how the plan asks you to **LINK** all your topics



Top Tip: Brief notes in each box will help you stay on track when you start to write your assignment.

Using a table to make an initial assignment plan (Just use brief notes in each of the boxes)

Assignment title:			
Your central idea (in just one sentence)			
List the main topics of your assignment	Key ideas and information about each topic	What evidence or examples will you include to support each topic?	Reference details for where you found your information, ideas and examples
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

A Basic Essay Structure

Title/question

Every essay title contains an explicit or implicit question. Your essay should focus on answering that question. Try rewriting the title so that it is a question.

Introduction: (about 10% of the essay)

1. Explain how you interpret the title
2. What issues/topics are you going to explore?
3. What will be your focus?
4. What will your essay show?

Main body: (about 80% of the essay)

Use a chain of paragraphs to EXPLORE AND DEVELOP your ideas/argument.

You will probably have 4 or 5 main topics.

Each topic will need 3 or 4 paragraphs in which you will introduce the topic, and present examples and evidence to show why it is important and how it links to the essay title.

In each paragraph the reader is asking you to explain:

- What is this paragraph about?
- What is your argument on this?
- What is your evidence? What does it mean?
- How does it link to the essay title?
- How does it link to the topic in the next paragraph?

Conclusion: (about 10% of the essay)

- Do not introduce any NEW material here.
- Summarise your ideas/argument (you might also have done this in your introduction)
- Restate what you consider to be the main points
- Make it clear why those conclusions are important or significant.
- In your last sentence: link your conclusions or recommendations back to the title.

Some students find it helpful to write a rough conclusion first, before they write the essay, so they know where they're going. They rewrite it, if necessary, when they've finished reviewing and editing the essay.

Reference List

Use the **Harvard Referencing System** to list all the books, articles, materials you have referred to in your essay:

- AUTHOR (date) Title. Town: Publisher.
- In alphabetical order by author's surname

Report Writing

(Report – an account of a matter after consideration/investigation)

This is a suggested format. Check your instructions or ask your tutor if there is a specific structure required for this report assignment.

Title

Author

Date

Summary

A brief (one paragraph) account of what the report contains including conclusion/recommendations.

- Do your summary last.

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Type your chapter heading	2
2.1 Section heading	3
2.1.1 Subheading	5
2.1.2 Subheading	7
2.2 Section heading	12
3. Type your chapter heading etc	

- List the contents in the order they appear.
- Number the section headings/sub headings, pages.
- Each section should have an appropriate title.
- List appendices
- List illustrations/figures (separately if there are a lot)
- Start with the introduction as number 1.
- Write the contents page at the end.

Continued...

Report Writing

Introduction

A brief (one paragraph) explanation of:

- Terms of reference
- Aims and objectives
- Methods used in the investigation
- Necessary background information
- Definitions of abbreviations
- Acknowledgements

(You will probably find it easiest to do this page at the end.)

Main Body

- Logical sections with clear headings.
- Section numbers next to headings.
- Figures/diagrams/charts.
- Essentials only – background information can go in the appendices.
- Written in a clear, brief and direct style.
- Written in the passive voice (not I, we, you) “The survey was carried out” not “I carried out the survey.”

Conclusion

- Draws together your findings.
- Tells the reader which findings you consider to be most important.
- Explains what you believe to be the significance of your findings.
- Shows whether your hypothesis (if you had one) was correct.
- You may wish to suggest areas for further research.

Recommendations

A numbered or bulleted list of things you believe should happen. These must logically relate to the findings in your report.

It's not always necessary to include recommendations.

Bibliography

Harvard system unless told otherwise: (AUTHOR LAST NAME, first name (DATE), **Full Title**, where published, name of publisher

All sources cited including Internet.

References should be traceable – somebody reading your report may want to follow up one of your references; they must be able to find it from what you've written.

Appendices

(Documents which add to the reader's understanding of the report.)

Numbered and listed in the contents

Referred to in the appropriate section of the report.

No need to wordprocess appendices.