

The Community of Aidan and Hilda

Celtic Christian eStudies

Guidelines for People New to Study

How to Read

Skim a book in order to find out whether it is relevant to your study aim, whether you should consult certain sections (e.g. a chapter or a theme word included in the index) , read it in full, or pick out its key ideas.

To pick out key ideas, look for summaries near the start or end of chapters, or at section headings, and note the main points down in a notebook.

Essays and assignments

The purpose of these is to get you to

- a) think
- b) build up a memory and put this in a logical order
- c) apply general information to particular circumstances
- d) express yourself clearly.

They also enable a tutor to assess your progress. Tutors look for:

- a) understanding of the content of the unit
- b) an ability to address the question set
- c) awareness of a variety of points of view
- d) an ability to relate one piece of material to another
- e) an ability to draw lessons from the material.

In order to write a successful essay you need to establish what you are being asked to write *about*. A common mistake is to gloss over key points in the question. If you don't answer the question the tutor has to assume that you can't.

Once you are clear about this, you need to know what you are expected to *do* with it. Underline the key verbs in the question. You need to give clear evidence that you have a clear idea of the recommended texts and the ways they can be brought to bear on the question. Using the course material and the set material does not mean you have to agree with them all, but you do need to show not only what you disagree with but why.

Do not make bold assertions without evidence.

Give references in a footnote when you quote or refer to a point made by an author. Number the footnotes in order. Give details in this order: Author surname, author initials or first name; title of book or article in italics; name of publisher and date of publication and page number in brackets.

Key Verbs

These are based on a glossary in Roger Lewis' *How to Write Essays* published by the National Extension College.

Compare - look for similarities and differences between; perhaps reach a conclusion about which is preferable.

Contrast - bring out the differences between.

Define - make clear the meaning of a word, phrase or idea.

Describe - give a detailed account of.

Discuss - investigate, set about the arguments, weigh the conclusions, examine the implications.

Organise your material

An essay should have a beginning, a middle and end. The beginning should state its aim and method. The middle should set out the information or arguments in logical order. The end should summarise your main points and state your conclusion.

To begin with, you may gather your material like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Print this out and number the paragraphs in logical order. In order to keep within 10% of the number of words required, delete padding and repetitions or add further material.

Check for spelling, grammar and clarity. You may know what you mean, but would someone else know who did not know what is in your head, but not expressed on the paper? Read out your draft essay on someone who does not know this subject and ask them to tell you every word or sentence they do not understand.

Ask these questions as you read through your draft:

- Are the paragraphs in a logical order?
- Are there any unsupported ideas or statements?
- Is there any waffle?
- Are there unacknowledged references.

Make a plan

By ... (date) - do the reading and the research

By ... write the plan.

By ... first draft and review

By ... write and email it.

Presentation

Leave a wide margin or double spacing for your tutor's comments.

Number the pages.

At the beginning put the title of the essay, your name, and the date of emailing it.

Include a bibliography (if any) at the end of the essay.

Keep a copy.

If you get stuck

Talk about this with your personal mentor, or if necessary email your tutor. There are many different angles and styles from which to approach a subject. If water hit a dam, it will find a way round sooner or later.

RJS 05.05 This draws from The Distance Learner: A Travel Guide for Christians Studying Theology by Sharon Roberts and David Muir St John's Nottingham www.stjohns-nottm.ac.uk