



Answering the question and planning: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/uAXU1wWEX0>

Transcript

Introduction: Welcome to this tutorial on answering the question and planning brought to you by Reading University's Study Advice team. It is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time.

One of the most common complaints from lecturers is that, despite writing lots of information, students often fail to answer the set question clearly, accurately and completely. Much of this can be attributed to not understanding the question fully and poor planning, leading the question to be structured in an ineffective way.

This tutorial emphasises the benefits in not rushing straight in to answering a question but instead thinking more about the question before you begin. It involves breaking the question down and considering your ideas before planning an answer and creating a coherent well-structured essay.

Let's look at an example as to how this might work. Meet our student Alice. She has been set the following assignment and has no idea where to start.

Where do I start: An important first step is to define the topic – what is this question actually asking us about?

Set question in context: Consider the wider context in which this fits. In this case the buyer decision making process is part of consumer behaviour and establishing this helps to understand why a particular subject is important or interesting. It helps you to set the scene and engage the reader, and shows an understanding of wider issues.

Break the question down: Once you have understood the topic and the wider context in which it fits, you can look at breaking down the question to determine exactly what particular elements of the topic you are being asked to look into – as in this example.

Also pay particular attention to the instructions words. In this case Alice has been asked to analyse. You might be asked to criticise, discuss or illustrate, for example.

Generate ideas: Once you have firm grasp of what you have been asked to do, you need to think about what areas you might explore within your topic. When you generate ideas, in this way, its good practice that you write down some questions that you are looking to answer.

Generating ideas and giving your topic some thought is an important stage and you should do this before rushing into research. This will help to guide your research, will help you to focus and will save you time in the long run. It also ensures that your essay is being led from your points. Make sure you start from what you already know.

Making a plan is the next key step. You can make a plan in any way that suits you, perhaps a list of bullet points, mind map or a spider diagram like this. It doesn't really matter as long as you go through a process of putting your ideas into some structure. Try to separate your individual points and then consider for each point you may need some examples, evidence and comment. Remember also to add in an introduction and conclusion to your plan; as when you find information appropriate to these sections, you can add them in.

Add to your plan: You can evolve your plan as you commence your research, add in evidence and references and also you can highlight ideas on you plan which may need further thought or evidence.

There is often a temptation to miss out this important planning stage, especially when deadlines are looming and you're keen to get on with researching. Having a plan does serve a number of benefits. Firstly, it encourages you to think about the question carefully before you begin more detailed research.

It ensures your points are in a logical structure – which will help you when you begin writing.

Having the question central to your plan also ensures you maintain focus on the question and are less likely to write an answer to a slightly different question

than the one set.

And finally...making a plan should save you time in the long run.

Top tips: Our top tips, therefore, on answering the question and planning are; Make sure you take the time to understand the question, set it into context and break it down.

Next, generate your initial ideas - write down some questions and consider some ideas for research.

And finally make yourself a plan and add to this as you begin the research process.

Or in summary, in the words of Benjamin Franklin - to fail to plan is to plan to fail.