Time management

Briefly timetable the tasks required to complete your essay and meet the deadline:

- It might be useful to set small achievable deadlines for each step of the writing process.
- Remember that while you are researching, you could start writing.

If you encounter writer's block you could:

- Take a short break from the task.
- Say out loud what you are trying to write. You could record this and play it back, or speak to someone about it.
- On a spare page, give yourself three minutes to write in a relaxed way about the area you are stuck on.
- Do more reading and research.

Developing your research area

You may be generating your own title, but if you have an essay question...

Make sure you understand the question:

- Look up words you are unfamiliar with.
- Try writing the essay question out in your own words.

Identify what you are being asked to do:

- Be aware that the question may have more than one part to answer.
- Be sure you know exactly what the instructional terms mean.
- Locate your field of enquiry (decide on or identify your area of interest).
- If you are still not sure, talk to your tutor.

You could:

- Make use of the brief and/or lecture notes and handouts to identify a specific field of enquiry.
- Use brainstorming or mind-mapping to generate ideas.
- Record key words and concepts.
Note down relevant points from lecture notes/handouts or previous research.


Research

Read to widen and develop your ideas, perhaps using a planning tool, such as a mind-map to give an overview of your research.

Research might include primary and secondary material. Primary sources may include viewing artwork, visiting exhibitions, archives or interviews, questionnaires or email correspondence, for example. Secondary sources include books, articles, DVDs and films.

Keep your research focused by referring back to the essay question or to your chosen field of enquiry.

Keep updating your notes and plan which serve as an overview of your essay.

You could highlight keywords from your overview and use them to focus your research.

Planning your essay

After some initial research, it is advisable to spend some time planning your essay. You need to decide what you hope to demonstrate in your essay (it is very difficult to write if you do not have a clear purpose). Most discursive, academic writing makes claims and counter-claims in order to reach a conclusion.

Extract from your overview or notes all the points that support what you are trying to demonstrate.

Extract any points that might challenge or go against it.

Make links between points.

Try to put these points into an order that forms the basis of a coherent argument, leading to a conclusion. This could be a linear plan with headings and bullet points.

Organise your notes and try to locate evidence to support each step in your argument.

You must back up your argument with evidence or it will remain opinion.

Initiate further research to support weak or vague sections within your argument.

Be aware that you may have to adjust the focus of your argument in the light of further research.
Essay structure

Essays are built around an introduction, a main body and a conclusion. Some people prefer to write the main body and conclusion before writing the introduction. However, other people prefer to begin by writing the introduction to clarify their aims, although it is advisable to revise it for the final draft as the essay content may develop during the research and writing process.

Your introduction should immediately engage the reader and tell your reader what to expect. It might include:

- What you are going to write about or investigate.
- How you will go about this (methodologies).
- Definitions of any terms or concepts you feel need to be clarified.
- An opportunity to set your parameters (the limits and scope of your essay).

Your main body should be organised into paragraphs. These can be used to build your argument in a series of logical steps.

- Within your essay you will be hoping to discover, demonstrate or prove something.
- You should support this by use of a reasoned argument and evidence.
- A reasoned argument consists of the series of logical steps you make in order to lead to some sort of judgement or conclusion.
- Giving thought to the structuring of your paragraphs makes it easier to follow your line of argument.

Paragraphs are organised in order to build your argument via a series of logical steps:

- A typical paragraph is concerned with a single step in your argument.
- The first sentence of the paragraph is the topic sentence. It clearly sets out the step in your argument that you intend to deal with in the paragraph (the main idea).
- Subsequent sentences explain, define and expand on the topic sentence.
- Evidence is offered.
- Evidence is commented on.
- If appropriate, you could introduce further evidence to widen the discussion.
- A conclusion may be reached.
Try to make your paragraphs emerge out of the previous one and lead into the subsequent one.

Your conclusion should avoid introducing new ideas, however it should not simply repeat what you have said before, it should:

- Emphasise your main points and draw together the main threads of your argument.
- Relate to your introduction.
- Be used to form a judgement about the question you have posed.

**Academic writing**

Use formal English and avoid:

- Slang or colloquialisms.
- Clichés.
- Too informal or conversational a style.
- Abbreviations (for example, use ‘department’ rather than ‘dept.’).
- Lists and bullet points.
- Contractions (for example, use ‘cannot’ rather than ‘can’t’).

Take an objective analytical stance:

- Avoid subjective words (for example, ‘nice’, ‘wonderful’).
- Avoid addressing the reader as ‘you’.
- Avoid writing questions to the reader.
- Do not make statements unless you can back them up with evidence.
- Academic writing tends to be cautious. Use phrases like ‘the evidence suggests that…’ and ‘it could be argued that…’
- Any evidence you use must be referenced properly. UCA uses the [Harvard system](#).

To communicate your ideas effectively:

- Explain your ideas fully and carefully.
- Always define words and concepts which are ambiguous.
- Signpost the direction your argument is taking by using words such as ‘therefore’ or ‘however’.
- Do not use words or concepts that you do not understand.
- Keep your writing lucid, clear and precise.

Keep your sentences short and to the point.
Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism can be defined as the representation of all or part of other people's work as one's own.

It can be avoided by:

- Making sure you attribute all your sources correctly using the [UCA Harvard system](#).
- Keeping a full bibliography with all notes (this includes photocopies and electronic resources).

Using evidence

When writing an academic essay, the main voice should be your own and it should be clear what you are trying to demonstrate. However, since your ideas can’t have evolved or developed in a vacuum, you are expected to acknowledge sources that have influenced you. Ideally, your bibliography and research should show a wide range of sources, and you should demonstrate that you are aware of key theories and debates in your subject area.

You may reference different sources to support your argument. These could include:

- Texts (any written document).
- Illustrations (including but not restricted to images from books, the Internet, films, videos, plans/architectural drawings/maps).
- Data (including but not restricted to facts and figures, graphs and questionnaires).
- Your appendix (where you may have collected transcripts of conversations or interviews by e-mail, tape, telephone or video or other detailed information that you wish to reference).
- Exhibitions.
- Archives.

Your work, both practical and theoretical, does not exist in isolation; you are part of an academic community and you need to consider your writing in a contemporary art context. By interpreting other people's work and using it in your own way you can indicate the significance of these ideas to your own argument. By commenting on or evaluating the work of others you demonstrate your own understanding of the topic you are investigating and indicate how your contribution to the debate fits in.

You should reference the ideas of others through using quotations or by paraphrasing.
Quotations

Quotations should not constitute more than 25% of your word count. Keep selected quotations concise - they are often more effective when they are short and to the point.

“Quotation marks” should be used to show which words are not your own. The author, year of publication and page number should be referenced in your text, next to the quotation, which should link to full details of the source in your bibliography. For more information on how to format references in text see the UCA Harvard Referencing guide.

Keep their use relevant and consistent to the point you are making. Quotations should be used to underpin an idea or to support your argument and not as a substitute for it. If you include a quotation you need to make it clear to your reader why it is there. You may need to explain or elaborate its significance, or use it as a starting point for further discussion.

Take care not to change its meaning when you make use of a quotation.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you explain another person’s ideas in your own words and can be useful to summarise the main points of a long text. It is important to acknowledge the other person’s ideas by referencing them.

To paraphrase effectively you need use different language than the original author - just changing a word here and there, or altering the word order is not sufficient, and often ends up making the meaning unintelligible.

Illustrations

Only include an illustration if you are going to make use of it. This could be by:

- Analysis
- Comparison
- Deconstruction
- Interpretation
- Extrapolation

The source of illustrations should be detailed in your list of illustrations at the end of your essay using the UCA Harvard system.
Editing, revision and review

Read through and amend your essay before handing it in:

➢ Does it make sense? Try reading it out loud.
➢ Does your argument need further clarification?
➢ Does your argument flow smoothly?
➢ Are your quotations cited and referenced properly?

For more information see the Editing, Revision and Review Study Guide.

Presentation and format

Format may vary from course to course but might include any of the following:

General presentation

Essays should be word-processed, and their overall presentation and layout should be reader-friendly. It is a good idea to back your essay up, so that you have more than one copy of your essay - one to keep for yourself and one to hand in.

➢ Number your pages.
➢ Set it out on A4 paper.
➢ Use 1.5 or double-line spacing for your writing (single spacing for quotations).
➢ Use a readable font (for example, Times New Roman or Arial).
➢ A 12-point font is recommended.

The front cover might indicate...

➢ The full title.
➢ Your full name.
➢ The qualification/course code.
➢ The name of the University.
➢ Name of your unit leader.
➢ Word count.

The contents page might list with page numbers...

➢ The introduction.
➢ Main body.
➢ The conclusion.
➢ List of illustrations.
➢ Bibliography.
Appendices.

The Bibliography contains details of all your sources...

It should appear on a separate page (or pages), be formatted according to the UCA Harvard system and in alphabetical order. It should include:

- All written sources.
- All electronic sources.
- Film, video and photographic references.
- Exhibitions.

**Instructional terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Account for</td>
<td>Explain, clarify, give the reasons for. (Quite different from ‘give an account of...’ which is more like ‘describe in detail’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss in-depth and show how they interrelate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argue</td>
<td>Make a case, based on appropriate evidence and logically structured for and/or against some point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess</td>
<td>Consider the value or importance of something, paying attention to positive, negative and disputable aspects, and citing the judgements of any known authorities as well as your own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment on</td>
<td>State clearly and objectively your opinions on the material or subject in question. Support your views with reference to suitable evidence or explanations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Look for similarities and differences between two or more things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Single out and emphasise the differences and dissimilarities between two or more things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticise</td>
<td>Give your judgement as to the value or truth of something. Discuss all the available evidence and examine all the implications. Cite specific instances and arguments as to how the criteria apply in this case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define</td>
<td>Set down the precise meaning of something, giving sufficient detail as to allow it to be distinguished from other similar things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Give a detailed and comprehensive account of something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Investigate and examine by careful argument. Explore the implications and the advantages and disadvantages. Weigh up the arguments and draw conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Make an appraisal as to the worth of something in the light of its truth or utility. Cite evidence and argument in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Clarify, interpret, describe and account for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent (or how far)</td>
<td>Explore the case for a stated proposition or explanation, probably arguing for a less than total acceptance of the proposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use in doing so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrate</td>
<td>Make clear and explicit by the discussion of concrete examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>Clarify or explain something, perhaps indicating how it relates to some other thing or looking at it in a particular way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify</td>
<td>Argue a case expressing valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline</td>
<td>Give the main features or the general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising structure or arrangement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>Show how things are connected, and how they possibly affect, cause, or resemble each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Make a survey of, examining the subject critically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Present the main points in a brief, clear form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarise</td>
<td>Give a concise account of the main points, omitting details and examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trace</td>
<td>Describe in narrative form the progress, development or sequence of events from some particular point.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>