

# Preparing an assignment

This guide provides an overview of how to complete an assignment (e.g. an essay or even a dissertation). Although it is focused mainly on written work, its principles might also be applied to group work or a presentation. Ideally, you will use this guide prior to starting work on your assignment. However, if you have already started, consider at what stage in the process you are at, and how you might structure your workload in order to complete the remaining stages of the process.

## Process

Completing any piece of work – written or otherwise; essay, dissertation or presentation – successfully and on time is about *process*. What does this mean? A *process* is a ‘series of actions’ ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)). In the context of preparing an assignment, it means breaking the task down into stages. Consider the stages in the following diagram:



This is a fairly basic arrangement – you might like to add stages to this process or break down one or more of the stages further into smaller elements. The advantage of using a process like this one is that it provides a structure on which you can build your approach towards completing your work. Let’s consider each stage in more detail.

### Plan

Planning involves thinking carefully about the question, conducting research, and then organising your thoughts. Whilst reading and making notes are important at this stage, allocating time to think about the subject is essential if you are going to formulate a convincing and effective argument.

Identifying such an argument early on will help you immeasurably as you complete your work.

### Draft

Drafting a piece of work essentially means writing it; but ‘drafting’ has been chosen to describe this stage because it is highly likely (and often recommended) that you will re-write or amend your text as you work. When you create a piece of work, it is a living document; in other words, it will change as you spend more time on it. Thus, *draft* your work rather than *write* it because you will make changes as your thoughts develop.

### Edit

Editing is an important part of creating a good piece of work. As noted above, it is likely that you will have already made some edits or changes as you complete the first or early drafts of your work. But set aside some more time once you have a good working draft of your work to make more substantial changes. Editing allows you to fine-tune your work; look out for inconsistencies or less clearly expressed points.

### Proofread

Proofreading is the most neglected and perhaps most underappreciated stage of completing a piece of work. Whether you are writing an essay or creating slides for a presentation, you may make one or two avoidable errors, such as a typo or an unintended change in font size. It is at this stage that you can correct these errors. Where editing is about fine-tuning your work, proofreading is about polishing it – giving it a veneer of quality. Set aside enough time to read through or view your work thoroughly before submitting it.

### Submit

Don’t forget to celebrate your success after submitting your work. Hard work should be recognised and rewarded.

For more information on assignment preparation, visit:

<http://study.cardiffmet.ac.uk/AcSkills/Pages/default.aspx>.