

## WRITING LAW ASSIGNMENTS 2

Writing an effective assignment can be seen as a process which follows a series of stages: **planning**, **research** and **writing**. Each of these stages is an essential part of writing an assignment.

### PLANNING

To prepare for the task of writing an assignment it is vital that you understand **why** you are writing, and **what** you need to write about.

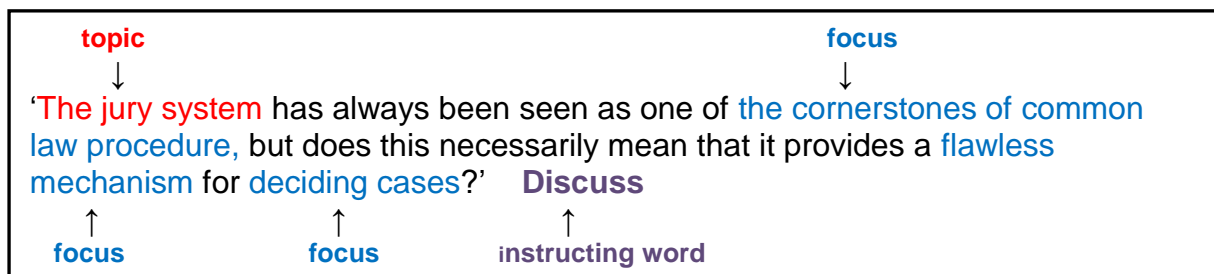
- **Analyse the assignment question**

Whether it is an essay question, seminar question or an exam question, as you study the question, you should break it down into the following parts:

1. **the topic**
2. **the focus of the topic**
3. **the instructing word(s)**

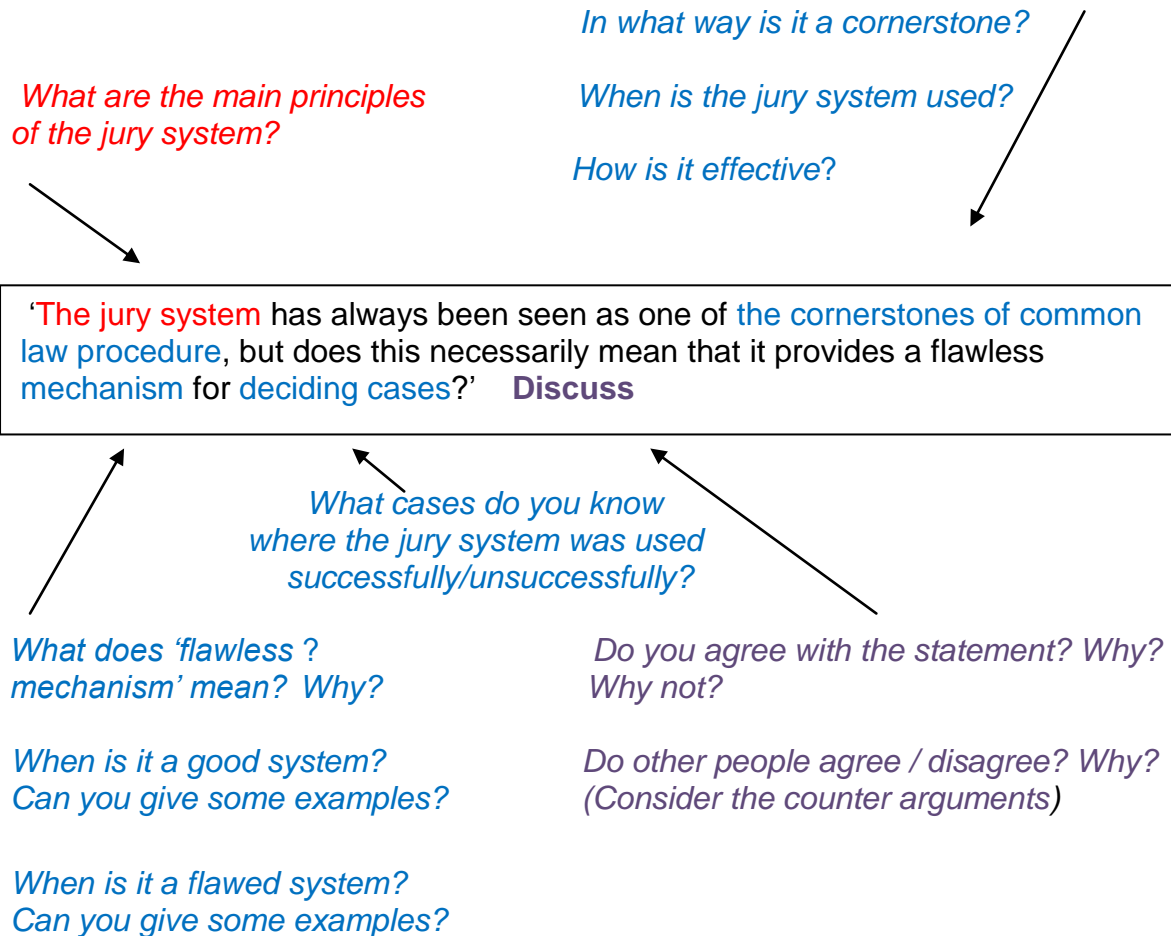
If you do not analyse the question carefully enough paying attention to each of the above aspects, you may find that you have not answered the question fully or done what you were asked to do.

#### Example:



- **Find a focus**

Sometimes it is difficult to keep the meaning of an essay fixed in your mind. One way of making sure that all your ideas and arguments are relevant is to **rephrase the title**. You can do this **by making questions about the key words** in the essay title.. These can often provide the beginnings of an essay plan too.



- **Brainstorm**

After you have analysed your essay title, you need to explore your ideas and the direction of your writing by brainstorming. This is done by:

**Listing:** write all the words and ideas that come to mind in a random order.

or

**Mapping:** build up clusters of ideas in a diagrammatic form.

## Brainstorming helps you to:

- start your essay with your own ideas
  - have a clear idea of what you want to find out in your reading
  - be better able to evaluate information from your sources
  - avoid using irrelevant material
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- **Initial outline**

After you have analysed the question and brainstormed ideas for your essay, you need to group and organise them. This will give you a preliminary structure which you can write out as **an outline**, to show the main ideas, and the supporting details. In this way, you are ready to do research on areas of your essay.

## RESEARCH

The purpose of doing research is to find, evaluate and select essential relevant information. As you do your research, you need to take notes. It is important to make your own notes – **and not just highlight areas on photocopies**. If you read actively, and make notes using your own words, and organising these notes as answers to your initial questions, your piece of writing can begin to take shape. Also, as you take notes, you should begin to think whether you agree or disagree with the ideas. Your notes need to be clear so that they can be used to summarise, or paraphrase ideas and information in your own writing. Always make sure that you mark direct quotations clearly and record the source of the quotation.

- **Use your time efficiently**

If you have analysed the question and brainstormed the topic effectively, you will have identified specific questions that you will want your essay to answer. Make these questions the focus for your research and note-taking by writing them out on separate pages. When you start taking notes, organise your notes according to each question/issue and you will be able to see more easily how much information you have.

In addition, when you want to plan the structure of your essay, you will be able to organise your information more efficiently using these questions. Keep a record of all sources used, and also any comments, thoughts or ideas which occur to you.

- **Using supporting material**

The best starting point for background information on an essay is a relevant chapter in a **good text book**. It can give you an accessible summary of the law and the central debates surrounding the law. It is useful to read other text books too on the same subject, which may present the information in a different way.

However, it is important to remember that your use of text books should be limited, and they should not normally be used as supporting material for an argument, and never as a reference point for a statement of law. In your essay you are expected to support your arguments by reference to a variety of sources, such as **statutes, case law, journal articles, your seminar and lecture notes**.

If you use the Internet, use it appropriately. It is useful for finding a range of official publications, and accessing journals through Westlaw and LexisNexis but other material may not be reliable or accurate.

## **WRITING / REVISING 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts**

- The best way to start writing is to write. Write something fairly simple such as a definition.

Another way is use these sentence starters:

- *The aim of this essay is to ...*
- *In the first paragraph, I will explain ...*
- *The first argument in this essay is that ...*

When you have finished writing your essay, you may revise these starters and make them more sophisticated.

- Allow yourself plenty of time for writing and be prepared to write several drafts. This gives you the opportunity to examine your argument and make sure it is clear and convincing. Keep the focus of the question in mind always.

Revise your 'working outline' to include all new ideas and arrange your points into a coherent, balanced, logical order.

## WRITING the FINAL DRAFT, proofreading & editing

### • Checklist for evaluating your essay

<p><b>Address the question:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Does the essay clearly answer the question?</li><li>- Does the essay maintain its focus throughout?</li><li>- Is your own position on the issue clear?</li><li>- Has non-essential descriptive writing been limited or removed?</li></ul>
<p><b>Essay structure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is the essay structure clear, logical and well-defined with an appropriate introduction, main body and conclusion?</li><li>- Is your position on the issue stated in the introduction?</li><li>- Does the conclusion draw together points made in the main body?</li><li>- Does it 'mirror' the introduction?</li></ul>
<p><b>Show understanding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Have you shown your understanding of the question and key law principles?</li></ul>
<p><b>Developing an argument:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is the argument developed logically and coherently with a clear line of reasoning?</li><li>- Are reasons well-linked and easy to follow?</li><li>- Is the argument balanced – showing understanding of both sides?</li><li>- Are the arguments and reasons supported by evidence?</li></ul>
<p><b>Critical thinking / critical evaluation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Have you made a reasoned evaluation of the ideas and arguments of other writers throughout the essay, giving your own opinion and analysis (not merely repeating ideas of others)?</li><li>- Have you presented and evaluated alternative perspectives, ideas that contradict your own viewpoint, and/or any current controversies?</li></ul>
<p><b>Source material, referencing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is there evidence of wide reading from a range of sources?</li><li>- Is the source material reliable and accurate (not all Internet sites are reliable)?</li><li>- Is there appropriate use and referencing of primary and secondary sources?</li><li>- Is the reference system within the text consistent and accurate (footnotes)?</li><li>- Is there a list of references of source material used in the essay at the end of the essay (bibliography)?</li></ul>
<p><b>Use of language and academic style:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is it a well-presented, readable and generally clear essay?</li><li>- Is there precise, accurate use of legal language?</li><li>- Have you proofread it for basic grammar, spelling and punctuation errors?</li></ul>