

ACE Quick Guide to Assignment Planning

Before you begin to write your assignment, you should plan your approach carefully – **ensuring that your argument progresses logically from introduction to conclusion** and **fulfils the requirements of the brief**.

The Benefits of Assignment Planning Include:



Improved **time management** skills.



The prevention of **underwriting** or **overwriting**.



Improved accuracy and cohesion – **detecting potential gaps in your argument**.



The avoidance of **unnecessary repetitions**.

Preparing to Plan Your Assignment

1. Break Down the Assignment Brief

To produce an outline, it is important to **understand what the brief is asking of you**. You can use the ACE Quick Guide to Understanding an Assignment Brief to break down the task description, **identifying the directive, subject matter, and limiting words**. Here, you may find it helpful to summarise the task in your own words, using bullet points or a mind map (see p. 5) to organise your preliminary ideas on the assignment topic. This is where your plan begins!



2. Conduct Preliminary Research

When you are confident you understand the task, you can begin to conduct some research. First, **establish what you know about the topic and what you will need to find out**.

You can then utilise your notes, alongside the assignment brief, to **generate a list of key terms and their synonyms**. These can be employed to search for resources using academic databases such as Google Scholar. For additional guidance, see the ACE Quick Guide to Google Scholar.





3. Evaluate Your Chosen Resources, Keeping Organised Notes

Once you have identified an appropriate scholarly resource, it is important to **read with a purpose in mind** and **ask meaningful questions** – evaluating its strengths and limitations rather than accepting the information at face value. For additional support, see the ACE Quick Guide to Evaluating Sources and Reading Critically.

As you read, **keep detailed, well-organised notes**.

4. Reflect on Your Reading

At this stage, it is helpful to reflect on the reading you have completed. Are there any **significant trends**? Have you identified **relevant disparities, contradictions, or alternatives** proposed by the wider academic community?

As you look over your notes, think about how you will **organise your preliminary research** in your assignment – fulfilling the requirements of the brief.

Assignment Planning Techniques

There are **many ways to plan an assignment** and it is important that you find an approach that works for you. Here are four example techniques:

1. Linear Planning	Linear planning involves outlining your assignment sequentially, from introduction to conclusion – dividing the main body into headings and sub-headings (see p. 3).
2. Tabular Planning	This technique uses the same principles as linear planning but organises the information in a tabular format (see p. 4).
3. Mind-Mapping	In a mind map, the information is presented visually ; your assignment topic is placed in the centre and associated ideas / topics / headings arranged around it (see p. 5).
4. Flow Diagram	A flow diagram also presents the information visually; it involves using shapes and arrows to outline the structure of your argument , from introduction to conclusion (see p. 6).

Whichever you adopt, **be prepared for change!** Your plan is a **live document** and should be **updated as you write, edit, and undertake supplementary research** for your assignment.

These techniques are explored in more detail below.



1. Linear Planning

Using your assignment brief, **divide your work into clear headings** based on the main themes / topics / ideas you want to cover. You should create your own title for each heading.

You may also **divide each heading into sub-headings** based on different aspects of the theme / topic / idea you want to explore in more detail. Create your own title for each sub-heading.

Populate each sub-heading with bullet points covering:

- What you want to discuss.
- What you already know.
- Research / theory you will incorporate.
- Relevant workplace examples.
- Areas for further research and development.

Once your plan is more developed, **think about how you will organise your work in paragraphs**. Each paragraph should have a clear focus / function in developing your overall argument.

You can use the acronym **TEEL (Topic, Expand, Evidence, Explanation, Link)** to structure your paragraphs.

For additional information, see the ACE Quick Guide to Critical Writing: Building an Argument.

Assignment Title: _____

Word count: _____

Introduction

- *Briefly outline what you will include in the introduction*
- *For further guidance, see ACE's Quick Guide to Introductions and Conclusions*

Heading 1 (Word Count: ___ / Complete by: ____)

Sub-heading 1

-
-
-

Sub-heading 2

-
-
-

Heading 2 (Word Count: ___ / Complete by: ____)

Sub-heading 1

-
-
-

Sub-heading 2

-
-
-

Conclusion

- *You may find it helpful to make a note of your key points / the arguments you will include in your conclusion.*

Allocate a **word count** and **provisional completion date** for each section.



2. Tabular Planning

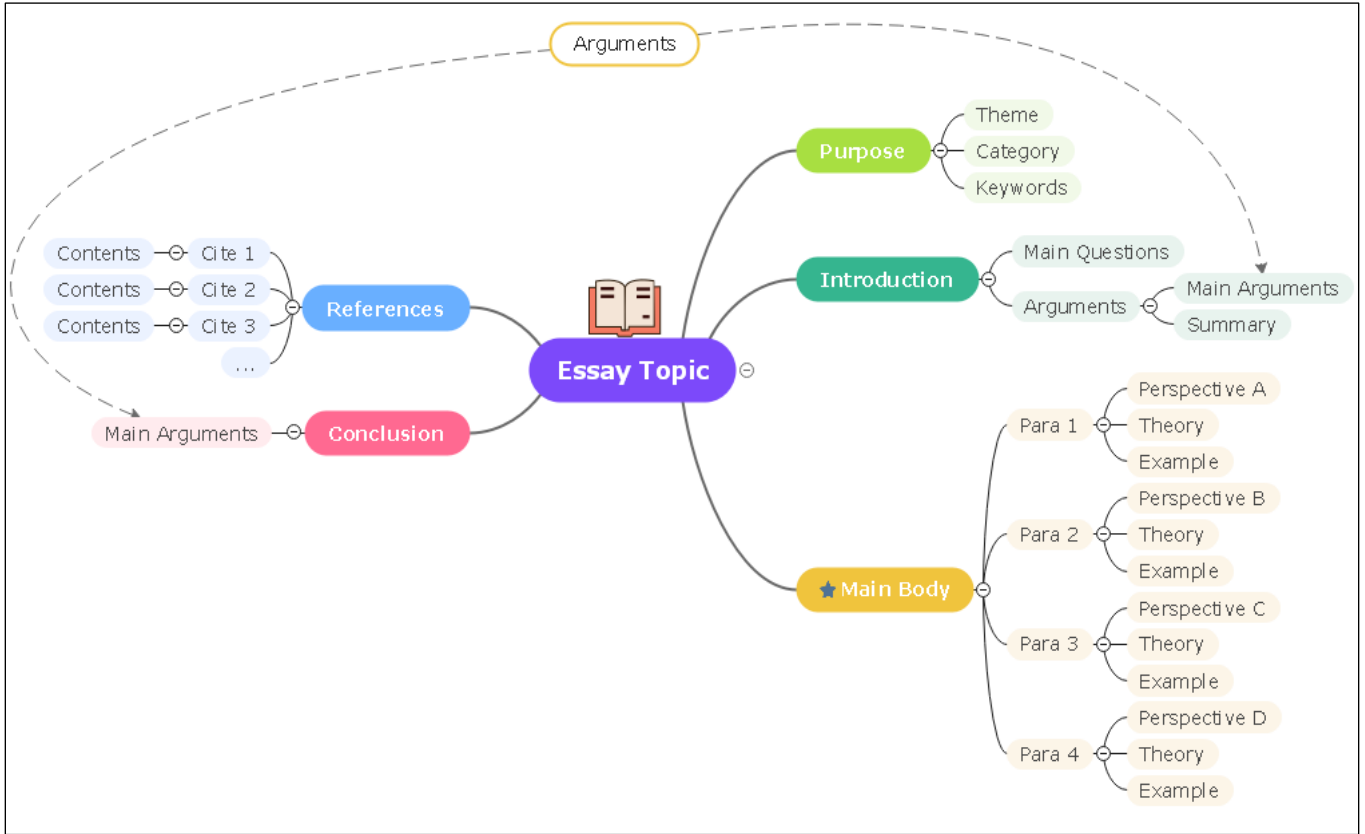
Introduction			
Heading 1	Sub-heading 1	Sub-heading 2	Evidence & Sources
Word count: _____ Complete by: _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	
Heading 2	Sub-heading 1	Sub-heading 2	Evidence & Sources
Word count: _____ Complete by: _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	
Heading 3	Sub-heading 1	Sub-heading 2	Evidence & Sources
Word count: _____ Complete by: _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••	
Conclusion			

You can incorporate additional columns into a tabular plan for different purposes, depending on what the brief requires, e.g. **Workplace Examples**, or **Counterarguments**.



3. Mind-Mapping

You can draw your mind-maps **by hand** or use **online mind-mapping software applications** such as Edrawmind.



(Edraw Content Team, 2024)

Mind-maps enable you to organise your plan on a **single, easily accessible page**. As such, it may be easier to see **connections between different aspects of your work**. You can also add **images**.

Mind-maps are effective tools for people who consider themselves **visual thinkers** and dislike linear planning techniques.

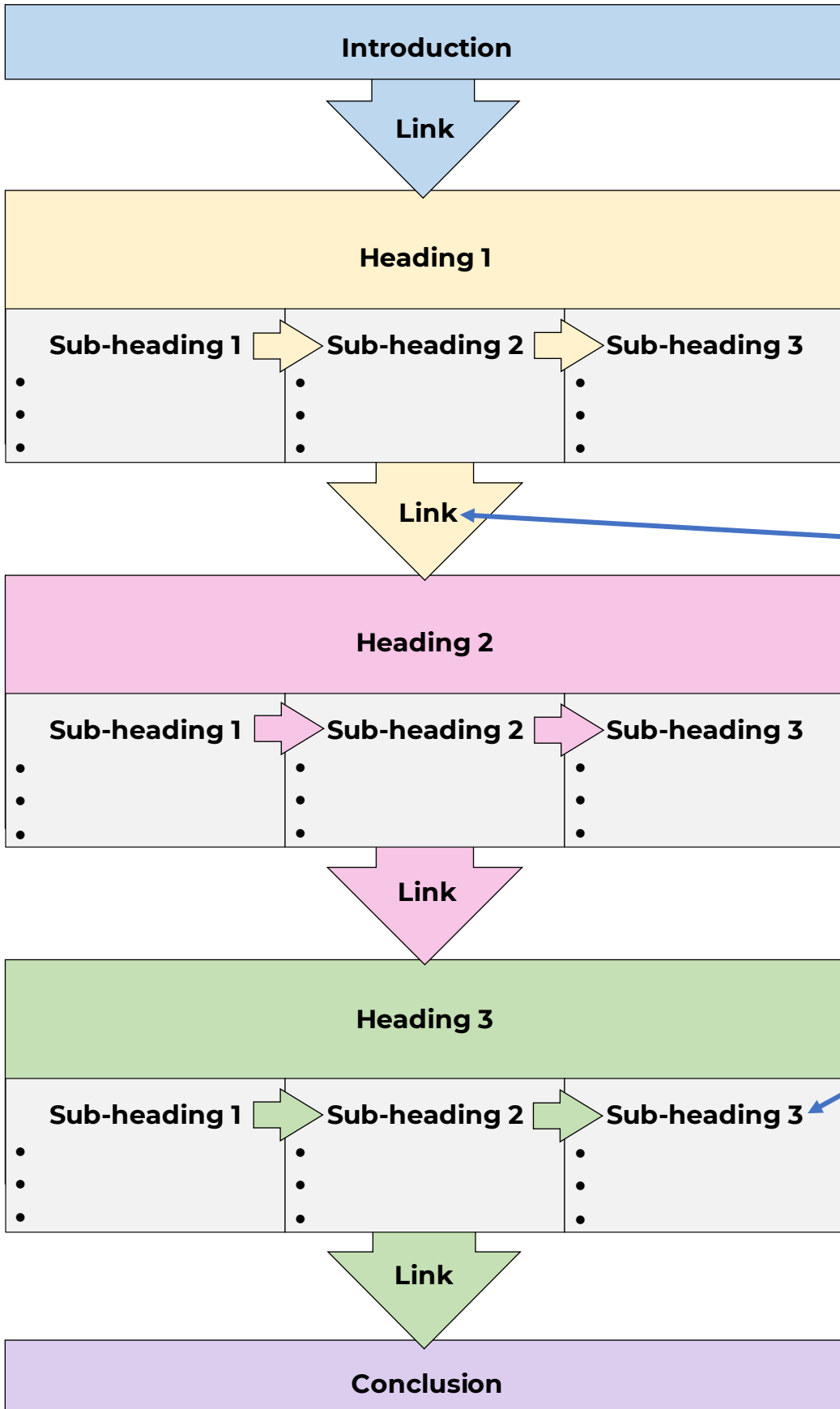
Mind-Mapping Software

There are several different options available for mind-mapping software applications. Whilst some applications are free, others require a paid subscription. Here are some examples:

X- Mind	Xmind
EdrawMind	EdrawMind
Canva	Canva



4. Flow Diagram



You can produce flow diagrams on Microsoft Word or use **sticky notes** on a sheet of A4 paper – **reordering them as the structure of your argument changes.**

On each arrow, clearly and succinctly **explain how each heading or sub-heading links to the next.**

This will help you to identify potential gaps in your argument.

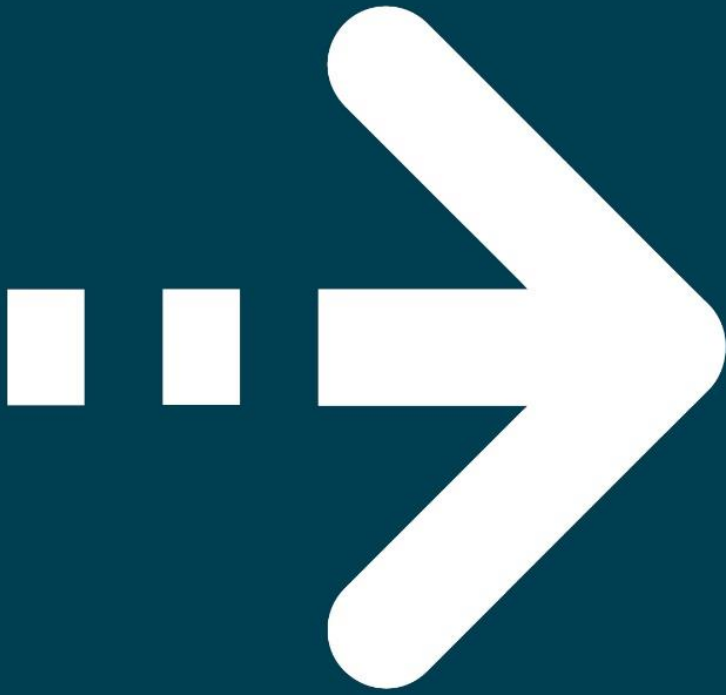
Each sub-heading in the main body of your assignment may be comprised of **multiple, related paragraphs.**

The ACE Quick Guide to Critical Writing: Building an Argument includes further guidance on when to begin a new paragraph.



Reference List

Edraw Content Team (2024) *Mind map for essay: complete guide with useful tips*. Available at: <https://www.edrawmind.com/article/essay-mind-map-examples.html> (Accessed: 29 May 2024).



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