

Introduction to Online assignments

The idea behind online assignments is often for you to test out your ideas in a safe space, respond to other people's ideas, and get their feedback on what you are thinking. These can feel like a chore to complete, especially when you have reading and other graded work to get done. Usually though, they connect to an important theme of the module which will feed into a major assignment and draws on the reading. For help with NILE, please refer to the [Learning Technology Team](#).

Preparation & Substance

Successful engagement with any of these tasks depends on knowing and understanding: this means doing the research, understanding the concepts, identifying examples and thinking through issues, theories and ideas. You will be expected to incorporate your reading, research, and/or visual materials in any and all of these tasks. The more detail, depth, and analysis you incorporate, the better.

Do you have to reference correctly? While this may not be evaluated or marked in this particular case, getting into the habit of accurate citation and referencing is essential for your academic integrity. So yes, you do need to reference correctly - and while we're at it, that means you should be summarising, paraphrasing and synthesising too. All of these are tools to make sure that you develop your understanding and learn from the tasks set by your tutors.

Style

Most of these assignments will fall into one of three categories:

- Formal academic
- Informal academic
- Reflective

The purpose of the first two is for you to show your understanding and develop your ideas. In a formal academic type of blog or discussion post, you should reach the same standard of writing and structure as you would in an essay. In fact, some tutors may encourage you to use the blogs to write an essay in small chunks.

In an informal academic task, you'll be expected to do all of the research and referencing, but you can write in a freer, less formal way. This means that you don't need to worry so much about using formal style (such as avoiding contractions and the first person), although you should still use the terminology appropriate to the subject as much as possible. These assignments require writing that is clear, concise and readable, rather than complex.

Have a look at these examples <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/> and <http://www.theguardian.com/tone/blog> to see how blogs are often written. This is what you should aim for.

In reflective writing tasks, you are expected to write personally to give an account of your learning, engagement with ideas and potentially your emotional responses. These will necessarily be written in less formal way, but you should still show your engagement with reading and core concepts.

Structure is not as important here as in extensive written assignments, but given that you are still communicating through writing, try to use structure to get your point across more effectively. One of the main purposes of online assignments is to get you practicing with writing more often, so think about your structure in the same way as you would a formal assignment.

A useful formula is the same as for an academic paragraph:

- **Point** - what do you want / need to say?
- **Evidence** - what is your support or proof for what you are saying? i.e. use your reading and preparation.
- **Explanation** - interpret your research and explain what it means.
- **Link** - link this back to the main aims of the module or the theme or topic; consider implications or applications.

Responding to others

Many of these tasks involve responding to others, and getting their responses to your input. This can mean leaving comments and feedback on their blog post, replying to their discussion board message, or responding to their statement in a live discussion in the classroom. In any of these situations, the same advice applies: be kind, respectful and tough. It's completely legitimate and in most cases encouraged to have some disagreement or debate about the issues being raised. These could be down to different interpretations of the subject matter, different perspectives or different philosophies - all of which are fine. However, don't take it personally, and don't let it get personal. If someone starts to make you feel uncomfortable, say so clearly before you get upset. You are always allowed to draw the line and say 'that makes me uncomfortable' or 'that's a bit personal.'

Journal assignments

If you are asked to maintain a journal (usually reflective in nature) on NILE, this will be confidential and only visible to you and your tutor. This type of assignment is looking for evidence of your personal growth based on your experiences of group work or research. You might want to think about your future here, and the type of skills you will need as a professional.