A collection of stationery items including ink bottles, a pen, and a utility knife. The items are arranged on a white surface. A horizontal orange bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'STARTING OUT IN ACADEMIC WRITING'.

STARTING OUT IN
ACADEMIC WRITING


You have been given a brief and now you have to begin. Where to start is often very intimidating. There are a number of prewriting tools to use for getting you through this initial stage of the writing process. A few examples of these include:

Brain storming or mind mapping
Free writing

(See Generating ideas pg. 46)

What we are going to focus on in this section is *breaking down your brief and planning your essay.*

**PREWRITING
FOR YOUR
ESSAY**



Breaking down your brief

The first step we must take is to analyse and question, “What is the brief asking me to do?”

Underline the most important words in the brief. This will usually include the instructional word or phrase as well as the main topic. Keep an eye out for instructional words like.

Compare: This usually means the lecturer will give you two topics from subjects such as art movements/ artists/ ideas and you will need to state similarities and differences.

Contrast: Contrast is very similar to “compare”. The lecturer will still give you two topics and you will have to find and explain only the differences between the two.

Argue: This means you are expected to form your own opinion on the given topic and argue (debate) that point throughout the essay using quoted and paraphrased research to back up your argument.

Review: This is mainly used when you are asked to do an exhibition review. This means you are expected to conduct research about the topic/ exhibition and form an opinion through assessing what you have read and experienced. You can write this as an argument.

PREWRITING FOR YOUR ESSAY

Planning your Essay (Essay Structure)

After interrogating your brief you should now do some prewriting exercises. This next step is to familiarize yourself with the topic by researching it very broadly. Once you have a general understanding you are ready to plan your essay. Planning your essay before you start in depth research allows you to stay focused on the topic. Only search for relevant information, not information that is interesting but irrelevant for the brief. Always keep in mind the argument you are making and check that the information is the most suitable for supporting your argument. Interesting, but irrelevant information is more of a distraction than a solution to the brief. Try to map out your essay:

- What is the purpose of the essay/ what is your research question? This is sometimes given to you in your brief as the topic.
- Now try and break down your essay, depending on the required length, into topic sentences (the main idea for each paragraph). These will be the points you want to argue throughout the essay.
- Organise your points from weakest to strongest. This becomes the order of each paragraph.

PREWRITING FOR YOUR ESSAY

PREWRITING FOR YOUR ESSAY

- You now have the overall purpose and the points (themes) for each paragraph of your essay. Ensure you always relate your writing back to the purpose.
- You are ready to do more research. Find a quote that you can paraphrase or use as a direct quote to back up each point you are arguing. You can also look for a counter argument. Explain the relevance of the quotes/paraphrase to the point you want to make and your paragraph is complete.

RESEARCH

You are expected to do research for every subject, in every module in the Fine Art course. What does this mean? This means that your lecturers expect you to spend time in the library, on the Internet and in conversation to gather relevant information on a specific topic, whether it is on an artist or artwork for a practical subject or information for an essay.

We are in a university, and there are certain expectations we need to fulfill. There is so much information out there, especially on the Internet. What we need to remember is, just because information is found on the Internet does not mean it's true. Anybody can start a blog or webpage and write about their feelings and views on any given topic; this doesn't mean that they know a lot about it. That is why you are expected to use only credible sources.

What is a credible source?

A credible source is an author or artist that has authority in their field and knows a lot about the topic. Think of it this way: you would only go to a doctor who has studied and got his/her degree, not a friend who Googled your illness. The same applies to research; we only want information from people who know what they are talking about.

Non-academic sources:

- Wikipedia
- Most blogs

Academic sources:

- All published books
- ebooks
- Journal articles (both online and printed)
- Most Webpages
- Anything from the following online databases that DUT has access to:
 - Google scholar
 - Wilson's web
 - Jstor
 - Proquest
 - Ebsco
 - Art Full Text

(For more please see the DUT library webpage or consult the subject librarian)

RESEARCH

Tips and tricks

- You can find most portals to academic sources on the DUT website, in the library section.
- The quick search tool called *Summons* is very helpful and easy to use.
- If the text is found on an established webpage like a university/gallery webpage it is credible.
- If you are using Google, type “.pdf” at the end of the topic you are searching. This will usually show books and journal articles.
- Books are books, whether online or hardcopy. If it has published information it is a credible source.
- Always check for when the text was written. A text written in 1962 may not be [as] valid anymore. Discuss this with your lecturer.

After having done the research you need to write your findings down in the form of quotes or paraphrases and these need to be referenced.

RESEARCH

What is a reference?

A reference is the details of the source/s you have used in your written assignment.

What do we reference?

We have to reference any quoted or paraphrased research we have used from books, journal articles, interviews, newspapers, magazines, websites, movies, online videos, lecture notes and images of artworks. We can use this research as evidence to support our own point of view.

Why do we reference?

There are a number of reasons we have to reference:

- 1) To acknowledge the sources of the information you have used in your assignment.
- 2) To distinguish your own point of view from that of someone else.
- 3) To show different points of views.
- 4) To prove your point by referring to documented evidence.
- 5) To add credibility to your writing.
- 6) To demonstrate your knowledge of and familiarity with the topic.
- 7) To enable readers to consult the original reading.
- 8) To ensure you are not plagiarising.

REFERENCING



Referencing as an important tool in research.

When we talk about references, we think of these little brackets in the text referring to another source (text, image...) and the referencing list at the end of our paper. But what is that good for? We probably think 'plagiarism', to indicate that we didn't steal other's ideas.

The most important function of the reference is to enable research. Each reference leads to a research paper, also called an academic text. These texts try to solve problems in the field, in our case Fine Art. When you find a text to read for your assignment, you can find more references at the end of that text, and they will enable you to find more sources for your topic.

And when you write your text, your references enable other readers to see what you found and they can read further.

At university you are still learning to become a researcher. The idea is that once you are finished here you can become a researcher in your own right. Then your texts will add to the knowledge in your field.

REFERENCING

PLAGIARISING



Plagiarising is taking someone else's ideas/ writing/artwork and passing it off as your own by not acknowledging or referencing the source. It is taken very seriously at all academic institutions, and therefore DUT may take disciplinary action if you are found guilty. This could mean failing an entire subject or eventually being deregistered. Don't waste your energy finding ways to cheat as lecturers are good at spotting when work has been plagiarised.

How do we reference?

DUT follows the Harvard referencing style. You can find this guide on the DUT website, as a pdf, or on you can buy one at the library. Every type of academic source gets referenced differently, that is why it is important to follow the guide very carefully. It is expected of you to in-text reference and provide a reference list.

In-text Referencing

In-text referencing is referencing found within the assignment. Anywhere that you have used information or ideas that are not your own, you are expected to include an in-text reference (see 'Referencing a quote' pg. 37 for more examples). This reference will allow the reader to find the full information of the source in your reference list.

Example: *Diane Victor, a renowned South African artist, explores ephemerality in her prints and drawings. Her work deals with issues of "personal and social violence to racial anxiety, corruption, gender inequality, economic exploitation and social commentary - in the new contemporary South African landscape post-apartheid" (Diane Victor 2013).*

As you can see the 1st sentence is the author's own opinion so there is no in-text reference, the second sentence is information taken from a source so it has been referenced, shown in the brackets.

*Note that the first time you introduce an artist in your writing you must use their full name and thereafter you may refer to them using only their surname.

You will then be able to find the corresponding reference in the reference list:

PLAGIARISING

PLAGIARISING

References

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. 2006. *How to Research*. England: Open University Press.

Diane Victor (online). 2013. Available: <http://www.art.co.za/dianevector/> (Accessed 12 March 2014).

Encyclopædia Britannica. Vanitas (online). 2013. Available: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/623056/vanitas> (Accessed 12 March 2014).

Things to remember in your reference list

*Note that all the references are in alphabetical order.

*All sources such as books and internet sources are placed together in the referencing list.

*The entire URL is included for internet sources, that will take the reader directly to the source (You must never shorten or change the URL as this will make the URL ineffective and therefore your source information would be false).

For more information on referencing both in-text and a reference list please see the DUT referencing guide

In this course you will use a lot of images of artworks within your writing, whether that be for your journals, reflective reports or your essays. Someone made these artworks. Like an author writes, an artist makes art, both of these creations are the intellectual property of the creator. This means that if you make an artwork and someone wants to use the image in their assignment they need to credit you as the artist, otherwise it may look like they made it. You also have to credit the source from which you found the image of the artwork, in your reference list. There are six details we need next to/ underneath the image of the artwork:

- Name of artist
- Title of artwork
- Date
- Medium
- Size
- Provenance (location)

REFERENCING ARTWORKS



Example



Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1886, oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm, MoMA New York

The reference in the reference list would look something like this:

Van Gogh, V. 1886. The Starry Night (painting). In: The Collection (online) 2014. Available: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79802 (Accessed 10 October 2014).

This section is partially adapted from:

Poor Referencing Skills (online). 2013. Available: <http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/plagiarism/citation.html> (Accessed 9 October 2014).

Why do we Reference (online). 2013. Available: http://www.cite.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=why_reference (Accessed 21 November 2013).