

## 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

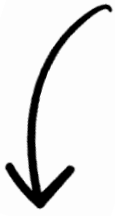
When you are confident you understand the task, you can begin to conduct some research. First, **establish what you know about the topic and what you will need to find out**.

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:

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

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.

# 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

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Sub-heading 2

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**Heading 2** (Word Count: \_\_\_ / Complete by: \_\_\_\_\_)

Sub-heading 1

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Sub-heading 2

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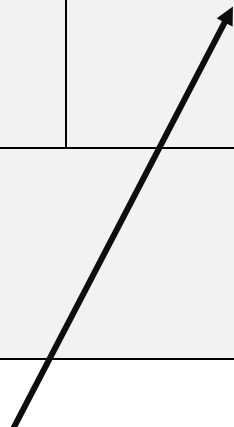
**Conclusion**

- 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

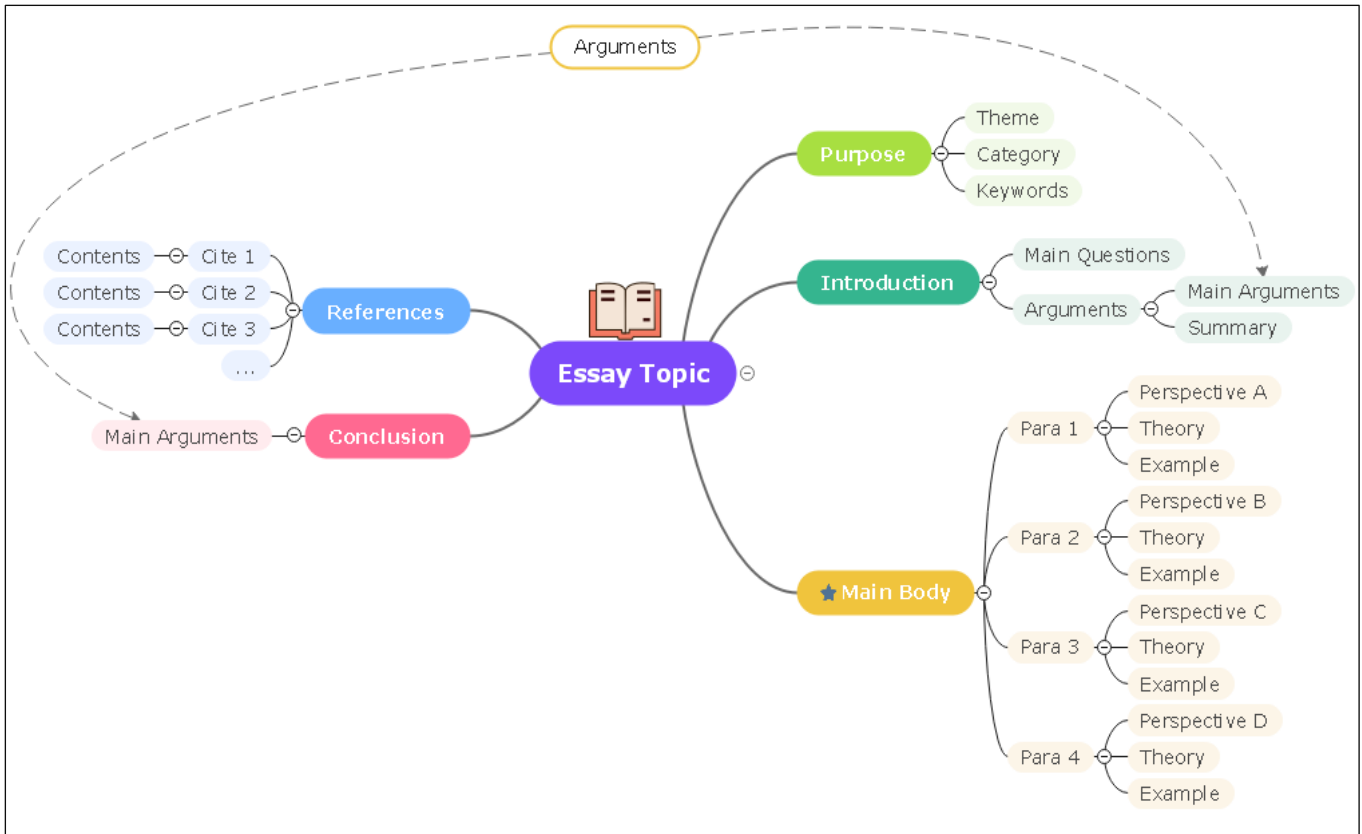
<b>Introduction</b>			
<b>Heading 1</b>	<b>Sub-heading 1</b>	<b>Sub-heading 2</b>	<b>Evidence &amp; Sources</b>
Word count: ----- Complete by: -----	• • •	• • •	
<b>Heading 2</b>	<b>Sub-heading 1</b>	<b>Sub-heading 2</b>	<b>Evidence &amp; Sources</b>
Word count: ----- Complete by: -----	• • •	• • •	
<b>Heading 3</b>	<b>Sub-heading 1</b>	<b>Sub-heading 2</b>	<b>Evidence &amp; Sources</b>
Word count: ----- Complete by: -----	• • •	• • •	
<b>Conclusion</b>			



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)

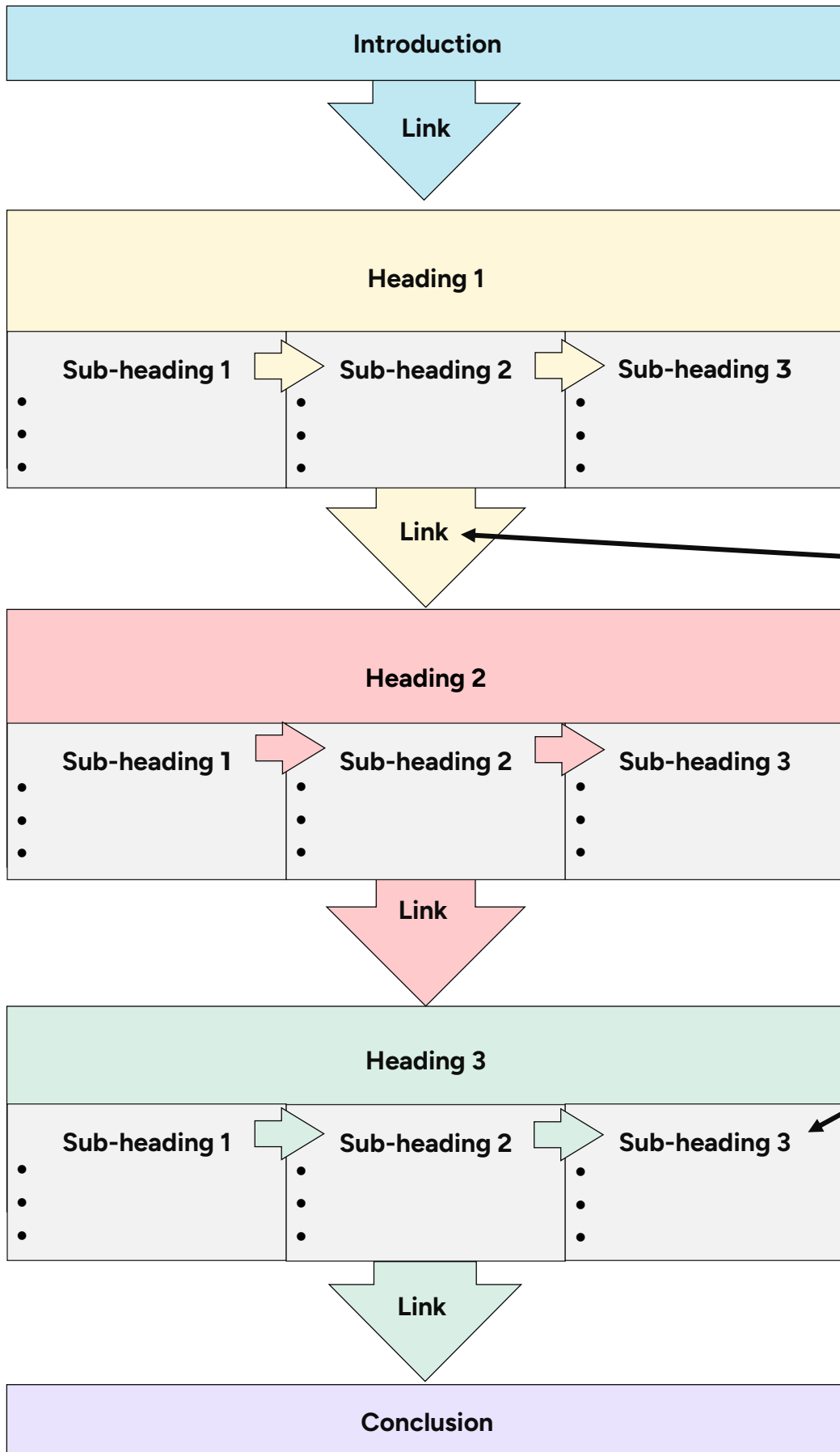
Mind-maps enable you to organise your plan on a **single, easily accessible page**. As such, it may be easier to see **connections between different aspects of your work**. You can also add **images**.

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. Examples include [Xmind](#), [EdrawMind](#) and [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: 20 December 2024).



[QA.com](https://qa.com)