

THIS ACADEMIC TIP SHEET EXPLAINS:

- why we assess student learning
- the benefits of assessment
- how to approach assessments
- the critical thinking needed for assessments

WHY DO WE ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING?

Assessment enables your lecturer or tutor to see how well you're achieving the unit outcomes. Through your assessments your lecturer/tutor can provide you with feedback that can help you improve your performance. Your work can also be given a score/grade.

HOW TO APPROACH AN ASSESSMENT

You should approach your assessments positively, starting the day you begin classes.

Preparation

- Read all the assessment tasks you're required to submit. It helps to photocopy them and scrawl notes.
- After your first lecture/tutorial look at your first assessment closely.
- Check that you understand the directions and key terms. Are any becoming clearer?
- When your lecturer/tutor explains the assessment, take lots of notes so when you read them later it'll be clear what you need to do.
- Ask questions. If you looked at the assessment earlier, you may be better prepared.
- Figure out what you know already; re-read lecture/tutorial/workshop notes and do some basic research and reading.
- Approach your lecturer/tutor to sort out any ambiguous terms or to clarify any issues in the content/format/presentation. Do this by identifying specific issues and asking well thought out questions. Don't expect others to interpret the question for you.

NOTE: Doing this by email means your lecturer has time to answer and you'll have a written record of the response.

SEMESTER PLANNING

- Put all your assessment due dates for all units onto a calendar/wall planner.
- Make a date to complete the first draft of each assessment.
- Make a date to complete final drafts of each assessment.
- Look at the 'total picture' and make adjustments so that you don't have any periods when you'll be overloaded.

NOTE: Also see our Tip Sheet for Using a Semester Planner

RESEARCHING YOUR ASSESSMENT

- Think about what skills and knowledge you already have and identify any gaps.
- What skills do you need to develop? What do you still need to find out?
- Consider the direction of your assessment. What approach are you going to take?
- Set boundaries and limits for the amount of studying/research/development.
- Consider time management techniques, especially if you have a tendency to procrastinate.
- Acknowledge that there may be 'chaos' at first as you develop skills, search for information or generally get started on your approach.

WRITING YOUR ASSESSMENT

- Ensure that you have something worthwhile to say.
- Be clear about the purpose of the writing.
- Develop a thesis or focus statement, if required.
- Write a plan for your assessment. Make sure this fits the conventions of the form of assessment you're completing, e.g. essay, report, case study.
- Consider your point of view in relation to the assessment.
- Check your sources carefully. Are they credible and reliable? Be especially critical of internet material.
- Check your lecturer's/tutor's expectations for requested writing style. Do you need to use first or third person? In most cases avoid a 'journalistic' style of writing, that is, avoid generalisations, emotive words, colloquial expressions, and sentence fragments. Make sure you write using a proper paragraph structure and check spelling.
- Write a draft and edit it. You may prepare several drafts before being satisfied that the assignment is completed. Edit your final draft carefully and check spelling, grammar and referencing.
- Be aware of your reading audience. Is your writing interesting, relevant and meaningful for your reader?
- If you need to prepare a title, make sure it matches the content of your assessment.
- Present your assessment with an assignment cover sheet if requested.

NOTE: If at any stage you're having problems, talk to your lecturer/tutor and/or your learning adviser or peer mentor. There's no shortage of help at ECU!

CRITICAL THINKING

Assessments involve critical thinking. This can occur when you are:

- planning and thinking about your task
- identifying and locating sources of information
- deciding on the relevance of the information
- applying the information to the set task
- establishing and expressing your main ideas
- preparing a well-reasoned argument appropriate to the task
- suspending your own assumptions and biases in the communication of ideas
- integrating the evidence collected with your conclusions
- organising your information so that it's clear, logically expressed and convincing
- expressing your material in an appropriate framework, e.g. report, essay
- reviewing your material to make sure you've covered all significant parts of the topic, i.e. you've addressed the question comprehensively
- addressing your readers or audience and their expectations, and writing appropriately (style and language)

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

- ✓ Have you got a plan for completing all assessments for the semester?
- ✓ Did you closely analyse the assessment task?
- ✓ Have you read the set texts and references and taken notes?
- ✓ Are you clear about your approach to the assessment?
- ✓ Did you read and research widely?
- ✓ Have you made an assessment/essay/report plan?
- ✓ Have you written a draft and edited it carefully?
- ✓ Have you addressed the assessment task?
- ✓ Did you submit the assessment on time and in the correct format?
- ✓ Have you kept a copy of your assessment?

WANT HELP WITH YOUR STUDY?

Please contact our Academic Skills Centre to find out how we can assist you.

✉ learningadviser@ecu.edu.au