

Study Skills Series



**PRINCIPLES OF ESSAY
WRITING**

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Where do I start?

Many students are naturally apprehensive about their writing skills especially if they are returning to study after a long break. However academic writing is just another skill that develops with practice. Ask any student who has graduated and they will tell you that the quality of their first assignment was very different to the work they were producing in their final year.

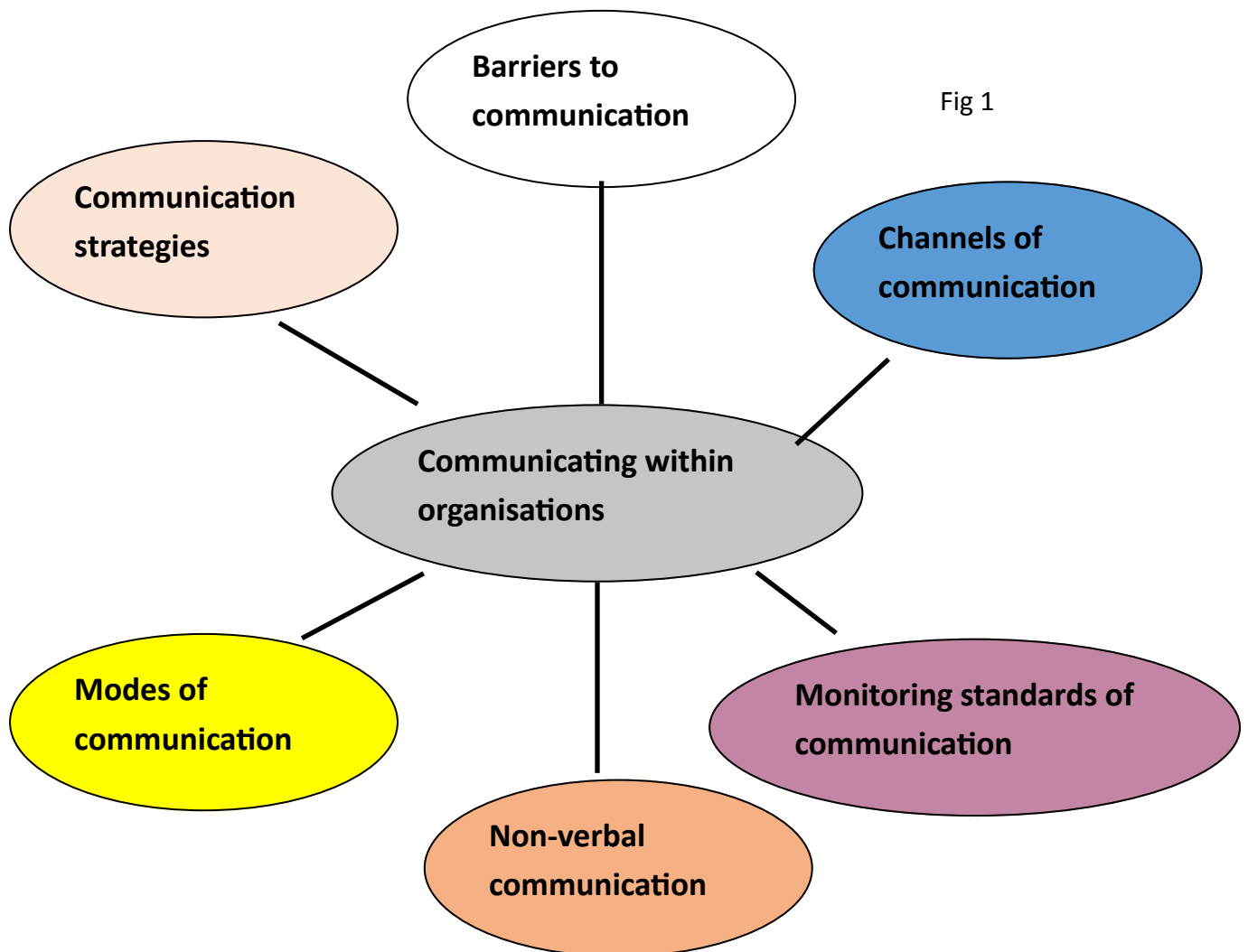
Reading academic literature, allowing time to plan assignments, submitting drafts and responding to feedback are just some of the ways which will help you develop your writing skills. In addition, there are many texts in the language section of the Institute library coded **PE** which provide guidance on writing academic assignments.

This leaflet highlights the key principles discussed in these texts, focusing primarily on essay writing. Please see separate leaflets addressing reflective writing and writing reports.

How do I start?

- First thing is to read the assignment task; what are you being asked to do? It may be helpful to underline key words.
- Undertake a preliminary search of the literature to gain an idea about the scope of the topic, textbooks are useful at this stage.
- Compile a concept map of the possible issues, ideas, and discussion points you may want to include in your assignment. Fig 1 shows a concept map for an assignment about communication within organisations
- Select one or two subtopics to focus on, it is rarely possible to address all the issues you would like to discuss; narrowing the topic down will enable you to gain sufficient depth and breadth to your analysis to achieve good marks.

- Search the literature again, narrowing your search to the subtopic(s) you will be focussing on. Compile a second concept map based on the literature you have obtained.



- You are now in a position to plan your assignment. Look at your second concept map and consider which issues should be discussed first to build a logical essay. Sometimes it may be possible to use a framework or a model to help you structure your ideas.
- Next think about your introduction, this should include a brief introduction to the topic/ sub-topic(s), a rationale for selecting this particular focus, and an overview of the key issues to be discussed. Plan out the main body, split this up into the subtopics and issues you wish to address. Indicate alongside each issue the relevant pieces of literature you have read which covers these issues.

Make sure that:

- ◆ *The issues are addressed in a logical order*
- ◆ *You have clearly analysed the issues from a number of different perspectives; this is where wide reading helps.*
- Plan your conclusion, this should sum up the key points raised in the main body and not introduce anything new.
- You are now in a position to start writing your assignment. Make sure you have allowed yourself plenty of time to plan your work, discuss your ideas with your personal teacher and to submit a draft for feedback.

Common Mistakes

- 1) Plan your time carefully, make sure you submit a draft for feedback—those who do invariably do well.
- 2) Read the feedback you are given on your draft and respond to it.
- 3) Avoid colloquial expressions, jargon and slang.
- 4) Avoid discriminatory language.
- 5) Make sure you exhaust one line of argument before starting another; avoid jumping from one topic to another and back again.
- 6) Use the spell check on your computer
- 7) Avoid writing in the first person unless advised otherwise.
- 8) Ensure that the references in your text match those in the reference list, check that you have written these in the required format.

You will be given additional guidelines in your course handbook. Please read these carefully especially those related to plagiarism and referencing.

Get writing - Good Luck