ESSAY WRITING HANDBOOK

B.Sc. in Counselling & Psychotherapy
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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to outline the academic requirements of the B.Sc. in Counselling and Psychotherapy with PCI College and Middlesex University, and to assist you in how to approach and meet these requirements. There are three academic levels to be met:

Level One: Modules PCI 1104-06
Level Two: Modules PCI 2207-10
Level Three: Remaining modules.

The first year of study is at Level One and this handbook is aimed particularly at First Year students. If you master the basic approach to assignments in first year then this will be a resource you will bring with you into Level Two, which will be further added to in second year, and then brought further still to Level Three in third and fourth year.

For most students the thoughts of doing an essay can be daunting, particularly if, as with many Adult Students, you are taking on an assignment at third level for the first time. So the aim of this handbook is to try and make this task less intimidating by providing guidelines, advice and suggestions you may find helpful.

Whichever path you have come down we hope you will find this handbook useful for planning, structuring and writing your essays. We would also suggest purchasing the book ‘Cite Them Right: The essential referencing guide’ as an invaluable aid to you in writing essays. In this particular world of Adult Education, your experience of life is also an important resource you bring with you, which can benefit your essay writing.

Note Taking and Handouts

Tutors will usually provide handouts of the material they are covering in class, however, it is also important to make your own notes on the points that seem important or significant to you at the time. Some may make copious notes and others sparse notes to remind them of various points or thoughts that occur at the time. It is worthwhile to remember that there is no right or wrong way to take notes; the important thing is to do what feels right for you. Sometimes students feel that if they concentrate on the note-taking they are paying less attention to what is being said by the tutor and other students, so it’s important to try to strike a balance. Most tutors will tell the group early on in a module what the assignment will be and this may help you to focus your note taking.

It is important to be aware that audio recording of classes is not permitted.

Reading

A reading list is included in the module narratives and in many cases the tutor will recommend particular books. Students are not expected to read all the books on the list but to focus on the ones recommended or on what you consider most appropriate for the essay you are planning.

How to read textbooks is often unclear to students tackling academic essays for the first time. Most textbooks should not be read from cover to cover like a novel, but some books which are usually small and in a story format may need to be read this way.

Textbooks can be approached in two ways; firstly, by reading the table of contents and looking for chapters
that seem relevant to your topic. On finding such a chapter read the introduction (first few paragraphs) where the author will outline what he/she is going to discuss, and if it still seems relevant then skip to the summary (last few paragraphs) where they are presenting their conclusions. If you consider that the contents of the chapter seem relevant to you, then read the whole chapter in detail and make appropriate notes.

The second approach to textbooks is to start with the index and look for words you consider are relevant to your ideas. Page numbers will be listed against the words so check these pages to decide on the relevance to you. In cases where a word is used a lot there may be sub-headings in the index with page numbers against these and this can help refine your search.

When reading, take notice of other words or phrases that are used to describe your ideas and then search further in the manner described above. This is how to learn to get deeper into a subject or idea. The other thing to look for is other authors that are quoted relating to your topic, and check the bibliography for the name of the book or publication as this gives you a further source of reference. This is how you learn to develop an expanding resource which can be further added to by articles in newspapers and magazines, or programmes on television and radio.

**Procedures for Essays**

Before looking at how to tackle an essay it is important to be aware of the procedures relating to the submission of essays so that you know starting out what the deadlines are.

**Deadlines**

*Formative assessment assignments*, essays/projects/etc. must be received in the PCI College office at Corrig House by 5.00 pm on the Assignment Deadline Date, which can be found on your timetable.

*Summative assessment assignments*, essays/projects/etc. must be received in the PCI College office at Corrig House by 5.00 pm on the Assignment Deadline Date, which can be found on your timetable.

An extension to this due date may be applied for under certain circumstances (see page 3).

**Reading Service**

Students may send the two summative essays in Year 1 and Year 2, and one in Year 3 to a Reader for feedback. Such assignments must be sent to the Reader within four weeks of the end of the relevant module. The reader will give you feedback on whether they consider you are meeting the structural and literary requirements of the essay (see sample page 23/24). It is useful to make use of this facility particularly with your early essays as this may help you to improve them and learn for future essays.

**Assignment Cover Page**

The main purpose of this sheet is to clearly indicate your name, student ID, class, year, subject title and project topic. When submitting an essay it is essential that an **Assignment Cover Page** is attached to the front of the essay (see sample page 27). This page should be fully and correctly completed, clearly identifying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Module</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>Formative or Summative</td>
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and signed by the student so that the essay can be correctly identified and processed by PCI College staff. Students are asked to be aware that modules are not necessarily taken in number order so in particular to be aware of the module number when submitting an essay.

Extensions
Students looking for an extension to the due date for any assignment must apply in writing to the Programme Leader using the application form provided at the end of this Handbook (Page 26) - or online on the P.C.I. College Student Intranet).

Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, usually medical. Incomplete forms unaccompanied by the relevant documentation, for example, a Medical Certificate will not be approved.

It is important to note that extensions may only be applied for on or before the original assignment due date and four weeks is the maximum extension that may be granted. Applications for extensions must be accompanied by a processing fee of €40.

Assignments not received by due date
All assignments handed in after the agreed due date must be accompanied by a processing fee of €40 and a “Late Assignment Release Application Form” (Page 34 - or online on the P.C.I. College Student Intranet).

If the relevant assignment has not been received within four weeks of the agreed due date, the student may be required to repeat the module in question at a later date.

Second extensions may be approved at the sole discretion of the Programme Leader whose adjudication in such matters is final.

It is your responsibility to have your assignment in on time – we do not contact students to remind them if their assignment is late.
**Directive words**

The following is a list of ‘Favourite Directive words’ you will find used in assignment titles and referred to by tutors when they talk about essays and assignments. The purpose of the list is to give you an understanding of the meaning of these words as they refer to assignments.

Analyse  
Show the essence of something, by breaking it down into its component parts and examining each part in detail.

Argue  
Present the case for and/or against a particular proposition.

Compare  
Look for similarities and differences between propositions.

Criticise  
Give your judgement about the merit of theories or opinions about the truth of facts, and back your judgement by a discussion of the evidence.

Define  
Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase. Show that the distinctions implied in the definition are necessary.

Describe  
Give a detailed account of the topic.

Discuss  
Investigate or examine by argument, give the reasons for and against.

Enumerate  
List or specify and describe.

Evaluate  
Make an appraisal of worth of the topic in light of its apparent truth or usefulness, include your personal opinion.

Examine  
Present in depth and investigate the implications.

Explain  
Make plain, interpret and account for in detail.

Illustrate  
Explain by use of concrete examples, or by the use of a figure or diagram.

Interpret  
Bring out the meaning of, and make clear usually by also giving your own judgement.

Justify  
Give adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions.

Outline/Summarise  
Give the main details of a subject, omitting the minor details.

Prove  
Demonstrate truth or falsity by presenting evidence.

Review  
Make a critical survey of the subject.

State  
Specify fully and clearly.

Trace  
Identify and describe the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.

*Adapted from Marshall and Rowland (1993)*
Writing the First Essay

When you first come across the set topic for an assignment, it is useful to record your immediate reactions to it. Think for example, of the following questions:

1. What connection do I make to this topic?
2. What are my first ideas and/or questions?
3. What do I feel curious/want to know more about?
4. What do I resist about this topic?
5. What do I want to communicate about it?

We suggest that you start to write from the very beginning, so that writing becomes part of the process of essay preparation, rather than only what comes at the end. Keeping a note of whatever is sparked off when you meet the essay topic for the first time can be valuable, especially if you later lose your way in the amount of material gathered. Whether that happens or not, keep going back to you first responses and questions. Note how your ideas are either developing and expanding, or running into a dead end. In this way you can build up the final shape of the essay as you prepare for it, even if the end result is different from your first thoughts.

Presentation

Presentation plays a very important part in your essay, so making the essay look well will make a good first impression on the reader. It may also earn you the extra few marks you need to improve your grade. Presentation includes sections, paragraphs, headings, etc, all of which are discussed below. A very important part of presentation is the style and size of font you use so set out below are guidelines regarding these aspects.

- Line spacing should be double.
- Font size should be 12 points.
- Heading fonts should be 12 point bold.
- Sub-Headings should be 12 point italics.
- Title should be 14 point bold.
- The font should be Times New Roman or a similar font.
- Typed on standard A4 paper single sided.
- 25mm margin on all sides

Table of Contents

The table of contents may not be necessary for every project or essay. It simply provides the reader with a list of the contents of the project/essay and may indicate the relevant page number. This will actually be the last task you undertake after the essay has been completed.

Starting the essay

Perhaps the hardest part of writing an essay is getting the first words on paper. You will look at the blank page or computer screen and struggle to put the first words down. In time you will find your own style or way of starting but here we will offer a couple of suggestions that have been found useful. The following is based on using a computer, as this gives most flexibility, but with adaptations will also apply to handwriting.

At this point don’t overly worry about the structure such as introduction, main body and conclusion. Write the title of the essay at the top of the page and then a list of headings that you have thought about or ideas that
have occurred to you. These headings are the skeleton of the essay which you will now build upon. Now that you are no longer looking at a blank page the next stage is to start writing in thoughts and ideas under the various headings. At this stage you don’t need to work through each heading in turn but rather put ideas where you think they best fit and don’t be concerned about the same idea being under more than one heading. Also there is no need to worry about spelling or sentence formation as this stage is all about getting the thoughts and ideas onto the page.

You will now no longer have a blank page but hopefully a number of pages full of writing, and therefore have moved from the starting phase to the working phase.

**Working phase**

Output as much as you can in the manner described above over as many writing sessions as you need. When the flow of ideas tapers off then it is time to start reviewing what you have written and start the process of pulling ideas together and moving headings, and the work relating to them, into the form of structure you want for your essay. The process of writing should have helped you pull ideas together so a form of headings and sub-headings will have emerged, with sub-headings breaking down further into paragraphs.

In this main body of the essay the first headings and sub-headings, part 1, should be presenting your main argument. Parts 2, 3, etc. will have a similar format of headings and sub-headings and will be used to develop the argument, offering alternative argument(s). Each point can be written up as a separate section containing one or more paragraphs. A paragraph illustrates (with definitions, examples etc.) one key idea that is relevant to the main point.

Once you are happy with the order and composition of the sections you can then clarify the links between them using subheadings or pointers such as:

- However........
- Following on from......
- Having discussed X, I will now consider.......

The essay should flow, moving smoothly from one paragraph and section to the next. It is often helpful if you include your plan or a table of contents at the beginning to clarify the structure for yourself and your reader.

Give evidence for argument and counter argument (if appropriate), and cite literature, with references. To achieve the above you will need to read and re-read your work moving ideas around, adding new ideas and removing elements you no longer feel are relevant.

**Closing phase**

The closing phase of writing the essay has a number of elements which include writing the introduction, the conclusion, and attaching the bibliography.

**Introduction**

The introduction is basically an outline of the essay. The idea is to catch the reader’s attention and ensure that they will read on. It should include a definition of the topic and the main points you are going to describe, discuss or argue, identifying the main themes to be covered in the main part of your essay or project.
It may seem strange to write the introduction at the end but if you start with the introduction you will most likely get bogged down as you won’t have known exactly where your ideas will take you. What is needed in the introduction is to tell the reader your interpretation of the essay topic and how you intend to address it. When you have written the main body of the essay you then know what you have done, so you are able to tell the reader what it is you will do.

Conclusion
The conclusion is important because it rounds off the essay. It is where the material considered in the main body of the essay is summarised and reflected upon. In writing the conclusion you should summarise your points (briefly) and draw them together. It should be related to the introduction and can include your personal opinion and suggestions, and indicate where further work needs to be done. Under no circumstances should new material or points be raised in the conclusion.

Key Points
It is important to start writing early on in the course, probably through the medium of a personal journal. Find out which tools suit you best (from pen and paper to word processor) but prepare to be flexible. Keep a record of thoughts, questions and themes throughout the preparation stage, which help to shape the finished essay, which should be balanced in content.

Linking
Use link words and phrases to carry the meaning forward from one paragraph to the next – words like:

- however
- on the other hand
- nevertheless
- not only.....but also
- whereas
- conversely

Signposting
Periodically remind your reader where you have got to. Use words and phrases like:

- in short
- as we have seen
- or more directly:
- to summarise
- having dealt with X we must now consider Y

Sentences
Sentences can vary a great deal in length. If you need a punchy opening or conclusion, use a short sentence. If you have a lot of items of information, a series of simple, short sentences can be effective. You will tend to need longer sentences when you are explaining and developing your argument. Sometimes you may want to change the sentence length simply to vary the texture of your writing and maintain your reader’s interest.

Paragraphs
Paragraphs are clusters of sentences. You should have one main theme per paragraph. In other words, the paragraphs mark the natural breaks in your argument, when the focus of attention shifts. Each paragraph should have its own job of work to do for your essay. Avoid excessively long paragraphs. Paragraphing is part
of the signposting which shows the way through the essay; readers will get lost if the signs are too far apart.

**Quotations**

You use quotations when you want to illustrate concepts, add flavour to your work, support your arguments or analyse a quotation in depth (such as when it is given as the topic to discuss.) Whenever you directly copy the words of another author **(quoting)** or put their ideas into your own words **(paraphrasing)** you must acknowledge that you have done so, or you are plagiarising their work.

How you acknowledge their work depends on which style you are following. There are various styles used and one of the most frequently used is the ‘Harvard Style’ which is the style used in PCI College. Be careful to present all your acknowledgements in the same style.

**Citing using the Harvard Style**

The Harvard style is a type of author-date style. Generally, when using the Harvard style a citation in your paper requires only the name of the author (or authors) and the year of publication (with no punctuation between the two items). Citations should be, whenever possible, placed at the end of a sentence (before the concluding punctuation). For example:

> ....as one writer put it “the darkest days were still ahead” (Weston 1988, p.45).

Alternatively, the author’s surname may be integrated into the text, followed immediately by the year of publication in parenthesis (brackets).

> Scholtz (1990, p.564) has argued that.....

If there is more than one reference by an author in the same year they are generally labelled in order of publication with a lower case letter.

> ... other researchers faced this problem (Stairs 1992a, p.98, James 1994, p107) while Stairs (1992b, p.3) recognised......

If the author’s name is unknown you should give the title of the article, book or Webpage.

> ... the worst election loss in the party’s history (The Age 4 May, 1968, p.2)......

At the end of your essay you make a **bibliography** of your sources.

There are two types of quotation – short and long – and these are presented in different ways.

**Short Quotations**

These comprise of no more than a few words and are included in the text. You must enclose them in quotation marks and give the name of the author, year and page number:

> ... Northedge (1993:149) describes the purpose of essays as “to consolidate what you have been studying”.

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**Long Quotations**

Long quotations are set apart from the text usually by missing a line below and above the quote. They are indented and are referenced in the same way as short quotations. For example:

Ivancevich and Matteson (1978: 8-9) define stress as:

“an adaptive response, mediated by individual differences and/or psychological processes, that is a consequence of any external (environmental) action, situation or event that places excessive psychological and/or physiological demands upon a person.”

Note: Not more than 10% of an essay word count should comprise of quotations. So for example, in a 2,000 word essay, a maximum of 200 words may be direct quotes. Use sparingly to emphasise a point.

**Presenting a Bibliography**

As well as acknowledging the information you have found in the body of your work you need to **provide a list of it at the end.** The bibliography is a list of all the books, journals, speeches etc. that you claim to have studied for the purposes of your essay or that you have directly referred to in the text. An accurate and thorough bibliography is an essential academic requirement. **The bibliography is always presented in alphabetical order.**

**A Harvard style bibliography.**

The following is the basic reference style in a bibliography:

Author Surname, Author Initials (Year of Publication) Title, Edition. Place of Publication: Publisher.

**Example**


Sometimes getting the punctuation just right in a bibliography can be a bit tricky, so for your convenience we have included the following:

**Punctuation**

Author Surname “Comma” Author Initial “Full stop” “Open brackets” Year of Publication “Close brackets” Title “Comma” Edition “Full stop” Place of publication “Full colon” Publisher “Full stop”

The following is a sample Harvard style bibliography:


How do I put a web page citation together?
Web pages can require a little skill, because it can be hard to find all the information you need. If you can find the name of an editor or author use this format. Note: some style guides do not require the brackets around the date.

Author/editor’s surname, author/editor’s first name or initial. (eds) {if appropriate} (last update or copyright date), “Title of page”, (Title of site), Available:URL (Accessed: Access date)

Example:

Note: No use of (eds) because P. Hudson is credited as the author.

If you can’t find the name of an editor or author use this format. Remember, consistency is what really counts.

“Title of page”, (last update or copyright date), (Title of site), Available:URL (Accessed: Access date).

How do I put a conference paper citation together?
If you have quoted an author who has written a conference paper the details should be put together in the following order, with identical punctuation. Note: some style guides do not require the brackets around the date.

Author’s surname, Author’s first name or initial. (Year of publication), “Title of paper”, In: Editor’s surname Editor’s first name or initial, (ed) Title of the Conference, Date of Conference, Publisher’s name, Place of publication, pp Page numbers.

Example:

How to reference journals in the bibliography.

- The author/editor’s name (surname first)
- Year of publication
- Title of Article
- Title of Journal (underlined or in italics)
- Volume
- Issue
- Pages
Checklist – when you have reached the end of the essay

1. Has the Project submission sheet been correctly and thoroughly completed?
   Module No., Title of Essay, Tutor, Student’s name, Student ID, Date, Year, Group, etc.

2. Have you met all the requirements of the Lecturer/College such as presentation, length and academic conventions? Are there page numbers?

3. Does your essay adequately address the topic/question?

4. Is the theme of the essay clearly stated in the introduction?

5. Do your main points reflect the theme?

6. Is all the material relevant to the topic?

7. Have you provided enough evidence to support your main points?

8. Are all central terms clearly defined?

9. Does the essay follow a logical structure?

10. Are your main points and paragraphs adequately linked?

11. Where you have used practical experience to illustrate a point, is it relevant and integrated into the main theme of the essay/project?

12. Does your conclusion relate to your introduction and reflect the material in the essay?

13. Is your essay/project overly long?

14. Is the bibliography complete and presented in alphabetical order?

15. Have you credited and not plagiarised the ideas contained in the essay?

16. Is the writing style your own?

17. Are lines double spaced, with justified paragraphs and clear headings?

Adapted from Marshall and Rowland (1993)

Common errors

The following is a list of the most common errors found in course work essays. The list was supplied by a senior lecturer in counselling in a university offering a range of counselling training. Most of these errors can be eliminated simply by paying more attention to your writing and to proofreading and editing your work before handing it in.
Most common errors in essay writing

- Unstructured, rambling essay.
- Not addressing the essay title/straying from the set task.
- Not striking a balance i.e. being overly personal/intellectual.
- Failure to keep track of a line of thought – disjointed sentences.
- Short, choppy paragraphs; or long rambling paragraphs; or no paragraphs.
- Vagueness and repeated phrases.
- Counselling and/or academic jargon.
- Careless misspellings and typographical errors – failing to proofread.
- Not building an argument or developing a line of reasoning.
- Imitating (badly) academic texts you don’t really understand (or outright plagiarism!).
- Relying for references on the few (out of date and not relevant) books you happen to have on your shelf.
- Being eccentric, rebellious, ‘grinding an axe’.
- Assuming that the reader is familiar with abbreviations, jargon, etc.
- Poor or sloppy presentation.
- Being ‘Pollyanna-ish’ – insufficiently critical.


It is useful, and helpful, to have your essay read by someone else who can draw attention to words, sentences or paragraphs which don’t seem clear or seem to fit in the context. We can spend so much time working on the essay that we become blind to such things whereas others can see them clearly. Another action that will help in this regard is to read the essay out loud as this also draws attention to such errors.

Evaluation, Editing and Proofreading
This is where the rough draft is checked and rewritten to produce the finished product. It is part of the task of project/essay writing to adhere to the recommended length. Therefore, you should evaluate everything you have written in the context of the project/essay title. Overly long essays are inappropriate and will be penalised accordingly. Check spelling, grammar and presentation. All essays/projects must be typed, double spaced and on one side of the page only, and presented in accordance with College requirements.
Spellcheckers
We can be drawn into a false sense of security with spellcheckers and assume that when we run it that all is well. This is not always the case. Make sure the language you are using is set to ‘English (Ireland)’. Also make sure that the correct word is used and not one sounding like it, for example: ‘human being’ and not ‘human been’ or ‘human bean’.

Word Count
Every essay has a specific number of words and it is important that this word count be adhered to within a +/-10% margin. The essay should be paginated and include the word count at the end and also on the assignment page. A normal, typed, double-spaced essay is said to yield approximately 250 words per page. Page count requirements are open to cheating by doing things like extending the line height, widening all four margins, increasing the font size or using a wider-style font, and other style elements that help spread the content over the pages. While this may satisfy the requirement, keep in mind that your tutor is expecting a certain level of content in the essay, and an incomplete essay stretched over the required amount of pages is still an incomplete essay. Conversely, an essay that rambles on will still seem to ramble even if the student creatively crams more words into a smaller space.

Learn to be economical with your words and make every word count. If your essay is thoroughly researched, it should be difficult to fall below a word count target. In fact, if your research was very good, you may have more difficulty staying below a maximum word count. You have to find a balance between fitting in the information you deem essential and not making the essay sound disjointed and choppy.

Essays which exceed the word count, including the % margin, will be marked down.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is a serious offence in academic writing which may result in an assignment being marked as Fail. It is essential in academic writing to show very clearly where you got your information from.

Plagiarism is defined as:

*Plagiarize ‘pla-je-,riz also j - ∵ vb -rized; -riz·ing vt [plagiary] : to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own : use (a created production) without crediting the source vi: to commit literary theft: present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source - pla·gia·riz·er n


In order to avoid plagiarism, you must give credit when

- You use another person’s ideas, opinions, or theories.
- You use facts, statistics, graphics, drawings, music, etc., or any other type of information that does not comprise common knowledge.
- You use quotations from another person’s spoken or written word.
- You paraphrase another person’s spoken or written word.

Recommendations
- Begin the writing process by stating your ideas; then go back to the author’s original work.
- Use quotation marks and credit the source (author) when you copy exact wording.
- Use your own words (paraphrase) instead of copying directly when possible.
- Even when you paraphrase another author’s writings, you must give credit to that author.
- If the form of citation and reference are not correct, the attribution to the original author is likely to be incomplete. Therefore, improper use of style can result in plagiarism. Get a style manual and use it.

Source: https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/definition.html

Examples

Original passage
Mary had a little lamb with fleece as white as snow. Everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go. He followed her to school one day, which was against the rules. It made the children laugh and play to see a lamb at school. [Goose, M. (1968). *Mary had a little lamb*. Imagination, FL: Glad and Big Publishing.]

Acceptable paraphrase
According to Goose (1968), Mary had a lamb that followed her wherever she went. Although pets were forbidden at school, it followed her there one day, much to the amusement of Mary’s friends (p. 5).

Acceptable paraphrase with quotations
In a scene more suited to film noir than the nursery, we learn of Mary, a girl possessed of a doppelganger in the form of a young sheep. This ubiquitous sheep, pale as a proverbial ghost with "fleece as white as snow," relentlessly pursues Mary wherever she goes. She cannot even get away from it by taking sanctuary at school, where the lamb appears one day, frolicking with Mary’s school chums. Mary suffers severe discipline from her teachers, as it was "against the rules" to have such a creature at school (Goose, 1968, p. 5).

Unacceptable paraphrase
Mary possessed a small lamb with wool as white as snow. Everywhere that Mary went the lamb went too. He even followed her to school once, even though it was against the rules. But all the children laughed and played to see the lamb at school.

Why is this unacceptable?
- synonyms inserted for author’s words
- the author’s original sentence structure and tone is still there
- the passage is not cited in any way
- distinctive phrases such as "white as snow" should be in quotation marks

Source: http://cfcc.edu/lrc/distance/Plagiarism.html

Journaling Guidelines
Journaling is an important component and resource for students participating in all modules.

- Journals may be kept daily or weekly but in relation to integrating and summarising specific learning arising from the module content, findings show that students benefit most from entries that are made as soon as possible after each input of class time.

- Create an appropriate space/time, and aim for a good balance between quiet time, writing time and reflection time.

- The number of pages written may not always reflect productive reflection or learning. Some shorter entries may provide more insight than longer prosaic entries. Moments of inspiration for integrating what you have learned in class or that can provide insight into a theoretical concept may arise at any time, in a traffic jam, having coffee with your colleagues or arguing with your family.

- There are many different styles of journaling and it is expected that one of the additional learning outcomes of keeping a journal over the course of your studies will be that of developing your own journaling style.

- Journals may be written in any or a combination of the following formats:
  - Bullet point format.
  - Prose or diary style.
  - Report or dialogue format.
  - Series of feedback statements.
  - Under a series of headings.
  - Poems/reflections/paintings/drawings/photographs.
  - Be creative; use your intuition and imagination. (Follow whatever format or combined format fits your needs and your style).

- Journals should refer to both personal and professional elements. It is for you. When writing about personal issues that have been touched on, write about how these might affect your professional development.

- Record any thoughts/reflections on techniques and theories that are used or referred to in the group.

- How are you experiencing the group and what are you contributing to it? This could include your reflections on the here and now of a particular evening as well as the more global context of the group in general. (For example, what are you experiencing about yourself in this group that is different from other groups you have been in?).

- What are you discovering about yourself through being on this course?

- Have your needs in the group changed since the beginning of the course and if so why/how?
What is your experience of feedback from others on the course and how are you using this feedback?

Critiques

When you are asked to write a critique you are being asked to analyse and evaluate, not just summarize. A summary merely reports what the text said; that is, it answers only the question, “What did the author say?”. A critique, on the other hand, analyses, interprets, and evaluates the text, answering the questions “how?”, “why?” and “how well?”. A critique does not necessarily have to criticise the piece in a negative sense. Your reaction to the text may be largely positive, negative, or a combination of the two. It is important to explain why you respond to the text in a certain way.

Analyse the text

As you read the book or article you plan to critique, the following questions will help you analyse the text:

- What is the author's main point?
- What is the author's purpose?
- Who is the author's intended audience?
- What arguments does the author use to support the main point?
- What evidence does the author present to support the arguments?
- What are the author's underlying assumptions or biases?
- You may find it useful to make notes about the text based on these questions as you read.

Evaluate the text

After you have read the text, you can begin to evaluate the author's ideas. The following questions provide some ideas to help you evaluate the text:

- Is the argument logical?
- Is the text well organised, clear, and easy to read?
- Are the author’s facts accurate?
- Have important terms been clearly defined?
- Is there sufficient evidence for the arguments?
- Do the arguments support the main point?
- Is the text appropriate for the intended audience?
- Does the text present and refute opposing points of view?
- Does the text help you understand the subject?
- Are there any words or sentences that evoke a strong response from you? What are those words or sentences? What is your reaction?
- What is the origin of your reaction to this topic? When or where did you first learn about it? Can you think of people, articles, or discussions that have influenced your views? How might these be compared or contrasted to this text?
- What questions or observations does this article suggest? That is, what does the article make you think about?

Plan and write your critique
It is generally best not to follow the author’s organisation when organising your analysis, since this approach lends itself to summary rather than analysis. Begin with an introduction that defines the subject of your critique and your point of view. Defend your point of view by raising specific issues or aspects of the argument. Conclude your critique by summarising your argument and re-emphasising your opinion.

- You will first need to identify and explain the author’s ideas. Include specific passages that support your description of the author’s point of view.
- Offer your own opinion. Explain what you think about the argument. Describe several points with which you agree or disagree.
- For each of the points you mention, include specific passages from the text (you may summarize, quote or paraphrase) that provide evidence for your point of view.
- Explain how the passages support your opinion.

**Level Two Essay Writing**

**Introduction**

You learned many essential essay skills writing level one essays. Writing at level two requires you not only to demonstrate these same skills but to bring your work to a new level. Level two essays are more extensive and therefore provide you with the opportunity to cover your topic in greater detail and depth. Many students find some of the shorter essay word counts very restrictive and often feel that they had much more to say than Level one would allow. Level two invites you to demonstrate a more impressive knowledge of the module and of the specific topic you are addressing. This affords you the opportunity to display a more critical and analytical approach to the topic. The ability to sustain higher levels of argument and analysis are important elements of essay writing at level two.

While some descriptive work will be required you must ensure there is more critical analysis at this level. That means looking at the strengths AND limitations of a theory or approach. It means incorporating an evaluation of theory, your own or others (or both). It means introducing an argument and developing it. It means showing evidence of independent thought. It means making sure you support any evaluation or argument with appropriate evidence. You will also be required in some types of essays to relate theory and practice. Of course, in essays on universal topics like Loss, your own personal experience and engagement with the topic will be essential.

**The Basics**

First of all let’s recap on important basics with level two essays in mind.

**Presentation**

Material must be well presented:

- Spellings and grammar/sentence formation are expected to be of a high standard.
- Use paragraphs, linking them with words like whereas, however, etc.
- A logical structure creates an easy flow. Sections such as introduction and conclusion and at least four or five other sections create a sense of focus and relevance.
- Use headings, they are like signposts for the reader and indicate how the essay is moving forward.
- The introduction should state the purpose of the essay and/or why you chose this topic.
- The conclusion is very important. It brings your essay to a close and often includes evidence of integration (What did you learn doing this essay?). Do not introduce any new material in conclusion
- Bibliographies at this level are expected to be longer than level one. You need to show you read definitive works, e.g. Bowlby, Jung and Adler. You will also be required to show you accessed the web as part of your research/reading.

**Content**

This must be relevant and developed:

- The theme should be clearly stated. Write about the topic. The essay topic should be brought into sharp focus from the beginning.
- Main terms should be clearly defined.
- Knowledge base must be relevant. Irrelevant information can undermine the overall impact of your essay.
- Key concepts at this level should not only be understood but inter-related and contextualised.
- Strengths, limitations and evaluations must be explored at level two.
• Ensure you have more critical analysis than description in level two essays.
• Main points and arguments must be supported by evidence and appropriate references. References must be cited as described in the level one part of this handbook. Evidence of reading is essential at this level.

**Getting Started**

It is always a good idea to read the module narrative, including the Assessment scheme, BEFORE the module starts. You will have an idea of the purpose and focus of the module. Often the aim of the essay is stated in the narrative. Some modules have suggested titles. If you have an idea of the essay requirements or you have an idea for a topic you can start planning as the module progresses. It also means you can ask the tutor relevant questions.

**Reading/Writing**

It is a good idea to choose your topic BEFORE you start reading. Know why you chose the topic. How do you interpret the title? Do you agree with the title? What do you want to say about the topic? What are your arguments about the topic? Have you anything new to say about this topic? Can you personally engage with the topic?

Once you have decided on a title/topic start reading AND writing. While it is laudable to read a lot of material, you have a limited time frame, so reading needs to be focused as described in level one. Use the index at the back of the book to help you read the sections appropriate to your topic. Do not forget to keep note of page references, this will save hours of work when doing citations.

Get writing at the same time as you’re reading, the hardest hurdle is putting those words on the blank page! If you write down the answers to questions you posed while choosing the essay title then you at least have made a start. Make a start, any start, editing will put shape on your work.

A short plan outlining what you might include in the various sections of your essay is always helpful, again it helps maintain focus and relevance.

Level two essays require argument and analysis. One of the simplest ways of ensuring that you argue and analyse is to pose questions. Opening your essay with a question or rhetorical statement is one way of introducing your stance. Once you have introduced your argument then you must develop it, sustain it and support it with evidence. Do not be too polemical in your arguments, a balanced appraisal of other ideas or theories is appropriate. You should also show that you are aware of the limits of the theory you espouse or your argument. For example, “On balance, the correct opinion seems to be...”. You will be expected to adequately justify your conclusions.

Being analytical is not as difficult as it appears. It requires that you explore the topic in some depth. It is a mixture of critiquing, discussing, examining, interpreting and evaluating. A list of definitions of the above directive words is included on page 5. Again support any point you make with evidence especially with appropriate quotes. Remember you can always refute a quote, as long as you can support your claim!

Your own opinion and your own engagement with the topic will be what makes your essay unique so don’t be afraid to be yourself in the essays.

As you write each paragraph or section ask IS THIS RELEVANT AND LOGICAL?
Introduction and Conclusion
The last sections you write will probably be the Introduction and the Conclusion. They are very important. The introduction sets the tone of the essay, it is an invitation to the reader to join you as you explore your topic of choice. A quote is often a good opening line. The conclusion is what will stay with the reader as they turn the page. It should relate to the introduction. It can include personal opinions and suggestions, but, it must not have any new material.

As you write each paragraph or section ask IS THIS RELEVANT AND LOGICAL?

Editing and Proofing
Your final draft needs to be carefully read and re-read to ensure that you have done all you intended to do. You may find moving sections around makes your essay flow more easily. Get a third party to check grammar and spelling, at this stage you are more likely to read what you think you’ve written and not actually what’s there in black and white!! And don’t forget your bibliography!!

As you read each paragraph or section ask IS THIS RELEVANT AND LOGICAL?

How you present your essay is important. Fill out the covering sheet accurately. Bind your essay sheets, do not use paper clips or staples, your presentation should reflect the effort you put into it!
Level Three Essay Writing

If it is your intention to study for the B.Sc. degree, you will be expected to present written assignments at Middlesex University Level 3. En route, you have been required to write at Levels One (Modules 1-6) and Two (Modules 6-12). At this point in the journey to degree level you can begin with confidence in your ability to offer Level 2 writing and to have done so successfully. Now, you need to add some important qualities to your work.

Level 3 essays are more extensive, they comprise over 4,500 words and therefore provide you with the opportunity to cover your topic in greater detail and depth. Many students find some of the shorter essays, say 1500 – 2000 words, very restrictive and often feel that they had much more to say than Levels 1 or 2 would allow. Level 3 invites you to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Module and of the specific topic you are addressing.

Having adjusted your mind to the task of providing longer written explorations of your study, you now need to show that your work is being done in a more advanced and engaging style. In order to upgrade your academic expression there are five special qualities that you will need to include in your presentation. These are qualities that indicate your ability to move forward from merely describing your topic and all its facets, to demonstrating your ability to offer a critical view of the subject matter.

How do you do this, you may ask. Well, let us take an example. Imagine you are asked to write about the work of Albert Ellis and his ABCDEF model. At Level 2 you could describe Ellis in the context of the Rational Emotive/Cognitive Behavioural schools of thought. You might then go on to reproduce your own description of his theory and what it means to you – and then you could show through a casework example how you might implement that theory, making some reference to its strengths and weaknesses.

At Level 3 all of the above might serve as an introduction to an analysis of the theory against a background of the provision of a counselling service to a variety of clients. You can now address Ellis’s ABCDEF:

1. as a workable structure;
2. as suited to the needs of particular clients in particular circumstances – age, ethnicity, sex etc.;
3. pose and answer questions about the suitability of some counsellors to manage the Ellis process and directive style;
4. develop a new conclusion proving your points with quotation and reference from the work of respected authors in the field;
5. draw conclusions which will reflect your personal evaluation of the Ellis model.

As you can appreciate, this is a very different exercise and needs the support of peer discussion, class lectures, reading, internet essays, VTR presentations and indeed any source that gives evidence to support or contradict your ideas.

Another quality in Level 3 work is to be able to state a position:

“All women who work at home and outside of the home as well cannot hope to offer their children the normal level of caring and nurturance that they could have received had these women not been forced to earn a wage in order to provide their children with a decent standard of living and lifestyle.”

This proposition is likely to provoke reaction from all sides. The Level 3 writer sets out some of the most significant reactions s/he has to this statement – sees what is praiseworthy and blameworthy in the various points of the statement and conducts the debate on paper representing a number of points of view. This is
now an Argument and having worked through it in your essay, you come to conclusions. Each viewpoint that you offer should be supported by references from reputable sources, as we have said above. Your summary at the end will probably not offer a solution or a conclusion but will show that you have considered all points of view and you are in a position to make a suggestion regarding changes that could be made to the original proposition.

Suppose you are exploring this statement:
“All suicide in Young Adolescents is an outcome of poor mental health and depression”.

Clearly there are many young adolescents who take their own lives while they are in the depths of depression, others who do so once they feel that are emerging from a period of depression and a large number who do so but have never shown any sign of being depressed. You find reliable book references on each of these positions and you mount your argument, showing evidence to support each of the three categories. And then you may have evidence to suggest that this kind of suicide is 4 or 5 times more common in young males than in females of comparable ages.

All of these pieces of information and points of view are then considered and you suggest that the original statement might be changed to reflect what you have discovered from your studies.

Another engaging way to demonstrate your reflection, critical and argument skills is to draw a comparison between two major figures, schools of therapy or models of practice. The Jung Vs Freud argument is a famous one for the argumentative mind. Person Centred Vs. Gestalt Counselling is another; the Howard Model of Grieving Vs. Kubler-Ross is a further example. Each of these comparisons and contrasts offer you an opportunity to argue from your point of view, having discussed, compared, contrasted and found support in your reading.

In conclusion, try to begin by giving some indication of your purpose in tackling the essay. Show that your explorations will promise some insights and offer suggestions about issues of contention in your Module themes and then set out your arguments. Keep your reader interested in what you have to say.
Case Study Structure

Introductory section

Your approach to this piece of work. Discuss your stance, and its theoretical basis, regarding confidentiality, consent, the degree of client involvement and the selection of the client.

Setting the scene for the reader. Context for counselling (agency, private practice etc.); referral process; contract agreed; length of contact so far – continuing or completed; relevant background information; any involvement with third parties.

History of the relationship. Just enough description of the development of the relationship to provide a necessary background for the main section.

Main Section

Your conceptualisation of your experience with this client. Draw on theory and give references where appropriate. Your experience of the process for the client, for yourself and for the relationship. Draw on your theoretical model regarding issues such as initial assessment, therapeutic strategy, stages in the process and outcome.

Highlight any key moments in the process and explore their meaning. Where relevant to your theoretical model, comment on your use of particular techniques/interventions and their effectiveness. Illustrate your personal style and reflect on how well it fits with your theoretical model.

Discuss anything you could have done differently. Illustrate your use of supervision if this has been important in this relationship.

Conclusion

Reflect on what you have learned from this relationship and from doing the case study. Mention any themes that have emerged for you, indicating areas for future personal/professional development.

Consider the relationship and the stage it is at now. State what progress has been made on the client’s issues. If the work has been completed, comment on you/your client’s evaluation of the outcome.
Reader to Student Feedback Form

Module No.__________

Student Name: ________________________________ Group:______ Year:_____

Middlesex Reg. No. (not P.C.I. Card No.)_______________________

1. Submission date meets deadline: □

2. Layout:
   - Typed □
   - Double spaced □
   - Bound □

3. Cover page:
   - Name □ ID No. □ Year □
   - Level □ Group □ Module Title □
   - Module No. □ Tutor □ Due date □
   - Word Count □ Signed □

4. Table of Contents □

5. Introduction
   - Theme clearly stated □

6. Outline of main themes □ Definition of topic □ Other:

7. Main Section
   - Material well presented and focused □
• Logical Structure
• Main points
• paragraphs linked – easy flow
• Composition of sections
• Use of headings
• Use of Paragraphs – one key idea relevant to main theme
• Grammar/Sentence formation
• Knowledge base relevant and integrated
• Key concepts understood and inter-related
• Main terms clearly defined
• Evidence of reading
• Evidence to support main points
• Practical experiences Vs Sweeping statements
• Strengths/Limitations/Evaluation included
• Critical analysis Vs Description
• Argument relevant and well sustained
• Own integration/ability to relate theory to practice
• Evidence of independent thought

8. References/Quotations cited and credited

9. Correct no. of words Over □ Under □

9. Conclusion: Brings essay to a close □ Relates back to introduction □
   Includes personal learning/opinion/integration □ no new material raised □

10. Bibliography: Complete with author/year/title/publisher/alphabetical order □

Signed: _______________________ Date: ____________________

P.T.O. for further comments:
Application form for extension of due date for essay/project/assignment

*This form MUST be submitted on or before the due date

Name of Student: ______________________________________________________

Student ID: __________________________________________________________________

I am requesting an extension on my Module ______ assignment (tutor: ___________________)

From ______________________ (date due) until __________________________

on the following grounds:

________________________________________________________________________

(Medical grounds must be accompanied by a medical certificate)

I enclose a processing fee of €40.

Signed: ___________________________ (Candidate) Date: __________________

________________________________________________________________________

Extension granted: ___________________________ Date: __________________

(Programme Leader)

Comments:
Late Assignment Release Application Form

Name of Student: ________________________________ Student ID: ____________

I am requesting my results from my late assignment for Module number: ________ which was originally due for submission on:_________________(date)

Name of Module Tutor: ___________________________________

Venue__________________________

I enclose a processing fee of €40.

Signed: (Student)_______________________ Date: ______________

________________________________________________________________________

Office use only:

Late Assignment Results Released: _______________________ Date: ______________

(Programme Leader)

Comments: ________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
**B.Sc. In Counselling & Psychotherapy**

**Assignment Cover Page**

**NOTE:** THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETED IN FULL AND ACCOMPANY ALL ASSIGNMENTS. PLEASE READ COURSE HANDBOOK FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AS FAILURE TO COMPLETE IN FULL WILL RESULT IN YOUR ESSAY NOT BEING PROCESSED

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Received From Student:</th>
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**Year of Study:** ____________________________  **Venue:** ____________________________  **Group:** ____________________________

**Module Title:** ____________________________  **Module No.:** ____________________________

**Tutor:** ____________________________  **Due Date:** ____________________________

**Word Count** ____________________________  **Formative Essay** ____________________________  **Summative Essay** ____________________________

_I confirm that this assignment is all my own work_

**Student signature:** ____________________________

**Date:** ____________________________
I can confirm that I have a copy of this essay for my own records

*Group relates to Day i.e. Monday Dublin West

August 2011

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<th>LEVEL ONE</th>
<th>LEVEL TWO</th>
<th>LEVEL THREE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Knowledge is impressive and reflects wide reading. Argument is always relevant and well sustained. The student demonstrates a willingness to challenge received wisdom and to sustain a dialogue in these terms. Presentation is crisp, uncluttered and highly literate.</td>
<td>Knowledge is comprehensive both as to breadth and depth. Student demonstrates an exceptional ability to contextualise, to grasp concepts and their interrelationship, and/or to relate theory to practice. Outstanding ability to apply in the right measure, the skills necessary to achieve a desired outcome. Clear evidence of independent thought. The presentation is highly literate, fluent and accurate. The material is presented in a focused way so as to help sustain the argument. Citation is impeccable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>The knowledge-base is judged sound and relevant. The student demonstrates an understanding of concepts and of their inter-relationships; but conclusions are sometimes reached on the basis of insufficient factual information. Material is well presented.</td>
<td>The knowledge-base is up-to-date and relevant, but may not be broad or deep. Work reflects a thorough grasp of concepts and of their interrelationship, and a significant ability to relate theory to practice. The presentation is very good, the material generally well focused, reflecting inter alia a high degree of literacy. Arguments may sometimes be outstanding, even brilliant and indicative of genuine independent thought, but are not always consistently at that level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Written work is relevant but in lower ranges reflects some conceptual confusion and a reliance on description as a substitute for analysis. Syntax and grammar unsound.</td>
<td>Arguments may be generally relevant but not necessarily comprehensive. The student displays an awareness of what concepts are, but the ability to conceptualise, and/or to relate theory to practice is palpably limited. Frequent use of assertion rather than argument. Grammar and spelling sound, but perhaps with occasional lapses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>Basic knowledge-base is evidently incomplete and the grasp of concepts is evidently superficial. Written material lacks focus, and is prone to sweeping unsubstantiated assertion. Evidence of reading but the student is unable to rise above description.</td>
<td>Knowledge is adequate but limited and/or superficial, with a tendency to inaccuracy. Limited awareness of concepts. Limited ability to contextualise and to relate theory to practice. Frequently, evidence (which may be accurate) is deployed superficially, with lack of focus. Almost always offers description/assertion rather than argument. Grammar may be poor, or the linkage between paragraphs may be weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>Work may be accurate, but is more often than not irrelevant. Presentation is poor no evidence of appropriate reading.</td>
<td>Some accuracy but little relevance; very few relevant assertions. Minimal awareness that concepts exist. Work frequently lacks clarity. Communication frequently inarticulate. Presentation is poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>Work is neither relevant nor accurate, or is so inarticulate as to lack relevance.</td>
<td>Work is totally lacking in relevance. There is little if any accuracy. No grasp of concepts or awareness of what concepts are. Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation is often inarticulate, and not infrequently incomprehensible. The student may be the epitome of charm, but has no understanding of what is higher about higher education.

### Bibliography

Cape Fear Community College (2010) Information for Plagiarism, Available:  

Indiana University (2005) “How to Recognise Plagiarism” Available:  


