

**University of Malta
Department of Criminology**



Assignment Guidelines

Introduction

Dear Student,

The Department of Criminology welcomes you to this academic journey. This booklet provides details of expected practices together with basic guidelines for your assignments. It is to be highlighted that these guidelines are general and thus may not cover specific requirements outlined in the respective course descriptions, assessment criteria and recommendations provided by respective lecturer/s.

Students may contact the Department of Criminology for any clarifications or help they might need throughout the whole process.

Good luck!

Section 1: Assignments

Your assignment should be:

- Typed
- Double-spaced on standard-sized A4 paper with 2.5cm margins on all sides
- You should use a clear font that is highly readable. APA 7th edition recommends using 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Observe the maximum word length (e.g. 3,000 words)
- Use a limited number of headings in the essay (no more than six or seven, including your Introduction, Conclusion and Reference List)
- Highlight headings in bold
- Do not increase the font size or underline or use italics for your headings
- Check the appropriate use of headings, sub-headings and sub-sub-headings, unless your report is a very long one (over 3,000 words such as in a long essay)
- Do not number your paragraphs – for example, 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3 etc
- Do not include long lists of points and ‘bullet points’
- Write your paper as continuous ‘connected prose’
- Each assignment should have a title page as outlined hereunder
- Assignments must be submitted via VLE as per stipulated deadline/s however lecturer/s may also request a physical copy

Title page should include:

- **Your course**
- **Unit details (Course Code & title)**
- **Name of lecturer**
- **Your name & ID number**

1.1 Writing an assignment:

Read the question well and write what is requested from you:

- Discuss – the examiner is expecting you to consider, define and build the argument
- Compare – here you need to find the points that your two topics have in common
- Contrast - you need to find what your points DO NOT have in common
- Consider and evaluate – weigh the arguments against each other and see how valid they are
- Summarise – give an outline of the main points

1.1.1 Overall Structure

- Beginning - Introduce the key ideas
- Middle –
 - o Explain the ideas
 - o Give evidence supporting your point
 - o Comment on the evidence and how it helps to prove your point
 - o Link paragraphs – Minimise the number of subtitles in the final product
 - o Ending – conclude the essay without introducing new stuff. Give a summary of the main results.

Essay title: to be included in the upper half of the first page.

Length: the optimal length of a manuscript is the number of pages needed to effectively communicate the primary ideas of the study, review and theoretical analysis remaining within the word limit! As a general rule “less is more.” **If a paper is too long, shorten it by stating points clearly and directly, confining the discussion to the specific problem under investigation, deleting or combining data displays, eliminating repetition across sections, and writing in the active voice! ALWAYS RESPECT THE WORD COUNT GIVEN.** Please refer to the University’s guidelines in view of word limit <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/services/administrativesupport/apqru/GuidelinesforEssayTypeAssignmentsandDissertations.pdf> for typed assignments. More importantly, students are advised to stick to the word limit specified in the assessment criteria outlined for each respective study unit.

Subheadings: Avoid having only one subsection heading and subsection within a section just as you would in an outline. Use at least two subsection headings within any given section, or use none. **Avoid having a sub-heading for only one paragraph!** Use verbal bridges and transition words to link ideas from one paragraph to the next. Link words enhance the flow.

These resources might turn out to be useful in writing your assignment or research projects:

<https://books.google.com.mt/books?id=g2N8hr4Qy0MC>

https://www.google.com.mt/books/edition/Twenty_Writing_Assignments_in_Context/I0euDQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=writing+an+assignment+for+university&printsec=frontcover&bshw=rime/1

https://www.google.com.mt/books/edition/Writing_Up_Your_University_Assignments_A/W-3euTAGdnwC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=writing+an+assignment+for+university&printsec=frontcover&bshw=rime/1

1.2 Research: Where do I begin?

Where should I look for information? What types of sources are available?

Before you begin your research, you should ask yourself some questions. These will help narrow your search parameters.

What kind of information are you looking for?

Do you want facts? Opinions? News reports? Research studies? Analyses? Personal reflections? History?

Where would be a likely place to look?

Which sources are likely to be most useful to you? Libraries? The Internet? Academic periodicals? Newspapers? Government records?

How much information do you need?

How many sources of information are you looking for? Do you need to view both sides of the issue?

Online vs. Print Publications

An important distinction when doing research is the difference between traditional publications and Internet resources. **The Internet may be the most convenient place to begin your research, but it is not always the best.**

Internet Sources: Anything published exclusively online in a variety of digital formats. Material includes: web pages, PDF documents, e-books, multimedia.

Traditional Publications: This includes anything that has been published in print form and is widely available at libraries and bookstores. Material includes: books, textbooks, newspapers, popular and scholarly journals, and magazines.

NB: With the advent of new technologies, many traditional resources are now available online (including newspaper articles, magazines, book chapters, and journal articles). Be careful, see whether the source you have found is an online-only source or if it does have a print component as well.

1.2.1 Types of Sources

Traditional Print Sources

- **Books and Textbooks:** Books come in a multitude of topics. Because of the time it takes to publish a book, books usually contain more dated information than will be found in journals and newspapers.
- **Newspapers:** Predominately covering the latest events and trends, newspapers contain very up to date information. Newspapers report both information that is factual in nature and also share opinions. Generally, however, they will not take a “big picture” approach or contain information about larger trends.
- **Academic and Trade Journals:** Academic and trade journals provide up to date information and re-search in industry, business, and academia. Journal articles come in several forms, including literature reviews which overview about current and past research, articles on theories and history, or articles on specific processes or research.
- **Government Reports and Legal Documents:** The government releases information intended for its own use or for public use. These types of documents could be an excellent source of information. An example of a government report is the Malta Census report. Most government reports and legal documents can now be accessed online.
- **Press Releases and Advertising:** Companies and special interest groups produce texts to help persuade readers to act in some way or inform the public about some new development
- **Flyers, Pamphlets, Leaflets:** While some flyers or pamphlets are created by reputable sources, because of the ease in which they are created, many less-than-reputable sources also produce these. They are useful for quick reference or for very general information.
- **Multimedia:** Printed material is certainly not the only option for finding literature. Also consider media sources such as radio and television broadcasts, interactive talks, and public meetings.
- **Newspapers:** Predominately covering the latest events and trends, newspapers contain up to date information. Newspapers report both information that is factual but also share opinions and consequently are not bias free. This being said, crime particularly violent crime generates a lot of emotions and thus it is easily sensationalised in a way that could pave way to moral panic.

Internet-Only Sources

- **Websites:** Most of the information on the Internet is distributed via websites. Websites vary widely in quality of information and validity of sources.
- **Weblogs / Blogs:** A rather recent development in web technology, weblogs or blogs are a type of interactive journal where writers post and readers respond. They vary widely

in quality of information and validity of sources. For example, many prestigious journalists and public figures may have blogs, which may be more credible of a blog than most.

- Message boards, discussion lists, and chat rooms: Discussion lists, chat rooms, and message boards exist for all kinds of disciplines both in and outside of the university. However, plenty of boards exist that are rather unhelpful and poorly researched.
- Multimedia: The Internet has a multitude of multimedia resources including online broadcasts and news, images, audio files, and interactive websites.

1.3 FAQs in writing

Which tense should I use past or present?

- Past tense – when describing procedures, you have carried out and observed
 - o *The temperature was recorded at 10-minute intervals*
- Present tense – when writing about general principles or your own conclusions
 - o *Increases in temperature generally occur when this reagent is added*

Sentences: Vary length of your sentences. If more than 20-25 words split in smaller sentences.

Abbreviations / Acronyms: Use standard abbreviations when you can. Define other abbreviations the first time you use them. It is recommended that a Glossary is created where a long essay is being drafted.

Paragraphs: A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Present this in an organised fashion or you will lose your readers. Keep one idea to one paragraph **with several bits of supporting evidence**. The entire paragraph should concern itself with **a single focus**. If it begins with one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas. **AVOID ONE SENTENCE PARAGRAPHS**. A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Regardless of whether you include an explicit topic sentence or not, you should be able to easily summarise what the paragraph is about.

Section 2: Referencing & Avoiding Plagiarism

Academic scholarship is premised on the meticulous use of other people's work and there is an **absolute imperative to show where material came from and how your reader can gain access to it**. Think of this as offering your reader a complete 'map reference' or GPS position – so they can go to the initial source and check things out for themselves.

When you have quoted someone else's work directly or paraphrased it, you will **have indicated the source in the text – the surname, followed by the year of publication and the page number(s)**. This information on its own, however, is not sufficient for your reader to go to a library and look up the original source. You need to provide more information at the very end of your assignment in a section called References, presented alphabetically, where full details of the works cited are presented.

The emergence of AI tools like ChatGPT in essay writing, as elucidated on Turnitin (<https://www.turnitin.com/blog/chatgpt-essay-writing-how-to-talk-to-students-about-ai-and-integrity>), brings forth a crucial discussion on academic integrity. Misusing these tools by allowing AI to compose your essays obscures your true understanding and engagement with the coursework. For instance, relying on AI to write an essay on Shakespeare's plays deprives you of the rich analysis and personal insights you could have developed through individual effort. Moreover, over-reliance on AI curtails the growth of your critical and creative thinking skills, pivotal for your academic journey. For example, if AI is used to resolve a complex mathematical problem, the opportunity to wrestle with the problem, develop problem-solving strategies, and learn from any mistakes is lost.

Additionally, be aware that tools are available to discern whether a text is AI-generated, human-generated, or a mixture of both, which further underscores the importance of maintaining honesty in your academic submissions. It's imperative to acknowledge the ethical boundaries when employing AI writing aids, thereby ensuring you uphold the tenets of originality and intellectual honesty in your academic pursuits, preparing you for a fruitful and authentic learning experience.

2.1 References vs Bibliography

The reference list should be provided at the end of an article wherein the author provides the information necessary to identify and retrieve each source. Choose references judiciously and include only the sources that you used in the research and preparation of the article.

References usually come at the end of a text (essay or research report) and should contain **only those works cited within the text**. So, use the term 'References' to cover works cited, and 'Additional Bibliography' to refer to works read as general background. A **Bibliography** is any

list of references at the end of a text, whether cited or not. It includes texts you made use of, not only texts you referred to in your paper, but your own additional background reading, and any other articles you think the reader might need as back-ground reading. You are to provide a bibliography only if requested by lecturer/s.

Both References and Bibliography must be in alphabetical order; and each entry must be laid out in a strictly ordered sequence. Please refer to the University guidelines in view of APA 7th referencing:

https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/112018/1/APA_7_referencing_guide.pdf.

Students are advised that the Department of Criminology accepts only APA referencing as outlined in the guidelines (use the link provided).

How many references?

The final piece of advice relates to the number of external sources it is appropriate to use for a 3,000-word paper. **In any assessed piece of work, you are expected to show that you have read and understood the relevant literature, as well as to show that you can comment critically on it.** Your own thinking must be grounded in existing literature. Part of your intellectual task is to identify and then use **appropriate academic material**.

Your markers will consider the number of references you make, but also the way you understand and use the material, together with their relevance to the argument you develop in your papers.

Please do not attempt to state that no sources were found as such points towards a lack of scholarly activity and/or inability to carry out your research.