

MODULE 1

GUIDE TO TACKLING YOUR FIRST ASSIGNMENT

Introduction

The library is your knowledge partner and would like the opportunity to journey with you to achieve academic success. In subscribing to the belief that student academic success starts in the library, we commit to providing conducive spaces and the most appropriate research support for an enriching learning experience.

Purpose of the guide

This guide introduces you to the fundamentals for a hassle-free experience with your first assignment. The intention is to give you a sound grounding for more intensive research assignments that will come later. Irrespective of the complexity of your research assignments, the library provides the most appropriate information resources for that enriched life-long learning experience.

Objective of the guide

We would like to provide you with uncomplicated guidelines as you tackle your introductory research assignments. This guide focuses on interpreting a reading list, developing search strategies using appropriate keywords, searching platforms to find relevant and authentic information resources, and to accurately cite them to eliminate plagiarism.

Let's go

It can be quite overwhelming to start any research assignment, but if it's broken down into smaller steps, it becomes more manageable and less daunting. This guide is meant to assist you in tackling your first assignment. It also provides the basics and sets the foundation for more complex assignments that require a deeper interrogation of library resources, including consultations with expert library staff. If this guide does not fulfil all your information needs for the first assignment, please do not hesitate to explore the wide range of library guides ([accessible via the Library's website](#)) or [contact](#) the library staff.

As you begin to think about your assignment, consider how you find and evaluate your information. This guide walks you through the basics of what is called the research process, and how to find library resources to support your assignment.

Where do I start?

Your lecturer will give you an assignment topic, possibly after covering the basics of the topic. The lecturer may provide a reading list with the expectation that you can start with this list and, if possible/necessary, add more readings when preparing for the assignment. The items on your reading list are reliable sources of information, which are relevant to your topic. In an alternate scenario, the lecturer may present a research topic without a reading list and expect you to find the relevant resources to answer the assignment.

Let's start with the first scenario where a reading list is provided and then follow that with the second scenario where you must determine or identify your keywords and use these keywords to find the relevant resources.

Starting point: the reading list (scenario 1)

The first thing that must be done is to [interpret a reading list](#) which will have, amongst others, references to books and journal articles. You must be able to differentiate between a book and a journal article before you start with the assignment.

Here is what a typical citation or reference for a book looks like in the UCT author-date referencing style:

Raju, R., Adam, A., Johnson, G., Miller, C. and Pietersen, J. 2015. *The quest for a deeper meaning of research support*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Libraries. DOI: 10.15641/0-7992-2522-8.

Author/s of the book. Date of publication. *Title of the book*. Place of publication: Publisher. Digital object identifier (DOI).

A typical article would read as follows:

Raju, R., Claassen, J., Adam, A., D'Angelo, A., Keraan, S., Mostert, N. and Vonk, S. 2018. Restructuring for relevance: a paradigm shift for academic libraries. *Library Management*. 39 (6/7): 1-12. DOI: 10.1108/LM-06-2017-0062.

Author/s of the article. Date of publication. Title of the article. *Title of the journal*. Volume (issue number): page numbers. DOI.

For more examples, you can consult the [UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard Referencing style](#).

For other referencing styles, please see this link:

<http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/lib/research/referencing>

Exploring your reading list

Now that you can differentiate between the different information resource types (e.g., books and journal articles), you can start your search. It is important to note that there are a substantial number of those references which will be in electronic format (e.g., e-books and journal articles). However, there will be references which will be in hardcopy (paper) format, which means you will have to go to the library to borrow or photocopy/scan them. Please make sure that you follow copyright legislation (rules) when you are making photocopies/scans.

Locating information resources

You now have your reading list and you know how to read a reference. The next step is to access the information resources on the reading list. [Google](#) is a quick and familiar way of finding information and can be a useful way to begin researching around a topic. However, you are strongly encouraged to use the library databases as they provide authentic research information. The University makes substantial investments to ensure that you have access to authentic information resources to assist you with your assignments. Your lecturers will make attempts to ensure that the references in the reading list are accessible in the Library.

What about Google Scholar?

[Google Scholar](#) works in a similar way to other search engines but searches for scholarly literature. Be that as it may, you will still need to carefully evaluate the information to ensure that it is relevant to your assignment.

Using the Library platform for your resources

The Library has a platform (online catalogue) called Primo, which you can browse to find relevant information resources. In Primo you can find all books and journals (in both formats, electronic and physical copies) held at UCT Libraries. For physical copies of material, Primo will give you the call or shelf number (Dewey number, e.g., 658.402 THE). This call number can be understood as the 'street address' of the book.

If you find any e-books when you are searching for information, you can click on the hyperlink to access the full text.

Many students browse the shelves initially to look for books on a topic. Books are shelved in number sequence using the call number on the spine of the books. Books with similar content or subject matter are grouped together, which facilitates browsing. If you need help locating a book, please ask any library staff member.

Read critically and extract information relevant to your topic

The first step is to thoroughly evaluate your information resources. Your success with academic writing depends upon how well you understand what you are doing as you write, and then how you approach the assignment task. Hence, you need to read the consulted information resources critically and extract the most relevant information to support your assignment. It is important to understand that writing up the assignment requires more than the ability to construct correct sentences or compose neatly organised paragraphs. Successful completion of an assignment requires that you utilise your research skills and your ability to read complex texts and respond critically to new information.

Plagiarism

A good understanding of [plagiarism](#) is extremely important when writing up your assignment.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the taking of another person's ideas, writings or inventions and using them as your own. This does not conform to good academic work. Re-wording/paraphrasing another person's work without citing the source is also considered plagiarism. One way to alleviate plagiarism is to reference all sources used.

What is referencing or citing?

[Referencing](#) is the process of acknowledging the contribution of other writers and researchers in an academic piece of work. Any research assignment that draws on the ideas, words or research of other writers must be cited/acknowledged. There are two tiers of citing: firstly, in-text referencing and, secondly, the creation of a list of references used.

In-text citations – when you refer to other people’s work in the text of your assignment. These citations appear in the main body of your assignment. It is very important to acknowledge the authors of the book/article that you used in your assignment, whether you have quoted them directly or just referred to their research/ideas. In-text citations are when you refer to other people’s work in the text of your assignment. These citations appear in the main body of your assignment.

Generating a reference list – You must ensure that you keep a record of all your sources you used or referred to in your assignment. At the end of the assignment, you will compile your reference list.

There are many citation styles – check what is the preferred style of your department. UCT generally uses the [UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard Referencing style](#).

Knowing all of this, you are now ready to submit your assignment.

Developing and applying keywords (scenario 2)

In scenario 2 (if you have not been given a reading list), you will need to develop a set of keywords and apply these keywords to a search process. The first step in this process is to understand your assignment topic. You need to have a good idea as to exactly what the topic requires. A good starting point in understanding the topic is accessing disciplinary reference material.

The Library makes collections of [subject encyclopaedias and handbooks](#) that serve as a great source of background information on a variety of topics to start your research. This background reading sets a good foundation for the creation or identification of keywords.

What are keywords?

Keywords are words in your assignment topic that provide guidance on how to select or identify key concepts you will be looking at. You need to choose keywords and

phrases that best describe that topic. Please remember to include synonyms, related terms and alternative spellings in your list.

Once you have developed your keyword list, you can use these keywords to find the necessary information resources. The starting point in the collection of the information resources is the library platform (Primo) and (if necessary) Google Scholar.

The steps hereafter are the same as Scenario 1.

Study spaces

The library strives to provide a safe (non-judgmental) and conducive study space. The library's extended hours provide students with plenty of time to complete their assignments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, starting your first assignment journey can feel daunting, but with this guide you will be equipped with the foundational tools to navigate the process effectively. By understanding the importance of interpreting your reading lists, developing search strategies, critically evaluating sources, and adhering to referencing and citation guidelines, you are laying the groundwork for academic success. Remember, the library is your knowledge partner throughout this journey, offering not only resources but also support from knowledgeable staff. With these skills and support, you will be well-prepared to tackle any academic challenge that comes your way.

Additional resources

- [Introduction to the virtual library service video](#)
- [UCT Author-date Reference Guide: based on the Harvard Referencing style](#)