

Your First Assignment

Your first assignment represents a significant point in your university studies. Writing an assignment allows you the chance to demonstrate your understanding of your subject, and to develop your research skills and academic skills such as writing and referencing.

Your first assignment can be a time of mixed emotions. Maybe there's a bit of excitement because you're finally 'getting your teeth into uni study'. But great interest in an assignment topic may also be tinged with apprehensions like: 'Am I understanding it the right way?'; 'I don't know where to start'; 'What does the lecturer expect?' Then there's the sudden realisation of the time commitment involved in actually researching and drafting a written assignment. All these mixed feelings are common to students..

This section looks at the process involved with preparing and submitting an assignment.

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Assignments

How your progress and achievement is assessed will vary from subject to subject. In most subjects, you will be required to complete assignments. These assignments may take various forms such as preparing an essay, report or case study, participating in a group project or giving an oral presentation.

The Learning Skills website provides detailed information on many types of assignment and how to prepare them. The Library catalogue and databases will also be invaluable to you in finding information for your assignments.

[learning skills, catalogue, database](#)



Your time management will be important when preparing assignments. Don't underestimate how long it will take you to fully research, draft and polish your work. Leaving assignments until the last minute will unnecessarily restrict you in your effort and cause you undue stress. Read the assignment task as soon as you receive your study materials, and keep the task in the back of your mind as you progress through the subject. The earlier you get started on your assignment, the better.

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Assignment Expectations

You can find details of your assignments in the Assessment section of your subject outline. This section usually includes details such as the type of assessment required, the date it is due, and the percentage each assessment item contributes to your overall grade.

Subject outlines may also include marking criteria. If included, read this information carefully as it provides guidance on what your lecturer is looking for and the basis on which your work will be marked. Always ask your lecturer if you are unclear of what is expected for an assessment item or a Learning Skills Adviser if you aren't sure of the process involved.

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Researching Your Assignment

When you start searching for information, there are some important steps involved. You need to:

- **Identify** the information you require
- **Create** a search strategy
- **Select** where to search
- **Carry** out your information search
- **Access** the resources
- **Evaluate** the resources you find

Identify The Information You Require

Before you begin researching a topic, be clear on what you are being asked to do. For instance, do you need to write an essay, a report, or a personal reflection? This will inform you as to the level of research you need to carry out. You can glean this information from your subject outline and also from discussions with your lecturer.

You also need to identify the specific subject area that you are investigating. This information can be drawn from the question by identifying:

- instruction or task words
- key concepts
- qualifying words or phrases

Once you have done this, it is important to identify alternative terms that can be used for the concept you are researching. You can do this by accessing dictionaries or a thesaurus.

Topic Analysis

Work through the section on Topic Analysis which deals with identifying the information you need. Remember, Library staff are available online or in person if you require assistance locating resources.



Smartskills

SmartSkills is found on the Library homepage. Work through the online tutorial module on Topic Analysis which will help you in identifying the information you need. Remember: Library staff are available online or in person if you require assistance locating resources.



Creating A Search Strategy

The key concepts and words that you identify in your topic analysis form the basis of your search strategy.

You create a search strategy by connecting these words together. The word "and" can be used to link search terms together.

For example, if your assignment question was:

Discuss the changes in the Australian urban environment brought about by the phenomenon of global warming.

The key terms are:

Australia, urban environment, global warming

Your search strategy might be:

Australian and urban environment and global warming

Selecting Where To Search

Once you have analysed your topic and created a search strategy, you need to decide where you will search for resources. The following are some possibilities:

- **Check the resources provided by your lecturer**, either online or in print. Use your subject outlines, subject forums and check whether there are any items on reserve in the library, or online in electronic reserve (eReserve) for your subject.
- **Search the CSU Library catalogue** for resources available from the Library.
- **Check the CSU Library databases** for articles published in periodicals. The Library Databases hold a collection of details of journal articles but may also include conference papers, book chapters, reports, dissertations, books and other types of information. They supply you with a reference or citation to help you locate the article. Sometimes you have online access to the full text of the article.
- **Access the Online Reference Collection**, which includes links to many of online reference materials including statistics, Australian standards, dictionaries and thesauri.
- **Check the Subject Gateway** on the Library website, this provides you with the most suitable databases and selected internet resources for your subject area.

Investigating Online Library Resources

Work through the [Smart Skills](#) module Library on your desktop, which introduces you to the resources available through the Library website.

[smartskills](#)



Carrying Out Your Information Search

The next step is to carry out your information search.

- When you access specific resources online, you will find that they have associated help guides.
- There are also a number of "How do I" guides available via the Library home page which will help you conduct your search.
- *Smart Skills*, the online interactive tutorial, also provides step-by-step help with searching.

Using Catalogues and Databases

Work through the modules on using the library catalogues and databases.

[smartskills](#)



Once you have worked through SmartSkills, try locating resources using the catalogues and databases in the activities below.

Using The Library Catalogue and Databases

Practice using the library catalogue by locating the following resource:
Blythe, Jim, 2006, Principles & practice of marketing. Thomson, London.

catalogue

Using The Library Catalogue and Databases

Using the search strategy developed earlier, locate some appropriate resources in a database.

"Australian and urban environment and global warming"

Remember, library staff are available online or in person if you require assistance locating resources.

database

Accessing Resources

Once you have identified some useful resources, you'll need to know how to access them.

Books

These include items listed in the Library catalogue with a call number and campus location. If you are able to visit a campus in person, you may borrow or copy from the item. You will need your student ID card to borrow.

If the item is on loan, only available at another campus, or you are studying at a distance, use the Request option in the catalogue record to arrange for the book to be held for you when it is returned, or for a copy to be delivered to your campus.

DE students also have the option of selecting Home as a delivery option. If you live within Australia, we will post the item to you. You are responsible for return postage.

Copies of book chapters may be requested in the same way as periodical articles (see below).

Periodical Articles

Items found in Library databases may be available in full-text online. These can be immediately printed or saved for future use.

Items not in full-text in one database may be available in full-text from another online source or in print at one of the campus libraries. Make a note of the full citation (i.e. author and title of the article, title of the periodical, year and volume number of the periodical issue and page numbers of the article). Search the library catalogue for the periodical title to check whether the title is held. If you find it, also check the holdings to make sure that the issue you want is present.

Not all periodicals indexed in the databases are held by CSU.



If the periodical is only available at another campus or you are studying at a distance, use the 'request a photocopy' option in the catalogue record corresponding to the issue you want, and enter the item details to arrange for the article to be scanned and sent to you electronically.

Copy Requests must comply with Australian Copyright legislation. Students may request copies for the purposes of private research or study:

- up to 10% or one chapter of a book, or
- one article from any single issue of a periodical.

DE students may also request library materials through the Request forms link on the Library website.



Requesting Items Via the Library Catalogue

How do I ... "request a book or copy" from the Library Home page.



[catalogue](#)



Reserve

Your lecturer may have arranged for items likely to be in heavy demand to be placed in the Library Reserve.

Articles in reserve may be accessed by searching the main Library Catalogue using the keyword option, with your subject code (eg. BIO433). Articles may be printed or downloaded from the Reserve collection using the (free) Adobe Acrobat Reader software.

Using Reserve

Access this link to learn more about the Reserve process.



[reserve](#)



Not Held By CSU But You Really Want Something?

Copies can be obtained for you from other (non-CSU) libraries and are generally supplied within seven days. There is a charge of \$10.00 for each item and higher charges may apply if copies are obtained overseas. Books can be obtained from most Australian libraries, and they can take up to two weeks to be supplied. There is a charge of \$10.00 for each item.

Pre-payment is not required, a charge will be raised when the Library obtains the item. Interlibrary loans will only be supplied when specifically requested.

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Library Contacts

<http://www.csu.edu.au/division/library/about/contacts/>

Knowing Which Information To Use

Critical evaluation of information is a crucial step in the academic research process. Apart from being able to differentiate between fact and fiction, it's important for you to be able to assess the relevance, accuracy and suitability of information to your particular purpose.

Using poor quality information sources or worse still, citing misinformation, will degrade the quality of your work.

Evaluate the resources you find

When evaluating information resources, it is important to reflect on the following:

Origin

- Who produced it?
- What are their qualifications and experience?

Purpose

- Who is this item aimed at?
- What was the reason behind producing it?
- Does it take into account previous writing/study in this area?

Content

- Is the content useful for the area you are researching?
- Is the subject area covered in great depth?
- Are only parts of the subject area covered?
- Is the information accurate?
- Is the information timely?
- Is supporting evidence provided?
- If it is a website, is the page up-to-date and updated regularly?
- Is the focus popular, professional, or academic?

Structure

- Is the item written in an organised manner?
- Are the necessary details regarding the authors included?
- Is data provided in appropriate formats e.g. tables, graphs etc?
- Are help guides available if appropriate?

Evaluation

- Is there a review of this resource available?

For detailed information on evaluating websites refer to:

http://www.csu.edu.au/division/studserv/online/docs/web_eval.pdf

Assignment Assistance

Remember that the only silly question is the one you don't ask! There will be times when you need some advice about preparing your assignments and you should take advantage of the support available. You need to know who to ask, depending on the type of question you have.

If you have any difficulties with the interpretation of an assignment question or the academic content it requires, you should contact your lecturer. Staff contact details and consultation times should be available in your subject outline.

Learning skills advisers can assist you with the processes involved in learning and provide advice about assignment preparation. For instance, you may need some advice on how to write a report or essay, how to reference a paper correctly, or how to structure your work. Learning skills staff can be contacted through Student Services [Support Central](#).

You can also find specific support with English skills and mathematics and statistics through Student Services.

[english, maths](#)



Your subject forum is another avenue of support and assistance open to you. Other students are often helpful in discussing and clarifying assignment expectations. Subject forums are accessible through the Forums tool in my.csu or directly if your subject outline is available online.

If you need an extension of time to complete your assignment, apply for one before the due date.



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Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is something that all students should understand, and avoid at all costs. Plagiarism refers to using the work, ideas or words of others without acknowledgement.

As many cases of plagiarism occur as a result of not understanding correct referencing techniques, it is essential that you are aware of the CSU Policy on Academic Misconduct, its consequences, and most importantly, how to avoid plagiarism in your work. All this information is available to you through the CSU Avoiding Plagiarism website.

Avoiding Plagiarism

From the Learning Skill site, select the link to Avoiding Plagiarism. Work your way through the online guide. Print the Avoiding Plagiarism Checklist and insert it into this folder for a handy reference.



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Presentation Of Assignments

Presenting your assignment in a neat, easy to read and professional manner is important. Refer to your subject outline for advice on presentation. If no specific advice exists, the learning skills [site provides general rules to follow](#).

In the majority of cases, your assignments will need to be typed. For this reason, a basic understanding of a text processing package such as Microsoft Word will be essential. The University provides self-paced online training modules on how to use all Microsoft Office applications. Access to this training package is free of charge to CSU students.

Formatting Your Assignments

Select and access Knowledgebank and ensure you are able to format your text, insert headers and footers, create appropriate margins and line spacing.



[web based training](#)



Don't forget to number the pages of your assignment.



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Saving Your Work

You only need to talk to a student who has lost a day, a month, or even a year's work because of a computer failure to realise the importance of saving and backing up your files. If you can't afford to lose your work, you can't afford not to save it.



- Don't wait until you finish your assignment before saving it for the first time. You should save your work regularly while working on it.
- Save your work in at least two places, three is even better.
- Avoid a situation where the data is stored in only one place, i.e. all copies are on your hard drive.
- If you are working on your own computer, organise your files into meaningful folders that are easily located.
- When working in the computer labs on campus, you may save your work to the hard drive temporarily while working on it. Once you have finished working on the document, save it to your disk, and delete it from the computer's local drive.

File Management

Once again access Knowledgebank. Ensure you are able to save, copy, move and delete files by working through the File Management section. Bookmark Knowledgebank for future reference.



[web based training](#)



Set up a folder for each subject and save all relevant files there. Back up your subject folders at the end of each week.



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Referencing Your Assignment

Correct referencing can make or break your assignment. Referencing is essential to demonstrate that you can maintain academic integrity in your writing and thus avoid any incidences of plagiarism. The main referencing system for CSU is APA Style, which you will need to become familiar with in order to use it correctly and consistently throughout an academic paper. It is wise to read your Subject Outline carefully to check that another referencing system is not asked for by that subject.

Fuller details regarding referencing a paper can be found in the 'How Do I' guides on the Learning Skills website.

learning skills

possible, print out any internet sources you intend to use in an assignment, just in case the site isn't available next time you want to use it. Record the reference details of the copy.



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Assignment Submission For Distance Education Students

There are several ways you can submit assignments. Regardless of which submission method you choose, you should always keep copies of your assignments.



Electronic Assignment Submission (EASTS)

Most CSU distance education subjects allow you to submit assignments electronically through EASTS, where you submit your assignment through the University tracking system across the Internet. Files can be accepted in several formats including the latest version of Word documents, RTF and HTML.

To access EASTS, go to **my.csu** and select the appropriate subject link in the My Subjects tool. The EASTS link is included within your **Interact** subject site. Information pages are provided with further assistance is available by clicking the Help link at the top of the EASTS website.

When using EASTS, ensure your file name has no spaces in it.



Mail Submission Of Assignments

Please note the following points when mailing assignments:

Check that you have attached the correct assignment coversheet to the front of your assignment.

If you have changed your address, amend the address on your assignment coversheet.

If you require confirmation of your assignment being received check on my.csu > Quick Links > Subject Info > My Subject Material.

Postal Assignments Should Be Addressed To:

Assignment Section

Learning Materials Centre
Charles Sturt University
Locked Bag 600
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678

Hand Delivery Submission of Assignments

Special assignment boxes are located near the Learning Materials Centre Offices at the Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Thurgoona and Wagga Wagga campuses. The boxes are cleared each weekday at 5pm. The NSW Police College at Goulburn has a hand-in facility, which is only for Policing students.

Courier Submission Of Assignments

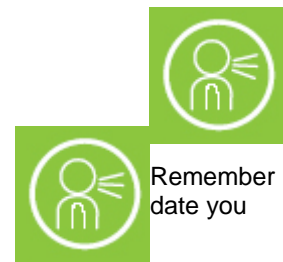
Couriered Assignments Should Be Delivered To:

Assignment Section

Learning Materials Centre
Charles Sturt University
Boorooma Street
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678

Always check the cost of using a courier before deciding on this option.

that your assignments must reach CSU by the due date. The due date isn't the post your work.



Remember date you

Return Of Assignments

You can normally expect to receive your marked assignment within four weeks of its due submission date (if it was submitted on time). All assignments (including those submitted via EASTS) are returned by post.

Tracking Your Assignment

You can check the details of when your assignment was received and when it was despatched. Access my.csu > Quick Links > Subject Info > My Subject Material. Note the despatched date is the date it is mailed from the LMC Assignment Section, so allow the appropriate amount of time for mailing.

If you have any further queries about your assignment receipt or despatch, contact the Student Services Support Central.

[study material](#)

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Submitting Assignments On Campus

Where and how you submit your assignments on campus will vary according to the class and the nature of the assessment item. Check with your lecturer how they would like your assignments to be submitted. Ensure you know this information prior to the deadline.



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Using Assignment Feedback

Receiving your first assignment back will provide you with an indication of several things. It will show you how well you understood the expectations of the subject, your understanding of the content and how well you were able to present this information in an acceptable academic format.

Hopefully you will be rewarded with a mark that you are pleased with or at least expected. If not, remember that your first assignment is exactly that, your first, of an ongoing developmental process, so use whatever result and feedback you receive to your advantage.

Look carefully at the marker's comments. Some may be as simple as a question mark if your point is not clear, they may write something like "ref" if you have not included appropriate citation details. Feedback on specific content may also be included. If you're not sure what is meant by a particular comment, follow it up with your lecturer.

Take note of the areas you can improve further. You can be incredibly knowledgeable about a topic but be let down by your academic writing style. Similarly, a brilliant piece of writing will only gain top marks if your grasp of content is also high.

Did you leave enough time to adequately plan and research your assignment? What can you improve on next time around?

If you would like assistance making the most of your assignment feedback, you can [contact a Learning Skills Adviser](#)

Don't wait until your next assignment to act on your lecturer's feedback. Act on their advice straight away.



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