

18

Writing essays, assignments and reports

A

Preparing for a research assignment

Here is an extract from a study skills leaflet given to students at a university, containing advice on how to tackle a research project. Note the collocations in bold.

- All students are expected to **submit a 5,000-word report**, detailing their research project and **presenting their findings**.
- **Select a research topic** in discussion with your tutor. You will need to formulate a **working hypothesis**¹ when you begin your study. The purpose of your research is to see if your data **supports the hypothesis**².
- If you are **undertaking**³ a study which involves informants or volunteers, read the advice on **research ethics**⁴ in the department handbook.
- A key section of your report will be a **literature review**. This is not simply a summary of your **background reading**, but an **in-depth critique**⁵ of the most important books and articles, where you can show your awareness of current research.
- Make sure you **provide**⁶ a **rationale** for your study, and always **back up your conclusions** with evidence; never exaggerate any claims you make.
- Wherever appropriate, you should **lay out your results** in the form of tables, charts and diagrams.

¹ a theory which can be used provisionally but may change

² We usually do not say *prove the hypothesis*; *prove* is too strong.

³ (formal) carrying out; (informal: doing)

⁴ a system of standards which control how research is done

⁵ examination and judgement of something, done carefully and in great detail

⁶ (formal) give

B

Other collocations often used in essays, reports and assignments

The book offers a **vigorous**¹ defence of free market economics and **makes the case** for privatisation of all state-owned industries. It **confronts issues** which are of current importance in developing countries.

McGraw **puts the case** for single-sex primary education but he fails to **tackle all of the issues** that opponents of this approach to early schooling have raised.

This essay cannot give an **exhaustive**² account of climate change; it focuses only on the risk to sea levels. Recent **research indicates** that sea levels are rising very rapidly.

Physicists have recently begun to **formulate new theories** about the nature of the universe. The big question is how to **test these theories**.

Although Kristov's book **covers a lot of ground**, it does not offer a **full explanation** of the events leading to the civil war. Indeed, **the thrust**³ of Kristov's argument is that such an account cannot be written, since the people with **first-hand**⁴ knowledge of those events are no longer living.

This essay provides a **critical analysis**⁵ of international trade agreements.

¹ very strong and forceful ² extremely detailed ³ the main idea or opinion that is discussed

⁴ experienced directly ⁵ a detailed study or examination which assesses quality



We say **do research**, NOT ~~make~~ research. The Internet is a good place to **do research**.

Exercises

18.1 Complete each sentence using a verb from the box in the appropriate form.

cover	indicate	present	provide	put
review	tackle	test	undertake	

- 1 It is a huge task to a study involving hundreds of participants.
- 2 Fischler her findings at an international biochemistry conference last year.
- 3 Chapter 2 the literature on urban regeneration and concludes that more research is needed.
- 4 I have a rationale for the study in the introduction to this essay.
- 5 The research that owning a pet increases life expectancy by five years.
- 6 The next step was to the theory by carrying out a set of experiments.
- 7 The essay a lot of ground.
- 8 The book a number of issues which were previously ignored.
- 9 The lecturer the case for a dramatic change in economic policy.

18.2 Rewrite each sentence using a form of the words in brackets.

- 1 The system of standards for conducting research are described in the university's research manual. (ETHIC)
- 2 You need to make an examination and judgement of the arguments which is very detailed. (DEPTH, CRITIQUE)
- 3 You need to read books and articles which give you information about the subject. (BACKGROUND)
- 4 You do the analysis in order to find out whether the data indicate that your initial idea was correct. (HYPOTHESIS)
- 5 All the interviewees were people who had knowledge of the situation from direct experience. (FIRST)
- 6 It is impossible to give a complete explanation of the decline of agriculture in the 1960s. (FULL)

18.3 Complete each sentence using a word from the box in the correct form. Then number the events in the order in which they would occur in real life.

- ☐ Write a analysis of previous studies.
- ☐ Form a hypothesis.
- ☐ out your results in tables and diagrams.
- ☐ your report.
- ☒ 1 a topic.
- ☐ Make the for studying the topic in the introduction.

case
critical
lay
select
submit
work

18.4 Correct the collocation errors in these sentences.

- 1 The trust of Torsten's argument is that public transport can never replace the private car.
- 2 Economists reformed a new theory of inflation in the late 1980s.
- 3 It is important that we should front the issue of climate change immediately.
- 4 In her essay, she put forward a vigorated defence of the European Union constitution.
- 5 I shall not attempt to give an exhausting account of population growth in this essay.
- 6 The article does not back down its conclusions with enough convincing evidence.

FOLLOW UP

Find an article on the Internet relating to an academic subject that is important for you. Print it off and highlight any useful collocations you notice in it.