

Organising information for your assessments

What not to do

Too many students miss an important step when they start to work on assessments. Many students try to go straight from their source material to writing their assessment, which often leads to the paragraphs in their assessment replicating the order in which they found the information. This is a poor strategy as it makes your assessment look disorganised. To avoid this, add a step in the process of putting your assessment together that involves organising, grouping and classifying your information to fit what the assessment task is asking you to do.

What to do

Before you started searching for information, you should have carefully analysed the assessment task (see the *Understanding assessment tasks Quick Guide*). This will give you important tips on:

- (a) where to target and refine your search for information and
- (b) how to structure your assessment.

Finding the right information for your assessment can be seen as a kind of brainstorming activity after which you have a lot of information, but the information isn't in any particular order. To organise your information, use the information in the assessment task to help structure the information you have.

There are many different ways that you can organise information. In academic writing it is almost always important to show that you have carefully analysed the information you have found.

Showing that you have analysed your information

One way to organise information is to construct an outline or a chart which classifies and groups your information by organising it into **categories**.

Let's look at how we might organise or classify information for the essay task below.

Traditionally in many societies mothers are expected to stay at home and take care of their children. However, the financial pressures of modern life have forced many mothers to find jobs outside the home and rely on childcare for their children. With reference to one particular type of childcare facility discuss whether this arrangement is damaging for children or not.

Let's assume that we have done a lot of research and that we are going to choose a licensed pre-school as our one particular type of childcare, and that our thesis (the case we are arguing) is that this type of childcare is beneficial to children (see the *Understanding assessment tasks Quick Guide*).

The chart below shows how you might organise the information you have gathered in your essay. We already have a thesis. Our next step is to organise/group our information in ways that best support this thesis. We do this by grouping similar information into categories and then giving a label to each category. In the chart following we have grouped our information into four categories and labelled them with words that fit the kind of information in the category.

Organising information for childcare essay		
Thesis	Main Points (Categories)	Arguments and supporting evidence
	Psychological	Language development Emotional development Literacy and numeracy development
Childcare in a licensed pre-school is beneficial for children	Physiological	Gross motor skills through exercise on playground equipment Fine motor skills through craft and art General physical health benefits
	Social	Forming friendships Learning to share and cooperate Independence from parents
	Legal	Licensed by Community Services At least one staff member trained in early childhood Regulated staff/student ratios

How does organising information in a chart like this help you?

1. It helps your **thinking** by organising your thoughts.
2. It helps you to be more **abstract** by grouping information under abstract headings. This in itself shows critical thinking and evaluation because you have done something to re-organise the information you have found.
3. It helps you to **structure** your answer by grouping similar information together.
4. It can be used as a **plan** for your assessment.
5. It can also help you **prepare** for exams.

Check the *SCU Learning Zone* for more related Quick Guides.