



How to Write an Essay: Some Helpful Hints!

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Aims of this Presentation

Give some helpful hints on writing an essay including:

- ▶ Picking a topic
- ▶ Searching for papers
- ▶ Summarising papers
- ▶ Organising essay structure
- ▶ Writing a narrative
- ▶ Critical reviewing

Picking a Topic

- ▶ Something that interests you!
- ▶ Make it relevant to placement
- ▶ Can look at previous essay titles: but best to get your own idea
- ▶ Make sure it is of relevance for clinical psychology
- ▶ Make sure clear clinical implications: why this would be relevant?
How would this influence your clinical practice?
- ▶ Have a very quick look at literature before decide on title

Picking a Title

- ▶ Balance between area which is too specific versus too broad
- ▶ Think: what would I discuss within this?

Too General:

Discuss the efficacy of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy with children and adolescents.

Too Specific:

Discuss the efficacy of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Pre-Pubescent Children.

Just right:

Discuss the efficacy of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents.

Finding Papers

- ▶ Identify a working title
- ▶ Pull out keywords from this (use other papers as well)
- ▶ Use: Google scholar, PsychInfo, Pubmed (Medline), Embase.
- ▶ Google search as well (reports, NICE guidelines etc.)
- ▶ Hint: do on same computer if possible (shows up if already clicked on that link)
- ▶ When downloading papers: import reference to EndNote

Finding Papers

- ▶ Save pdfs in folders organised by different themes/sections
- ▶ E.g. My essay '*Substance Misuse in Depression and Bipolar Disorder: A Review of Psychological Interventions and Considerations for Clinical Practice*'. (attached for reference)

Divided into:

- ▶ Assessment issues, CBT, effect on symptoms, epidemiology, group interventions, guidelines and report, integrated treatment, motivational interviewing, other therapy, reviews, self-medication, service issues.

Finding Papers



- ▶ Find at least 80 papers
- ▶ Avoid reading review articles and books in detail
- ▶ Always read primary source
- ▶ If did search a while before submitting, check any recent papers

Summarising Papers

- ▶ Go through each paper and write a brief summary, one sentence to one paragraph.
- ▶ Should be more than just abstract. Focus on method and results.
- ▶ Write in your own words. Write your interpretation of results: what does it mean? Clinical implications?
- ▶ BRIEF note of limitations
- ▶ Don't read discussion in too much detail: need to think about your interpretation of results not copy there's!
- ▶ Summarise papers into a dozen or so word files structured in same way was paper folders

Summarising Papers: An example

- ▶ The attached paper (Baker et al., 2009) was summarised in a word file as:

- Baker et al (2010)- examined those with high levels of depression and alcohol use, and compared a brief single integrated intervention (90 minutes) compared to a longer intervention (9 one hour sessions) which either focus on depression, alcohol or both. The longer treatments led to reduces alcohol consumption, however there was no difference on depression. Integrated focus was related to better outcomes for both drinking and depression. In terms of single interventions, men were more likely to reduce drinking and had improved functioning if focused on alcohol, whereas women were more likely to reduce drinking and had improved functioning if it focused on depression.

Structure

- ▶ Decide on a structure before start writing
- ▶ Start with intro: why writing essay, what will cover
- ▶ Think before start writing: what's my argument/perspective?
Outline this in Introduction.

E.g. my essay argument was: those with depression and bipolar more complex and need modified, integrative therapies tackling both at same time.

May be useful to summarise clinical implications at end of essay.

Structure

► Useful to have headings and sub-headings. E.g.

1. **Impact of Substance Misuse**

- a. *Effect on symptom severity and relapse*
- b. *Importance of Self-medication*
- c. *Other correlates of substance misuse*

2. **Assessment and Diagnostic Issues**

- a. *Primary/Secondary Distinction*
- b. *Challenges in Assessment*
- c. *Psychometric Tools*

3. **Psychological Interventions**

- a. *Integrated Interventions*
- b. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*
- c. *Motivational Interviewing*
- d. *Group Interventions*
- e. *Other approaches*

Writing a Narrative

- ▶ Once you have summarised all the papers and developed a structure:
- ▶ Put all paragraph for summaries for papers into a word file in the structure
- ▶ Go through and write into a narrative
- ▶ Try and keep a flow summarising the literature as a whole rather than individual studies
- ▶ Link to models/theories wherever possible
- ▶ Consider clinical implications as you go

Writing a Narrative

- ▶ Earlier paper (Baker et al., 2010). Paragraph summary written in essay in 2 sections as relevant to both (rather than just describing paper in detail once):
- ▶ *In those with depression and alcohol problems, if integrated interventions are not available then women respond better to a focus on depression, whereas men respond better to a focus on alcohol (Baker, et al., 2010).*
- ▶ *Research has shown that integrated CBT reduces both substance misuse and depression (Lydecker, et al., 2010), more so than focusing on either depression or substance misuse (Baker et al., 2010).*

Writing a Narrative

- ▶ Don't discuss individual studies in too much detail unless very important

Combine studies in the narrative:

Studies in other countries estimate this figure at between 40 and 97% (Heikkinen & Lönnqvist, 1995; Paraschakis, et al., In Press; Scocco et al., 2006; Waern et al., 2002; Wanta et al., 2009).

Writing a Narrative

Instead of describing results of studies one by one can put together.

Rather than:

Waern et al (2002) found that psychosis is related to suicide risk. This was also found by Voaklander et al (2008). There also appears to be a relationship between suicide and bipolar disorder (Juurink et al (2004)...

Like this:

Specific diagnoses which increase risk in older adults include psychosis (Voaklander et al., 2008; Waern et al., 2002), personality disorders (Harwood et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2008), bipolar disorder (Juurink et al., 2004) and anxiety disorders (Juurink et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2008; Waern et al., 2002).

Critical Reviewing

- ▶ My style: don't discuss in detail
- ▶ Critical but not just trying to pick holes!

- ▶ Things to consider:

Sample used (size, representative? Undergraduates?)

Sampling method (any bias?)

If trial: randomised? Assessors blind?

Measured used

Potential confounding variables

Critical Reviewing

- ▶ BUT
- ▶ Don't go through weakness of every study (boring!)
- ▶ Identify themes on weakness e.g. studies in area tend to test with non-clinical populations, most evidence based on open trials rather than RCTs
- ▶ Are the conclusions justified given the studies weakness?
- ▶ Think about gaps in the literature: what hasn't been answered?

Conclusion

- ▶ Overall what does the literature suggest?
- ▶ Summarise literature: don't discuss new material
- ▶ Don't merely repeat: what does it mean
- ▶ What is your personal opinion of the area (give the evidence you have discussed)

- ▶ What are the main problems with research in the area?
- ▶ What gaps are there in the literature?
- ▶ How might future research address these gaps and limitations?

- ▶ Clinical implications

Abstract



- ▶ Write after whole essay written
- ▶ 250 words
- ▶ Don't copy word for word from essay

- ▶ Summarises main areas covered (look at subtitles) and argument

Formatting

- ▶ Format in line with APA guidelines (see attached document for template- don't read whole document!)

Main points:

- ▶ **Referencing** (End Note will make this easier)

Journals:

Lynch, T. R., Cheavens, J. S., Morse, J. Q., & Rosenthal, M. Z. (2004). A model predicting suicidal ideation and hopelessness in depressed older adults: the impact of emotion inhibition and affect intensity. *Aging & Mental Health, 8*(6), 486 - 497.

Reports:

National Institute of Clinical Excellence. (2004). *Self-harm: The short-term physical and psychological management and secondary prevention of self-harm in primary and secondary care*. London: National Institute of Clinical Excellence.

Books:

Whicher, E., & Abou-Saleh, M. (2007). Bipolar affective disorder and drug and alcohol problems. In A. V. Baker & R. Velleman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of co-existing mental health and drug and alcohol problems*. (pp. 267-289). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Formatting

▶ Titles:

Heading Level 1

Heading Level 2

Heading Level 3

Heading Level 4

Indents in paragraphs, no gaps between paragraphs

Finishing Up

- ▶ Leave for a week then come back to it
- ▶ Print out and read: not just on screen
- ▶ Look at it as a whole: does it come together as a whole?

A Final Thought...

- ▶ Publish it!
- ▶ Don't have to get distinction (or straight pass!)

Why should I bother?

- ▶ Looks good on CV
- ▶ The course will love you
- ▶ You have already done 99% of the work
- ▶ It means it will be used/appreciated!
- ▶ Makes it an additional motivator when writing

A Final Thought...

- ▶ How to find a journal:
- ▶ BPS faculty journals are good (e.g. Clinical Psychology Forum, PSIGE, Clinical Psychology and Learning Disabilities)
- ▶ BPS postgrad journal: <http://www.psypag.co.uk/the-quarterly/>
- ▶ Look through references section and pick one of their journals

Thank you

▶ And good luck!

