WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO GET A GOOD MARK?

At school, you will have been expected to show that you can research your subject and communicate your results. At university, you need to take those practices to the next level, and show that you can put knowledge to use to say something interesting and meaningful about your topic. Do these ten things well and you will get the mark you deserve.

1. **Read the question** – Rather than picking out key words, look for the overall topic of the question, and the way in which you’re being asked to discuss that topic.

2. **Research effectively** – Think about what you need to find out before you start reading. If the topic is new to you, start with a general overview to establish themes and topics, then consider what you need to know more about and target reading that will help you to achieve that.

3. **Evaluate your sources** – The most recent research (mostly found in journal articles) is often best as it will have been built on existing research. If you’re using a website, look for an author or at least a reputable organisation with responsibility for the website.

4. **Organise your discussion** – If you are writing a report, you will probably be told how to structure your answer. For an essay or literature survey, group what you want to discuss under three or four headings: perhaps by theme, point, aspect of the topic or period. Tell your reader how you’re organising your discussion in your introduction, so they know what to expect.

5. **Have a clear answer** – Decide what you want to say about the question or title, and keep showing how your discussion, findings and research develop that argument. Be explicit!

6. **Support your ideas with evidence** – Support any statement you make with evidence, either from your reading or from example. We are looking for evidence of deeper understanding so avoid making generalisations without evidence. Every idea you get from your reading must be acknowledged with a citation, whether it’s a direct quote, a paraphrase or a passing mention.

7. **Cite your sources correctly** – Find out the correct style of referencing for the department you are submitting the work to, and look for examples to help you get it right. Don’t assume it is the same as other departments, or the same as you have done in the past at school or college.

8. **Be critical** – Explain why you’ve chosen the information you present, how it works and how it helps to build your answer to the question. Whatever the source, always consider the author’s reasons for writing it: what were they trying to prove and how does that compare to what you want to discuss? Keep asking why – not just why you disagree, but also why you agree with it.

9. **Write academically** – To communicate complex ideas, you need simple, clear, accurate sentences and appropriate language. Use technical terms, but only where necessary. Avoid any casual or informal language which might make it easier to misinterpret your meaning.

10. **Check your work** – Leave your work for a day, then print it off and read it aloud. Pay attention to missing words and punctuation, correct citations, inconsistencies and errors. Paying attention to details and presentation shows that you are taking a professional approach.