**Planning your Essays**

**Aim:** The aim of the session is to emphasise the foundational role of reading in essay planning, and that planning doesn’t happen a few minutes before writing but is an ongoing process. It is also designed so that students have some opportunities to apply the process rather than it being too abstract and/or didactic. This key question and material on racial injustice in the justice system/Stop and Search is intended to be a vehicle through which the academic skills are developed, rather than it become the topic of the class. However, by using the sample reading, students are encouraged to consider the nature of structural and institutional racism in a balanced way. This enables some students to bring their lived experiences into the classroom. However, it is also intended to challenge other students’ perception of experiences of racial injustice and the ways in which it can be addressed to move towards a more equitable society. Young Black male students in the past have explicitly said they appreciated this topic being used because it is their experience, and they want that acknowledged in the HE classroom.

**LOs:** Describe the stages of effective planning

  Organise and synthesise notes and ideas as you plan

   Produce an effective essay structure

**Level**: L4 - can be levelled up

**Duration:** 1 hour. If a longer session is possible, the activities can be integrated more gradually throughout to give an even greater sense of how the planning process build up. I’ve noted where you could do this.

**Numbers refer to slides**

1. LOs to be explained.
2. **2-3 minutes as an intro:** It could be worth asking them whether they spend much time planning, why they do/don’t, or do they find it difficult or a helpful thing to do. Remind them that a piece of writing is a form of communication – they communicate their understanding, their knowledge, their ideas – they tell the reader something. A clear and well-planned structure is the key to that. I often compare the structure of an assignment as taking the reader for a walk – they want to get to their destination in the most logical way, without pointless detours and dead-ends, and you don’t want your tutor to keep saying ’are we there yet?’
3. **5 minutes or so**. This is to remind them that planning is an ongoing process and not just something they spend a few minutes on before writing. They should start planning out their ideas even before reading by identifying aspects of the topic they want to include and how to develop them into key themes once they have read. The point about active reading is an important one here as it starts getting them to think about their reading and note-making as a thinking process and is underpinned by the questioning nature of academic reading. It also helps them to start approaching their reading in a less linear/narrative way as building their notes around questions like these encourages them to move backwards and forwards through a text. This doesn’t have to be laboured here – just flagged up as introducing them to a new way of reading that starts the planning process.

If you feel you have time, you could throw out the question they’ll be using later on to ask for some initial ‘brainstorming’ ideas: **Do you think that the criminal justice system is institutionally racist? If so, why? If not, why?**

1. **5 minutes.** Explain how this can organise their reading into key points and themes ready for planning, and how they can start to see how they can organise and synthesise their reading by thinking as they go along. Synthesis will probably need some explanation at this point and is a further way in which they can be encouraged to think about their reading as they plan. This should be seen as additional to their other note-making but it does work and makes the whole process much easier – students say it revolutionises their reading and planning, even if it appears onerous at first glance. They can, of course, colour code the themes as they emerge. The idea is that they go into something like this after each of their readings to add to it. As they need to also move up and down it to identify how different readings connect etc, it helps to keep their reading and thinking active throughout. They can be told here that they are about to use a ‘ready-made’ one to start some planning, so they can see where this is all going.

[Here's the example of a reading grid with some notes on two readings about Stop and Search](https://ljmu-my.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/g/personal/lstrwynw_ljmu_ac_uk/Ed61ca4_iaBNvdbSz1P1W7oBTEp8MOFYFZYjbn3DRW0Lfg?e=JRqt5h). This could be given as a more detailed example, as well as to help them in the next activity (see slide 7).

1. **3 minutes or so to explain**. To move on from reading and gathering their notes, this helps them get to the next stage in planning. This is because they need to be shown how just a collection of key points will not form a good structure (referring back to the original point about communication) - they need to think about which points go together and lead on from each other, so they need to think carefully about how those themes emerge through their reading and note-making. They may need what we mean by ‘theme’ explaining as they often don’t really know at this point, although we can take this type of knowledge for granted. These themes will form the foundation of their plan. Ask them also why they should think of their conclusion at this point and not as they come to write it. Do any of them do this? There is an example of how to theme a collection of points.
2. **3 minutes or so.** You can talk them through the example mind map to model how a collection of points based on the central question about the role of HE can be categorised into three themes, showing how each theme has a number of points in it that share a connection.
3. **15 minutes, including feedback and discussion.** This is the start of them being able to experiment with applying their learning so far (unless you’ve brought activities in earlier in a longer session, which is preferable to waiting until this point but in only an hour, it’s the best point). Getting them to then do this is to engage them in applying the process by getting them to focus on a specific question, and for you to check their learning and understanding of it. It also reinforces the point about writing growing from their reading and how their initial brainstorming ideas become more refined after reading. The choice of question and readings is to encourage them to question the nature and effects of structural and institutional racism, for some to refer to their own experiences but for all to engage in some critical thought around the issue.

This can all be done with handouts of the reading grid and asking through a Q and A for their ideas, or using flip chart paper etc., but each group contributing to a shared Padlet work well and offers a greater sense of whole group collaboration, while enabling you to see all of their contributions. If you want, and have more than an hour, you can give them the two full readings too to engage more fully.

Readings used:

[Black people nine times more likely to face stop and search than white people | Police | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/27/black-people-nine-times-more-likely-to-face-stop-and-search-than-white-people)

[We spent seven years observing English police stop and search – here's what we found (theconversation.com)](https://theconversation.com/we-spent-seven-years-observing-english-police-stop-and-search-heres-what-we-found-149563)

1. **2-3 minutes explanation.** The main point here is that each key theme will be a paragraph that includes the relevant points. If they have a lot to say about the theme, it can be spready over a number of paragraphs depending on the different points within the theme, but these paragraphs should run consecutively. if they have enough to say about it, otherwise have a paragraph per theme. You could just mention here that there is no rule about how long a paragraph should be but if it is only a sentence or two, it’s too short and that’s when they need to add more information or add it into another paragraph from the same theme. They don’t want to jump about and take detours.
2. **5 minutes max to talk through and explain this.** WEED is a very useful way for them to start thinking about how they can use their structure to show critical analysis. I often describe it as a more sophisticated university-level of PEE (point, evidence, explanation) that they may be familiar with from school. If they even write WEED on their plan for each paragraph, they can check that each will have each element in it. Of course, they don’t have to have it always in this order (except the W) but it’s a good starting point as they can use it to begin to build up their confidence and skills in critical writing, as well as well-structured paragraphing. The E and E will also often be blended. It also helps them to avoid the very short paragraphs that can make their writing feel disjointed because they won’t be able to get all four elements into just a sentence or two. Students who start to use this tell us they find their writing develops a great deal and the D element forces them to think critically and say something to show that analysis.
3. **3-5 minutes explanation.** The key message here is that their planning at this stage must be detailed. A list of paragraph headings isn’t a plan! They need to think about what point they want to make, how they will support it and whether they can explain how it is relevant to their assignment and the conclusion they want to reach. If they can’t explain this relevance to themselves (get them think about completing the phrase ‘This is relevant because’), they either need to think and read a little more, or more likely leave it out because it isn’t relevant. The WEED is taken from the previous slide and is here to show them how they can note down each element on their plan. Again, many by this point feel this is all just too much work! I always remind them here that it is this reading and planning process where their real efforts should be, and it should take much longer than the writing. However, if they do at least most of this, their writing will be quicker and much easier, as well as being more supported, critical and well-structured.It will almost be like filling in the gaps.Again, no rules as such but roughly 80% of their essay preparation/writing should be on reading and planning.
4. **10 minutes including some feedback and discussion.** This is an opportunity for them to move through the process to the final stages and see how they have been building up to this point.
5. **2-3 minutes**. As timings are tight, just responding to their writing in the last activity can work well as a plenary and this could be missed.