

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

FACULTY OF LAWS

ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

Various study-units offered at the Faculty of Laws require students to submit assignments as part of their method of assessment. This document provides guidelines for students and academics on the expected practice of the Faculty of Laws in relation to assignments and must be understood to apply only to assignments and not to seminar presentations, portfolios, journals, logbooks or other modes of assessment. These guidelines are intended to apply in default and any lecturer may waive all or part of these guidelines, provided they are replaced by new guidelines developed by that lecturer in relation to the assignment of any study unit she or he is grading, whether in whole or in part by means of an assignment and further provided that the lecturer complies with applicable University regulations in so doing. Students should be encouraged to take a positive approach to an assignment.

Special note to students: This is an opportunity to come up with your own piece of work and also to satisfy your curiosity on a particular area of legal knowledge. Above all, it is a learning experience that will help you in your future career as you develop your critical and analytic skills and your report-writing skills. It is up to you to make the best of it. Some may be tempted to take short cuts and even resort to academic dishonesty, but failure to make the best of this learning experience will ultimately be your loss.

Special note to academics: The academics must ensure that titles for assignments are carefully planned and conducive to granting students opportunity to think and reflect, and to hone their analytical and other skills as highlighted in these Guidelines and/or in the course descriptions of the study unit in the context of which the assignment is set. Furthermore, when preparing the assignment question, the academics should also prepare their Marking Schemes.

2. Aims of the Assignment Guidelines

The aims of these Assignment Guidelines are:

- i.**to enable the student to produce a work which has been instigated, developed and produced as a consequence of his/her own initiative, and which assists the student in developing his/her own opinions by embedding them within the context of legal doctrine and offers opportunities for specialisation;
- ii.** to provide the student with the opportunity of identifying the essential characteristics and applying the applicable techniques there to;
- iii.** to develop the student's skills in researching and undertaking a structured and methodical approach to an assignment;
- iv.** to plan, manage and execute an in-depth investigation of a relevant law related concept or problem;

- v. to prepare a technically competent and professionally written assignment;
- vi. to demonstrate the ability to define explicit objectives and be able to support and justify conclusions;
- vii. to apply knowledge acquired in class and through independent reading to a given legal concept or problem; and viii. to enable the student to apply analytical/critical skills as well as or in lieu of purely descriptive skills in assignment writing

3. Planning the Assignment

The assignment has to be the entire work of the student and it is the student's responsibility to take all the relevant decisions on how to plan the work and on how to carry out the research. An assignment, unlike a dissertation or a thesis, does not attract the assistance of a Principal Supervisor and/or Co-Supervisor, and is therefore unsupervised; albeit the lecturer who sets the assignment may provide general guidance to all students writing the assignment as to how it should be written.

Once an assignment title is published by the Faculty of Laws (at least one month prior to the submission deadline), students are strongly advised to start the research and writing process as early as possible. There are dangers in putting off these tasks to a later date. Always allow as much time as possible for the final stages. Final amendments, organising typing/word processing and doing a thorough job on the proof reading, compiling the references and various tables (of content, statutes, cases, international instruments, abbreviations, etc.) and using the plagiarism software all take longer than one might originally envisage. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that work on an assignment progresses steadily, to enable submission according to the deadline. No extension will be granted beyond the due date, unless a valid justification (of an unpredictable and/or non-academic nature) be submitted to the Dean PRIOR to the submission deadline.

4. Word count

Students are to ensure that they do not exceed the stipulated word count/page limit since exceeding text will not be read. Footnotes are to be included in the word count. They should be used for citation purposes and not to supplement the text.

The length of the assignment will generally be indicated by the Faculty Office when publishing the assignment title, but the lecturer responsible for the particular study-unit is the final arbiter as to maximum length.

The Title Page, all Tables and References are not to be included in the word count. Appendices are not included in the word count though, unless directed otherwise by the lecturer, they should not be included. Furthermore, the University of Malta crest should not be used.

5. Submission

A date will always be set for assignment submission on VLE and the deadline will be communicated to students at least one month prior. Students may upload their draft and final version (in PDF format) as many times as required in both containers, provided that uploading is carried out prior to the submission due date.

It is important to include the Declaration of Authorship as the second page of the assignment which may be downloaded from the Faculty of Laws website.

Furthermore, no wrong uploaded assignment on VLE will be replaced for examination purposes after the submission deadline and a 0F will be awarded. A non-submission will also be awarded a 0F and when a hard copy is also requested, it is the soft copy as uploaded on VLE that determines eligibility for examination.

6. Assignment Assessment Criteria

The criteria for assignment assessment will be as follows:

- (1) Strength & clarity of argument 20%
- (2) Structure 20%
- (3) Content, knowledge and application of relevant law 20%
- (4) Research and understanding of relevant literature 20%
- (5) Writing style, including academic referencing and formatting 20%

7. Plagiarism and other Forms of Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, that is, the wilful representation of another person's work, without the acknowledgement of the sources, as one's own or the deliberate and unacknowledged incorporation in a student's work of material derived from the work (published or otherwise) of another, is unacceptable. Reference is made to the University's guidelines on Plagiarism and Collusion which are applicable to such practices. Such practices will incur the penalty of outright failure in addition to any other measure the University Assessment Disciplinary Board or the Faculty Assessment Disciplinary Board may impose.

Apart from plagiarism, other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. These include commissioning (presenting the work of others as one's own), false declaration (making a false declaration in order to receive special consideration or to obtain extensions to deadlines) and falsification of data.

8. Format and Structure of the Assignment

An assignment should have a **Title Page** which sets out the title of the assignment, study-unit code number, name of study unit, and the name and ID card no of student.

It is important to submit a **Declaration of Authorship** with each assignment. The said Declaration must be signed and inserted in the introductory pages of the electronic and hard copy of the assignment.

All **TABLES** should follow. These include the Table of Contents, Table of Statutes, the Table of Cases, the Table of International Instruments, and the Table of Abbreviations (or any other applicable Table/s). Not all of the above listed Tables might be needed, depending on the subject-matter of the assignment.

An **Introduction** should follow, together with the main **Body** and **Conclusion**. While the **Introduction** must usher in the topic and also explain how the student intends to approach the topic and reply to the question put, the **Conclusion** must refer back to the Introduction and actually mirror it, by describing how the topic was approached and drawing out the main reflections of the student and summarily stating the implications of the analysis conducted in the assignment. A good-quality Introduction and Conclusion are key to a good assignment.

The **References** and **Appendices** are to be placed at the end in this order.

9. References

The Department of Law of the University of Oxford's referencing style OSCOLA is to be used for all assignments.

Referencing is not about listing every book and article that has been written and/or that the students have read about the subject. What is included in the reference list should be material the student actually used in the assignment. (More advanced research works such as doctoral theses may include a bibliography which includes material relevant to the subject at hand but which has not actually been cited).

10. Appendices

In assignments, the use of appendices is discouraged. These should usually be reserved for longer written work such as dissertations and theses.

11. Writing and grammatical conventions

The typescript should be clear and consistent and typed in **not less than Font 12 for the main text and Font 10 for the footnotes**.

The typing should be at least **1½ line spacing on A4 paper**.

Avoid use of the first person unless you are directed otherwise by the lecturer. For example, "I investigated the following issues ...", should be more properly phrased as "the following issues were investigated..." or "this study looked at...".

Sentence Length: Ideally you should be concise and informative and you should aim to be clear. Clarity is often lost by using long sentences or inappropriate words. Overlong sentences tend to become very difficult for the reader to understand or follow. Try to keep your sentences within reasonable length limits but, at the same time, use flexible and varied sentence lengths to prevent the style becoming stilted. Also take care to avoid excessive formality and/or unduly pompous language.

Address the Question: The assignment title has to be addressed. Avoid having long introductions that do not address the assignment question. Keep to the point. Read the question well and answer only what is being asked. Do not go round and round in circles or ramble.

Quotations should be typed in single inverted commas. If the quotation is more than four lines long it should be indented. In quotations, the exact spelling and punctuation of the original should be followed. You should give the author's name, date and page number in brackets underneath. If you edit a quotation, make sure that this is made clear to the reader. Do not use long quotations to embellish the text, to make *ad hominem* arguments or to obfuscate your meaning. Instead use short quotations in order to make your arguments more eloquent and your analysis more clear, deep and comprehensive.

Abbreviations (and acronyms) must be typed in full when first mentioned, with the abbreviation in brackets. The abbreviation can be used thereafter. Always compile a List of Abbreviations and insert it at the very end of the Tables' section of your assignment.

Numbers: Use words for numbers up to ten. Exceptions which should always be expressed as figures are: (i) ages (ii) percentages, e.g. 25 per cent.

Non-sexist writing: Use neutral terms, unless a specific male or female is meant.

Very good grammar and syntax is expected.

Be prepared for the unexpected such as loss or corruption of files. Make regular back-ups of your work.

12. Referencing and Citations

Referencing is what you do at the end of the assignment where you list the sources you have used to complete your piece of work. This is called either a **reference list** or a **bibliography** and it is always compiled in alphabetical order by author name. Strictly speaking, a bibliography includes all sources you have consulted, whereas a reference list contains only sources that you have cited in your text. For the purpose of an assignment, you are only expected to include a Reference list.

Citation is what you do in the actual text of the assignment to indicate the source used or quoted. The three most common sources of reference are books, journal articles, and internet documents, although other sources, such as the print media and judgments data bases could be used.

13. Application of these Guidelines

These guidelines apply only to Faculty of Laws students and not necessarily to assignments that are serviced to other Faculties/Institutes/Centres/Schools.

Faculty of Laws
University of Malta

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