

Organising Your Notes

You have been given an assignment task and you have done lots of reading. You have found some really good information but how do you work out what to use? What's more, how do you turn this jumble of information into a well structured assignment?

Here are some steps that you can take to organise your notes and begin to draft your assignment.

1. Take notes

It is important that you take your information from a **variety of sources**. This way you can verify the information you find because you can see that different authors generally agree. If all your information comes from only a couple of sources, you can't be sure that this is generally accepted knowledge.

When you take notes you need to **write down all the bibliographical details** of each source so that you can cite and reference these in your assignment. In the example below, all the details needed to cite and reference the source has been written at the top of the notes.

Also, as you write your notes, make sure you include the **page number** on which the information is found. For websites or other resources, you should note the paragraph number. In the example below, the page numbers are written down the side next to the notes.

Don't write notes in full sentences. Not only does it take longer but you are more likely to express the idea in exactly the same words in your assignment. This is plagiarism and not allowed. The notes below are generally only written in phrases. Also, try to use



words different from those in the source or rearrange the order of the sentence. This way you record the meaning but not the exact words.

It is often better to **write notes rather than just highlight text** that you have photocopied. It helps your mind absorb and process the information and also you lessen the risk of expressing yourself in exactly the same words as the author.

Example of notes taken from a journal article

Bibliographic details at the top	Proctor, T. & Thomas, R. (2004). Australian Tourism and the "Tyranny of Distance". <i>Australian Economic Quarterly</i>, 17(1), 35-47. Retrieved 12 February, 2009 from Informit Search Database.
Page number of each note	p. 34 Long way from tourist feeder countries in Northern hemisphere
Notes written in words or phrases	p. 35 Australia in southern hemisphere, a long way from tourist feeder countries in northern Europe and America. Average of 17 hours to reach Australia, twice as long as other tourist countries
	p. 36 Australia more expensive and less accessible than US, Asia and Sth America.
	p. 36 competition - wildlife in Tanzania and Kenya, volcanoes& biodiversity in Costa Rica
	p. 37 International zoos have Australian wildlife

2. Look for patterns in your notes

When you feel you have enough information, read through your notes and **look for patterns** or ways in which bits of information could be grouped together. In the example below, similar points can be found in different sources.

Also, **think about the relationships** between different bits of information and between the questions and the information you have collected. Use colour or

numbers to mark bits of information that are related. Colour has been used in the example below to show the three different ideas that seem to be repeated in the notes.

Collect all the related information and **try to name the way they are related** to each other and to the main point of the assignment. The three groups of information in the example below can be groups under the headings of landforms, distinctive animals and distance/cost.

Themes in notes are colour coded

Landforms

Wildlife

Distance

Proctor, T. & Thomas, R. (2004). Australian Tourism and the "Tyranny of Distance". *Australian Economic Quarterly*, 17(1), 35-47. Retrieved 12 February, 2009 from Informit Search Database.

- p. 34 Long way from tourist feeder countries in Northern hemisphere
- p. 35 Australia in southern hemisphere, a long way from tourist feeder countries in northern Europe and America. Average of 17 hours to reach Australia, twice as long as other tourist countries
- p. 36 Australia more expensive and less accessible than US, Asia and Sth America.
- p. 36 competition - wildlife in Tanzania and Kenya, volcanoes & biodiversity in Costa Rica
- p. 37 International zoos have Australian wildlife
- p. 38 Fare to US from Europe one third of fare to Australia from Europe.
- p. 40 Tourists generally come to Australia for 6 weeks or more. More expensive than a 2 week holiday in Greece or Spain.
- p.42 Nth American tourists often choose to come to Australia because the culture is similar.

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism. (2009). *Australia's natural attractions*. Retrieved 10 February, 2009 from http://www.ret.gov.au/pubs/2008_09/natural_heritage.html

A's tourism industry 3.9% gross domestic product
 on average tourists spend three times more than in other countries. In USA spend more
 Australia in top ten of most desirable places to go on holiday 2000-2004
 Survey - Natural attractions most like to go to: Uluru, Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu Great Ocean Road, Tasmanian Wilderness.
 Uluru largest rock in world,
 30,000kms of coastline in Australia, much of it beach. Over 10,000 miles of white beaches, among best surfing conditions in world, warm enough to swim all year
 Half the continent is desert. Rainforests mainly in northern Australia but also in Tas wilderness.
 1,000,000 species plants and animals, not all scientifically catalogued
 Unique animals: marsupials (animals that carry their young in pouches) and monotremes (animals that lay eggs but also feed young with milk).
 Visitors to zoos growing each year.
 Tourism Commissioner – "87% of tourists (2000-2004) significant motivating reason for visiting Australia is extraordinary natural phenomena"

Themes in notes are colour coded

Landforms **Wildlife** **Distance**

Georgiou, P. (2007). *Famous landmarks of Australia* (3rd ed.). Sydney: Wiley and Son.

- p. 2 Landforms are tourist attraction
- p. 5 Tropical rainforests far north Q and NT 2,500 species of higher plants, attract 26% of tourist spending.
- p. 21 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park World Heritage property, listed for natural and cultural values
- p. 21 Uluru largest rock in the world. In central Australia near Alice Springs.
- p. 25 Cape York Peninsula is approximately the size of England, Scotland and Wales (137,000 km²), only 18,000 residents
- p. 30 British backpacker "I came to Perth because it was the most isolated city on earth. I could say I had been there."
- p. 30 Tourists are willing to pay extra to experience a sense of adventure long way from home
- p. 32 Many long sandy beaches. Eg. 90mile beach in Victoria
- p. 43 GBR largest coral reef in the world, 1,500 unique species of tropical fish, 400 species of coral and species whales, birds, sharks, sea snakes, marine algae and invertebrates

Zeehan, J. (2008). Going a round with a kangaroo: Tourists' encounters with Australian wildlife. In M. McKay & X. Mitchell (Eds.), *Travellers and holidaymakers: Tourism in Australia 1955-2005* (pp. 48-72). Sydney: Martyn Publishing.

- p. 51 Taronga Zoo and Darling Harbour Aquarium are two of the most profitable tourist attractions in Australia
- p. 51 most popular Australian animals – kangaroos, koalas and platypus.
- p. 52 Australia Post -postcards featuring Australian animals sent overseas more than all other postcards
- p. 54 Australia unique flora and fauna, marsupials and monotremes
- p. 54 assume animals are friendly because they are cute. Tried to pick up koala and was scratched. Kicked by mother kangaroo when trying to coax joey out of her pouch.
- p. 60 Dangerous animals a fascination. Want to see sharks, crocodiles, snakes.
- p. 62 High incidence of stings from jelly fish, insects, spiders, small snakes among tourists.

3. Organise your information

Before you start writing, you may find it helpful to put all of your information together so that it is all there as you write. The writing process is stressful enough without having to scabble through papers to find that reference you just know is there somewhere!

One way to organise your notes is to put them into a matrix (table) with each piece of related information along one row with a heading at the beginning.

Those people who are visual learners may prefer to organise their information using a concept map. Bits of information are written in boxes and lines are drawn between circles that are related in some way. Those groups of related boxes are named.

See below for examples of a matrix and a concept map using the notes above.

Organising Your Notes

This process is not straightforward. It is muddling, frustrating and you seem to go round in circles.

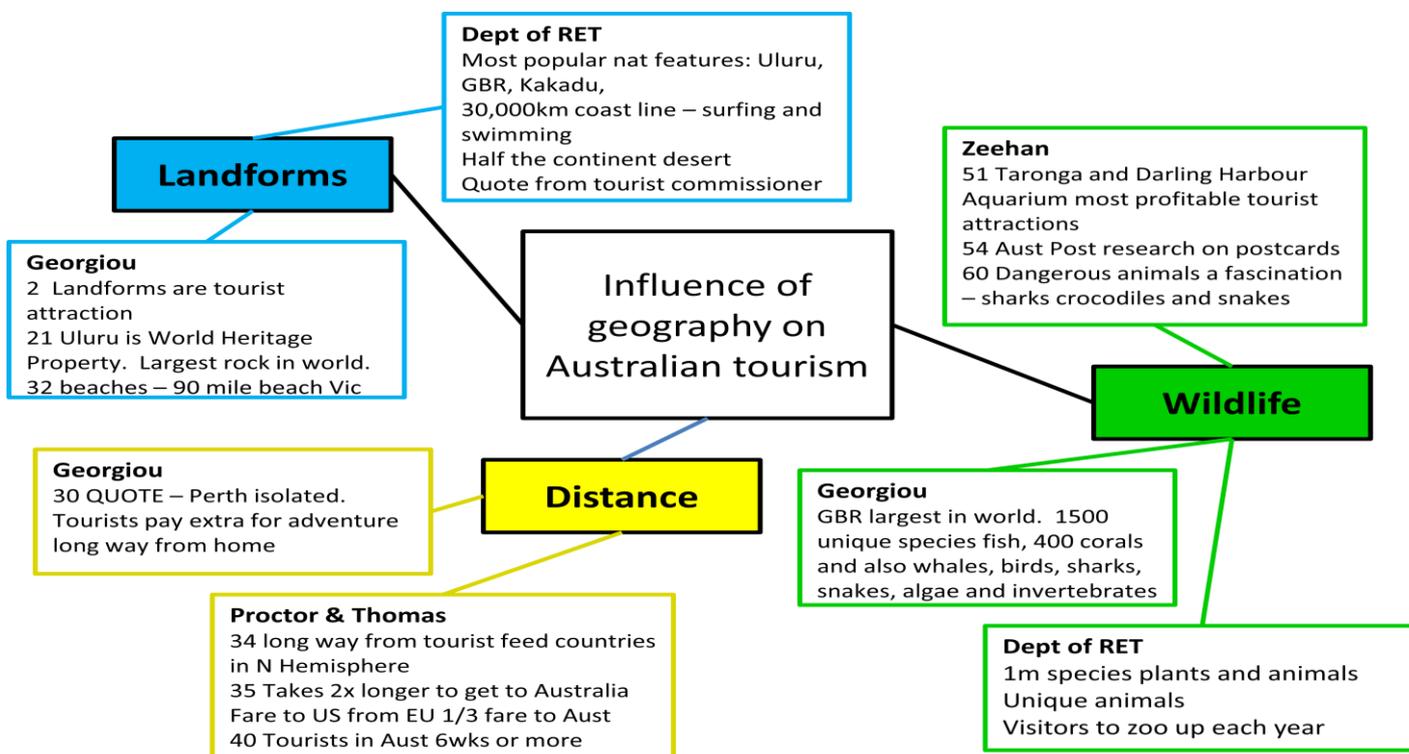
Clarify your thoughts by explaining it to someone, drawing diagrams or writing it in note form.

Take regular breaks to let your brain process. You will see it more clearly when you come back to it

Matrix of themes and sources

Headings			
Landforms +ve influence	Dept of RET Most popular nat features: Uluru, GBR, Kakadu, 30,000km coast line – surfing and swimming Half the continent desert Quote from tourist commissioner	Georgiou 2 Landforms are tourist attraction 21 Uluru is World Heritage Property. Largest rock in world. 32 beaches – 90 mile beach Vic	
Wildlife +ve influence	Dept of RET 1m species plants and animals Unique animals Visitors to zoo up each year	Georgiou GBR largest in world. 1500 unique species fish, 499 corals and also whales, birds, sharks, snakes, algae and invertebrates	Zeehan 51 Taronga and Darling Harbour Aquarium most profitable tourist attractions 54 Aust Post research on postcards 60 Dangerous animals a fascination – sharks crocodiles and snakes
Distance -ve influence	Proctor & Thomas P35 long way from tourist feeder countries P37 24 hours to get to Australia P38 Fare from Europe three times that from Europe to America P40 more expensive that Greece or Spain	Georgiou P 5 Long distances betw towns. British traveller “This place is HUGE”	

Concept map of themes and sources



4. Draft Your Paragraphs

Now that you have your notes organised you can use these to draft your body paragraphs.

Using a matrix or concept map makes drafting each paragraph relatively easy. For each paragraph you take the notes related to a heading.

Writing the topic sentence

Your topic sentence will contain the words of your thesis as well as the words of the main idea of your paragraph and define the relationship between them. For example, the topic sentence for the first body paragraph of this essay could be:

Australia's **distinctive animals** are a **magnet for tourists** to this land.

Australia's **animals** are the main idea of the first body paragraph while **magnet for tourists** reflects the essay's thesis that Australia's geography contributes to the tourist industry.

This sentence also conveys to the reader the relationship between the paragraph's main idea and the thesis. In this case it indicates that the animals have a positive influence on tourism in Australia.

Information sentences

Sometimes you may need to explain terms and concepts to make sure your reader fully understands. These come in the added information sentences.



Writing the evidence

Using the notes you have collected under the paragraph's main idea you need to write about the evidence which backs up the statement you made in the topic sentence.

These sentences need to be cited and referenced because you have taken this information from someone else's work.

Writing the concluding sentence

The role of the concluding sentence is to sum up the evidence and restate the main idea of the paragraph. In many ways it repeats and/or expands on the topic sentence using different words.

Completing your draft

In drafting your essay, you work on each paragraph in the body one by one. It is often good to start by writing the body paragraphs, then do the conclusion and write the introduction last. Many people find it very difficult to start writing because they think they should start with the introduction and thesis. It is actually easier if this is the last thing that you work on when drafting an essay. The overall ideas become clearer when you have worked out the details first.

For an example of how to structure your academic assignment overall, look at **Writing Structure Overview** in the Writing section of Studywell.

