1. Read the question carefully and understand what is required
   It may be blindingly obvious, but answer the question! Identify the command word (describe, analyse, evaluate etc) and make sure you know what that means - our website has a glossary. Be clear what the essay needs to be about but also what the constraints or focus of the essay are.

2. Preparatory reading
   Do not begin an essay until you have enough knowledge at your disposal to support your overall conclusion. Even if you start with a rough conclusion in mind, your reading may require you to change this.

3. Make an essay plan
   This will also guide your choice of further reading and the gathering of information. What are the main ideas or issues to be covered? What points will lead to your conclusion?

4. Gather information
   Lecture notes and/or handouts will not give you sufficient information to back up each of the points you are making. Make use of other sources such as books and academic journals. Reputable websites can also be used.

5. Structuring your essay
   All essays need an introduction, main body and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion should be approximately 10% of your word count each.

   Your paragraphs also need a structure: as a general rule remember one point = one paragraph. A typical academic paragraph should follow the PEEL structure: Point (assert something), Evidence (back up your point with references or experience), Explanation (how this helps answer the question), Link (to the next paragraph if necessary).

6. Most essays will require you to think critically
   It is in the explanation/analysis part of your paragraphs that you will gain credit for showing an ability to discuss and analyse the facts and argument you have presented. Make sure every paragraph explains why it is relevant to answering the question or reaching your conclusion.

7. Use academic writing style
   In essays, you need to write in a formal, clear, cautious and balanced manner. Avoid contractions and only write in the first person (I) if your tutor has said this is acceptable.

8. Sequence your argument
   This means developing a clear line of thought. Your ideas need to be organised in a sequence meaningful to the reader, and which can be signposted in the introduction. Include signposts throughout your writing to show how your argument is developing: phrases like ‘in addition’, ‘furthermore’, ‘conversely’, ‘consequently’ etc all help your reader follow your line of reason.

9. Support your argument by citing and referencing your sources
   Make notes as you read and record works and page numbers or put information into bibliographic software such as Endnote or Refworks so you can refer to them later.

10. Remember, your first draft is exactly that
    Be prepared to amend, add, expand or adjust parts of it until you are satisfied with the presentation and content. Check for: your content, argument and meaning; referencing; spelling and grammar; punctuation; and style. Are you using appropriate fonts, margins, line spacing etc?